

## Hindu Dharma:

### Part-1

"Hindu Dharma" is a book published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan which contains English translation of two volumes of the Tamil Book "Deivatthin Kural"; which is a collection of invaluable and engrossing speeches of Sri Sri Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi MahaSwamiji.





## Preface

This offering of Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life deals with another kind of discovery of India, a discovery in the spiritual realm, made by Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamikal, the 68th Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha. The Sage of Kanchi was spiritually supreme, intellectually pre-eminent. He was verily an akshayapatra - inexhaustible reservoir - of the spiritual wisdom of India dating back to the beginning of Time, and of Vedic Dharma. So was he with regard to modern knowledge, current affairs and contemporary men and matters.

The Mahaswami will shine forever as one of the greatest exemplars of sanatana dharma, the Universal Way of Life. This sanatani extraordinary personified in himself all that is best and noblest in Hinduism. He always stressed that Hinduism is the latter-day name given to mankind's earliest religion -- sanatana dharma. It is beginning less (anadi), endless (ananta) and hence eternal (sanatana), because it is in consonance with Nature's Laws.

To drive home the eternal or the sanatana aspect of our religion, the Mahaswami used to narrate a telling episode : "There was a palm-tree around which a creeper entwined itself. The creeper grew fast and within months it entwined the entire tree. 'This palm has not grown a bit all these months,' said the creeper laughing. The palm-tree retorted: 'I have seen tens of thousand creepers in my life. Each creeper before you said the same thing as

you have now said. I do not know what to say to you'. Our religion is like this tree in relation to other faiths."

We were fortunate to have lived in the times, and to have had frequent darshans, of one with such "illuminated Consciousness", whose nearly 100-year-long Pilgrimage on Earth ended on January 8, 1994. He was a realized soul, and whenever he spoke, he spoke in the accents of the Vedic seers precise, profound and authentic words that found a permanent lodgment in the hearts of his listeners.

The Mahaswami's words of distilled wisdom, as compiled by his ardent devotee Sri Ra. Ganapati run into six volumes covering more than 6,500 pages. Sri Ra. Ganapati and Sri A. Tirunavukkarasu of Vanadi Padippakam, the publisher, deserve our eternal gratitude for their invaluable efforts to preserve for posterity the Sage of Kanchi's words of wisdom.

Being in Tamil, these volumes, with their precious content, remain a closed book to tens of thousands of devotees in India and abroad who do not know that language but are athirst and ever-yearning for the Mahaswami's spiritual ambrosia.

The English versions of selected discourses, which have so far appeared in book-form, touch but a fringe of what the Mahaswami has said about sanatana dharma. The Bhavan, too, has had the privilege of contributing its humble mite in this direction --- we have published *Aspects of Our Religion, The Vedas, Adi Sankara : His Life and Times, The Guru Tradition and Kanchi Mahaswami on Poets and Poetry*.

This volume of nearly 800 pages has been rendered into English from the Tamil by R.G.K. It is a monumental effort reflecting enormous, dedicated and unremitting labour over a long period of time. In translation, the transformation is normally from gold to lead but R.G.K. has ensured that the sheen of the original is retained. He has also spared no pains to explain obscure points of legend, puranic allusions and scriptural references covering both Sruti and Smrti.

The Bhavan has been the blessed recipient of the Mahaswami's grace right from its inception in 1938. He has been one of the Bhavan's greatest guides and philosophers. He very closely watched with a benign concern that landmark projects of the Bhavan like the monumental 11-volume *History and Culture of the Indian People* covering nearly 5,000 years from the Vedic Age to the Modern Age. This is the only comprehensive history of India written by Indians --- a team of 100 eminent scholars, each a specialist in his chosen field. They laboured on it for 32 years under the inspiration and guidance of Kulapati Munshi, with the doyen of Indian historians Dr. Romesh Chandra Majumdar as General Editor. The Jagadguru then observed: "Distinguished historians like K.M. Munshi are engaged in writing afresh our history without any bias".

Commending Kulapati Munshi's ceaseless efforts through the Bhavan for the revival of Sanskrit, of India's ages-old traditions and the resuscitation of ethical and spiritual values embedded in sanatana dharma, the Mahaswami remarked: "Munshi is not an old fashioned sanatanist like me. He is a reformist and a friend and follower of Gandhiji. And he was a member of the Nehru Cabinet. So he cannot be included among the 'reactionaries'!....."

During the Bhavan's Silver Jubilee in 1962, the Mahaswami sent the following benediction:

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has made the people of Bharata Varsa in general and the intellectuals in particular evince interest in the various aspects of our culture and progress.

"May we pray: Give fresh vigor to the Bhavan, a unique institution, in directing its attention more and more, with greater and greater fulfillment, to the dissemination of moral principles and devotion."

He also sent along with it a cash "donation" of Rs1,000. Kulapati Munshi shed copious tears of joy and exclaimed in ecstasy: "This is the holiest of holy prasads. This is invaluable, inestimable and much more than several thousand crores of rupees. Nothing, nothing, can surpass divine grace."

The Mahaswami brings out the essentials of sanatana dharma in a language that is at once simple and clear. Commendable indeed is the cogency of the narrative. We are left in no doubt about any aspect of our eternal Dharma.

As will be seen in this volume, the Mahaswami's approach is catholic. He avers: "The goal of all religions is to lead people to the Paramatman according to the different attitudes of the devotees concerned. Our forefathers were well aware that all religions are different paths to realize the one and only Paramatman."

Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti (The truth is One, the wise speak of it in different ways).

This volume Hindu Dharma : *The Universal Way of Life* is in the nature of a discovery of Vedic India, Immortal India, by Pujyasri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, the Moral Monarch of this century. Sooner than later, this is bound to immensely inspire not only the people and youth of India but also the people and youth of the world over to restore and retain values, purity and sanity in personal and public life. This is our hope and prayer, nay conviction.

Vedo khilo dharmaulam; Dharmo rakshati rakshitah ---the Vedas are the root of all Dharma; Dharma protected, protects.



## A note to the readers

Sanskrit words are not italicized; but titles of Sanskrit works are, except those of well-known classics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita (or the Gita for short).

No uniform style is adopted in the use of Sanskrit words; they occur either in their stem form or in the nominative singular.

"Brahmin" is used instead of "Brahmana"; "Sankara" instead of "Samkara" or "Sankara", the last-mentioned being the correct form; and the anglicized "Sanskrit" instead of "Samskrtam".

The term "Self" in this translation denotes the "Atman" -- this is in keeping with the generally accepted usage. "Jivatman" is referred to as the "individual self".

"Devas" are referred to as "celestials" in order to distinguish them from gods like Siva, Rama, Krsna, Ganapati and so on.

What may be called "Hindi-ised" Sanskrit words like "bhajan" and "pandit" are italicized.

"Atmic" and "sastric", though admittedly hybrid derivatives, are used as a

matter of convenience. "Atmaic" (Atmanic?) and "sastraic" are perhaps less euphonic.

"Acarya" with a capital "A", unless otherwise indicated, means Adi Sankara or Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada.

"Matha" with a capital "M" refers to the Kanchi Matha.

"Paramaguru", meaning the "Supreme Guru", refers to Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami.

Words put in square brackets and intended to explain a term or passage in the main text are added either by the compiler of the discourses or by the translator. But simple meanings of words in the main text are given in round brackets.

In "References", some notes appear with "Ra. Ga": it means these are by Sri Ra Ganapati, the compiler. The translator wishes to own responsibility for errors, if any, in the rest of the "References."

For the quotations from the Upanishads used in the main text or reproduced "References", the translator has relied mostly on Ekadasopanisadah printed at the Nirnayasagara Yantralaya and published by Ba. Ra.Ghanekar.

The Guru Tradition, referred to in "References", comprises discourses by the Paramaguru and is published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan.

In the main text as well as in the notes there are references to places in Tamil Nadu. It must be noted that the names of the districts mentioned may not all of them be correct since they keep changing.



### Translator's note

More than 33 years ago, I said in an article in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* that "Hindus know less about their religion than Christians and Muslims know about theirs". Wanting to verify the statement, my editor Sardar Khushwant Singh asked my colleagues (most of them were Hindus), in schoolmasterly fashion, to name any four Upanishads. For moments there was silence and it was a Muslim lady member of the staff who eventually responded to the editor's question by "reeling off" the names of six or seven Upanishads.

Why are "educated" Hindus ignorant about their religion? Is it their education itself that has alienated them from their religious and cultural moorings? If so it must be one of the tragic ironies of the Indian condition. The Paramaguru himself speaks of our ignorance of the basic texts of our religion (Chapter 1, Part Five): "We must be proud of the fact that our country has produced more men who have found inner bliss than all other countries put together. It is a matter of shame that we are ignorant of the sastras that they have bequeathed to us, the sastras that taught them how to scale the heights of bliss. Many are ignorant about the scripture that is the very source of our religion -- they do not know even its name... Our education follows the Western pattern. We want to speak like the white man, dress like him and ape him in the matter of manners and customs..."

The fact is that during the past two or three centuries Hindus have gone



through a process of de-Hinduization which in some respects is tantamount to de Indianization. Various other reasons are given as to why Hindus do not have a clear idea of their religion. One is that it is not a religion in the sense the term is usually understood. Another is that it is not easily reduced to a catechism. A third reason is that, unlike other faiths, it encompasses all life and activity, individual, social and national, and all spheres of knowledge. Hindu Dharma is an organic part of the Hindu. It imposes on him a discipline that is inward as well as outward and it is a process of refinement and inner growth. Above all it is a quest, the quest for knowing oneself, for being oneself.

Hindu Dharma, it must be remembered, is but a convenient term for what should ideally be known as Veda Dharma or Sanatana Dharma, the immemorial religion. Indeed, it might be claimed with truth, that this Dharma is more than a religion, that it is an entire civilization, the story of man from the very beginnings of time to find an answer to the problems of life, the story of that greatest of all adventures, that of the human spirit trying to discover its true identity. "From our total reactions to Nature," says J.W.N. Sullivan, "Science selects a small part only as being relevant to its purpose..." Everything is relevant to Hinduism because its "purposes" is to know the Truth in its entirety, not fractions of truth that may have their own purposes but not the Great Purpose of knitting together everything to arrive at the ultimate knowledge. It needs a master to speak about such a religion. We must consider ourselves blessed that we had such a master living in our own time, I mean the Sage of Kanchi, Pujyasri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami, to teach us our Dharma. He was no ordinary master, but a Master of Masters.

This Great Master's discourses on Hindu Dharma, included in Volumes I and II of Deivattin Kural, are divided into 22 parts (there are two appendices in addition) in this book. There is, however, 'nothing rigid about this arrangement and we have here a single great stream that takes us through the variegated landscape that has come to be called Hinduism. To vary the imagery, it is a vast canvas on which the Paramaguru portrays the Hindu religion and it is a luminous canvas and there is nothing garish about the colors he dabs on it.

The Great Acharya does not lecture from a high pedestal. Out of his compassion for us he speaks the language that everybody understands. (We

must here acknowledge our profound indebtedness to Sri Ra. Ganapati, the compiler of Deivattin Kural, and Sri A. Tirunavukkarasu, the publisher, for having preserved the Sage of Kanchi's light of knowledge and wisdom for posterity.)

Throughout these discourses we recognize the Great Swami's synaptic vision. He sees connections where others see only differences. Is this not the special quality of a seer, the special quality of a mystic, who refuses to see things in compartments? Indeed, during the long decades during which Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami was the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha he was a great unifying force, a great civilizing influence. The manner in which he braids together the karmakanda and jnanakanda of the Vedas is indeed masterly. So too the way he presents the message of the Vedas or the essence of the Upanishads. Here we have something like the architectonics of great music or of a great monument like the Kailsanatha temple of Ellora or the Brhadisvara temple of Tanjavur. The Paramaguru takes all branches of knowledge in his stride, linguistics, astronomy, history, physics. He combines ancient wisdom with modern concepts like those of time and space -- he is aware, though, that some of these concepts are not new to our own scientific tradition. All the same, it must be noted that he does not speak what is convenient for today but what is true for all time.

It is difficult to summarise the ideas of our religion or to present the teachings of our Master in a few words. But it is necessary to underline certain points. For instance, the message of the Vedas on which Hindu Dharma is founded. "The Vedas hold out," declares the Paramaguru, the ideal of liberation here itself. That is their glory. Other religions hold before people the ideal of salvation after a man's departure for another world." To repeat, the ultimate teaching of the Vedic religion is liberation here and now. After all, what is the purpose of any religion? Our Acharya answers the question: "If an individual owing allegiance to a religion does not become a jnanin with inward experience of the truth of the Supreme Being, what does it matter whether that religion does exist or does not?"

"That thou art," is the great truth proclaimed by the Vedas. But how are you to realize the truth of "That"? Our Master's answer is: "Now itself when we are deeply involved in worldly affairs." In fact he tells us the practical means of becoming a jivanmukta, or how to be liberated in this life itself. After all,

he was a jivanmukta himself and he speaks of truths not from a vacuum but from actual experience. That reminds one of the special feature of Hindu Dharma which is that it contains the practical steps to liberation; in other words Hinduism leads one to the Light in gradual stages. Critics call this Dharma ritual-ridden without realizing that the rituals have a higher purpose, that of disciplining you, cleansing your consciousness, and preparing you for the inward journey. In a word, chitta - suddhi is the means to a higher end. From work we must go to worklessness. The Paramaguru's genius for synthesizing ideas is demonstrated in the way he weaves together karma, bhakti, yoga and jnana.

In our Vedic religion, individual salvation is not --- as is often alleged --- pursued to the neglect of collective well-being. "The principle on which the Vedic religion is founded," observes the Sage of Kanchi "is that a man must not live for himself alone but serve all mankind." Well, varna dharma in its true form is a system according to which the collective welfare of society is ensured. As expounded by the Paramaguru, we see it to be radically different from what we are taught about it in school. Critics call caste a hierarchic and exploitative arrangement. But actually, the system is one in which the duties of each jati are interlinked with those of others. In this way society is knit together, leaving no room in it for jealousies and rivalries to arise. One point must be specially noted: the Great Acharya lays stress again and again on the fact that no jati is inferior to another jati or superior to it.

In the varna dharma, as explained by our Master, the Brahmin does not lord it over other communities. Why do we need Brahmins at all? To preserve the Vedic dharma, to keep alive the sound of the Vedas which is important for the well-being not only of all Hindus but of all mankind. This duty can be performed only on a hereditary basis by one class of people. The Great Acharya goes to the extent of saying that we do not need a class of people called Brahmins if they do not serve other communities, indeed mankind itself, by truly practicing the ancient Vedic dharma. To paraphrase, if a separate class called Brahmins must exist and it must exist is not for the sake of this class itself but for the ultimate good of mankind. The Paramaguru, makes an impassioned plea to Brahmins to return to their dharma. He also points out that in varna dharma, in its ideal form, there are no differences among the jatis economically speaking -- all of them live a simple life, performing their duties and being devoted to the Lord.

It is varna dharma that has sustained Hindus or Indian civilization for all these millennia, observes the Paramaguru. And all our immense achievements in metaphysics and philosophy, in literature, in music, in the arts and sciences must be attributed to it. Above all, it is varna dharma that has made it possible for this land to produce so many great men and women, so many saintly men, who have been the source of inspiration for people all these centuries. Now this system has all but broken up and with it we see the decay of the nation.

There are so many other matters on which the Sage of Kanchi speaks -- for example, conducting an upanayana or a marriage meaningfully. He speaks with eloquence about our ideals of marriage and condemns dowry, describing it as an evil that undermines our society. There are, then, moving discourses on philanthropy, love and so on in which we see the Great Master as one who is concerned about the happiness of all, as one whose heart goes out to the poor and the suffering. His short discourses like "Outward Karma - Inward Meditation" or "Karma --the Starting Point of Yoga" encapsulate his philosophy with power and beauty. And the message of Advaita runs like a golden thread all through the book.

Altogether in these discourses we come face to face with a Great Being who is beyond time and space and we experience the "oceanic feeling", a term (originally French) coined by Romain Rolland and made familiar by Sigmund Freud. To us the Sage of Kanchi means an ocean of wisdom and an ocean of compassion. To think of him is to sanctify ourselves however unregenerate we may be. I must now, in all humility, pay obeisance to Pujyasri Jayendra Saraswati Swami and Pujyasri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswati Swami and seek their blessings Sri Mettur Swamigal, gentle, devout and learned, has been a source of inspiration to me in my work.

I am thankful to Sri P.S. Mishra, Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh, for his learned Foreword.

The venerable Sri A. Kuppuswami, who is a spry 84 and who served his Master, the Sage of Kanchi with devotion for almost a lifetime, read the typescript of this book running into more than 1,000 pages and made valuable suggestions. I have always relied on him for advice and I am grateful to him

for his Introduction, although I feel I don't deserve a bit the appreciative references he has made to me.

Dr W.R. Antarkar, a distinguished Sanskrit scholar, has laid me under a deep debt of gratitude by giving the once-over to the Sanskrit part of the main text. But he is not to be held responsible for mistakes, if any, that still remain uncorrected. I must also thank Sri L.N. Subramanya Ghanapathi, Dr R. Krishanmurthi Sastrigal , Sri S. Lakshminarayana, Srimati (Dr) Visalakshi Sivaramkrishnan and Sri V. Ramanathan for their assistance.

Thanks are particularly due to Siromani R. Natrajan, of *Manjari fame*, for his help in preparing the Tamil Glossary. He checked the notes I had made and added copious notes of his own. Owing to pressure on space all the material provided by him could not be incorporated. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Srimathi Bhavani Vanchinthan, a gifted Tamil teacher, for "double-checking" the glossary and to Srimati Saroja Krishnan for her help.

In all humility I place Hindu Dharma as an offering at the sacred lotus feet of Pujyasri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Swami. As one who has miles to go to become jnanin, I can look upon Mahaguru only in the form I knew him before he attained videhamukti. The dvita-bhava, it is said, is the appropriate attitude in which one expresses one's devotion to one's guru. Our Great Master is the Infinite dissolved in the Infinite. But do we not separate the Infinite from the Infinite to meditate on it and to worship It as the Saguna Brahman? It is thus that I adore the lotus feet of the Mahaguru. As the Upanishads proclaim, "Purnasya purnamadaya purnmevavsisyate."

"CHINNAVAN"

Bombay.



## Introduction

The word "Introduction", used with reference to a publication, signifies "the preliminary matter" prefixed to it. Does the present work, comprising as it does the discourses on Hindu Dharma, or more properly Veda Dharma, delivered by the greatest spiritual luminary of the century (that is the Sage of Kanchi) and translated into English by a seasoned writer, need an Introduction? For days this was the question that revolved in my mind following the request made by Sri R.G.K., that I should write an Introduction to this translation. (Sri R.G.K., a good friend of mine, was formerly Assistant Editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India.)

I felt that I was not qualified for the job of writing the Introduction. I was reminded of the short Introduction I had written to the *Guru Tradition* which also incorporates the discourses of the Sage of Kanchi and which is also translated by Sri R.G.K. --- this book was published in 1991. I should like to quote a sentence from it: "It is only the devotion to the sacred feet of the Great Guru of Kanchi, implanted in my heart in my boyhood days and nurtured during the past six decades and more, combined with the persistent desire of the translator (an esteemed friend), that has emboldened me to pen this short piece which is but an apology for an Introduction."

As desired by the translator, I have gone through the entire typescript of Hindu Dharma and this gives me the courage to write a few lines by the way of a preliminary note.

The lectures delivered decades ago in Tamil by His Holiness the Sage of Kanchi on diverse aspects of our Dharma, on our ancient culture and our arts and on a variety of other subjects have been brought out in six volumes by Vanadi Padippakam, a well-known publishing house of Madras. But until now adent followers of Hindu Dharma, who do not know Tamil, have not had access to these discourses given by the incomparable preceptor of our time, discourses that are as extensive and educative as they are enlightening and enchanting. Sri.R.G.K. deserves the thanks of people living outside Tamil Nadu, both in India and abroad, for throwing open to them the treasure-house of the upanyasas of the Great Acharya.

Translating any work from one language into another is an arduous task, especially if the work translated consists of the spoken word. I know for a fact that the translator of this book has toiled for months on end and tried his best to maintain fidelity to the original.

It is my earnest hope that middle-aged people and youngsters --- particularly teachers and students --- belonging to regions outside Tamil Nadu will get copies of Hindu Dharma and benefit by reading the same. I would like to make a humble request to the publishers to take such steps as would bring the book within easy reach of all especially teachers and students.

May the Divine World Mother and the Sage of Kanchi, who remains shining as the all-pervading "cit", grant long life and health to Sri R.G.K to enable him to bring out further English translations of the Great Acharya's discourses.

A.KUPPUSWAMI

Kanchipuram,



## Dharma Alone Protects

The *pipal* and the *neem* are the royal children of Mother Nature's kingdom of trees. As the *new year* approaches they shed their leaves, sprout tender green shoots again not long after. It is all the work of Mother Nature.

The custom of marrying the pipal to the neem and of installing the idols of *Vinayaka* and *Nagaraja* under them goes back to the dim past. After the winter months these trees will be bare and *Vinayaka* and *Nagaraja* will remain exposed to the sun. This is the time when we may sit under the open sky and bask in the sun because it is now neither too warm nor too cold. When it rains or when the sun beats down harshly on us, we need to shield ourselves with an umbrella. And when it is bitterly cold we cannot sit in the open and gaze at the sky. But now, when the leaves *fall* and the warmth of the sun is comforting (it is believed that with *Sivarathri* the cold season bids you goodbye with the chant, "siva, siva"), we may sit in the open, by day or at night, to gaze upon the sky. To proclaim the beneficial nature of this season as it were- when the pipal and the neem are shorn of their leaves- Mother Nature worships the gods under the trees (*Vinayaka* and *Nagaraja*) with the rays of the gentle sun.

*Nagaraja* may also be called *Subrahmanya*. Indeed to the Telugu-speaking people the name 'Subbarayudu' denotes both *Subrahmanya* and the snake. The Tamil-speaking people worship snakes on *Sasti*, a custom that has existed from time immemorial. Mother Nature's concern for *Vighnesvara* and *Subrahmanya*, the children of *Parvati* and *Paramesvara*, is but an expression



of her love for all of us who too are but the offspring of the same primordial couple. There is fullness about this love. As I said just now, when it is neither too warm nor too cold, Vighnesvara and Nagaraja are exposed to the sun. But, as the sun gets warmer with the advance of spring, Mother Nature protects these deities from the heat. How? The trees now burgeon and form a green umbrella over Vinayaka and Nagaraja. The shedding of leaves, the burgeoning again, all this is a part of the natural process and according to the immutable law of the universe, which has been in force from the very beginning of time.

There is a law governing the behaviour of everything in this universe. All must submit to it for the world to function properly. Otherwise things will go awry and end up in chaos. It is the will of the Lord that all his creation, all his creatures, should live in happiness. That is why he has ordained a dharma, a law, for each one of them. It is compliance with this dharma that ensures all-round harmony. While Isvara protects his children from rain and sun, he also provides them, when needed, with the warmth of the gentle sun. His love for his children is expressed in the schema ordered by him for the functioning of Nature and the law he has laid down for trees is a part of it.

To be worthy of Isvara's love we must possess certain qualities, certain virtues. If there is a law that applies to trees, there must be one that applies to us also. We shall deserve the Lord's love and compassion only by living in accordance with this law and by working for the well-being of all mankind. What is called dharma is this law, the law governing the conduct of man. Isvara has endowed man with intelligence, but it is by using this very intelligence that human beings keep violating their dharma. If it is asked why they do so, all we can say in answer is that it is but the sport of the Lord. Man goes seeking this and that, believing that they will make him happy, and all the while he keeps violating his dharma. But he will discover sooner or later that it is dharma alone that gives him happiness in the end.

There is something that somehow turns people all over the world towards dharma. It is this something that inspires human beings everywhere to go beyond their material needs and do things that appear strange. How? One man reads the Bible, cross in hand; another smears ashes all over his body; and a third man wears the Vaisnava mark. From generation to generation mankind has been practicing such customs even without deriving any perceptible material benefit. What is the reason for this?

Man first earned the means for his daily upkeep. But he soon discovered that meeting the needs of the present would not be enough. So he tried to earn more and save for his needs also. The question, however, arose as to what precisely constituted his "future". As he reflected on it, it became clear that his "future" on this earth would be endless, that he would not live a thousand years or ten thousand. So he concerned himself with earning enough to see him through his life and at the same time leaving enough for his children.

What happened to a man after his death was the question that worried him next. The great men who emerged from time to time in various climes came to believe that the entity called man did not cease to exist even after his body perished. The truth dawned on them that the money and property acquired for the upkeep of a man's body served no purpose after his passing. As a next step they formed a view of what a human being must do in this life to ensure for himself a happy state in afterlife. Religious leaders in different countries taught different ways to achieve this. The cross, the *namaz*, the sacred ashes, the sacred earth came to be adopted in this manner by people belonging to different religious persuasions.

" You must look upon the world as belonging to the Lord, and it is your duty to so conduct yourself as to conform yourself to this belief. This constitutes the dharma of humanity. Acts dictated solely by selfish interests will push one into unrighteousness. A man must learn to be less and less selfish in his thoughts and actions; he must always remember the Lord and must ever be conscious that he is the master of all this world. " This view is the basis on which all religions have evolved.

No religion teaches us to live according to our whims and fancies; no religion asks us to acquire wealth and property for our personal needs alone. If a man believes that he alone is important, that he is all, he will live only for himself. That is why all religions speak of an entity called God and teach man to efface his ego or I-feeling. "Child, " they tell him" , "you are nothing before that Power, the author of this universe. It is he -- that Power -- who has endowed you with intelligence. Your intelligence, your intellect, must guide you on the path of dharma, righteousness. For this purpose, you must look up to this Power for support. " The great importance attached to bhakti or devotion in all religions is founded on this belief, the need for divine support for virtuous conduct.

Ordinarily, it is not easy to develop faith in, or devotion to, God expressed in abstract terms. For the common people devotion must take the form of practical steps. That is how ritual originated. Sandhyavandana, the namaz and other forms of prayer are examples of such ritual. The religious teach people their duties, how they must conduct themselves to God in the very midst of their worldly life.

"Love everyone. " "Live a life of sacrifice." "Serve mankind. " Such are the teachings of the various religions. If a man lives according to these tenets, it is believed that his soul will reach God after it departs from his body. Those who subscribe to Advaita or non-dualism declare that the soul will become one with the Godhead. According to another system of belief, after reaching the Lord, the soul will serve him and ever remain happy as the recipient of his compassion. There is no need to quarrel over the nature of the final state. "By following one path or another we attain the Lord. And that will be the end of all our sorrows, all our frustrations and all our failures in this world. There will now be nothing but bliss, full and everlasting. " No more than this do we need to know for the present.

If the Paramatman is to draw us unto himself we must, without fail, perform our duties to him as well as to the world. It is these duties that constitute what is called dharma. Again, it is dharma that serves us when we dwell in our body and when we cease to dwell in it. It serves us in life and afterlife. When we are in this world we must do that which would take us to a desirable state after we depart from it. We take an insurance policy so that our relatives will be able to take care of themselves when we are gone. But is it not far more important to ensure that we will be happy in our after life? Dharma is after life insurance. But in this life too it is dharma that gives us peace and happiness.

There need be no doubt or confusion about the dharma we ought to follow. We are all steeped in the dharma that our, great men have pursued from generation to generation. They have inwardly realized eternal beatitude and we know for certain that they lived without any care, unlike people in our own generation who are always discontented and are embroiled in agitations and demonstrations of all kinds. All we need to do is to follow the dharma that they practiced. If we tried to create a new dharma for ourselves it might mean trouble and all the time we would be torn by doubts as to whether it

would bring us good or whether it would give rise to evil. It is best for us to follow the dharma practiced by the great men of the past, the dharma of our forefathers.

Man is subject to all kinds of hardships and misfortunes. To remind ourselves of this, we eat the bitter flowers of the neem on New Year's Day-that is on the very first day of the year we accept the bitterness of life. During the *Pongal* ceremony, which is celebrated almost towards the close of the year, we have sugarcane to chew. If we have only sweetness in the beginning we may have to experience bitterness towards the end. We must not have any aversion for the bitter but welcome it as the medicine administered by Mother Nature or by dharma. If we do so, in due course, we will learn to regard any experience, even if it were unpleasant, as a sweet one.

Great indeed were the misfortunes suffered by Sri Rama during his exile in the forest. To a son going on a long journey the mother gives food to take with him. Kausalya does the same when her son Rama leaves for the forest, but she does so after much thought, for she wants the food to last during all the fourteen years of his exile. And what is that food? Kausalya gives Rama the eternal sustenance of dharma. Raghava, she says to him, "it is dharma alone that will protect you, and this dharma is what you yourself protect with courage and steadfastness. " It is the escort of dharma that the mother provides her son sent out from his kingdom.

*Yam palayasi dharmam tvam dhrithaya ca niyamena ca*

*Sa vai Raghava-sardula dharmastvamabhiraksatu*

It was dharma that brought victory to Rama after all his struggle. If a man treads the path of dharma he will win universal respect. If he slips into adharma, unrighteousness, even his brother will turn a foe. The Ramayana illustrates this truth. Sri Rama was regarded with respect by the *vanaras*. What about Ravana? Even his brother Vibhisana forsakes him.

Dharma --- and dharma alone is our protecting shield. How did Ravana with his ten heads perish and how did Sri Ramachandra rise with his head held high as Vijayaraghava (the victorious Raghava)? It was all the doing of dharma.

One's religion is nothing but the dharma practiced by one's forefathers. May all adhere to their dharma with unwavering faith and courage and be rewarded with everlasting bliss.



### Papa and Punya

Nobody wants to be known as a sinner, but all the same we keep transgressing the bounds of morality and disobey the divine law. We wish to enjoy the fruits of virtue without being morally good and without doing anything meritorious.

Arjuna says to Bhagavan Krsna: "No man wants to commit sin. Even so, Krsna, he does evil again and again. What is it that drives him so? ". The lord replies "It is desire. Yes, it is desire, Arjuna ".

We try to gain the object of our desire with no thought of right or wrong (Dharma or Adharma). Is fire put out by ghee poured into it? . No, it rises higher and higher. Likewise, when we gratify one desire, another, much worse, crops up. Are we to take it, then, that it would be better if our desires were not satisfied? - No. Unfulfilled desire causes anger, so too failure to obtain the object we hanker after. Like a rubber ball thrown against the wall such an

unsatisfied desire comes back to us in the form of anger and goads us into committing sin. Krsna speaks of such anger as being next only to desire (as an evil).

Only by banishing desire from our hearts may we remain free from sin. How is it done? We cannot but be performing our works. Even when we are physically inactive, our mind remains active. All our mental and bodily activity revolves around our desires. And these desires thrust us deeper and deeper into sin. Is it, then, possible to remain without doing any work? Human nature being what it is, the answer is "No". "-- It is difficult to quell one's thinking nor is it easy to remain without doing anything-- ", says Tayumanavasvamigal. We may stop doing work with the body, but how do we keep the mind quiet? The mind is never still. Apart from being until itself, it incites the body to action.

We are unable either to efface our desires or to cease from all action. Does it then mean that liberation is beyond us? Is there no way out of the problem? Yes, there is. It is not necessary that we should altogether stop our actions in our present immature predicament. But instead of working for our selfish ends, we ought to be engaged in such work as would bring benefits to the world as well as to our inward life. The more we are involved in such work the less we will be drawn by desire. This will to some extent keep us away from sin and at the same time enable us to do more meritorious work. We must learn the habit of doing work without any selfish motives. Work done without any desire for the fruit thereof is *Punya* or virtuous action.

We sin in four different ways. With our body we do evil; with our tongue we speak untruth; with our mind we think evil; and with our money we do so much that is wicked. We must learn to turn these very four means of evil into instruments of virtue.

We must serve others with our body and circumambulate the Lord and prostrate ourselves before him. In this way we earn merit. How do we use our tongue to add our stock of virtue? By muttering, by repeating, the names of the Lord. You will perhaps excuse yourself saying: "All our time is spent in earning our livelihood. How can we think of God or repeat his names?" A householder has a family to maintain; but is he all the time working for it? How much time does he waste in gossip, in amusements, in speaking ill of others, in reading the papers? Can't he spare a few moments to remember the Lord? He need not set apart a particular hour of the day for his *japa*. He

may think of God even on the bus or the train as he goes to his office or any other place. Not a paisa is he going to take with him finally after his lifelong pursuit of money. The Lord's name (Bhagavannama) is the only current coin in the other world.

The mind is the abode of Isvara but we make a rubbish can of it. We must cleanse it, install the Lord in it and be at peace with ourselves. We must devote atleast five minutes every day to meditation and resolve to do so even if the world crashes around us. There is nothing else that will give us a helping hand when the world cosmos is dissolved. It is by helping the poor and by spreading the glory of the Lord that we will earn merit.

Papa, sinful action, is two-pronged in its evil power. The first incites us to wrong-doing now. The second goads us into doing evil tomorrow. For instance, if you take snuff now you suffer now. But tomorrow also you will have the same yearning to take the same. This is what is called the vasana that comes of habit. An effort must be made not only to reduce such vasana but also cultivate the vasana of virtue by doing good deeds.

It is bad vasana that drags us again and again into wrong-doing. Unfortunately, we do not seem to harbour any fear on that score. People like us, indeed even those known to have sinned much, have become devotees of the Lord and obtained light and wisdom. How is Isvara qualified to be called great if he is not compassionate, and does not protect sinners also? It is because of sinners like us that he has come to have the title of "Patitapavana" [he who sanctifies or lifts up the fallen with his grace]. It is we who have brought him such a distinction.

"Come to me, your only refuge. I shall free you from all sins. Have no fear (sarvapapebhyo moksaisyami ma sucah). " The assurance that Sri Krsna gives to free us from sin is absolute. So let us learn to be courageous. To tie up an object you wind a string round it again and again. If it is to be untied you will have to do the unwinding in a similar manner. To eradicate the vasana or sinning you must develop the vasana of doing good to an equal degree. In between there ought to be neither haste nor anger. With haste and anger the thread you keep unwinding will get tangled again. Isvara will come to our help if we have patience, if we have faith in him and if we are rooted in dharma.

The goal of all religions is to wean away man- his mind, his speech and his body- from sensual pleasure and lead him towards the Lord. Great men have appeared from time to time and established their religions with the goal of releasing people from attachment to their senses, for it is our senses that impel us to sin. "Transitory is the joy derived from sinful action, from sensual pleasure. Bliss is union with the Paramatman. " Such is the teaching of all religions and their goal is to free man from worldly existence by leading him towards the Lord.



### The Purpose of Religion

Religion is the means of realizing dharma, artha, kama and moksa. These four are called purusarthas.

In Tamil, dharma is called "aram"; artha is known as "porul"; and kama and moksa are called "inbam, " and *vidu* respectively. "Artha" occurs in the term "purusarthas", but it is itself one of the purusarthas? What a man wants for himself in his life- the aims of a man's life- are the purusarthas. What does a man want to have? He wants to live happily without lacking for anything. There are two types of happiness: the first is ephemeral; and the second is everlasting and not subject to diminution. Kama or in barn is ephemeral happiness and denotes worldly pleasure, worldly desires. Moksa or vidu is everlasting happiness, not transient pleasure. It is because people are ignorant



about such happiness, how elevated and enduring it is, that they hanker after the trivial and momentary joys of kama.

Our true quest must be for the fourth artha, that is vidu or moksa. The majority of people today yearn for the third artha that is kama. When you eat you are happy. When you are appointed a judge of the high court you feel elated. You are delighted when presented with a welcome address by some institution, aren't you? Such types of happiness are not enduring. The means by which such happiness is earned is porul. Porul may be corn, money, and house. It is this porul that is the way to happiness. But the pleasure gained from material possessions is momentary and you keep constantly hungering for more.

Moksa is the state of supreme bliss and there is no quest beyond it. We keep going from place to place and suffer hardships of all kinds. Our destination is our home. A prisoner goes to his vidu or his home after he is released. But the word vidu also means release or liberation. Since we are now imprisoned in our body, we commit the grave mistake of believing that we are the body. The body is in fact our goal. Our real home is the bliss called moksa. We must find release from the goal that is our body and dwell in our true home. God has sentenced us to goal (that is he has imprisoned us in our body) for our sins. If we practice virtue he will condone our sins and release us from the prison of our body before the expiry of the sentence. We must desist from committing sinful acts so that our term of imprisonment is not extended and endeavor to free ourselves and arrive in our true home, our true home that is the Lord. This home is bliss that passeth understanding, bliss that is not bound by the limitations of time, space and matter.

Lastly, I speak of the first purusartha, dharma. Dharma denotes beneficent action, good or virtuous deeds. The word has come to mean giving, charity. "Give me dharmam. Do dharmam, mother, " cries the *beggar*. We speak of "dana-dharma" [as a portmanteau word]. The commandments relating to charity are called "ara-kattalai" in Tamil. Looked at in this way, giving away our artha or porul will be seen to be dharma. But how do we, in the first place, acquire the goods to be given away in charity? The charity practiced in our former birth- by giving away our artha- it is that brings us rewards in this birth. The very purpose of owning material goods is the practice of dharma. Just as material possessions are a means of pleasure, so is dharma a

means of material possessions. It is not charity alone that yields rewards in the form of material goods; all dharma will bring their own material rewards.

If we practice dharma without expecting any reward in the belief that Isvara gives us what he wills- and in a spirit of dedication, the impurities tainting our being will be removed and we will obtain the bliss that is exalted. The pursuit of dharma that brings in its wake material rewards will itself become the means of attaining the *Paramporul*. Thus we see that dharma, while being an instrument for making material gain and through it of pleasure, becomes the means of liberation also if it is practiced unselfishly. Through it we acquire material goods and are helped to keep up the practice of dharma. This means that artha itself becomes a basis of dharma. It is kama or desire alone that neither fulfils itself nor becomes an instrument of fulfilling some other purpose. It is like the water poured on burning sands. Worse, it is an instrument that destroys everything dharmic thoughts, material possessions, liberation it-self.

All the same it is difficult, to start with, to be without any desire altogether. Religion serves to rein in desire little by little and take a man, step by step, from petty ephemeral pleasure to the ultimate bliss. First we are taught the meaning and implications of dharma and how to practice it, then we are instructed in the right manner in which material goods are to be acquired so as to practice this dharma; and, thirdly, we are taught the proper manner in which desires may be satisfied. It is a process of gaining maturity and wisdom to forsake petty pleasure for the ultimate bliss of moksa.

Moksa is release from all attachments. It is a state in which the Self remains ever in untrammled freedom and blessedness. The chief purpose of religion is to teach us how this supreme state may be attained.

We know for certain that ordinary people do not achieve eternal happiness. The purpose of any religion is to lead them towards such happiness. Everlasting blessedness is obtained only by forsaking the quest for petty pleasures. The dictates of dharma help us to abandon the pursuit of sensual enjoyments and endeavor for eternal bliss. They are also essential to create a social order that has the same high purpose, the liberation of all. Religion, with its goal of liberation, lays down the tenets of dharma. That is why the great understand the word dharma itself to mean religion.



## Man and Beast

Animals grow transversely. That is why they are called "tiryak" in Sanskrit. Man who grows upright ought to have, unlike beasts, a high ideal before him. He will then obtain more happiness than all other creatures. But what do we see in reality? Man experiences greater sorrow than all other creatures. Animals do not know so much desire, so much sorrow and so much humiliation, as do humans. More important, they are innocent of sin. It is we humans who keep sinning and suffering as a consequence.

In one sense it seems to me that Isvara has not endowed us with the same advantages that he has endowed animals with. We are not fitted with weapons of defense. If a cow feels threatened it has horns to defend itself. The tiger has its claws. We have neither horns nor claws. Sheep have hair to protect them from the cold of winter, so too other animals. But man is not similarly equipped. So he cannot repulse an attack; nor can he run fast like the horse, which has no horns but is fleet-footed. Against all these handicaps, man has the advantage of being more intelligent than all other creatures.

In order to protect himself from the cold of winter, man removes the hair (fur) of animals and weaves it into rugs. When he wants to travel fast he yokes a horse to his cart. God has furnished man with this kind of skill; though he has neither claws nor horns to defend himself, a human being can forge weapons on his own. With the strength of his intelligence he remains the master of all other creatures and also rules over the entire world of inert matter.

All species of animals have their own habitats. Some types of bear that are native to the cold climes do not thrive in our country. The elephant is a denizen of the forests of India and some other countries of South-East Asia and Africa, but it does not flourish in a cold climate. But man inhabits the entire earth. He uses his brains to make any part of this planet fit for him to live.

But, even with his superior intelligence, man suffers. All hardships stem from the fact of birth. How can one save oneself from being born again? But, then, what is the cause of our birth? The wrongs committed by us are the cause of our birth and we have taken this body of flesh and blood to suffer punishment for the same. Suppose a certain number of whiplashes are to be administered according to the law. If the body perishes after ten lashes, we take another birth to suffer the remaining strokes. The sins we commit in satisfying our desires are the cause of our being born again and again. If there is no "doing", there will be no birth also. Anger is responsible for much of the evil we do and desire is at the root of it. It is of the utmost importance that we banish desire from our hearts. But it is not possible to remain without any action after having cultivated so many attachments. If the attachments were done away with we would cease to sin.

What is the cause of desire? Desire arises from the belief that there is something other than ourselves and our being attached to it. In truth it is the one *Sivam* that manifests itself as everything.

The cow sees its reflection in the mirror and charges it imagining it to be another cow. If a man sees his own image thus, does he think that there is another person in the mirror? He is not perturbed by his image because he knows that it is himself. Similarly, all that we see is one and the same thing. Desire springs from our belief in the existence of a second entity, and it causes anger, which, in turn, plunges us in sin. A new birth becomes inevitable now. If we are enlightened enough to perceive that all objects are one, there will be no ground for desire. There must be an object other than ourselves, a second entity, to be desired. No desire means no anger and no sin. In this state there will be neither any "doing" nor any birth. And, finally, there will be no sorrow.

How do we obtain such enlightenment or jnana? Our body is sustained by our mother's milk. It is Amba who nourishes us with the milk of jnana. She is

indeed the personification of jnana. We will be rewarded with the light of wisdom if we firmly hold her lotus feet and dissolve ourselves in her. One who does so becomes God.

The first step in this process of enlightenment is to make a man truly a man, by ensuring that he does not live on an animal level. The second step is to raise him to the heights of divinity. All religions have this goal. They may represent different systems of thought and philosophy. But their concern ought to be that man is not condemned as he is today to a life of desire and anger. All religions speak in one voice that man must be rendered good and that he must be invested with the qualities of love, humility, serenity and the spirit of sacrifice.



### Devotion Common to all Faiths

All religious traditions have one purpose, to elevate man by freeing him from his cares and worries. A human being has worries that are not shared by other creatures. But it must be noted that all religious systems proclaim that man can not only free himself from his cares, if he makes an effort, but that he can also attain the enlightenment that is not within the reach of other creatures. They speak in one voice that he will be rid of his cares if he goes for refuge to the Great Power that rules all worldly activities. Devotion or bhakti is a feature common to all religious schools- Advaita (non-dualism),

Dvaita (dualism), Visistadvaita (qualified non-dualism), Saiva Siddhanta, Christianity, Islam and so on. The Buddha did not speak of devotion but it seems his followers cannot regard their master without bhakti. They have deified the Buddha and created images of him that are bigger than those sculpted for any deity. In very recent times a number of jnanins have laid stress on inquiry into the Self as the sole means of liberation. But they are themselves worshipped as God by their followers. Bhakti is an inborn characteristic of man; it is indeed an organic part of him.

Devotion in the Advaita system implies adopting an attitude of non- difference between the worshipper and the worshipped; that is the devotee must look upon Isvara as not being different from himself. It might be asked: "The devotee who worships the omnipotent and omniscient Lord has only very limited strength and knowledge. How can the two of them be the same? " But the question also arises: "Does God regard us as being different from himself? If there are objects, entities, different from God how did they originate? If they came into existence as entities separate from Him how can He hold sway over them? ".

If we think on these lines it will become clear that the one and only Paramatman exists in various forms: if the ocean stands for Isvara we have in contrast the pond, the well and the little quantity of water contained in a spoon and soon that stand for diverse living beings. The water in all is the same. There maybe differences in the strengths of the various entities. But if you go to the base, the ground or root, you will discover that they are the same. If we go to the root we will become one with the root. This is liberation according to Advaita. Merely to talk about non-dualistic liberation is nothing more than an Intellectual exercise and will serve no purpose. The truth of such liberation must become an inward reality. In other words the quest must culminate in actual experience and it can be had only with the grace of Isvara. Great sages proclaim that it is only with the blessings of that Power which keeps us in a constant whirl of action that the whirl will stop and that we will have the Advaitic urge to seek the ground. "Isvaranugrahadeva pumsam Advaitavasana. "

Even in the initial stages when we feel that Isvara and his devotee are separate, we must try to cultivate the awareness, albeit to a small degree, that the Paramatman who appears as Isvara is the same as the Paramatman that has become "us". If such be our approach, our love for the Lord will

become more intense. After all, is there anything or anyone we love more than ourselves?

Isvara awards us the fruits of our actions. If we become more and more devoted to him, as recipients of his grace, we will get closer and closer to him. He will himself reveal to us who he is and there will be no need for us to inquire about him or into him. In response to our devotion he will deign to reveal his true nature to us. He declares so in the Gita: "Bhaktya mam abhijanati yavan yascasmi. . . ." (By devotion he comes to know who in truth I am. . . ).

Countless are the attributes of Isvara that bespeak his surpassing beauty and auspicious qualities. Devotees find constant delight in contemplating them. But for the jnanin, the enlightened one, the ideal is the Godhead that has no attributes and it is in his Godhead that he is finally absorbed. Sagunopasana (worship of Isvara with attributes) is the first step towards this end. For it our religion has evolved the concept of "istadevata" ("the deity of one's choice", "the deity one likes").

What is special about sanatana dharma or Hinduism as it has come to be called? Alone among all religions it reveals the one and only Godhead in many different divine forms, with manifold aspects. The devotee worships the Lord in a form suited to his mental make-up and is thus helped to come closer to the Lord with his love and devotion. These different forms are not the creation of anyone's imagination. The Paramatman has revealed himself in these forms to great men and they have had close contact, so to speak, with the deities so revealed. They have also shown us how we too may come face to face with these divinities, given us the mantras to accomplish this and also prescribed the manner in which the divine forms, whose vision they have had, are to be adored.

Bhakti or devotion is common to all religions whatever the manner of worship they teach. It is not exclusive to our faith in which different deities are revered.



## The Unity of Religions

All religions have one common ideal, worship of the Lord, and all of them proclaim that there is but one God. This one God accepts your devotion irrespective of the manner of your worship, whether it is according to this or that religion. So there is no need to abandon the religion of your birth and embrace another.

The temple, the church, the mosque, the vihara may be different from one another. The idol or the symbol in them may not also be the same and the rites performed in them may be different. But the Paramatman who wants to grace the worshipper, whatever be his faith, is the same. The different religions have taken shape according to the customs peculiar to the countries in which they originated and according to the differences in the mental outlook of the people inhabiting them. The goal of all religions is to lead people to the same Paramatman according to the different attributes of the devotees concerned. So there is no need for people to change over to another faith. Converts demean not only the religion of their birth but also the one to which they convert. Indeed they do demean God.

"A man leaves the religion of his birth because he thinks there is something wanting in it," so you may think. 'Why does the *Svaamigal* say then that the convert demeans the new religion that he embraces?' I will tell you why. Is it not because they think that God is not the same in all religions that people embrace a new faith? By doing so, they see God in a reduced form, don't they? They presumably believe that the God of the religion of their birth is useless and jump to another faith. But do they believe that the God of their



new religion is a universal God? No. No. If they did there would be no need for any change of faith. Why do people embrace a new faith? Is it not because that the continuance in the religion of their birth would mean a denial of the blessings of the God of the new faith to which they are attracted? This means that they place limitations on their new religion as well as on its God. When they convert to a new religion, apparently out of respect for it, they indeed dishonour it.

One big difference between Hinduism and other faiths is that it does not proclaim that it alone shows the path to liberation. Our Vedic religion alone has not practiced conversion and the reason for it is that our forefathers were well aware that all religions are nothing but different paths to realise the one and only Paramatman. The Vedas proclaim: "The wise speak of the One Truth by different *names*. " Sri Krsna says in the Gita: "In whatever way or form a man worships me, I increase his faith and make him firm and steady in that *worship*. " And says one of the Azhvars: "*Avaravar tamatamadu tarivari vahaivahai avaravar iraiyavar*". This is the reason why the Hindus have not practiced- like adherents of other religions- proselytisation and religious persecution. Nor have they waged anything like the crusades or *jehads*.

Our long history is sufficient proof of this. All historians accept the fact of our religious tolerance. They observe that, an empire like *Srivijaya* was established in the East, people there accepted our culture and our way of life willingly, not because they were imposed on them by force. They further remark that Hinduism spread through trade and not through force.

In my opinion the Vedic religion was once prevalent all over the world. Certain ruins and relics found in various regions of the planet attest to this fact. Even historians who disagree with my view concede that in the past people in many lands accepted Indian culture and the way of life willingly and not on account of any force on our part.

All religions that practice conversion employ a certain ritual. For instance, there is baptism in Christianity. Hinduism has more ritual than any other religion, yet its canonical texts do not contain any rite for conversion. No better proof is needed for the fact that we have at no time either encouraged conversion or practiced it.

When a passenger arrives at a station by train he is besieged by the driver of the horse-cart, by the rikshavala, by the cabbie, and so on. He hires the vehicle in which he likes to be driven to his destination. It cannot be said with reason that those who ply different vehicles are guilty of competing with one another for the fare. After all it is their livelihood. But it makes no sense for the adherents of various faiths to vie with one another to take a man to the one and only destination that is God.

There is a bridge across a river, consisting of a number of arches, each of them built to the same design and measurement. To the man sitting next to a particular arch it would appear to be bigger than the other arches. So is the case with people belonging to a particular religion. They feel that their religion alone is great and want others to join it. There is in fact no such need for anyone to leave the religion of his birth for another.

That the beliefs and customs of the various religions are different cannot be a cause for complaint. Nor is there any need to make all of them similar. The important thing is for the followers of the various faiths to live in harmony with one another. The goal must be unity, not uniformity.



### Qualities of Religious Teachers

Today students of philosophy and seekers all over the world accept Advaita or non-dualism as the supreme system of thought. Since you call me a teacher of Advaita you will naturally expect me to say that it is because of the excellence of this Vedantic system that it has so many followers.

But, on reflection, the question arises as to whether all people do indeed subscribe to non-dualism. The world over people follow so many different religions, subscribe to so many different philosophical systems. People belonging to the same country go from one faith to another. During the time of the Buddha many adherents of the Vedic religion embraced his system. In later centuries many Hindus became converts to Christianity or Islam. Jains have become Vaisnavas with the name of "Pustimargins". During the time of Sri Ramanuja a number of people went over to the Visistadvaita (qualified non-dualism) fold. Similarly, Sri Madhva's school of Dvaita or dualism also gained many adherents. When Adi Sankara held sway, non-Vedic religions like Buddhism and Jainism suffered a decline. Those following the path of karma then- the karma marga is a part of the Vedic religion- returned to Advaita, which indeed is a wholly Vedic system.

Why did religions that had flourished at one time go under later? Do people really follow a religion or subscribe to a philosophical system after making a proper inquiry into the same? Perhaps only thinking people embrace a religion after an assessment of its doctrines. The same cannot be said about the generality of people who any faith. If it is claimed that the common people accept a religion for its concepts, they must be able to speak about them and

tell us how these doctrines are superior to those of other religions. The fact is that the vast majority of the followers of any faith know precious little about the beliefs or doctrines on which it is founded.

I believe that the growth or expansion of a religion is in no way related to its doctrines. The common people do not worry about questions of philosophy. A great man of exemplary character and qualities appears on the scene- a great man of compassion who creates serenity all round- and people are drawn to him. They become converts to his religion in the firm belief that the doctrines preached by him, whatever they be, must be good. On the other hand, a religion will decline and decay if its spokesmen, however eloquent they are in expounding its concepts, are found to be guilty of lapses in character and conduct. It is difficult to give an answer to the question why people flock to religions that have contradictory beliefs. But if we examine the history of some religions- how at one time people gloried in them and how these faiths later perished- we shall be able to know the reason. At the same time, it would be possible for us to find out how at the first place they attracted such a large following. If you find out how a religion declined you will be able to know how it had first grown and prospered.

The decay of a religion in any country could be attributed to the lack of character of its leaders and of the people constituting the establishment responsible for its growth.

When we listen to the story of the Buddha, when we see again and again his images that seem to exude the milk of human kindness, compassion and tranquility spring in our own hearts and we feel respectful towards him. People must have been attracted to him thus during his time. How, in later times, there was a moral decline in the Buddhist monastic establishments will be seen from *MattaVilasam* written by Mahendra Pallava. This work shows how Buddhism came to be on the decline and demonstrates that the rise or fall of a religion is dependent on the quality and character of its spokesmen.

After the Buddha came AdiSankara to whom people were drawn for his incomparable goodness and greatness. Later appeared Ramanuja and Madhva who, in their personal lives, stood out as men of lofty character. They too were able to gather round them a large following and extend the sway of their respective systems. Recently came Gandhiji as a man of peace and sacrifice. Millions of people accepted his teachings, which indeed came to constitute

religion, "Gandhism". If a system owes its growth to the excellence of the philosophical principles on which it is based, Gandhism ought to be at the peak of its glory today. But what do we see in reality? The Gandhian way of life as practiced now is all too obvious to need any comment.

The question here is not about the religions that try to draw people to themselves either through force or the lure of money. It is but natural for ignorant people to become converts to a new religion through rites like baptism after receiving various inducements and "social rewards". It was in this manner, they say, that Christianity extended its influence during times of famine. It is also said that Islam was propagated with the sword, that masses of people were forced to join it by force of arms. Here again there is proof of the fact that that the common people do not adopt a religion for the sake of any principle or out of any interest in its philosophical system. There is one matter to consider. The padres [Christian missionaries] converted mainly people living in the ceris [that is people on the outskirts of a village or town]. Their usual procedure was to tell these poor folk that they were kept suppressed in the religion of their birth and offer them inducements in the form of free education and medical treatment and the promise of a better status.

Not all, however, fell to such lures. However much they seemed to be suppressed in the religion of their birth, many of them refused to be converted, ignoring the advantages held out. Why? One reason was their good nature and the second was respect for the great men who have appeared in our religion from time to time. They told themselves: "Let us continue to remain in the religion of our forefathers, the religion that has produced so many great men."

We must not censure those who convert people to their faith. They believe that their religion represents the highest truth. That is why they practice conversion by compulsion or by placing various temptations before people belonging to other faiths. Let us take it that they try to bring others into their fold because they believe that that is the only means of a man's salvation. Let us also presume that they believe that there is nothing wrong in carrying out conversion either by force or through the offer of inducements because they think that they are doing it for the well-being of the people they seek to convert.

If religions that resort neither to force nor to money power have grown, it is solely because of the noble qualities of their teachers. Outwards guise alone is not what constitutes the qualities of the representative or the spokesman of a religion. Whatever the persuasion to which he belongs he must be utterly selfless, bear ill-will towards none, in addition to being morally blameless. He must live an austere life, and must be calm and compassionate by nature. Such a man will be able to help those who come to him by removing their shortcomings and dispelling the evil in them.

Producing men of such noble qualities from amongst us is the way to make our religion flourish. It is not necessary to carry on propaganda against other religions. The need is for representatives, for preceptors, capable of providing an example through their very life of the teachings of our religion. It is through such men that, age after age, sanatana dharma has been sustained as a living force. Hereafter too it will be through them that it will continue to remain a living force.

If a militant proselytizer appears on the scene, I shall not be able to gather a force to combat him. Nor can I spend crores and crores like those religious propagandists who build schools and hospitals to entice people into their faith. Even if I were able to do so, conversions carried out in such a manner would be neither true nor enduring. Suppose a group comes up that has more muscle and money power; it will undo my work with its superior force and greater monetary strength. We should not, therefore, depend on such outward forces to promote our religion but instead rely on our Atmic strength to raise ourselves. In this manner our religion will flourish without any need for aggressive propaganda or the offer of inducements.

At present many intellectuals abroad talk in glowing terms of Advaita, may be because of its lofty character as a philosophical system. They come to the school of Vedanta after examining it and after being inwardly convinced of its truth. But the common people need the example of a great soul, a great life [not abstract principles].

A man of peace and compassion, a man of wisdom and self-sacrifice, must arise from our midst.



### The Religion without a Name

We speak of the "Hindu religion", but the religion denoted by the term did not in fact have such a name originally. According to some, the word "Hindu" means "love"; according to some others a Hindu is one who disapproves of himsa or violence. This may be an ingenious way of explaining the word.

In none of our ancient sastras does the term "Hindu religion" occur. The name "Hindu" was given to us by foreigners. People from the West came to our land across the Sindhu river which they called "Indus" or "Hind" and the land adjacent to it by the name "India". The religion of this land came to be called "Hindu". The name of a neighbouring country is sometimes applied to the land adjacent to it. Let me tell you an interesting story in this connection.

In the North people readily give alms to anybody calling himself a *bairagi*. The bairagis have a grievance against Southerners because they do not follow the same practice. "iIlai po po kahe Telungi" is one of their ditties. "Telugus do not say "po, po" but "vellu" for "go, go". "Po" is a Tamil word. Then how would you explain the line quoted above? During their journey to the South, the bairagis had first to pass through the Telugu country (Andhra); so they thought that the land further south also belonged to the Telugus.

There is the same logic behind the Telugus themselves referring to Tamil Nadu as "Arava Nadu" from the fact that a small area south of Andhra Pradesh is

called "Arva". Similarly, foreigners who came to the land of the Sindhu called all Bharata beyond also by the same name.

However it be, "Hinduism" was not the name of our religion in the distant past. Nor was it known as "Vaidika Mata" (Vedic religion or as "sanatana dharma" ( the ancient or timeless religion). Our basic texts do not refer to our faith by any name. When I thought about it I felt that there was something deficient about our religion.

One day, many years ago, someone came and said to me: "Ramu is here. " At once I asked somewhat absent-mindedly: "Which Ramu? " Immediately came the reply : " Are there many Ramus? " Only then did it occur to me that my question, "Which Ramu? ", had sprung from my memory of the past. There were four people in my place bearing the name of "Ramu". So, to tell them apart, we called them "Dark Ramu". When there is only one Ramu around there is no need to give him a distinguishing label.

It dawned on me at once why our religion had no name. When there are a number of religions they have to be identified by different names. But when there is only one, where is the problem of identifying it?

All religions barring our own were established by single individuals. "Buddhism" means the religion founded by Gautama Buddha. Jainism was founded by the Jina called Mahavira. So has Christianity its origin in Jesus Christ. Our religion predating all these had spread all over the world. Since there was no other religion to speak about then it was not necessary to give it a name. When I recognised this fact I felt at once that there was no need to be ashamed of the fact that our religion had no name in the past. On the contrary, I felt proud about it.

If ours is primeval religion, the question arises as to who established it. All inquiries into this question have failed to yield an answer. Was it Vyasa, who composed the Brahmasutra, the founder of our religion? Or was it Krsna Paramatman who gave us the Bhagavad-Gita? But both Vyasa and Krsna state that the Vedas existed before them. If that be the case, are we to point to the rsis, the seers who gave us the Vedic mantras, as the founders of our religion? But they themselves declare: " We did not create the Vedas. " When we chant a mantra we touch our head with our hand mentioning the name of one seer or another. But the sages themselves say: "It is true that the



mantras became manifest to the world through us. That is why we are mentioned as the 'mantra rsis'. But the mantras were not composed by us but revealed to us. When we sat meditating with our minds under control, the mantras were perceived by us in space. Indeed we saw them (hence the term mantra-drastas). We did not compose them. "[the seers are not "mantra-kartas". ]

All sounds originate in space. From them arose creation. According to science, the cosmos was produced from the vibrations in space. By virtue of their austerities the sages had the gift of seeing the mantras in space, the mantras that liberate men from this creation. The Vedas are apauruseya (not the work of any human author) and are the very breath of the Paramatman in his form as space. The sages saw them and made a gift of them to the world.

If we know this truth, we have reason to be proud of the fact that we do not know who founded our religion. In fact we must feel happy that we have the great good fortune to be heirs to a religion that is eternal, a religion containing the Vedas which are the very breath of the Paramatman.



## The Universal Religion

In the dim past what we call Hinduism today was prevalent all over the world. Archaeological studies reveal the existence of relics of our Vedic religion in many countries. For instance, excavations have brought up the text of a treaty between Rameses II and the Hittites dating back to the 14th century B. C. In this, the Vedic gods Mitra and Varuna are mentioned as witnesses to the pact. There is a connection between the name of Ramesses and that of our Rama.

About 75 per cent of the names of places in Madagascar have a Sanskrit origin.

In the Western Hemisphere too there is evidence of Hinduism having once flourished there. In Mexico a festival is celebrated at the same time as our Navaratri; it is called "Rama-Sita". Wherever the earth is dug up images of Ganapati are discovered *here*. The Aztecs had inhabited Mexico before the Spaniards conquered that land. "Aztecs " must be a distorted form of "Astikas". In Peru, during the time of the holy equinox [vernal? ] worship was conducted in the sun temple. The people of this land were called Incas: "Ina" is one of the Sanskrit names of the sun god. Don't we call Rama *Inakula-tilaka?*

There is book containing photographs of the aborigines of Australia dancing in the nude (*The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, by Spencer Killan, pages 128 & 129). A close look at the pictures, captioned "Siva Dance", shows that the dancers have a third eye drawn on the forehead.

In a virgin forest in Borneo which, it is said, had not been penetrated by any human being until recently, explorers have found a sacrificial post with an inscription in a script akin to our Grantha<sup>s</sup> characters. Historians know it as the inscription of Mulavarman of Kotei. Mention is made in it of a sacrifice, the king who performed it, the place where the yupa<sup>s</sup> was installed. That the king gave away kalpavrksas<sup>s</sup> as a gift to Brahmins is also stated in this inscription. All such details were discovered by Europeans, the very people who ridicule our religion.

Now something occurs to me in this context, something that you may find amusing. You know that the Sagaras went on digging the earth down to the nether world in search of their sacrificial horse. An ocean came into being in this way and it was called sagara after the king Sagara.

The Sagaras, at last found the horse near the hermitage of Kapila Maharsi. Thinking that he must be the man who had stolen the animal and hidden it in the nether world they laid violent hands on him. Whereupon the sage reduced them to ashes with a mere glance of his eye. Such is the story according to the Ramayana. America, which is at the antipodes, may be taken to Patala or the nether world. Kapilaranya(the forest in which Kapila had his hermitage), we may further take it, was situated there. It is likely that Kapilaranya changed to California in the same manner as Madurai is something altered to "Marudai". Also noteworthy is the fact that there is a Horse Island near California as well as an Ash Island.

Another idea occurs to me about Sagara and sagara. Geologists believe that ages ago the Sahara desert was an ocean. It seems to me that Sahara is derived from sagara.

Some historians try to explain the evidence pointing to the worldwide prevalence of our religion in the past to the exchange of cultural and religious ideas between India and other countries established through travels. I myself believe that there was one common religion or dharma throughout and that the signs and symbols that we find of this today are the creation of the original inhabitants of the lands concerned.

The view put forward by some students of history about the discovery of the remnants of our religion in other countries- these relating to what is considered the historical period of the past two or three thousand years- is

that Indians went to these lands, destroyed the old native civilizations there and imposed Hindu culture in their place. Alternatively, they claim, Indians thrust their culture into the native ways of life in such a way that it became totally absorbed in them.

The fact, however, is that evidence is to be found in many countries of their Vedic connection dating back to 4, 000 years or more. That is, with the dawn of civilization itself, aspects of the Vedic dharama existed in these lands. It was only subsequently that the inhabitants of these regions came to have a religion of their own.

Greece had an ancient religion and had big temples where various deities were worshipped. The Hellenic religion had Vedic elements in it. The same was the case with the Semitic religions of the pre- Christian era in the region associated with Jesus. The aborigines of Mexico had a religion of their own. They shared the Vedic view of the divine in the forces of nature and worshipped them as deities. There was a good deal of ritual in all such religions.

Now none of these religions, including that of Greece, survives. The Greek civilization had once attained to the heights of glory. Now Christianity flourishes in Greece. Buddhism has spread in Central Asia and in East Asia up to Japan. According to anthropologists, religions in their original form exist only in areas like the forests of Africa. But even these ancient faiths contain Vedic elements.

Religious and philosophical truths are often explained through parables, stories, so that ignorant people can understand them easily. Since metaphysical concepts are difficult to grasp, either they have to be told in the form of a story or they have to be given the form of a ritual, that is they must find expression as religious acts. For the common people the performance of a rite is a means of finding the truth present in it in the form of a symbol. I do not, however, agree with the view that all rituals are nothing but symbolic in their significance and that there is no need to perform them so long as their inner meaning is understood.

Ritual as ritual has its own place and efficacy. Similarly, I would not say that stories from the Puranas are nothing but illustrations or explanations of certain truths or doctrines. As stories they are of a high order and I believe

that they really happened. But, at the same time, they demonstrate the meaning of certain truths. As for rites, their performance brings up benefits. But in due course, as we learn to appreciate their inner meaning we shall become purified in mind. This is the stage when we shall no more yearn for any benefits from their performance and will be rewarded with supreme well-being (that is, liberation).

It is likely, though, that, with the passage of time, some stories or rites will become far removed from their inner meaning. Or, it may be, the inner meaning will be altogether forgotten. So it must be that, when new religions took shape abroad, after the lapse of thousands of years-religions not connected with the Vedic faith that is the root-the original Vedic concepts become transformed or distorted.

You must be familiar with the story of Adam and Eve which belongs to the Hebrew tradition. It occurs in the *Genesis* of the Old Testament and speaks of the tree of knowledge and God's commandment that its fruit shall not be eaten. Adam at first did not eat it but Eve did. After that Adam too ate the forbidden fruit.

Here an Upanisadic concept has taken the form of a biblical story. But because of the change in the time and place the original idea has become distorted-or even obliterated.

The Upanisadic story speaks of two birds perched on the branch of a pippala tree. One eats the fruit of tree while the other merely watches its companion without eating. The pippala tree stands for the body. The first bird represents a being that regards himself as the jivatman or individual self and the fruit it eats signifies sensual pleasure. In the same body (symbolized by the tree) the second bird is to be understood as the Paramatman. He is the support of all beings but he does not know sensual pleasure. Since he does not eat the fruit he naturally does not have the same experience as the jivatman (the first). The Upanisad speaks with poetic beauty of the two birds. He who eats the fruit is the individual self, jiva, and he who does not eat is the Supreme Reality, the one who knows himself to be the Atman.

It is this jiva that has come to be called Eve in the Hebrew religious tradition. "Ji" changes to "i" according to a rule of grammar and "ja" to "ya". We have the example of "Yamuna" becoming "Jamuna" or of "Yogindra" being

changed to "Joginder ". In the biblical story "jiva" is "Eve" and "Atma" (or "Atman") is "Adam". "Pippala" has in the same way changed to "apple". The Tree of Knowledge is our "bodhi-vrksa". "Bodha" means "knowledge". It is well known that the Budhha attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. But the *pipal* (pippala) was known as the bodhi tree even before his time.

The Upanisadic ideas transplanted into a distant land underwent a change after the lapse of centuries. Thus we see in the biblical story that the Atman (Adam) that can never be subject to sensual pleasure also eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. While our bodhi tree stands for enlightenment, the enlightenment that banishes all sensual pleasure, the biblical tree affords worldly pleasure. These differences notwithstanding there is sufficient evidence here that, once upon a time, Vedic religion was prevalent in the land of the Hebrews.

Let me give the another example to strengthen the view that however much a custom or a concept changes with the passage of time and with its acceptance by people of another land, it will still retain elements pointing to its original source. Our *Tiruppavai*<sup>T</sup> and *Tiruvembavai*<sup>T</sup> are not as ancient as the Vedas. Scholars ascribe them to an age not later than 1, 500 years ago. However it be, the authors of these Tamil hymns, Andal<sup>T</sup> and Manikkavacakar<sup>T</sup> belong to an age much later than that of the Vedas and epics. After their time Hindu empires arose across the seas. Even the Cola kings extended their sway beyond the shores of the country. More worthy of note than our naval expeditions was the great expansion in our sea trade and the increase with it of our foreign contacts. As a result, people abroad were drawn to the Hindu religion and culture. Among the regions that developed such contacts, South-East Asia was the most important. Islands like Bali in the Indonesian archipelago became wholly Hindu. People in Siam (Thailand), Indochina and the Philippines came under the influence of Hindu culture. Srivijaya was one of the great empires of South-East Asia.

[Here the Paramaguru briefly touches upon the stages representing the emergence of various religions]. In primeval times the Vedic religion was prevalent everywhere: this was the first stage. In the second stage new religions emerged in various parts of the world. In the third stage these decayed and their place was taken by Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. In the subsequent stage the Hindu civilization became a living force outside the shores of India also, particularly in South-East Asia. This was the period

during which great temples reminding us of those of Tamil Nadu arose with the spread of our religion and culture: Angkor-vat in Cambodia; Borobudur in Java, Indonesia; Prambanan, also in Java. Now it was that our *Tiruppavai* and *Tiruvembavai* made their passage to Thailand.

Even today a big festival is held in Thailand in December- January, corresponding to the Tamil *Margazhi*, the same month during which we read the *Tiruppavai* and *Tiruvembavai* with devotion. As part of the celebrations a dolotsava (swing festival) is held. A remarkable feature of this is that, in the ceremony meant for Visnu, a man with the make-up of Siva is seated on the swing. This seems to be in keeping with the fact that the *Tiruppavai* and *Tiruvembavai* contribute to the unification of Vaisnavism and Saivism.

If you ask the people of Thailand about the Pavai poems, they will not be able to speak about them. It might seem then that there is no basis for connecting the that festival with the *Pavai* works merely because it is held in the month corresponding to the Tamil *Murgazhi*. But the point to note is that the people of that country themselves call it "*Triyampavai- Trippavai*".

Those who read the Bible today are likely to be ignorant about the Upanisads, but they are sure to know the story that can be traced back to them, that of Adam and Eve. The Thais now must be likewise ignorant about the *Pavis* but, all the same, they hold in the month of Dhanus every year a celebration called "*Triyampavai - Trippavai*. " As part of it they also have a swing festival in which figures a man dressed as Siva. Here the distortion in the observance of a rite have occurred during historical times- one of the distortions is that of Siva being substituted for Visnu. Also during this period the Thais have forgotten the *Pavis* but, significantly enough, they still conduct a festival named after them. Keeping these before you, take mind back to three thousand years ago and imagine how a religion or a culture would have changed after its passage to foreign lands.

It is in this context that you must consider the Vedic tradition. For all the changes and distortions that it has undergone in other countries during the past millennia its presence there is still proclaimed through elements to be found in the religions that supplanted it.

How are we to understand the presence of Hindu ideas or concepts in the religious beliefs of people said to belong to prehistoric times? It does not

seem right to claim that in the distant past our religion or culture was propagated in other countries through an armed invasion or through trade, that is at a time when civilization itself has not taken shape there. That is why I feel that there is no question of anything having been taken from this land and introduced into another country. The fact according to me, is that in the beginning the Vedic religion was prevalent all over the world. Later, over the countries, it must have gone through a process of change and taken different forms. These forms came to be called the original religions of these various lands which in the subsequent period- during historical times- came under Buddhism, Christianity or Islam as the case may be.





## Distinctive Features of Sanathan Dharama

Our religion has a number of unique or distinctive features. One of them is what is called the theory of karma, though this theory is common to religions like Buddhism which are offshoots of Hinduism.

What is the karma doctrine? For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. There is an ineluctable law of physics governing cause and effect, action and reaction. This law pertaining to physical phenomena our forefathers applied to human life. The cosmos includes not only sentient beings endowed with consciousness but also countless insentient objects. Together they constitute worldly life. The laws, the dharma, proper to the first order must apply to the second also. According to the karma theory, every action of a man has an effect corresponding to it. Based on this belief our religion declares that, if a man commits a sin, he shall pay the penalty for it. Also if his act is a virtuous one, he shall reap the benefits thereof.

Our religion further asserts that one is born again and again so as to experience the consequences of one's good and bad action. "Do good. " "Do not do evil, " such are the exhortations of all religions. But Hinduism (and its offshoots) alone lay stress on the cause-and-effect connection. No religion originating in countries outside India subscribes to the cause-and-effect connection, nor to the reincarnation theory as one of its articles of faith. Indeed religions originating abroad hold beliefs contrary to this theory and strongly oppose the view that man is born again and again in order to exhaust his karma. They believe that a man has only one birth, that when his soul departs on his death it dwells somewhere awaiting the day of judgment. On

this day God makes an assessment of his good and bad actions and, on the basis of it, rewards him with eternal paradise or sentences him to eternal damnation.

Some years ago, a well-known writer from Europe came to see me nowadays you see many white men coming to the Matha. This gentleman told me that the Bible stated more than once that God is love. He could not reconcile this with the belief that God condemns a sinner to eternal damnation without affording him an opportunity for redemption. On this point a parade had told him: "It is true that there is an eternal hell. But it is eternally vacant. "

The padre's statement is difficult to accept. Let us suppose that the Lord in his compassion does not condemn a sinner to hell. Where then does he send his soul? Since, according to Christianity, there is no rebirth the sinner is not made to be born again. So he too must be rewarded with heaven (as much as the virtuous man). This means that we may merrily keep sinning without any fear of punishment. After all, God will reward all of us with heaven. This belief implies that there is no need for morality and truthfulness.

According to our religion too, Isvara who decides our fate after death on the basis of our karma is infinitely merciful. But, at the same time, he does not plunge the world in adharma, in unrighteousness- that is not how his compassion manifests itself. What does he do then? He gives us another birth, another opportunity to reap the fruits of our good and bad action. The joys of heaven and the torments of hell truly belong to this world itself. The sorrow and happiness that are our lot in our present birth are in proportion to the virtuous and evil deeds of our past birth. Those who sinned much suffer much now and, similarly, those who did much good enjoy much happiness now. The majority is made up of people who know more sorrow than happiness and people who experience sorrow and happiness almost in equal measure. There are indeed very few blessed with utter happiness. It is evident from this that most of us must have done more evil than good in our past birth.

In His mercy the Lord gives us every time a fresh opportunity to wash away our sins. The guru, the sastras, and the temples are all his gifts to wipe away our inner impurities. That Isvara, in his compassion, places his trust even in a sinner confident that he will raise himself through his own efforts and gives him a fresh opportunity in the form of another birth to advance himself inwardly- is not such a belief better than that he should dismiss a sinner as

good for nothing and yet reward him with heaven? If a man sincerely believes, in a spirit of surrender, there is nothing that he can do on his own and that everything is the Lord's doing, he will be redeemed and elevated. But it is one thing for God to bless a man who goes to him for refuge forsaking his own efforts to raise himself and quite another to bless him thinking him to be not fit to make any exertions on his own to advance inwardly. So long as we believe in such a thing as human endeavour we should think that Isvara's supreme compassion lies in trusting a man to go forward spiritually through his own *efforts*. It is in this way that the Lord's true grace is manifested.

That God does not condemn anyone to eternal punishment in hell is the personal opinion of a particular padre. It cannot be said that all religions like Christianity which believe that a man has only one birth agree with this view. They believe that God awards a man hell or paradise according to the good or evil he has done in one single birth. Since sinners who deserve to be condemned to hell predominate, the day of judgment has come to be known by the terrible name of doomsday. Here we have a concept according to which the Lord's compassion seems to be circumscribed.

There is strong evidence to support the reincarnation theory. A lady from the West came to see me one day and asked me if there was any proof of reincarnation. I did not have any discussion with her on the subject. Instead, I asked her to visit the local obstetric hospital and find out all about the children born there. There was a learned man who knew English where we were camping then. I asked him to accompany the lady. Later, on their return from the hospital, I asked the woman about her impressions of the new-born children. She said that she had found one child plump and lusty, another skinny; one beautiful and another ungainly. One child was born in a comfortable ward [that is to a well-to-do mother] and another to a poor mother.

"Leave aside the question of God consigning a man to eternal hell after his death, " I said to the foreign lady. "We are not witness to such a phenomenon. But now you have seen with your own eyes how differently the children are born in the hospital that you visited. How would you account for the differences? Why should one child be born rich and another poor? Why should one be healthy and another sickly? And why should one be good-looking and another not so good looking?"

"If you accept the doctrine that men are born only once, you cannot but from the impression that God is neither compassionate nor impartial- think of all the differences at birth- and that he functions erratically and unwisely. How are we to be devoted to such a God and have the faith that he will look on us with mercy? How are we to account for the differences between one being and another if we do not accept the doctrine that our life now is determined by the good and the bad we did in our past births. " The lady from the West accepted my explanation.

Such an explanation is not, however, good enough for people in modern times. They demand scientific proof of reincarnation. Parapsychologists have done considerable research in the subject and their findings are in favour of the theory of rebirth. During the studies conducted in various parts of the world they encountered people who remembered their past lives. The latter recalled places and people they had seen in their previous birth-places and people that have nothing to do with them now. The parapsychologists verified these facts and to their amazement found them to be true. The cases investigated by them were numerous. Most of us are wholly unaware of our past lives, but some do remember them. According to the researchers the majority of such people had been victims of accidents or murder in their previous lives.

The doctrine of the incarnations of the Lord- avatars- is another unique feature of our religion. The Reality (Sadvastu) is one. That It manifests itself as countless beings is one of our cardinal tenets. It follows that it is this one and only Reality that transforms itself again and again into all those beings that are subject to birth and death. Also it is the same Reality that is manifested as Isvara to protect this world of sentient beings and insentient objects. Unlike humans he is not subject to the law of karma. It is to live out his karma- to experience the fruits of his actions- that man is born again and again. But in birth after birth, instead of washing away his old karma, he adds more and more to the mud sticking to him.

If the Lord descends to earth again and again it is to lift up man and show him the righteous path. When unrighteousness gains the upper hand and righteousness declines, he descends to earth to destroy unrighteousness and to establish righteousness again- and to protect the virtuous and destroy the wicked. Sri Krsna Paramatman declares so in the Gita.

Ishvara is to be known in different states. That the Lord is all- that all is the Lord- is a state that we cannot easily comprehend. Then there is a state mentioned in the "vibhuti yoga" of Gita according to which the Lord dwells in the highest of each category, in the "most excellent" of things. To create the highest of excellence in human life he sends messengers to earth in the guise of preceptors (acaryas), men of wisdom and enlightenment (jnanins), yogins and devotees. This is another state in which God is to be known. Not satisfied with the previous states, he assumes yet another state: he descends to earth as an avatara. The word "avatarana" itself means "descent". Ishvara is "paratpara", that is "higher than the highest", "beyond what is beyond everything". Yet he descends to earth by being born in our midst to re-establish dharma.

Sindhanta Saivas do not subscribe to the view of Siva having avataras. Nor they agree with the belief that Adi Sankara and Jnanasambandhar were incarnations of Siva and Muruga (Subrahmanya) respectively. Their view is that if Ishvara dwells in a human womb, in a body of flesh, he makes himself impure. According to Advaitins even all those who inhabit the human womb made up of flesh are in substance nothing but the Brahman. They see nothing improper in the Lord coming down to earth.

All Vaisnavas, without exception, accept the doctrine of divine avataras. Philosophically speaking, there are many points of agreement between Vaisnavas and Saivas though the former are not altogether in agreement with the view that it is the Brahman itself that is expressed as the individual self. When we speak of the avataras, we generally mean the ten incarnations of Visnu. Vaisnavas adhere to the doctrine of avataras because they believe that Visnu descends to earth to uplift humanity. Indeed it is because of his boundless compassion that he makes himself small [or reduces himself] to any degree. In truth, however, the Lord is neither reduced nor tainted a bit in any of his incarnations because, though in outward guise he looks a mortal, he knows himself to be what in reality he is.

Altogether the Vedic dharma that is Hinduism accepts the concepts the concept of incarnations of the Lord. Saivas too are one with Vaisnavas in believing in the ten incarnations of Visnu.

That the one and only Paramatman who has neither a form nor attributes is manifested as different forms with attributes is another special feature of

our religion. We worship idols representing these forms of deities. For this reason others label us polytheists. Their view is utterly wrong. Because we worship the one God, the one reality, in many different forms it does not mean that we believe in many gods. It is equally absurd to call us idolaters who hold that the idol we worship is God. Hindus with a proper understanding of their religion do not think that the idol alone is God. The idol is meant for the worshipper to offer one-pointed devotion and he adores it with the conviction that the Lord who is present everywhere is present in it also. We see that practitioners of other religions also have symbols for worship and meditation. So it is wholly unjust to believe that Hindus alone worship idols- to regard them with scorn as idolaters is not right.

That ours is the only religion that does not proclaim that its followers have an exclusive right to salvation is a matter of pride for us Hindus. Our catholic outlook is revealed in our scriptures which declare that whatever the religious path followed by people they will finally attain the same Paramatman. That is why there is no place for conversion in Hinduism.

Christianity has it that, if a man does not follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, he shall be condemned to hell. Islam says the same about those who do not follow the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. We must not be angry with the adherents of either religion on that score. Let us take it that Christians and Muslims alike believe that followers of other religions do not have the same sense of fulfillment as they have. So let us presume that it is with good intentions that they want to bring others into their fold (Christianity or Islam as the case may be) out of a desire to help them.

Let us also assume that if they resort to means that seem undesirable, it is to achieve what they think to be a good objective, luring others into their faith. It was thus that they carried out conversions in the past, by force of arms. Islam, particularly, expanded its sway in this way. It is often said that Christianity spread with the help of money power. But Christians also used their army to gain adherent, though with the force of arms was associated the philanthropic work of the missionaries. White men had the advantage of money that the Muslims of the Arabian desert did not possess. Christian missionaries built schools, hospitals and so on to induce the poor to embrace their faith.

We may not approve of people being forced into a religion or of conversions carried out by temptations placed before them. But we need not for that reason doubt that those who spread their religion in this fashion really believe that their work will bring general well-being.

We cannot, however, help asking whether their belief is right. People who do not follow either Christ or the Prophet, are they really condemned to hell? A little thinking should show that the belief that the followers of Christianity or Islam have an exclusive right to salvation cannot be sustained. It is only some 2, 000 years since Jesus was born and only about 1, 400 years or so since the birth of the Prophet. What happened to all the people born before them since creation? Are we to believe that they must have passed into hell? We are also compelled to infer that even the forefathers of the founders of Christianity and Islam would not have earned paradise. If, like Hindus, all those who lived before Christ or the Prophet had believed in rebirth, we could concede that they would have been saved: they would have been again and again until the arrival of Christ or the Prophet and then afforded the opportunity of following their teachings. But if we accept the logic of Christianity and Islam, according to which religions there is no rebirth, we shall have to conclude that hundreds of millions of people for countless generations must have been consigned to eternal hell.

The question arises as to whether God is so merciless as to keep dispatching people for ages together to the hell from which there is no escape. Were he compassionate would he not have sent, during all this time, a messenger of his or a teacher to show humanity the way to liberation? Why should we worship a God who has no mercy? Or for that matter, why should there be any religion at all?

The countries are many and they have different climates and grow different crops. Also each part of the world has evolved a different culture. But the Vedas encompassed lands all over this planet from the very beginning. Latter other religions emerged in keeping with the changing attitudes of the nations concerned. That is why aspects of the Vedic tradition are in evidence not only in the religions now in force but in what we know of those preceding them. But in India alone has Hinduism survived as a full-fledged living faith.

It must also be added that this primeval religion has regarded- and still regards- with respect the religions that arose subsequent to it. The Hindu

views is this: "Other religions must have evolved according to the degree of maturity of the people among whom they originated. They will bring well being to their adherents. " "Live and let live" has been and continues to be the ideal of our religion. It has given birth to religions like Buddhism and Jainism and they [particularly Buddhism] have been propagated abroad for the Atmic advancement of the people there.

I have spoken about the special characteristics of Hinduism from the philosophical and theological points of view. But it has also another important feature which is also distinctive- the sociological.

All religions have their own philosophical and theological systems. Also all of them deal with individual life and conduct and, to a limited extent, with social life. "Look upon your neighbour as your brother. " "Regard your adversary as your friend. " Treat others in the same way as you would like to be treated yourself. " "Be kind to all creatures. " "Speak the truth. " "Practice non-violence. " These injunctions and rules of conduct relate to social life up to a point- and only up to a point. To religions other than Hinduism social life or the structure of society is not a major concern. Hinduism alone has a sturdy sociological foundation, and its special feature, "varnasrama dharma", is an expression of it.

Varna dharma is one and asrama dharma is another (together they make up varnsrama dharma). Asrama dharma deals with the conduct of an individual during different stages of his life. In the first stage, as a brahmacharin<sup>s</sup>, he devotes himself to studies in a gurukula<sup>s</sup>. In the second stage, as a youth, he takes a wife, settles down in life and begets children. In the third, as he ages further, he becomes a forest recluse and, without much attachment to worldly life, engages himself in Vedic karma. In the fourth stage, he forsakes even Vedic works, renounces the word utterly to become a sannyasin and turns his mind towards the Paramatman. These four stages of life or asramas are called brahmacharya, garhasthya, vanaprastha and sannyasa.

Varna dharma is an "arrangement" governing all society. It is very much a target of attack today and is usually spoken of as the division of society into "jatis". But "varna" and "jati" are in fact different. There are only four varnas but the jatis are numerous. For instance, in the same varna there are Ayyars, Ayyangars, Roas, etc - these are jatis. Mudaliars, Pillais, Reddiars and Naikkars are jatis belonging to another varna. In the Yajurveda (third



astaka, fourth prasna) and in the Dharmasastra a number of jatis are mentioned- but you do not meet with them today.

Critics of Varna dharma brand it as "a blot on our religion" as "a vicious system which divides people into high and low". But, if you look at it impartially, you will realize that it is a unique instrument to bring about orderly and harmonious social life.



### The Vedas - the Root of All

Our religion consists of two major divisions, Saivism and Vaisnavism. The doubt arises as to whether we are speaking here of two separate faiths or of a single one.

Christianity too has two major divisions but people belonging to both conduct worship in the name of the same God. In Buddhism we have the Hinayana and Mahayana streams but they do not make two separate faiths since both are based on the teachings of the same founder, the Buddha.

Do Saivas and Vaisnavas worship the same god? No. However it be with ordinary Vaisnavas, their acaryas or teachers never go anywhere near a Siva temple. Their god is Visnu, never Siva. In the opinion of the worshippers of Visnu, Siva is also one of his (Visnu's) devotees. There are extremists among Saivas also according to whom Visnu is not a god but a devotee of Siva. How then can the two groups be said to belong to the same religion?

Are they to be regarded as belonging to the same faith by virtue of their having a common scripture? The divisions [sects] of Christianity have one common scripture, the Bible; so too is the Qur'an the common holy book for all divisions of Islam. Is such the case with Saivas and Vaisnavas? Saivas have the Tirumurai as their religious text, while Vaisnavas have the Nalayira-Divyaprabandham as their sacred work. For Saivas and Vaisnavas thus the deities as well as the scriptures are different. How it be claimed that both belong to the same religion?

Though divided into Saivas and Vaisnavas, we have been saved by the fact that the white man brought us together under a common name, "Hindu". But for this, what would have been our fate? In village after village, we would have been fragmented into separate religious groups- Saivas, Vaisnavas, Saktas, worshippers of Muruga, Ganapati, Ayyappa, and so on. Further, in these places followers of religions like Christianity and Islam would have predominated. Now two regions of our subcontinent have become Pakistan, Had we not been brought together with the label of Hindu, the entire subcontinent would have become Pakistan. The very same men who created Pakistan through their evil design and sowed the seeds of differences among us with their theory of two races- Aryans and Dravidians- unwittingly did us a good turn by calling us Hindu, thereby bringing into being a country called "India. "

So are we one religion or are we divided into *Two faiths*? The belief that Saivas and Vaisnavas have separate deities and religious works does not represent the truth. Though the present outlook of the two groups suggests that they represent different faiths, the truth will be revealed if we examine their prime scriptures. The saints who composed the *Tirumurai* of the Saivas and the *Nalayira-Divyaprabandham* of the Vaisnavas never claimed that these works of theirs were the prime religious texts of respective sects. Nor did they regard themselves as founders of any religion. Vaisnavism existed before the Azhvars and so too there was Saivism before the Nayanmars.

The original scripture of both sects is constituted by the Vedas. Saivas describe Isvara thus:

*Vedamodarangamayinanai*

*Vedanathan, Vedagitan, aranan kan*

Similarly, the Vaisnava texts proclaim, "Vedam Tamizh seytaMaran Sathakopan. "If we pay close attention to their utterances, we will discover that the Vedas are the prime scripture of both sects. The Tevaram and the Nalayaira-Divyaprabandham are of the utmost importance to them (to the Saivas and Vaisnavas respectively); but the Vedas are the basis of both. The great saint-poets who composed the Saiva and Vaisnava hymns sing the glories of the Vedas throughout. Whenever they describe a temple, they go into raptures, saying, "Here the air is filled with the sound of the Vedas and pervaded with the smoke of the sacrificial fire. Here the six Angas of the Vedas flourish. " In the songs of these hymnodists veneration of the Vedas finds as much place as devotion to the Lord.

The Vedas reveal the One Truth to us in the form of many deities. The worship of each of these divine beings is like a ghat on the river called the Vedas. Sekkizhar says the same thing: "*Veda neri tazhaittonga mihi Saivatturai vilanga. "*

Apart from Saivism and Vaisnavism, there are a number of sectarian systems like Saktam, Ganapatyam, Kaumaram, and Sauram (worship of Sakti, Ganapati, Kumara or Subrahmanya and the Sun God). The adoration of these deities is founded in the Vedas, according to the Texts relating to them: "Our deity is extolled in the Vedas, " each system contains such a declaration.

Thus we find that there is but one scripture as the source common to the different sects and schools of thought in the Hindu religion.

This source includes the Upanisads. On ten of them (Dasopanisad) the great teachers of the Saiva, Vaisnava, and Smarta traditions have written commentaries. The Upanisadic texts proclaim that the Brahman is the one and only Godhead: In the Kathopanisad it is called Visnu; in the Mandukyopanisad it is called Sivam. All the deities mentioned in the Samhitas of the Vedas- Mitra, Varuna, Agni, Indra and so on - are different names of the same Truth. So it is said in the Vedas: "Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti. "

It emerges that for all the divisions in our religion there is but one scripture- a scripture common to all- and one Godhead which is known by many names. The Vedas are the common scripture and the Godhead common to all is the Brahman. Thus we can say with finality, and without any room for doubt, that all of us belong to the same religion.

The Vedas that constitute the scripture common to all and which reveal the Godhead that is common to us also teach us how to lead our life, and- this is important- they do us the ultimate good by showing us in the end the way to become that very Godhead ourselves. They are our refuge both here and the hereafter and are the source and root of all our different traditions, all our systems of thought. All sects, all schools of our religion, have their origin in them. The root is one but the branches are many.

The Vedas are the source not only of various divisions of Hinduism, all the religions of the world may be traced back to them. It is our bounden duty to preserve them for all time to come with their glory undiminished.



### The Vedas in their Original Form

It is sad that people keep fighting over this or that language. It seems that it would be better for us to be voiceless than keep quarrelling in this manner. Language is but a tool, a tool to convey our thoughts and feelings, to make ourselves understood. It cannot be the same in all countries. Each community, each region or country, has its own tongue. So it is absurd to quarrel over claims that one's language is superior to another's. We could at best say that "we know that language" or "we do not know it". But to talk of "my language" and "your language" is not right. It is also wrong to give greater importance to one's mother tongue than to God or religion. I would go to the extent of

saying that we have no need even for Sanskrit, considered merely as a language, as a language per se. But our Vedas and sastras, which are basic to our religion, are in that language and, since they must be preserved, Sanskrit too must be kept alive.

After composing his *Kural* Tiruvalluvar went to Madurai for its arangetram. There, in the city, was the pond of the golden lotuses and the seat of the learned (the Sangapalagai). The poet placed his work on this seat. At once all the learned men seated on the Sangapalagai fell into the pond but the book remained on it. It was thus that the *Kural* was presented to the public. Many distinguished poets and savants have sung the praises of this work and its content. In Tiruvalluvar-Malai which contains these praises one poet says:

*Ariyamum centamizhum araynditaninidu*

*Siriyadu tenronraicepparidal-Ariyam*

*Vedam udaittu Tamizh Tiruvalluvanar*

*Odu Kuratpavudaittu*

"I thought about the question, which is superior, Sanskrit or Tamil. Sanskrit and Tamil are equal in their greatness. We cannot say that the one is superior to the other. The reason is that the Vedas are in Sanskrit and now in Tamil we have the *Kural*. If there were nothing equal to the Vedas in Tamil, Sanskrit should have been said to be superior. Now the *Kural* is present in Tamil as the equal of the Vedas. Both languages- Sanskrit and Tamil- are now seen to be equally. "

Why is Sanskrit considered a great language? In his praise of the Tirukkural here the poet gives the answer: it is because the Vedas are in that language. Some do not seem to attach any special significance to the fact that the Vedas are in Sanskrit. They think that these sacred texts could be known through translations.

Nowadays a number of books are translated from one language into another and in this process the original form or character is changed or distorted. The words spoken by a great man on a particular subject may not be fully understood today. But if they are preserved in the original in the same language, there is the possibility of their meaning being fully grasped at some

future date. You use a beautiful word to convey an idea in your language, but its equivalent may not be found in any other tongue. Also, it may become necessary to express the same in a roundabout way.

There is also the possibility that the opinion expressed first, in its original context, may not come through effectively in a translation. We must consider the further disadvantages of the translation being circumscribed by the mental make-up of the translator, the limitations of his knowledge and understanding of the subject dealt with. The translation done by one may not seem right to another. When there are a number of translations of the same work, it would be hard to choose the right one. We shall then be compelled to go back to the original.

This is the reason why I insist that the Vedas must be preserved in their original form. They are the source of the philosophical systems associated with the great acaryas. These masters evolved their doctrines from their own individual viewpoints, without making any modifications in the Vedas to suit them; nor did they establish any religions of their own outside the Vedic tradition. The source, the root, of their systems of thought is one and the same- the Vedas. It is because this source has remained unchanged in its original character that thinkers and teachers have, from time to time, been able to draw inspiration and strength from it to present new viewpoints. But these viewpoints have not meant the creation of new religions. The reason is that all of them- all these systems- belong to the larger system called the Vedic religion.



## Division of Labour

The proper functioning of society is dependent on a number of factors. Meeting the needs of man entails many types of physical as well as intellectual work. It is totally wrong to claim that one kind of work is inferior to another kind or superior to it.

We need rice, all of us, don't we? Also salt, clothing, books, and so on. Would it be possible - or practicable - for each one of us to grow rice or wheat, to make salt or to produce clothing and books? The tiller grows crops not only for himself but for the of the entire community. The weaver weaves for all of us. Some carry on trade for the sake of the entire society. And some wage war on behalf of all of us to defend the country

What about the Atmic well-being of mankind? Well, some people are charged with the caring of such well-being: they practice meditation, perform puja, conduct sacrifices and carry out the ordinances of the sastras that are meant for the good of all mankind. Our dharmasastras have cut out an ideal path of happiness for us by creating a system which is to the advantage of all and in which different sections of people are allotted different occupations.

How has this allotment been made? Is it according to the capacity of earth? If so there is the risk of everyone having an excessive idea of his own ability. If work is assigned according to the predilection of each individual, everyone will claim that he is suited for jobs that are "prestigious" and, in the end, no one will come forward to do other jobs. How should a system be devised in which people fill vocations in a manner that ensures the smooth functioning of

all society? It must be one that works not only for the present but for all time. This is not possible if everyone competes with everybody else for every kind of job. It is as an answer to such problems that varna dharma in which vocations are hereditarily determined came into existence.

The principle behind this arrangement is that a man must do the work handed down to him from his forefathers - whatever such work be - with the conviction that it has been ordained by Isvara and that it is for the good of the world. The work he does in this spirit itself becomes a means of his inward advancement.

The religious observances meant to free people from worldly existence vary according to their callings. We cannot expect a man who does hard physical work to observe fasts. Those who do intellectual work do not need much bodily nourishment. They are enjoined to perform many a rite and to observe a number of fasts so that they will learn not to take pride in their body. There would be no room for disputes and misunderstandings among the various sections of people if they realised that the differences in the observance of religious practices are in keeping with the different vocations.

If we keep performing the rites prescribed even without understanding their meaning, It will stand us in good stead in later life when we do come to understand the meaning. It would indeed be commendable if each one of us carried out the duties prescribed and helped others to carry out theirs. "Why do you pursue that vocation, that dharma? Why don't you do the work that I do? Or shall I take up your dharma, your duties? " We must not give room for such feelings of rivalry or become victims of the competitive spirit. When a man thinks of abandoning his dharma - the duties allotted to him by birth - you must persuade him not to do so and impress upon him that he must remain loyal to his dharma since it serves not only him individually but all others.

As I said earlier there is no gradation among people doing various kinds of work: the man who does one type of job is neither inferior to the man doing another kind of job nor superior to him. It is to ensure that society functions properly that the sastras have divided jobs into a number of categories and assigned them to different groups of people.



If we are guided only by our likes and dislikes in the choice of our occupation - or if we are engaged in work according to our sweet will - the common purpose of society will suffer. You see today that everyone is intent on filling his pockets with other people's money. If there were no principle to guide us in the fulfilment of the common good, the only concern of people would be that of finding such work as can bring them a lot of cash. There is no place for any division of labour in all this and so also no concern for the well-being of mankind in general.

If everyone does his hereditary work and performs the rites that his forefathers performed, there will be no cause for feelings of rivalry or jealousy. There is the further advantage that life in the community will go on smoothly without any hindrance to the common work and, at the same time, each individual will feel pure inwardly. All this must be taken into account if, in the name of carrying out reforms, society is not "deformed".

The government has the obligation to provide food, clothing and housing to all irrespective of the work they do. Jealousies and rivalries will develop if people hunger for things beyond these essentials. All the trouble today arises from the fact that the satisfaction gained from money is greater than that gained from anything else. This attitude must change. With maturity of outlook a man will come to realise that the fulfilment he obtains from doing the work allotted to him properly is itself his God.

You see such a variety of eatables in front of you. The ragas (musical modes) you listen to are numerous. And many and varied are the types of work essential to the smooth functioning of society. You add salt to your rasam to give it the right flavour. But if you add it to a sweet drink the result will be rasabhasa (the drink will not be palatable). Similarly there would be rasabhasa if the svara (musical note) of one raga were used in another [the music so produced would be cacophonous, not pleasing to the ear]. People today are lacking in taste. While narrating a moving incident from a puranic story the Bhagavatar tells cheap jokes which the audience relishes immensely. When there are so many delectable things to eat, people smoke tobacco which is injurious to health. These are all instances of rasabhasa on a small scale. The rasabhasa on a big scale is the confusion created in the varna system [making a mess of it], a system that has contributed so much to the welfare of our people through its enunciation of different codes of conduct for different sections of the community.



### What is Varna Dharma?

In the old days the kitchen fireplace was fuelled with dried wood, cow dung and so on. On rainy days it was difficult to light it. But if only a few sparks were produced they could be fanned into a flame so as to set the wood or cow dung on fire. Our sanatana dharma has not entirely perished. A few sparks of it are present in the life of a small number of great men still living in our midst. It is my ardent wish to keep blowing on them with a view to propagating our ancient religion in its true character.

Our reformers want to do away with varna dharma so as to make Hinduism no different from other faiths.

In this context, I must ask you: What is religion? Religion is like a therapeutic system meant to cure the ills contracted by the self. The physician alone knows about the disease afflicting the patient and how it is to be treated. Our sanatana dharma is the medicine prescribed by our sages and creators of the dharmasastras who never sought anything for themselves and

who, in their utter selflessness, were concerned only about the good of mankind.

In other countries other physicians have prescribed medicines in the form of their own religious systems. Would your doctor like to be told that he should treat you in the same way as another doctor treats his patient? There are several systems of medicine. In one there is a strict diet regimen, in another there is not much strictness about the patient's food. In one system the medicines administered taste sweet; in another they taste bitter. To be restored to health we have to follow strictly any one method of treatment, not insist on a combination of the various therapies.

Other religions lay down only such duties as are common to all their followers. In the Vedic religion there are two types of dharma, the one being common to all and the other to individual varnas. The duties common to all Hindus, the universal code of conduct, have the name of "samanya dharma". Non-violence, truthfulness, cleanliness, control of the senses, non-acquisitiveness (one must not possess material goods in excess of what is needed for one's bare requirements, not even a straw must one own in excess), devotion to Isvara, trust in one's parents, love for all creatures - these form part of the samanya dharma. Then each varna has its own special code of conduct or "visesa dharma" determined by its hereditary vocation.

If the special duties (visesa dharma) of the various varnas were made common to all (that is made part of the samanya dharma) a situation would arise in which no one would observe any dharma. To illustrate, I shall give you an example. Abstaining from meat was laid down as a common dharma in Buddhism. But what do we see today in countries where that religion has a wide following? There almost all buddhists eat meat. In contrast to this is what obtains in our religion. Our seers and authors of the dharmasastras had a profound understanding of human nature. They made abstention from meat applicable to a limited number of people. But others follow the example of these few, on days of fasting, on special occasions like the death anniversaries of their parents, on days sacred to the gods.

The religions that flourished once upon a time in other countries- religions that had one common code of conduct for all its adherents - have become extinct. In Europe the Hellenic religion is gone. So too in West Asia the prehistoric Hebrew faiths no longer exist. And in the East only a residue

remains of Confucianism, Shintoism, etc. Religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam too have but one code of conduct for all their adherents. Their followers in various countries now find less and less inner satisfaction. The number of people who have lost faith in their religion is on the increase in all these lands. They become either atheists or turn to the yoga, bhakti or jnana schools of Hinduism.

It is difficult to say how long people will continue to owe allegiance to the religions that arose in various countries during historical times. I say this not because I happen to be a representative of Hindus nor is it my wish to speak in demeaning terms about other religions. My wish is indeed that people following different religions ought to remain in their respective folds and find spiritual fulfilment in them. I do not invite others to embrace my faith. In fact I believe that to do so is contrary to the basic tenets of my religion. Nothing occurs in this world as an accident. People with different levels of maturity are born in different religions: so it is ordained by the Lord. I believe that a man grows inwardly by practising the tenets of the religion of his birth.

I speak about what I feel to be the worthy features of Hinduism- features that are not found in other religions - it is neither to speak ill of the latter nor to invite their followers to our side. Non-Hindus attack these unique aspects of our religion without taking the trouble of understanding them and some Hindus themselves are influenced by their views. That is why I am constrained to speak about the distinctive doctrines of our religion. Acceptance of concepts like karma, the Lord's incarnations, etc. will in no way weaken their [of non-Hindus] attachment to the basic beliefs of their own religions. What is the fundamental concept of any religion, its living principle? It is faith in the Lord and devotion to him. For others to view these special concepts of Hinduism sympathetically does not mean that their faith in God or devotion to him will be affected in any way.

I say all this not because I think that other religions are in any trouble nor because I have reason to be happy if indeed they are. I echoed the views of distinguished students of religion like Toynbee, Paul Brunton and Kostler. I merely repeated their view that lack of faith in religion - indeed atheism - is growing day by day everywhere and that all religions are struggling for their survival.

This trend is seen to be on the rise in our own country. But foreigners who have made a study of religious beliefs all over the world are unanimous in their view that in comparison with other countries things are better here. "The religious urge has not yet reached a lamentable state in your country, " They tell us, Sadhakas, seekers, keep coming to India in large numbers. A little thought should show without a shadow of doubt that if religious feeling is on the decline and atheism on the rise in India it is due to the fact that we have become increasingly lax in observing varna dharma and have come to believe that all Hindus should be made into one without any distinction of caste.

When a religion divides its followers in many ways, we think that there will be no unity or integrity among them. It also seems to us that such a religion will fall apart as a result of internal squabbles. Since the time of Alexander, India has been invaded by wave after wave of foreigners belonging to other faiths. Considering the divisions in our religion and the series of foreign invasions, Hinduism should have ended up in smoke. But what we actually see is different. Religions which have no distinctions of caste and which prescribed the same duties and rites for all their followers have disappeared in the flow of time. Similar systems still surviving today are faced with danger, as is attested to by the intellectuals amongst their own followers. But Hinduism with its many divisions is still breathing. We must try to understand the secret of its survival without being carried away by emotions.

We have practised varna dharma for millennia and it has continued to be a living force. What is its secret? Or think of this. It is the special duty of Brahmins to preserve the mantras. But have they ever been in a majority? No. Have they enjoyed the power of arms? No. Have they had at least money power, the advantage gained from wealth? The answer again is "No". (Brahmins acquiring the habit of accumulating money is a recent phenomenon. It is of course quite undesirable). How or why did other castes accept the divisions laid down in the sastras created by the Brahmins who did not have the strength derived either from money or from numbers?

A great man like the Buddha or the Jina arose to proclaim: "We do not need the Vedas, nor do we need the sacrifices prescribed by them. Let us have one uniform dharma for all people. We do not need Sanskrit either. Let us write our new sastras in Pali or some other Prakrt, in a language understood by the common people. "It is true that some people were persuaded to embrace these new religions, Buddhism and Jainism, but the attraction of these faiths was

momentary and the two gradually declined. The old Vedic religion emerged again with new vigour.

A great man has sung thus: "It is needed a wonder that life remains in this body with its nine apertures (nava-dvara or nine gates). If it departs it is no matter to be wondered at. " Likewise, it would not have been a matter for surprise if Hinduism had perished with all its constant exposure to attack from outside. It is indeed a miracle that it is not dead.

If some faiths in India itself and outside have declined and if our religion alone has survived for ten thousand years, does it not mean that it has something that is lacking in others? This something is the varna system. Our present-day reformers argue that the varna division is responsible for the disintegration of our society. The fact is it is precisely this division, varna dharma, that has sustained it and kept it intact. It follows that this dharma has features that are superior in character to concepts like equality, features that are vital to the very well-being of people. Our society is divided on the basis of it, but it must be noted that this division has helped our religion to preserve itself successfully against all onslaughts.



## Unity in Diversity

Talking of the varna system I am reminded of the early days of aviation. In the beginning the air ship[dirigible balloon] was filled with one gas bag. It was discovered that the vessel would collapse even if it sprang just one leak. So it was fitted with a number of smaller gas bags and kept afloat without much danger of its crashing. The principle of different duties and vocations for different sections of society is similar to what kept the old type of airship from collapsing. In the varna system we have an example of unity in diversity.

Fastening together a large number of individual fire sticks is not easy: the bundle is loosened quickly and the sticks will give way. The removal of even one stick will make the bundle loose and, with each stick giving way, you will be left with separate sticks. Try to tie together a handful of sticks at a time instead of all the sticks together. A number of such small sheaves may be easily fastened together into a strong and secure larger bundle. Even if it becomes loose, none of the smaller bundles will come away. This is not the case with the large bundle bound up of individual sticks. A bundle made up of a number of smaller sets will remain well secured.

To keep a vast community bound together in a single uniform structure is well-nigh an impossible task. Because of its unmanageable size it is not easily sustained in a disciplined manner. This is the reason why - to revert to the example of the fuel sticks - the community was divided into jatis [similar to the smaller bundles in the analogy of the fire sticks] and each jati assigned a particular vocation. Each varna was divided into a number of jatis [smaller bundles], with each jati having a headman with the authority to punish

offenders. Today criminals are sentenced to prison or punished in other ways. But the incidence of crime is on the increase since all such types of punishment have no different effect. In the jati system the guilty took the punishment to heart. So much so that, until the turn of the century, people lived more or less honourably and there was little incidence of crime. The police and the magistrates did not have much work to do.

What was the punishment meted out to offenders by the village or jati headman? Excommunication. Whether it was a cobbler or a barber - anyone belonging to any one of the jatis now included among the "backward" or "depressed" classes - he would feel deeply stung if he were thrown out of his jati: no punishment was harsher or more humiliating than excommunication.

What do we learn from all this? No jati thought poorly of itself or of another jati. Members of each jati considered themselves the supreme authority in managing their affairs. This naturally gave them sense of contentment and satisfaction. What would have happened if some jatis were regarded as "low" and some others as "high"? Feelings of inferiority would have arisen among some sections of the community and perhaps, apart from Brahmins and Ksatriyas, no jati would have had any sense of pride in itself. If each jati had no respect for itself no one would have taken excommunication to heart. When the entire society was divided into small groups called jatis, not only did one jati have affection for another, each also trusted the other. There was indeed a feeling of kinship among all members of the community. This was the reason why the threat of excommunication was dreaded.

Now some sections of the community remain attached to their jatis for the only reason that they enjoy certain privileges as members belonging to the "backward" classes. But they take no true pride in belonging to their respective jatis. In the old days these sections "enjoyed" no special privileges but we know it to be a fact that, until some three or four generations ago, they were proud of belonging to their jatis. We must add that this was not because - as is the case today - of rivalries and jealousies among the various groups. There were indeed no quarrels, no rivalries, based on differences of jati. Apart from pride, there was a sense of fulfilment among members of each jati in pursuing the vocation inherited from their forefathers and in observing the rites proper to it.



Nowadays trouble-makers defy even the police. But in the past, in the system of jatis, there was no opposition to the decisions of the headman. The police are, after all, part of an outward system of discipline and law enforcement. But in jati rule the discipline was internal since there was a sense of kinship among the members of each jati. So in the jati set-up crime was controlled more effectively than in today's system of restoring to weapons or the constabulary. Though divided according to jatis and the occupations and customs pertaining to each of them, society remained united. It was a system that ensured harmony.



### Divided by Work but still of One Heart

I spoke about the different jatis, the work allotted to each of them and the rites and customs prescribed for each. What I said was not entirely correct. The vocation is not for jati; it is jati for the vocation. On what basis did the Vedic religion divide the fuel sticks[that is the jatis] into small bundles? It fixed one jati for one vocation. In the West economists talk of division of labour but they are unable to translate their ideas into practice. Any society has to depend on the proper execution of a variety of jobs.

It is from this social necessity that the concept of division of labour arose. But who is to decide the number of people for each type of work? Who is to determine the proportions for society to function in a balanced manner? In the West they had no answer to these questions. Everybody there competes with everybody else for comfortable jobs and everywhere you find greed and bitterness resulting from such rivalries. And, as a consequence of all this, there are lapses from discipline and morality.

In our country we based the division of labour on a hereditary system and, until it worked, people had a happy, peaceful and contented life. Today even a multimillionaire is neither contented nor happy. Then even a cobbler led a life without cares. What sort of progress have we achieved today by inflaming evil desires in all hearts and pushing everyone into the slough of discontent? Not satisfied with such "progress" there is talk everywhere that we must go forward rapidly in this manner.

Greed and covetousness were unknown during the centuries when varna dharma flourished. People were bound together in small well-knit groups and they discovered that there was happiness in their being together. Besides they had faith in religion, fear of God and devotion, and a feeling of pride in their own family deities and in the modes of worshipping them. In this way they found fullness in their lives without any need to suffer the hunger and disquiet of seeking external objects. All society experienced a sense of well-being.

Though divided into a number of groups people were all one in their devotion to the Lord; and though they had their own separate family deities, they were brought together in the big temple that was for the entire village or town. This temple and its festivals had a central place in their life and they remained united as the children of the deity enshrined in it. When there was a car festival (rathotsava) the Brahmins and the people living on the outskirts of the village [the so-called backward classes] stood shoulder to shoulder and pulled the chariot together. We wonder whether those days of peace and harmony will ever return. Neither jealousy nor bitterness was known then and people did not trade charges against one another. Everyone did his job, carried out his duties, in a spirit of humility and with a sense of contentment.

Considering all this, would it be correct to say that Hinduism faced all its challenges in spite of the divisions in society? No, no. Such a view would be totally wrong. The fact is that our religion has survived as a living force for ages together because of these very divisions. Other great religions which had but one uniform dharma for all have gone under. And there is the fear that existing religions of the same type might suffer a similar fate. What has sustained Hinduism as an eternal religion? We must go back to the analogy of the fuel sticks. Like a number of small bundles of sticks bound together strong and secure—instead of all the individual sticks being fastened together—Hindu society is a well-knit union of a number of small groups which are themselves bound up separately as jatis, the cementing factor being devotion to the Lord.

Religions that had a common code of duties and conduct could not withstand attacks from within and without. In India there were many sets of religious beliefs that were contained in, or integrated together with, a common larger system. If new systems of beliefs or dharmas arose from within or if there were inroads by external religious systems, a process of rejection and assimilation took place: what was not wanted was rejected and what was fit to be accepted was absorbed. Buddhism and Jainism sprang from different

aspects of the Vedic religion, so Hinduism(later) was able to digest them and was able to accommodate many other sets of beliefs or to make them its own. There was no need for it to treat other systems as adversaries or to carry on a struggle against them.

After the advent of Islam we adopted only some of its customs but not any of its religious concepts. The Moghul influence was felt to some extent in our dress, music, architecture and painting. Even such impressions of the Muslim impact did not survive for long as independent factors but were dissolved in the flow of our Vedic culture. Also the Islamic impact was largely confined to the North; the South did not come much under it and stuck mostly to its own traditional path.

Later, with the coming of the Europeans, faith in the Vedic religion began to decline all over India, in North as well as South. How did this change occur? Why do all political leaders today keep excoriating the varna system, giving it the name of "casteism"? And how has the view gained ground everywhere that the division of jatis has greatly hindered the progress of the nation? And why does the mere mention of the word jati invite a gaol sentence?

I shall tell you later, as best I can, about who is responsible for this state of affairs. For the present let us try to find out why some people want to do away with varna dharma. To them it seems an iniquitous system in which some jatis occupy a high status while some others are pushed down to low depths. They want all to be raised to the same uniform high level.

Is such a step possible or practicable? To find an answer, all that we have to do is to examine conditions in countries where there is no caste. If there were no distinctions of high and low in these lands, we should see no class conflicts there. But in reality what do we see? People in these countries are divided into "advantaged" and disadvantaged" classes who are constantly fighting between themselves. A true understanding of our religion will show that in reality there are no differences in status based on caste among our people. But let us for argument's sake presume that there are; our duty then is to make sure that the feelings of differences are removed, not get rid of varna dharma itself.

One more point must be considered. Even if you concede that the social divisions have caused bitterness among the different sections here, what about

the same in other countries? Can the existence of such ill-will in other lands be denied? The differences there, based on wealth and status, cause bitterness and resentment among the underprivileged and poorer sections. In America, it is claimed that all people have enough food, clothing and housing. They say that the Americans are contented people. But what is the reality there? The man who has only one car is envious of another who has two. Similarly, the fact that one person has a bank balance of a hundred million dollars is cause for heart-burning for another with a bank balance of only a million. Those who have sufficient means to live comfortably quarrel with people better off over rights and privileges. Does this not mean that even in a country like the United States there are conflicts between the higher and lower classes of society?

The story is not different in the communist countries. Though everyone is said to be paid the same wages there, they have officers and clerks who do not enjoy the same status. As a result of the order enforced by the state, there may not be any outward signs of quarrel among the different cadres, but jealousy and feelings of rivalry must, all the same, exist in the hearts of people. In the higher echelons of power there must be greater rivalry in the communist lands than elsewhere. The dictator of today is replaced by another tomorrow. Is it possible to accord the same status to all in order to prevent the growth of antagonisms? Feeling of high and low will somehow persist, so too the competitive urge.

It seems to me that better than the distinctions prevailing in the West—distinctions that give rise to jealousies and social discord—are the differences mistakenly attributed to the hereditary of vocations. In the old days this arrangement ensured peace in the land with everyone living a contented life. There was neither envy nor hatred and everyone readily accepted his lot.

The different types of work are meant for the good of the people in general. It is wrong to believe that one job belongs to an "inferior" category and another to a "superior type". There is no more efficacious medicine for inner purity than doing one's work, whatever it be, without any desire for reward and doing it to perfection. I must add that even wrong notions about work (one job being better than another or worse) is better than the disparities and differences to be met with in other countries. We are[or were] free from the spirit of rivalry and bitterness that vitiate social life there.

Divided we have remained united, and nurtured our civilization. Other civilizations have gone under because the people of the countries concerned, though seemingly united, were in fact divided. In our case though there were differences in the matter of work there was unity of hearts and that is how our culture and civilization flourished. In other countries the fact that there were no distinctions based on vocations (anyone could do any work) itself gave rise to rivalries and eventually to disunity. They were not able to withstand the onslaught of other civilizations.

It is not practicable to make all people one, nor can everyone occupy the same high position. At the same time it is also unwise to keep people divided into classes that are like water-tight compartments.

The dharmasastras have shown us a middle way that avoids the pitfalls of the two extremes. I have come as a representative of this way and that is why I speak for it: that there ought to be distinctions among various sections of people in the performance of rites but there must be unity of hearts. There should be no confusion between the two.

Though we are divided outwardly in the matter of work, with unity of hearts there will be peace. That was the tradition for ages together in this land- there was oneness of hearts. If every member of society does his duty, does his work, unselfishly and with the conviction that he is doing it for the good of all, considerations of high and low will not enter his mind. If people carry out the duties common to them, however adverse the circumstances be, and if every individual performs the duties that are special to him, no one will have cause for suffering at any time.



### Why only in this Country

The question arises: "What about countries other than India? And what about the religions practised there? They do not have a system of jatis nor do they have in force any division of labour based on heredity. Why should we alone have such an arrangement? . "

It will be conceded that even such countries as do not have any social division based on vocations have produced wise men who have contributed to the growth of knowledge and statesmen, administrators, agriculturists, traders and labourers. But if you look at the matter impartially- and not necessarily as a proud patriot-you will realise that no other country has had such a great civilization as we have had. It is true that great civilizations flourished in other lands too, but they did not last thousands of years like ours. To say this is not to blow our own trumpet. From the time of Alexander until today- when we seem to have fallen into an abyss from the heights of glory- foreigners have been filled with wonder for the Hindu civilization.

Other countries, it is true, have given birth to great men, to men of God, to philanthropists, to men of sacrifice. But if you take a census of all nations, you will see that no other nation would have given birth, generations after generation for thousands of years in an uninterrupted manner, to such a large number of great men, saintly men, wise men, philosophers, devotees and philanthropists. They will outnumber all such men produced in other countries put together. Foreigners refer to India as the "land of saints", as the "land

of sages". They express their profound admiration for our Vedanta, for our metaphysics, and all our ancient works.

The whole world acknowledge our unparalleled contributions to art, sculpture, music, poetry, astronomy, medicine. It never ceases to wonder at our great works of philosophy and literature like the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Ramayana, the Sakuntalam, etc. Scholars abroad are of the opinion that there are hardly any devotional works outside India like the Tamil Tevaram and Divyaprabandham. They note the Kural, in the same language, to be an astonishingly profound and lucid ethical work that is yet so brief. Foreigners come to our land, leaving their home and hearth, to find out all about our gopurams, our sculptures, our dances like Bharatanatyam all of which have cast a spell over them. Europeans enslaved us, ascribed all kinds of faults to us and held us in bondage with their policy of divide and rule. But, all the same, out of admiration for our culture they have sought out our sastras, our ancient texts, conducted research into them and translated them into their own languages.

To what special factors are we to attribute the existence of such a great and unique civilization? In looking for an answer you will discover that there was something in our social structure that was not shared by other countries, that is varna dharma. According to our reformers all our ills are due to the caste system. But it is this land with this unique system - varnasrama - that has excelled all other nations in metaphysics, in the arts, in social values and in wisdom. Stability in society and peace go hand in hand. Without them, without an atmosphere conducive to creative work, no arts, no philosophy, no culture could have flourished generation after generation. Philosophers and sages and geniuses in the field of arts would not have otherwise been thrown up in such amazingly large numbers.

The religions that governed life in other countries did not evolve a social structure capable of creating this kind of stability. One might say that the question of creating a sociological foundation was overlooked in them. They did not lay down rules for orderly social life and had but general interdictions and injunctions like "Do not steal"; "Do not tell lies"; "Do not commit adultery"; "Live a life of sacrifice". In Buddhism and Christianity the institutionalized system is meant only for the monks. Unlike in Hinduism in none of these religions was attention directed towards weaving together the entire society into a fabric in which one member formed a support to another.



One does not deny that there was scientific advancement in other nations. They had a system of defence and they carried on trade and commerce. But the spirit of rivalry vitiated all walks of life in these lands. No community had an occupation entirely to itself. Everyone could compete with everyone else for every kind of job. In our country people had their own hereditary calling and they were assured of their livelihood. This meant peace and stability in society. We must remember that it was because our people were bound together in their unique varna system that they excelled in culture and character, not to mention the fact the stability afforded by the system facilitated the birth of countless numbers of individuals who exemplified all that is noble in mankind. In contrast, in the absence of a similar institution, jealousy and rivalry became disturbing factors in the life of other countries.

Our nation should have witnessed many a revolution if, as claimed by our social reformers, the people were kept suppressed in the varna system. However, the term "social revolution" was new to us until recently. It is only after reading about the French Revolution, the American Revolution and the Soviet Revolution that we have known that compulsions would arise for great masses of people to be plunged in unrest. The common people in other countries were again and again involved thus in revolutionary movements. But we note - and this is important - that no revolution has achieved anything of permanent value. If there is an upsurge today there is another fifty or a hundred years later. We have to conclude from this that people abroad have remained discontented most of the time.

Today's situation is all too obvious to be stated. The whole world is in turmoil. Indiscipline, strikes, social upsets and savage orgies of violence have become the order of the day. It is only in a country like the Soviet Union where there is a dictatorship that comes down heavily on those who voice any opposition to it that there is hardly any unrest. However, it is said that the volcano of unrest might erupt any time there. Now and then an intellectual or writer escapes from that land to tell us about the tyranny from which people suffer there. Obviously in the Soviet Union too people are not happy and contented.

India has seldom had an autocracy or dictatorship of this type. It would not have taken the strides it did in the sciences and arts had it been a slave country or a country ruled by despots. People here never lamented before others that they were kept suppressed. All our works of knowledge and wisdom, all our arts and all our temples would not have been possible if the

mind was not enabled to unfold itself in an atmosphere of freedom. It would also be preposterous to suggest that a majority of the common people were victims of superstition and delusion and lived in fear of witchcraft. You could speak thus of the tribes living in the forests of Africa or South America. In these places the priest was like a king. He would be fearsome even to look at and he was able to impress his tribesmen that he could do anything with his utterances(his mantra- like formulae). He had also the power to punish people. Such was not the case in our country. People here were fairly knowledgeable irrespective of the jatis to which they belonged and they were devoted and advances in matters pertaining to the Self.

If you go through the Puranas(including the Tamil Periyapuram) You will learn that there were great men in all jatis. Imperial rulers like Chandragupta and ministers like Sekkizhar belonged to the fourth varna. Our priests had no authority to punish anyone, According to the canonical texts the priest must be a man of spotless character and, if he commits a wrong, he must punish himself. If a white man happens to come into physical contact with a black man, the latter is taken to task. But if a priest in our country comes into similar contact with an untouchable, it is he (the priest) who is enjoined to have a bath. Let us leave aside for the moment the question of untouchability. The point to note is that it was not by inspiring fear, by the threat of punishment or by suppression, that such customs were practised. a civilization like ours that is glorified all over the world could not have flourished if some sections of the people were suppressed or were victims of deception. it is only when the dharmasastras are advantageous to all that there will be no cause for any section of the people to revolt.

When the ancient varna system was in force, our civilization grew steadily without giving any cause for revolt or discontent among the people. But, that apart, look at the state of India after it broke with the old system of division of labour and took to the new path adopted by other countries on the pretext of "progress" and "equality". Everywhere you see immorality, dishonesty, corruption and prostitution. Agitations, strikes, demonstrations, hartals, curfew, etc, have become the order of the day. Is it not obvious from this that there is much discontent among the people? In matters of trade we have come to such a pass that we are the target of attack and ridicule of other nations for our dishonest practices. The time is past when everyone had nothing but praise for India. Even a small country like Pakistan drags us into war. Does this not show that our spiritual strength has diminished so much?

How did we lose our inner vitality? By giving up what have we become weak? What was it that nurtured our civilization and kept it growing for thousands of years? By parting with what have we descended so low as to be ashamed of calling ourselves heirs to this civilization? The fact is that, so long as we practised varna dharma that is unique to our country, our civilization stood like a rock arousing the admiration of all the world. But after this dharma began to decline we have been on the descent day by day.

Why should this country alone practise varna dharma? Because this dharma is necessary if we want to sustain a civilization that can promote the growth of philosophy, nourish our arts and culture, inspire us more and more in our inward search and help us in the realization of Godhead. If the varna system, is followed at least in this country, it will be an example to the rest of the world.

If there is not varna dharma, it means at once the growth of social disharmony, the rise of jealousies and discontent among the people. Men will compete with one another for the jobs they like or are convenient to them. There will be competition for education on the same lines. Since all will not succeed in their efforts or in their desire or ambition being satisfied, the result will be hatred and resentment everywhere. Look at what is happening now in India. When educated unemployment is on the increase, it is suggested that admissions to colleges must be restricted, that there are too many engineers already in the country and that some engineering colleges must be closed down. Here we see that the theory of throwing open everything to everybody does not work; imposing some restriction on people is seen to be inevitable. In the old days a man's work, whatever it was, became second nature to him and he had a sense of pride in it as an "asset", legacy that had come to him from his forefathers, indeed a prized family "possession". He also did his job efficiently and sincerely. Money was a secondary consideration then. Since everything was done on the basis of trust and with a high degree of personal involvement - the worker was always conscious that he was doing his work- there were no problems. The whole society prospered.

No civilization can flourish in the absence of a system that brings fulfilment to all. Varna dharma brought fulfilment and satisfaction to all.

Is it possible to bring Varna dharma back to life? Whether we fail in during all we can in reviving the system or whether we abandon our efforts finding

them to be futile, we must at least recognise that it is this system that our thousands of years brought well-being to all communities of our religion and to our country and throughout them to the whole world outside. Again, we must at least have the good sense not to find fault with such a system.



### Who is Responsible for the Decay of Varna Dharma?

Politicians and intellectuals alike say that jati is part of an uncivilized system. Why? Who is responsible for the disintegration of so worthy an arrangement as varna dharma?

These are question that I raised and I shall try to answer them. The wrong ideas that have developed about varna dharma must be ascribed to the Brahmins themselves. They are indeed responsible for the decay of an ages-old system that contributed not only to our Atmic advancement but also to the well-being of the nation as well as of all mankind.

The Brahmin relinquished the duties of his birth—the study of the Vedas and performance of the rites laid down in the Vedic tradition. He left his birthplace, the village, for the town. He cropped his hair and started dressing in European style. Giving up the Vedas, he took to the Mundane learning of the West. He fell to the lure of jobs offered by his white master and aped him in dress, manners and attitudes. He threw to the winds the noble dharma he had inherited from the Vedic seers through his forefathers and abandoned

all for a mess of pottage. He was drawn to everything Western, science, life-style, entertainment.

The canonical texts have it that the Brahmin must have no love for money, that he must not accumulate wealth. So long as he followed his dharma, as prescribed by the sastras, and so long as he chanted the Vedas and performed sacrifices, he brought good to the world, and all other castes respected him and treated him with affection. In fact they looked upon him as a guide and model.

Others now observed how the Brahmin changed, how his life-style had become different with all its glitter and show and how he went about with all the pretence of having risen on the scale of civilization. The Brahmin had been an ideal for them in all that is noble, but how he strayed from the path of dharma; and following his example they too gave up their traditional vocations that had brought them happiness and contentment, and left their native village to settle in towns. Like the Brahmin they became keen to learn English and secure jobs in the government.

For thousands of years the Brahmin had been engaged in Atmic pursuit and intellectual work. In the beginning all his mental faculties were employed for the welfare of society and not in the least for his own selfish advancement. Because of this very spirit of self-sacrifice, his intelligence became sharp like a razor constantly kept honed. Now the welfare of society is no longer the goal of his efforts and his intelligence has naturally dimmed due to this selfishness and interest in things worldly. He had been blessed with a bright intellect and he had the grace of the Lord to carry out the duties of his birth. Now, after forsaking his dharma, it is natural that his intellectual keenness should become blunted.

Due to sheer momentum the bicycle keeps going some distance even after you stop pedalling. Similarly, though the Brahmin seeks knowledge of mundane subjects instead of inner light, he retains yet a little intellectual brightness as a result of the "pedalling" done by his forefathers. It is because of this that he has been able to achieve remarkable progress in Western learning also. He has acquired expert knowledge in the practices of the West, in its law and its industries. Indeed he has gained such insights into these subjects and mastered their finer points so remarkably well that he can give lessons to the white man himself in them.

A question that arises in this context is how Vedic studies which had not suffered much even during Muslim rule received a severe set-back with the advent of the European. One reason is the impact of the new sciences and the machines that came with the white man. Granted that many a truth was revealed through these sciences- and this was all to the good up to a point. But we must remember that the knowledge of a subject per se is one thing and how we use it in practice is another.

The introduction of steam power and electricity made many types of work easier but it also meant comforts hitherto unthought-of of to gratify the senses. If you keep pandering to the senses more and more new desires are engendered. This will mean the production of an increasing number of objects of pleasure. The more we try to obtain sensual pleasure the more we will cause injury to our innermost being. The new pleasures that could be had with scientific development and the introduction of machines were an irresistible lure for the Brahmin as they were to other communities. Another undesirable product of the sciences brought by the white man was rationalism which undermined people's faith in religion and persuaded some to believe that the religious truths that are based on faith and are inwardly experienced are nothing but deception. The man who did not give up his duties even during Muslim rule now abandoned them for the new-found pleasures and comforts. He dressed more smartly than the Englishman, smoked cigarettes and even learned to dance like his white master. Those who thus became proficient in the arts of the white man were rewarded with jobs.

Now occurred the biggest tragedy.

Up till now all members of society had their hereditary jobs to do and they did not have to worry about their livelihood. Now, with the example of the Brahmin before them, members of other castes also gave up their traditional occupations for the jobs made available by the British in the banks, railways, collectorates, etc. With the introduction of machinery our handicrafts fell into decay and many of our artisans had to look for other means of livelihood. In the absence of any demarcation in the matter of work and workers, there arose competition for jobs for the first time in the country. It was a disastrous development and it generated jealousy, ill-will, disputes and a host of other evils among people who had hitherto lived in harmony.

Ill feelings developed between Brahmins and non-Brahmins also. How? Brahmins formed only a small percentage of the population. But they were able to occupy top positions in the new order owing to their intelligence which, as I said before, was the result of the "pedalling" done by their forefathers. They excelled in all walks of life- in administration, in academics, in law, in medicine, engineering and so on. The white man made his own calculations about developing animosity between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and realised that by fuelling it he could strengthen his hold on the country. He fabricated the Aryan-Dravidian theory of races and the seeds of differences were sown among children born of the same mother. It was a design that proved effective in a climate already made unhealthy by rivalry for jobs.

As if to exacerbate this ill-will, the Brahmin took one more disastrous step. On the one hand he gave up the dharma of his caste and joined hands with the British in condemning the old order by branding it a barbarous one in which one man exploited another. But, on the other hand, though he spoke the language of equality, he kept aloof from other castes thinking himself to be superior to them. If in the past he had not mixed physically with members of other castes, it did not mean that he had placed himself on a high pedestal. We must remember that there was a reason for his not coming into physical contact with other castes. There have to be differences between the jatis based on food, work and surroundings. The photographer needs a dark room to develop his films. To shoot a film, on the contrary, powerful lights are needed. Those who work in a factory canteen have to scrupulously clean; but those who dust machinery wear soiled clothes. This does not mean that the waiter in a canteen is superior to the factory hand who dusts machines. The man who takes the utmost care to keep himself intellectually bright, without any thought of himself, observes fasts, while the soldier, who has to be strong and tough, eats meat.

Why should there be bad feelings between the two, between the Brahmin and the Ksatriya? Does the Brahmin have to come into physical contact with the Ksatriya to prove that he does not bear any ill-will towards him? If he intertwined with the Ksatriya he would be tempted to taste meat and such a temptation might eventually drag him into doing things that militate against his own duty. Each community has its own duties, customs and food habits. If all jatis mixed together on the pretext of equality without regard to their individual ways of life, all work would suffer and society itself would be plunged into confusion.

It was with a definite purpose in view that the village was divided into different quarters: the agrahara (the Brahmin quarter), the agriculturists quarter and so on. Such a division was possible in rural life but not in the the new urban way of living. With urbanization and industrialization it becomes necessary for people belonging to various jatis to work together on the same shift, sit together in the same canteen to eat the same kind of food. The Brahmin for whom it is obligatory to observe fasts and vows and to perform various rites was now seen to be no different from others. Office and college timings were a hindrance to the carrying out of these rites. So the Brahmin threw them to the winds. He had so far taken care to perform these rites with the good of others in mind. Like a trustee, he had protected dharma for the sake of society and made its fruits available to all.

All that belonged to the past. Now the Brahmin came forward proclaiming that all were equal and that he was one with the rest. All the same he became the cause of heart-burning among others and -ironically enough- in becoming one with them he also competed with them for jobs. That apart, though he talked of equality, he still thought himself to be superior to others, in spite of the fact that he was not a bit more careful than they about the performance of religious duties. Was this not enough to earn him more hatred?

The Brahmin spoiled himself and spoiled others. By abandoning his dharma he became a bad example to others. as a matter of fact, even by strictly adhering to his dharma the Brahmin in not entitled to feel superior to others. He must always remain humble in the belief that "everyone performs a function in society; I perform mine". If at all others respected him in the past and accorded him a high place in the society it was in consideration of his selfless work, his life of austerity a, discipline and purity. Now he had descended too such depths as to merit their most abrasive criticism.

It is my decided opinion that the Brahmin is responsible for the ruin of Hindu society. Some people have found an explanation for it. The Brahmin, if he is to be true to his dharma, has to spend all his time in learning and chanting the Vedas, in performance sacrifices, in preserving the sastras, etc. What will he do for a living? If he goes in search of money or material he will not be able to attend to his lifetime mission- and this mission is not accomplished on a part-time basis. And if he takes up some other work for his livelihood, he is likely to become lax in the pursuit of his dharma. It would be like taking medicine without the necessary diet regimen: the benign power gained by the



Brahmin from his Vedic learning will be reduced and there will be a corresponding diminution in the good accruing to mankind from his work.

This is one reason why Brahmin alone are permitted by the sastras to beg for their living. In the past they received help from the kings\_ grants of lands, for instance-in consideration of the fact that the dharma practised by them benefited all people. But the sastras also have it that the Brahmins must not accept more charity than what is needed for their bare sustenance. If they received anything in excess, they would be tempted to seek sensual pleasures and thereby an impediment would be placed to their inner advancement. There is also the danger of their becoming submissive to the donor and of their twisting the sastras to the latter's liking. It was with a full awareness of these dangers that in the old days the Brahmins practised their dharma under the patronage on the rajas(accepting charity to the minimum and not subjecting themselves to any influence detrimental to their dharma).

The argument of those who have found an excuse for the conduct of latter days Brahmins goes thus. "Brahmins ceased to receive gifts from rulers after the inception of British rule. How can you expect them to live without any income? Force of circumstances made them to English education and thereafter too seek jobs with the government. It is unjust to find fault with them on that score. "

There is possibly some force in this argument but it does not fully justify the change that has come over Brahmins. Before the British, the Moghuls ruled us and before them a succession of sultanates. During these periods a few pandits must have found a place in the darbar. But all other Brahmins adhered to their dharma, did they not, without any support from any other ruler? The phenomenon of the Brahmin quarter becoming deserted, the village being ruined, all pathasala (the Vedic school) becoming forlorn and the lands(granted to Brahmins)turning into mere certificates is not more than a hundred years old. Did not Vedic dharma flourish until a generation ago?

The Vedic religion prospered in the past not only because of the patronage extended to the Brahmins by the Hindu rulers. People belonging to all varnas then were anxious that it should not become weak and perish. They saw too it that the Brahmin community did not weaken and contributed generously to its upkeep and to the nurturing of the Vedic tradition. Today you see hundreds of Vedic schools deserted. There are few Brahmin boys willing too study the

scriptures. Who had raised the funds for the Vedic institutions? [In Tamil Nadu] the Nattukottai Nagarattars, Komutti Cettis and Vellalas. The work done by Nagarattars for our temples indeed remarkable. Throughout Tamil Nadu, if they built a temple they also built a Vedic school with the belief that the Vedas constituted the "root" of the temple. This root, they felt, was essential to the living presence of the deity in the temple and for the puja conducted there. Similarly, the big landowners among the Vellalas made lavish donations to the Vedic schools.

If the Brahmin had not been tempted by the European life-style and if he were willing to live austerely according to the dictates of the sastras, other castes would have come forward to help him. It is not that the others deserted him. He himself ran away from his dharma, from his agrahara, from his village and from the Vedic school because of his new appetite for the life of luxury made possible with the new technology of the West. He forgot his high ideals and paid scant respect of the principle that the body's requirements are not more than what it takes- in physical terms- to help the well-being of the Self. All told the argument that the Brahmin was compelled to abandon his dharma because he was denied his daily bread does not hold water. We cannot but admit that the Brahmin became greedy, that he yearned far more than what he needed for his sustenance.

Let us concede that the Brahmin left his village because he could not feed himself there and came to a city like Madras. But did he find contentment here? What do we see today in actual practice? Suppose a Brahmin received a salary of Rs1000 in Madras today. If he gets a job in Delhi with double the salary he runs off there. When he goes to Delhi he would abandon totally the dharma he was able to practise at least to a small extent in Madras. Later, if he were offered \$4000 a month in America he would leave his motherland for that country, lured by the prospect of earning a fortune. There, in the United States, he would become totally alienated from his religion, from his dharma, from all his money. The Brahmin is willing to do anything, go to any extent, for the sake of money. For instance, he would join the army if there were the prospect of more income in it. If necessary he would even take to meat and to drinking. The usual excuse trotted out for the Brahmin deserting his dharma does not wash.

I will go one step further. Let us suppose that, following the import of Western technology, other communities also became averse to observing their

respective dharmic traditions. Let us also assume that, with their thinking and feelings influenced by the Aryan-Dravidian theory concocted by the English, these castes decided not to support the Brahmins any longer. Let us further assume that to feed himself (for the sake of a handful of rice) the Brahmin had to leave hearth and home and work in an office somewhere far away from his native village. Were he true to his dharma he would tell himself: "I will continue to adhere to my dharma come what may, even at the risk of death". With this resolve he could have made a determined effort to pursue Vedic learning and keep up his traditional practices.

There is no point, however, in suggesting what people belonging to the generation that has gone by should have done. I would urge the present generation to perform the duties that the past generation neglected to perform. To repeat, you must not forsake your dharma even on pain of death. Are we going to remain deathless? As it is we accumulate money and, worse, suffer humiliation and earn the jealousy of others and finally we die losing caste by not remaining true to our dharma.

Is it not better then to starve and yet to be attached firmly to our dharma so long as there is breath in us? Is not such loyalty to our dharma a matter of pride? Why should we care about how others see us, whether they honour us or speak ill of us? So long as we do not compete with them for jobs they will have no cause for jealousy or resentment. Let them call us backward or stupid or think that we are not capable of keeping abreast of the times. As we not now already their but of ridicule? Let us be true to our dharma in the face of the mockery of others, even in the face of death. Is not such a lot preferable to suffering the slings of scorn and criticism earned by forsaking our dharma for the sake of filling our belly? People nowadays die for their mother land; they lay down their lives for their mother tongue. They do not need a big cause like the freedom of the country to be roused to action: they court death, immolate themselves, even for a cause that may be seem trivial like the merger of a part of their district in another. Was there any demonstration of faith like this, such willingness to die for a cause or a belief, when the British came here with their life-style? At the same time did we protect our dharma with courage, in the belief that even death was a small price to pay for it?

The Lord himself has declared in the Gita that it is better to die abiding by one's dharma than to prosper through another man's dharma ("nidhanam sreyah").

Brahmins who had seen no reason to change their life-style during the long Muslim period of our history changed it during British rule. Why? New sciences and machinery came with the white man. The motor car and electricity had their own impact on life there. Brahmins were drawn to comforts and conveniences not thought of before. This could be for a reason for their change of life, but not a justification.

The Brahmin is not to regard his body as a means for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures but as an instrument for the observance of such rites as are necessary to protect the Vedas- and the Vedas have too be protected for the welfare of mankind. The basic dharma is that to the body of the Brahmin nothing must be added that incites his sensual appetite. It was a fundamental mistake on the part of the Brahmin to have forgotten the spirit of sacrifice that incites his dharma and become a victim of the pleasures and comforts easily obtained from the new gadgets and instruments. There is pride in adhering to one's dharma even when one is faced with adverse circumstances. Brahmins(during British rule) committed a grave mistake by not doing so and we are suffering the consequences. See the ill-will in the country today among children of the same mother. We have created suffering for others also. At first Brahmins were denied admission to colleges and refused jobs. Now things have come to such a pass that other communities also suffer the same fate.

All was well so long as man, using his own innate resources, lived a simple life without the help of machines. With more and more factories and increasing machine power, life itself has become complicated. The situation today is such everyone is facing difficulties in getting admission to college or in getting a job.

People ask me: "What is the remedy today? Do you expect all Brahmins to leave their new life-style and return Vedic learning? "Whether or not I expect them to do so and whether or not such a step seems possible, I must ask them to do so( to return to their Vedic dharma). Where is the need for a guru-pitha or a seat on which an acarya is installed if I am to keep my mouth shut and watch idly as the dharma that is the source of everything is being endangered? Even if it seems not possible (Brahmins returning to the dharma of their birth) it must be shown to be possible in practice: that is the purpose of the institutions called mathas. They must harness all their energies towards the attainment of this goal.

During the years of the freedom struggle some people wondered whether the white man would quit because of satyagraha. Many things in this world regarded as not being within the realm of possibility have been shown to be possible. It is not for me to say that this (return of all Brahmins to the Vedic dharma) is not possible; to take such a view would be contrary to our very dharma. It is up to you to make it possible in practice or not to make it possible. All I can do is to keep reminding you the message of the dharmasastras.



### The Least Expected of Brahmins

Whether or not the present Hindu society changes and whether or not it can be changed, it is essential to have a class of people whose very life-breath is Vedic learning. I do not speak thus because I am worried about the existence of a caste called Brahmins. Nothing is to be gained if there is such a caste and it serves only its own selfish interests. If a caste called Brahmins must exist, it must be for the good of mankind. The purpose of the Vedas, the purpose of the sound of the Vedas, is the well-being of the world. That is the reason why I feel that, hereafter at least, there ought not to be even a single Brahmin who does not chant the Vedas. The only remedy for all the ills of the world, all its troubles is the return of all Brahmins to the Vedic dharma.

In this context I should like to tell you the least expected of Brahmins. I am prepared to ignore that they have neither the courage nor the spirit of

sacrifice to come back to their dharma. But they can at least make their children take to it. In the next generation there must not be a single Brahmin who is not conversant with the Vedas. You must work for this goal and make sure that your sons learn these sacred texts.

If you are averse to making your sons mere Vaidikas and are anxious that they should lead a life of comfort like you( what you think to be a life of comfort), I am prepared to come one step further down to make the following suggestion. You would not perhaps like your children to take up Vedic learning as a lifelong vocation and would like to give them an education on modern lines so as to prepare them for office or factory work or to make them doctors, engineers, and so on. I am prepared to go with you so far. But I would ask you to perform the upanayana of your son when he is eight years old. He must then be put in a Veda class held for one hour in the evening after school hours. He must be taught the Vedas in this manner for ten years.

This is the least Brahmins can do to preserve tradition. Arrangements to impart Vedic learning to children must be made in every Brahmin household. I know that there are not enough teachers, a sad reflection on the state of dharma. Considering this and the likely economic condition of parents I would suggest that Veda classes may be conducted for all children together of a locality or neighbourhood. Children of poor families may be taught on a cooperative basis.

Step by step in this ways the boys will be able to memorize the mantra part of the Vedas and also learn the prayoga to conduct rites like upakarma. I speak here about "prayoga", the conduct or procedure of rites, because in the absence of purohitas(priests) in the future everyone should be able to perform Vedic rites himself.

The sound of the Vedas must pervade the world for all time to come. Everyone must sincerely work towards achieving this end. It is your duty to ensure the good not only of the Brahmin community, not only of all the castes of India, but of all the countless creatures of earth. It is a duty imposed on you by Isvara- it is a divine duty.

It is important that we perform this duty we owe to the people of the present. But it is equally important that we perform it so as to be saved from committing a crime against future generations. "As it is nobody cares for the

Vedas" you are likely to tell me. "Who is going to care for them in the coming years? What purpose is served by all the efforts we take now to keep up their study? " I do not share this view. When the wheel keeps turning, that part of it which is now down has necessarily to come up. Modern civilization with its frenzied pace is bound to have its fall after attaining its peak. We have been carried away by the supposed comforts made possible by advanced technology. But one day we will realise that they do not give us any felling of fullness and that we have indeed created only discomforts for ourselves through them.

The example of America is enough to drive home this point. People there are believed to have attained the acme of luxury and yet fell empty within. They are anxious to dispel the disquiet created by modern comforts. Americans who have some degree of awareness have been drawn towards Vedanta, yoga, devotional music and so on. Others want to forget sensual enjoyment somehow. They swallow all kinds of tranquilizers and are immersed in a deep stupor.

This fate may overtake our country also. We are always tempted by the feeling that there is some worldly pleasure yet to be savoured and we know no rest until we have done so. After draining pleasures to the dregs we will discover the impermanence of it all. That is the moment when we will turn to matters of the Self, to the quest of enduring bliss. When we realise the peace and harmony that society derived from Vedic practices, we will be keen to take to the path shown by them. If we of this generation create a break in the chain of Vedic study kept for ages, from generation to generation, we shall be committing the unforgivable crime of denying our descendants the opportunity of learning the Vedas.

"There are so many books dealing with the Vedic mantras and sacrifices, volume after volume produced by Indian and foreign scholars, " the suggestions is likely to be made. "Surely future generations can read them and learn the Vedas thus. "

Before I speak about this I have to answer important question, a question that goes to the very heart of the Vedic tradition. It is this: "What do you mean by saying that the sound of the Vedas protects the world" The mantras are certain sounds expressed in the form of words. These words have their own profound meaning. Could we not learn the mantras and their meaning from books? Why should there be a class of people specially devoted to the

chanting of the Vedas? If the meaning of these scriptures is to be preserved there is no cause for worry since there are books too serve such a purpose. There is no need for an exclusive caste functioning on a hereditary basis and charged with the duty of preserving these texts. But the question of the meaning of the Vedas apart, why should there be a class of people whose duty it is to chant the Vedic hymns preserve their sound in the form it has come to us from time immemorial? " This question must be answered.

Vedic hymns and preserve their sound in the form it has come to us from time immemorial? " This question must be answered.



### [Preserving the Vedas: Why it is a Lifetime Mission](#)

" If the divisions of labour on a hereditary basis is good for all society, what specifically is the benefit gained from the vocation of Brahmins, that is preserving the Vedas? " is a question frequently asked.

The potter makes pots for you; the washerman launders your clothes; the weaver weaves clothes for you to wear; the cowherd brings you your milk; the peasant tills the land to grow rice for you to cook and eat. Everyone does some work or other essential in the life of everybody else. The rice (or wheat ) grown by the tiller sustains us all. The cloth woven by the weaver is indispensable to our modesty, it is also needed to keep us warm in the cold



season. We drink the milk brought by the cowherd and also use it to make buttermilk; we cook our food in the pot made by the potter. We find that all jatis provide commodities useful for the society. What is the Brahmin's contribution in this context? What vocation is assigned to him by the Sastras which are the basis of varna dharma?

The Brahmin has to learn the Vedas by listening to his teacher chanting them; this is adhyayana. If adhyayana is chanting the Vedas, adhyapana is teaching the same. The sastras have charged the Brahmin with the additional duty of performing various rites including Vedic sacrifices.

The Vedas contain lofty truths. People in modern times may not be averse to the idea that these truths are worthy of being cherished. Society requires knowledge, arts, etc. The Vedas are a storehouse of knowledge. So the idea that we must have a special class of people to propagate the truths contained in the Vedas may seem reasonable enough. According to the sastras, however, such a special class is needed to preserve the sound of these scriptures. This class is constituted by the Brahmins and they perform their function on a hereditary basis. The idea that propagating the truths of the Vedas will help mankind may be acceptable to many, but not the belief that a small group of people can contribute to the good of the world by preserving the sound of the Vedas. The community stands to lose if the peasant does not till the land and the potter, weaver, carpenter, etc., do not do their respective jobs. But would you say the same thing about the work of the Brahmin? What difference would it make to the society if he ceased intoning the Vedas?

To understand the questions raised above we must first try to find out the nature of the Vedas. No purpose is served by approaching these subjects entirely on an intellectual level. We must accept the words of great men who know the Vedas deep in their hearts. "How can we do that, sir?" some people might protest. "We are rationalists and we can be convinced of a truth or statement only on the basis of reason or direct knowledge."

What do we do then? How can anyone claim, as a matter of right, that all subjects ought to be brought within the ken of human reasoning? Man is but one among countless creatures. Take for instance the experiments conducted by a physicist in his laboratory. Does a cow understand them? If the scientist formulates certain laws on the basis of his experiments, does the cow say that "These laws of physics do not exist"? But how are humans ignorant of

physics to know about such laws? They trust the statements made by people proficient in the subject.

To illustrate, take the example of any common appliance. Let us assume that you are told that it works on the basis of certain principles of science. Don't you accept these principles by observing how the appliance works? In the same way we must have faith in what great men say about the Vedas, great men who live strictly adhering to the sastras. We must also place our faith on our scripture on the basis of the fruits or benefits yielded by them, the benefits we directly perceive. One such "fruit" is till there for all of us to see. It is Hinduism itself, the religion that has withstood the challenges of all these millennia. Our religion has produced more great men than any other faith. People have been rewarded with the highest inner well-being [the highest bliss] as a result of their faith in the Vedic tradition. There is no insistence on their part that everything on earth must be brought within the realm of reason or direct perception.

"The sages transcended the frontiers of human knowledge and became one with the Universal Reality. It is through them that the world received the Vedic mantras, " this is one of the basic concepts of our religion. If you do not accept that human beings can obtain such Atmic power as exemplified by these seers, any further talk on the subject would be futile. One could point to you great men whom you can see for yourself, great men who have perfected themselves and acquired powers not shared by the common people. But if you think of them to be cheats or fraudulent men, any further talk would again be useless. In your present state of limited understanding, the argument that denies the existence of anything beyond the range of human reason and comprehension itself betrays the height of rationalism.

You have come here to listen to me instead of going to a political meeting where you can hear interesting speeches. So I believe that few of you here are full-fledged rationalists. You may not therefore refuse to listen to me if I speak to you about why the Vedas should be preserved according to the time-honoured tradition. But it is also likely that even if some of you happen to be rationalists, you may still be willing to listen to me thinking that there may be some point in what the Svamiyar has to say.

Some people are at a loss to understand why the sound of the Vedas is given so much importance. How does sound originate or how is it caused? Where

there is vibration, where there is movement or motion, there is sound. This is strictly according to rational science. Speech is constituted of vibrations of many kinds. We hear sounds with our ears. But these are sounds that are converted into electric waves and these we cannot hear. We know this from the working of the radio and the telephone. All that we hear or perceive others are indeed electric waves. Science has come to the point of recognizing all to be electric waves- the man who sees and listens, his brains, all are electric waves.

There are countless numbers of inert objects in the world- land masses and mountains, rivers and oceans, and so on. Also there are sentient creatures of many kinds. All of them must have been created out of something. During creation this something must have vibrated in many different ways and given rise to all that we see today. If all movements are sound, there must have existed numerous different kinds of sound before creation. In this creation one is sustained by another. In the process of mutual sustenance, different movements and sounds must be produced. It is not necessary that vibrations should form a part only of gross activities. Science has discovered that even our thinking process is a kind of electric current or energy. Each thought process is a form of electric current or energy and it must produce a vibration and a sound. This kind of sound being very subtle we do not hear it with our ears. Just as there are bacteria which we do not see with our naked eye, there are many sound that our ears do not pick up. According to science any physical or mental movement must produce a sound.

The idea that each movement produces its own sound may be put differently thus: to create a particular sound a particular movement must be produced. Take the case of vidvan singing. If you want to sing like him or creates birquas like him, you will have produce the same vibrations that he creates in his throat.

Sound and vibration(or motion) go together. The vibrations produce either a gross object or a mental state. We come to the conclusion that creation is a product of sound. This ancient concept is substantiated by science itself.

Creation, the many things connected with it, thoughts and movements and the sound associated with them fill space. What happens to the sound produced by the clapping of our hands? It remains in space. Good as well as bad action produce their own sounds as well as movements associated with them.

Conversely, the creation of these types of movements will result in good as well as evil. To produce good thoughts in people, good movements must be created: the sounds corresponding to them must be produced. If we can generate such sounds for the good of mankind than such good thoughts? The mantras of the Vedas are sounds that have the power to inspire good thoughts in people.

One more thing. We need food for our sustenance. And to grow food there must be rain. The formation of clouds and their precipitation are dependent on certain vibrations. Rainfall depends on the production of particular sounds which, in turn, create particular vibrations. The same applies to all our needs in life. It is true that unnecessary and evil objects are also produced by sound. But the one and only goal of the sound of the Vedas is the creation of well-being throughout the world.

But are sound and vibrations spontaneously produced? If vibrations arise on their own they will be erratic and confusing and not related to one another. But what do we see in the cosmos? There is a certain orderliness about it and one thing in it is linked to another. What do we infer from this? That a Great Intelligence has formulated this scheme that we see, that it has created it from its own vibrations.

The Vedas are sounds emanating from the vibrations of this Great Intelligence, the Great Gnosis. That is why we believe that the mantras of the Vedas originate from the Paramatman himself. We must take special care of such sounds too ensure the good of the world. Yes, the Vedic mantras are sequences of sounds that are meant for the good of the world.

Doubts are expressed on this point. People argue: "We hear the mantras of the Vedic distinctly. But we do not hear the sounds in space, the sounds of creation. How can the two be the same? "

What exists in the cosmos in present in the individual being. The belief that the "microcosm" inherits the "macrocosm" is not in keeping with our commonsense view of things. But all people, including atheists, will agree that there are "instruments" in our body in the form of the senses that we can grasp what exists in the macrocosm. The sun in the macrocosm is felt by our body as heat. We perceive the flower in our garden through its scent. We

savour the sweet taste of sugarcane with our tongue. With our eyes we learn that one object is red, that another it yellow.

Unless the macrocosm and microcosm are constituted of the same substance the one will not be able to be aware of the other. Indeed the very conduct of life will not be possible otherwise. If we go one step further, the truth will dawn on us that it is not merely that the macrocosm and the microcosm are constituted of the same substance but that it is the same substance that becomes the macrocosm and the microcosm. The yogins know this truth directly from their experience.

Whatever is present in space is also present in the individual being. These elements exists in the human body in a form that is accessible to the senses. The sounds a person makes in his throat have their source in space in a form not audible to us. The radio transforms electrical waves into sound waves. If a man can grasp the sounds in space and make them audible, he will be able to create with them what is needed for the good of the world. Yoga is the science that accomplishes such a task. Through yogic practice (perfection) one can become aware of what is in the macrocosm and draw it into the microcosm. I shall not be able to give you proof of this in a form acceptable to human reason. Yoga transcends our limited reason and understanding. The purpose of the Vedas is to speak about matters that are beyond the comprehension of the human mind.

You must have faith in the words of great men or else, to know the truth of such matters, you must practise yoga strictly observing its rules. It may not be practicable for all those who ask questions or harbour doubts about the Vedas to practice yoga in this manner. Even if you are prepared to accept the words of a true yogin, how are you, in the first place, to be convinced that he in indeed a true yogin and not a fraud? Altogether it means that you must have faith in someone, in something. Later such faith will be strengthened from your own observations, inference and experience. There is no point in speaking to people who have either no faith or refuse to develop it through their own experience.

There is a state in which the macrocosm and the microcosm are perceived as one. Great men there who have reached such a state and are capable of transforming what is subtle in the one into what is gross in the other. I am speaking here to those who believe in such a possibility.

When we look at this universe and their complex manner in which it functions, we realise that there must be a Great Wisdom that has created it and sustains it. It is from this Great Wisdom, that is the Paramatman, that all that we see are born and it is from It that all the sounds that we hear have emanated. First came the universe of sound and then the universe that we observe. Most of the former still exists in space. The space that exists outside us exists also in our heart. The yogins have experience of this hrdayakasa, this heart-sky or this heart-space, when they are in samadhi (absorbed in the Infinite). In this state of theirs all differences between the outward and the inward vanish and the two become one. The yogins can now grasp the sounds of space and bestow the same on mankind. These successions of sounds that bring benefits to the world are indeed the mantras of the Vedas.

These mantras are not the creation of anyone. Though each of them is in the name of a rsi or seer, in reality it is not his creation. When we say that a certain mantra has a certain sage associated with it, all that we mean is that it was he who first "saw" it existing without a beginning in space and revealed it to the world. The very word "rsi" means "mantra-drasta" (one who saw-discovered- the mantra), not "mantra-karta" (one who created the mantra). Our life is dependent on how our breathing functions. In the same way the cosmos functions in accordance with the vibrations of the Vedic sounds- so the Vedic mantras are the very breath of the Supreme Being. We must thus conclude that, without the Vedas, there is no Brahman: To put it differently, the Vedas are self-existent like the Paramatman.

The mantras of the Vedas are remarkable in that they bring blessings to the world in the form of sound- even if their meaning is not understood. Of course, they are pregnant with meaning and represent the lofty principle that it is the One Truth that is manifested as all that we perceive. They also confer blessing on us by taking the form of deities appropriate to the different sounds (of the mantras).

Sound does not bring any benefits, any fruits, by itself. Isvara alone is the bestower of benefits. However, instead of making the fruits available to us directly, he appoints deities to distribute them in the same manner as the king or president of a country appoints officials to carry out his dictates. The mantras represent various deities in the form of sound. If we attain perfection (siddhi) by constant chanting and meditation of a mantra, it should

be possible for us to see the deity invoked in his physical form. The deities also arise if we make offerings into the sacrificial fire reciting specific mantras. If a sacrifice is conducted in this manner, the deities give us their special blessings. We do not pay taxes directly to the king or president. In the same way, we pay taxes in the form of sacrifices and Vedic chanting to the aides of the Paramatman for the sake of the welfare of the world. The sounds of the mantras constitute their form.

The Vedas have won the admiration of Western scholars for their poetic beauty. They bring us face to face with many deities- they bring us also their grace. Above all, through the Upanisads they teach us the great truths relating to the Self. The Vedas are thus known for the profundity of the truths contained in them, but their sound is no less important. Indeed their sound has its own significance and power. All mantras, it must be noted have power, not only Vedic mantras.

The sound of some mantras have greater value than their meaning. Their syllables chanted in a particular manner create a special energy, but their meaning has no special significance. Take the mantra recited to cure a man stung by a scorpion. The words, the syllables, constituting the mantra have no special meaning. Indeed, they say, the meaning is not to be told. But by chanting the mantra, the vibrations are caused in space and one stung by a scorpion will be cured: the potency of the syllables of the mantra is such. The efficacy of sounds varies with the difference mantras. Evil is caused by reciting certain mantras or formulae: this is called "abhicara"[understood as the black magic in the West]. In all this the clarity with which the syllables are enunciated is important. There was the practice of knocking off the teeth of those who practiced billi sunyam (a form of black magic). The black magician, if toothless, will not be able to articulate the mantras properly and so his spells will not have the intended effect. If the syllables of the spell are not clearly and properly enunciated, they will not give us the desired benefit. If we appreciate the fact that sounds have such power, the question of the language of the mantras loses its importance. It would be meaningless then to demand that the mantras must be expressed in some other language [that we understand]. It would be equally meaningless to wonder whether the mantras of the sraddha ceremony should be rendered into English, Tamil or some other language so that our departed parents would understand them better.

The Vedic mantras do good to all creatures in this world and the hereafter: we must have implicit faith in this belief. It is not proper to ask whether what we ourselves cannot here with our ears will be heard by the seers. There is such a thing as the divine power of seeing and hearing. Our sight is dependent on the lens in our eyes. Were this lens different what we observe would also be different. Through the intense practice of yoga we can obtain the divine power of seeing and hearing.

We must not inquire into the Vedas with our limited powers of perception and with our limited capacity to reason and comprehend. The Vedas speak to us about what is beyond the reach of our eyes and ears and reasoning- that is their purpose. There are things that we comprehend through direct perception. We do not need the help of the Vedas to know about them. What cannot be provoked by reasoning and what is beyond the reach of our intellect- these the seers have gifted us in the form of the Vedas with their divine perception. How do we learn about the affairs of other countries? We are not eyewitnesses to them but we depend on newspaper reports of these affairs. There is another kind of newspaper which tells us about matters that cannot be known through any worldly means and this newspaper is constituted of the Vedic mantras that are the gift of the seers.

We have to accept the Vedas in faith. Develop a little faith in them and experience for your self the fruits yielded by them. In due course you will be convinced about the truths told about them.

Even today we see how mantras are efficacious though what we see is more often their power to do evil rather than good. The very word "mantrikam" inspires dread in us. If mantras have the power to do evil, they must also have the power to do good. We do hear reports of how mantras are beneficent, for instance how the mantras invoking the god Varuna produce rains.

It may be that sometimes the "Varunajapa" does not succeed in bringing rains. But this is no reason why all mantras should be rejected outright as of no value. Sick people die even after the regular administration of medicine. For this reason do we condemn medical science as worthless? We have an explanation for the patient's failure to recover: his illness and reached such an advanced stage that no medicine could be of any avail. Similarly, no mantra is of any help when it has to contend against the working of powerful karma.



There is also another reason. If you are not strict about your diet, the medicine taken may not work. Similarly, if we are lax in the observance of certain rules, the mantras will not produce the desired result.

Yoga is a science. In a scientific laboratory, certain rules have to be observed in the conduct of experiments. If the electrician refuses to wear gloves or to stand on a wooden stool during his work, what will happen? So too, anyone practising yoga has to follow the rules governing it. To return to Varuna japa. If the japa is not always successful, it is because- as I have found out through inquiries- of the failure of those performing the rite to observe the rule of "alavana"[taking food without salt].

In Tirivanaikka (near Tirucirapalli) people have seen with their own eyes a tree bare of foliage putting forth green shoots under the spell of mantras. The sthalavrksa here [the tree sacred to a place or temple] in the white jambu. That is why the place (Tiruvanaikka) is also called Jambukesvaram. Once the tree was dead expect for one branch or so. Then the cettians- the trustees of the temple- had an Ekadasa-Rudrabhiseka conducted for it. And behold, by the power of mantras the tree put forth fresh leaves.

Each sound has a specific impact on the outward world. Experiments were once conducted by a lakeside by producing a certain pattern of svaras on an instrument. It was observed that as a result of the vibrations so created the light on the water shone as particles. Later these particles took a specific shape. From such scientific proof it is possible to believe that we can perceive the form of a deity through chanting the appropriate Veda mantras. It is not that sound is transformed into light alone in the outward world. It is pervasive in many ways and produces various kind of impacts. The sound of the Vedic mantras pervading the atmosphere is extremely beneficial. There are ways in which sound is to be produced to make it advantageous to us. Some notes are to be raised, some lowered and some to be uttered in an even manner. The Vedas have to be chanted in this way. The three different ways of chanting are "udatta", "anudatta" and "svarita". The sound and svara together will turn the powers of the cosmos favourable to us.

The question that now occurs is why there should be a separate caste committed to Vedic learning practices even if it is conceded that Vedic mantras have the power to do good.

In answering this question we must first remember that the Vedas are not to be read from the written text. They have to be memorized by constant listening and repeated chanting. The learner then becomes a teacher himself and in this manner the process goes on from generation to generation. Maintaining such a tradition of learning and teaching is a whole-time occupation. Neither the teacher nor the taught may take up any other work.

We must also remember that the Brahmin is expected to master subjects other than the Vedas also, like the arts and crafts and the various sciences(sastras). He has in fact to learn the vocations of other jatis (but he must not take up any for his own livelihood). It is the responsibility of the Brahmin to promote knowledge and culture. He is expected to learn the hereditary skills of all jatis, including the art of warfare, and pass on these skills to the respective jatis to help them earn their livelihood. The Brahmin's calling is adhyayana and adhyapana (learning and teaching the Vedas). According to the sastras he must live in a modest dwelling, observe strict rules and vows so as to gain mastery of the mantras. He must eat only as much as is needed keep body and soul together. All temptations to make money and enjoy sensual pleasures he must sternly resist. All his actions must be inspired by the spirit of sacrifice and he must pass his days sustaining the Vedic tradition and practices for the good of mankind.

It is the duty of other jatis to see that the Brahmin does not die of starvation. They must provide him with bare necessities of life and such materials as re needed for the performance of sacrifices. Wages are paid to those who do other jobs or a price is paid for what they produce. The Brahmin works for the whole community and serves it by chanting mantras, by performing sacrifices and by leading a life according to the dictates of religion. That is why he must be provided with his upkeep. The canonical texts do not say that we must build him palace or that he must be given gifts of gold. The Brahmin must be provided with the wherewithal for the proper performance of sacrifices. In his personal life he must eschew all show and luxury. It is by taming his senses- by burning away all desire- that he gains mastery over the mantras.

I have said more than once that the Vedas are to be learned by constant listening, that they are not to be learned from the written text. Let me tell you why. The sound of the Vedas must pervade the world. This is of paramount importance, not that the text itself should be maintained in print.

Indeed, the Vedas must not be kept in book form. If the printed text is available all the time, we are likely to neglect the habit of memorizing the hymns and chanting them. There is not the slightest doubt about this. "After all it is in the book. When the need arises we can always refer to it. Why should we waste our time in memorizing the mantras? " Thus an attitude of indifference will develop among those charged with the duty of maintaining the Vedic tradition.

Nowadays we have what is called the "pancangaran" (pancangakkaran), that is the "almanac-man". We understand his job to be that of officiating at the rites performed by members of the fourth varna. But from the term "almanac"-man" we know that this is not his main duty. The pancangakkaran or almanac-man is truly one who determines the five angas" or components of the almanac. Each day has five angas: tithi, vara, nakshatra, yoga and karana. To find out whether a particular day is auspicious or whether a certain work or function may be performed on a particular day, all these five factors have to be taken into account. Today astronomers in Greenwich observe the sun, the moon and the stars to fix the timings of sunrise and sunset. Three or four generations ago, every village had an almanac-man who was an expert in such matters. He could predict eclipses, their exact timings, with the precision of present-day astronomers. He inscribed the five angas relating to the day on a palm-leaf and took it round from house to house to help people in their worldly and religious duties. In the past he had also another name "Kuttai Cuvadi"(meaning "Shortened Palm-leaf").

How have the present day almanac-men forgotten their great science? With the advent of the printing press the almanac could be printed for a whole year and made available to people. There was no longer any need for the old, type of almanac to pancanga, an important part of astronomy, is now on the verge of extinction.

The Vedas would have suffered a similar fate had we stuck to a system of learning them from written or printed texts. Their sound would not have then filled the world and created all-round well-being.

Our forefathers realised that to put anything in writing was not the best way of preserving it since it bred indifference to the subject so preserved. One who recited the Vedas from the written text ("likhita-pathaka") was looked down upon as an "adhama" (one belonging to the lowest order among those

chanting the

Vedas). In Tamil the Vedas are known as the "unwritten old text"(ezhutakilavi). In Sanskrit the Vedas are also called "Sruti", which means "that which is heard", that is to say not be learned from any written text. Since listening to the Vedas as they were chanted and then memorizing them was the practice, preserving the Vedic tradition came to be full-time vocation. The teacher taught pada by pada(foot by foot) and the student repeated each pada twice. In this way the sound of the Vedas filled the whole place. It was thus that the study of our own scripture, with all its recessions which are like the expanse of a great ocean, was maintained in the oral tradition until the turn of the century. This treasure, this timeless crop that sustains our inner beings, has come to us through the ages as ordained by the Lord. There can be no greater sin than that of neglecting this treasure and allowing it to perish.

If the Vedic tradition becomes extinct there is no need for a separate caste called Brahmins. Nowadays the cry is often heard, "Brahmin, get out". But do we hear cries like, "Potter, get out" or "Washerman, go away? " If the potter and the washerman leave the village they will be brought back by force and retained. Why so? Because the community need their services.

So long as the Brahmin possessed sattva-guna(the quality of goodness and purity) and so long as he kept the Vedic tradition going and lived a simple life, others recognized his value for society. They regarded him with affection and respect and placed their trust in him. They realised that if society was not afflicted by famine and disease (as in the case today), it was because the sound of the Vedas pervaded everywhere and the performance of Vedic recites created a healthy atmosphere around and brought its own blessings.

This was not the only way in which the Brahmin served society. His personal example was itself a source of inspiration to people. They saw how he curbed his sensual appetites, how he lived a life of peace, how he was compassionate to all creatures, how he mediated on the Lord, how he performed a variety of rites strictly adhering to sastric rules and without any expectations of rewards. They saw a whole case living a life of selflessness and sacrifice. Naturally, they too were drawn to the qualities exemplified by its members. They emulated their example, observed fasts and vows to the extent permitted by the nature of their occupations. It is preposterous to accuse the Brahmin of having kept other jatis suppressed. There is a special way of life

that the scriptures have prescribed for him and in remaining true to it he becomes a personal example for others desirous of raising themselves.

It is equally preposterous to suggest that other were kept down because they were denied the right to learn the Vedas. I have already spoken to you that preserving the Vedic tradition is a hereditary and lifelong vocation. Any calling must be pursued on a hereditary basis. Otherwise, there is the risk of society being torn asunder by jealousies and rivalries. The maintenance of the Vedic tradition is a calling by itself. There will be confusion and chaos in the system of division of labour if people whose vocations are different are allowed to pursue one common tradition. Also, as a consequence, will not the social structure be disturbed? Every vocation has as high a place on the social scale as any other. Why should anyone nurse the ideas that the pursuit of the Vedic dharma belongs to a plane higher than all other types of work?

Some castes are not permitted to learn the Vedas but there is no bar on their learning the truths contained in them. This is all that is needed for their Atmic advancement. We need only one class of people charged with the mission of keeping the sound of the Vedas alive in the world. The ideas contained in them for spiritual uplift are open to all. The songs of non-Brahmin saints like Appar and Nammazhvar are replete with Vedic and Vedantic thoughts.

Were it true that Brahmins had monopolised Atmic knowledge and devotion and kept others downtrodden, how would you explain the rise among the non-Brahmin jatis of so many great saints, not only the examples just mentioned above, Appar and Nammazhvar, but a number of other Nayanmars and Azhvars? The Nayanmars included men belonging even to jatis regarded as "low". Where do you find men of inner enlightenment like Tayumanavar and Pattiinattar? Apart from the fact that there were among non-Brahmin men worthy of being lauded by Brahmins for other enlightenment and devotion, there were individuals from the fourth varna who established empires and gave new life and vigour to the Vedic dharma. That Brahmins exploited other castes is a recently invented myth.

I do not claim that Brahmins are free from faults or are not guilty of lapses. Nobody is free from faults. But on the whole the Brahmin has done good to society and has been a guide to all its members. That is why he was enabled to live with dignity all these centuries.

When other communities now see that the Brahmin no longer serves society in any manner, they raise the cry, "Brahmin, get out". If they do not serve society and if all they do is to join others in the scramble for money, where is the need for a separate caste called Brahmins? It occurs to me that, if the caste called Brahmins serves no purpose to society, I shall be the first to seek its destruction. Nothing has any right to exist if it has no utility value. There is no need for a caste called Brahmin if the world does not stand to benefit from it.

Now there are "toll-gates" located in many places but often without any "gate". In the past a toll used to be collected from people crossing the boundary marked by these "gates". Later such a system was discontinued and no purpose was served by the gate. Nothing exists without a purpose. Now, if the Brahmin without Vedic learning has become as purposeless as the toll-gate without any toll actually charged, with what reason or justice can we say that he must not be thrown out?

The Brahmin today deserves to be reprovved, if he expects to be treated with any special respect. Criticism, however, should be it. The Brahmin must be faulted for abandoning his dharma, but the dharma itself, the Vedic dharma, is another matter. It is not proper to find fault with the dharma itself and it is the duty of others to help the Brahmin practice it. the Vedic dharma must be sustained so as to ensure the well-being of the world. Other jatis must support the principle that there must be a caste whose hereditary calling it is to maintain the Vedic tradition. If they themselves have lost faith in the Vedic dharma, they cannot find fault with the Brahmin for having forsaken it. If they believe that the Vedic dharma is not wanted, then it would mean (according to their own logic) that the Brahmin is not committing any offence by giving up his hereditary vocation. It also follows that for the sake of his livelihood he will have to take up some other job, competing with the others for the same. So to hold that there is no need for the Vedic dharma and that, at the same time, the Brahmin should not do any work other than the pursuit of that dharma does not stand to reason. On the other hand, it is proclaimed that the Vedic dharma is all wrong and must cease to exist but, on the other, the man whose duty it is to practice that dharma is hated for trying to do some other work. Is this just? It is part of humanity to see that not even a dog or a jackal goes hungry and it is a dharma common to all religions. Even those who maintain that we do not need any religion speak for compassion and the spirit of sacrifice in all our actions. So it is not just to

insist that a man must not pursue his hereditary vocation and that he must not, at the same time, do any other work but die of starvation.

Others can help greatly by making the Brahmin true to himself as the upholder of the Vedic dharma. I have heard it said that in the old days some Brahmins would go to the untouchable quarter and tell people there: "You and we, let us become one. " Whereupon the untouchables would reply: "No. no. You keep doing your work. That is for the good of both of us. Don't come here again". They would prevent the Brahmins from approaching them again by breaking their pots in front of them, the pots which were their only asset. Though people then were divided in the matter of work and did not mix together, they had affection for one another and believed that each did his work for the common good.

Even today the common people are not non-believers, nor have they lost faith in the Vedas. I feel that they will continue too have respect for the Vedic dharma and that the propaganda of hate [against Brahmins and the Vedas] is all to be attributed to political reasons. People, I repeat, do have faith in the Vedas, in Vedic rites and customs and if the Brahmin becomes a little better [that is by being true to his vocation] all hatred will vanish. As I said before, instead of expecting respect from others, he must remain true to his dharma even at the risk of his life. It is my belief that society will not allow him to suffer such an extreme fate. But my stand is that, even if it does, he must not forsake his dharma. Whatever the attitude of others, whether they help him or whether they run him down, the Brahmin must uphold the Vedic tradition for the well-being of all.

What I have spoken for the Brahmin community applies in principle too other also. The duties about which I have to speak to them (non-Brahmins) are many. They too are eager to know about them and I am confident that, things are properly explained, they will pursue faithfully their respective dharmas. I must, however, be qualified to give them advice. It is generally believed that I have a special relationship with the Brahmin community. In the Matha a number of Vedic rites are performed. So, rightly or wrongly, the impression has gained around that I have much to do with the case whose duty it is to uphold the Vedic dharma. That being the case, a question will arise in the minds of people belonging to other communities if I speak to them on matters of dharma, even if it is assumed that they will listen to me with affection and respect. The question is this: "Brahmins are so much dependent on his

support. Yet we don't see them acting on his advice and correcting themselves. So why should he come to speak to us of our duties? "

As a matter of fact, both are same to me, Brahmins and non-Brahmins. I am indeed more dissatisfied with Brahmins than with the others because they have abandoned the Vedic dharma, the dharma that confers the highest inner well-being on all. Even so, since it is believed that Brahmins are specially attached to me, I keep admonishing them to go back to the Vedic dharma with all their hearth, with all their strength. If Brahmins observe in practice a fraction of what is expected of them, then alone shall I be qualified to remind other communities of their duties. Brahmins must try as best they can to keep up the Vedic tradition. That is how they will help me to speak to other communities of their duties.

All mankind, all creatures of earth, must live in happiness. Everybody must practise his allotted dharma for the good of all with the realisation that there is no question of any work being "higher" than any other or "lower". Preserving the sound of the Vedas must remain the duty of one class so as to ensure plenty in this world as well as to create universal Atmic uplift. To revert to the question I put to you first. Leaving aside the vocation of the Vedic dharma, let us assume that the hereditary system is beneficial in respect of all types of work. But why should the preservation of the Vedic dharma be the lifelong vocation of one class? It is now established, as I conclude, that however it may be with the other vocations, whether or not they exist, whether or not there is a mix-up in them, the pursuit of the Vedic dharma must remain a separate calling.





### Is Cutting off the Head a Cure for Headache?

Today everybody- from the top leader down to the man in the street- is asking: Why should there be caste? With a little thinking, you will realise that the division of society into various jatis is for the good of all. It serves in two ways. While, on the one hand, it contributes to the progress of the entire community, on the other, it helps each individual to become pure of mind and obtain ultimate liberation.

You do not have to accept this view because it comes from me or because it is that of the sastras. You may think that people like me are reactionaries opposed to progress. But consider the opinion of a man whose goal, all will agree, was the advancement of this nation. This man was determined to do away with all differences among the people, eradicate superstition and elevate the "backward classes" to the level of the rest of society. This man was Gandhiji who extolled the varnasrama system and whole-heartedly accepted it. I mention this because I thought, if not anything else, at least the views of Gandhiji would persuade you to accept the fact that the varna system has good features.

Gandhiji has written an essay entitled, "My Varnasrama Dharma". In it he says: "Varnasrama is a system that has happened on its own. It is natural and inherent in a man's birth. It is a natural law that Hinduism has systematised into a science. This system makes a fourfold division of labour and lays down the duties of each section but not its rights. For any individual to think himself to be superior to others and look down upon another as inferior to himself is against the very spirit of Hindu culture. In the varnasrama system

each individual learns to discipline himself and the energies of society are prevented from being frittered away. I keep fighting against untouchability because I consider it an evil but I support varnasrama as healthy for society and believe that it is not the product of a narrow mind. This arrangement gives the labourer the same status as it does a great thinker". Gandhiji supported varnasrama with greater ardour than sanatanists.

It would be pointed out that Gandhiji's actions were such as to suggest that he was opposed to difference in society based on rites and customs. He supported even intercaste marriage. How is all this to be reconciled with the fact that he upheld varnasrama? Gandhiji thought that, though varna dharma was a worthy system, it had broken down and that it was not possible to revive it. What was the use of keeping the remains after the essence had been extracted from a thing, he asked. So he thought that retaining the outward differences in society was not justified after the principles on which these differences were founded were not longer in force.

I do not think like him. Varnasrama is the backbone of our religion. If it is to be abandoned on the pretext that it is beyond repair, we do not require either a matha or a man to preside over it. For any individual to run an institution labelling himself as its head [that is as the head of any matha] after the root of all dharma is gone, is tantamount to exploiting society. If the old system of caste is in reality extinct, there is no need for a matha and it should be disbanded. But I nurse the belief that such a thing has not happened yet. Nor do I think that caste will before long inevitably cease to exist. I am also confident that, if we are awake to the problem at least now and mobilise all our strength and resources to take the necessary steps, we shall be able to impart the varna system new life and vigour.

No matter how the varna system has become muddled with reference to other vocations, Vedic learning which is the life-breath of all occupations still survives in the pathshalas here and there. In these schools the scriptures are taught strictly in the traditional way. There is enthusiastic support for the efforts taken to spread Vedic learning. Students join the pathshalas in fairly large numbers. There is a small group committed to the cause of the Vedic tradition and to its continuance. My duty is the creation of more and more such groups and to work for their growth. If Vedic learning flourishes, a way will open up to counteract the veil consequences of the muddle created in the other varnas. And if Brahmins become an example and a guide- if not all of

them, at least a few- by remaining true to their old ways of life, others will return to their hereditary duties.

Since Gandhiji believed that varnasrama dharma could neither be mended nor revived in its true form, he wanted it to be totally scrapped. I think otherwise. Though [the flame of] varna dharma has become dim it is not totally extinguished and I feel that there are some sparks still, left which could be fanned into a bright flame again. We must learn the lesson from our history during the past fifty years that our society will have to pay dearly if it gives up varna dharma. You will learn this lesson from the fate suffered by the great civilisations that flourished in the rest of the world where such a system did not obtain.

The disintegration of the old system of hereditary vocations must be attributed to the introduction of machinery and the establishment of big factories. There is not much scope for machines in a simple life. The old varna system could be saved if people live a simple life and are occupied with the old handicrafts and cottage industries. Gandhiji spoke untiringly of his ideal that all work must be done by human power. He was against monstrous machines and urged people to live a simple life, eschewing all luxury. In this respect his views are in conformity with the ideals of varna dharma.

Today the various schemes introduced by the government together with the changed outlook of the people militate against the ideal of a simple life and the system of handicrafts. But, ironically enough, politicians and others keep singing the praises of Gandhiji unceasingly without translating his ideas into action. Gandhiji was a reformer who ardently wished the good of society and worked in the cause of egalitarianism. He was not a hard-nosed sanataniist who tenaciously clung to the canonical texts merely because they were old. People had faith in one like him. I thought that the views of such a man on varnasrama should make a deep impression on you.

Why are people generally opposed to caste? Because they believe that caste is responsible for the differences and disparities in society and the quarrels arising from them. I have told you so often that in reality no jati is inferior to another or superior to it. However, critics of varna dharma argue that, whether or not in reality it has caused differences in society, an impression had gained ground that it has. As you can see for yourself, they add," There

are quarrels arising out of them. We want to do away with the system of jatis because we don't want these fights to go on indefinitely and divide society."

To speak thus, however, is to suggest that we must cut off the head to cure a headache. If the old dharma suffers from a headache in the form of quarrels in society, it is our duty to restore it to health. How? We must speak to the people concerned about the true principles and remove the misunderstandings that cause quarrels. This is the mode of treatment to keep the old system of varna healthy. It is preposterous to suggest that, because of the disputes, the dharma that is the root and source of our society should itself be done away with.

If there is something that is the cause of a dispute, it does not stand to reason to destroy this something itself. We cannot conduct the affairs of the world in this manner. There will naturally be people for this and against any question. Such differences are inevitable. Today there are two issues which have been the cause of a great deal of conflict. These are languages and ideology. It would be absurd to argue that we want neither any language nor any ideology because they are the cause of conflict.

Nowhere else in the world today do we witness the sort of clashes that we face in our own country on the question of language. The caste of quarrels are not of the same scale as these- the frenzy aroused by language is so intense. The Tamil and the Telugu keep quarrelling with one another, so too the Bengali and the Bihari, the Kannadiga and the Maharastrian. Then there is the English vs. Hindi controversy. People indeed come to blows on the language issue. How would you solve this problem? Would you suggest universal dumbness as a solution, that is abolition of all speech, all tongues? .

Disputes concerning political ideology, about the type of government wanted, are far too numerous. There is the big divide between communism and capitalism: it has been the cause of trouble throughout the world. Without any world war actually breaking out, thousands of people have perished in the clash of ideologies. Apart from the struggle between capitalism and communism you see other kinds of unrest in various parts of the world: monarchy giving way to republicanism; the rise of dictatorial governments. Large numbers of people become victims in these ideological wars. Although everybody claims that he is for democracy, at heart there are so many differences between

one man and another on the question of political ideology and hence all the quarrels.

Would it be right to argue that all ideologies must be scrapped merely because they lead to quarrels? Any government is constituted on some ideologies basis or other, is it not? No ideology would mean no government- is it not so? Are we then to abolish the institution of governments and be alike animals [in the absence of any authority to enforce law and order]? If languages are not wanted because they are the cause of trouble and if governments are not wanted because they lead to ideological wars, it follows logically that religions and jatis also are not wanted since they too create disputes. Going a step further we may ask: Is it not because we human beings exist that we keep quarrelling among ourselves? So should we. . . . [the Paramaguru just smiles without completing the sentence].

Though there is a vociferous campaign carried on against caste, jati crops up as a crucial factor in elections. It is on the basis of caste that all parties conduct their electioneering. The cry, " We don't want any jati", seems really to mean, " we don't want a particular jati".

Maintaining the system of jatis on a nominal basis is not justified if each of the jatis does not have a special social responsibility to discharge. To assign a vocation to each group or jati on a hereditary basis is for the good of all society. It is particularly important that this country has a section of people whose lifetime work is to keep chanting the Vedas, the Vedas which bring happiness to all living creatures through the loftiness of their sound and the profundity of the truths contained in them. Performance of the rites that form part of the Vedic tradition is as much a duty of this section as that of learning the mantras.

Modernists think that it is the varna system that is responsible for quarrels in society over questions of "high" and " low" among the various jatis. On the contrary, I think it is precisely for the purpose of ridding society of feelings of differences in status that we need the caste system." If we are born in this jati, well, it is the will of Isvara. Our vocation has also been handed down to us in the same manner. Let us stick to it and do good to society as best we can. If somebody else finds that he has some other vocation, it is also according to the will of the Lord. Let each one of us do the work allotted to us in a spirit of dedication to Isvara". If such an attitude develops there will

be no room to think or feel that one kind of work is better than another kind or worse.

We must try to cultivate this outlook and inculcate it in everybody. We must set an example through our own life- there is no better way of making people understand the true spirit of the system of jatis. Then even our "oral propaganda" will not be necessary. If there is ill-will in society, it is because the concept of varna dharma is not properly understood. We must resolve right now to practise this dharma in its true spirit so that there will be no cause for society to be raven by bitterness.

With the decay of jati dharma, livelihood has become a major problem for everybody. The obsession with money is a natural consequence of this worry. Until 70 or 75 years ago, nobody had any problem about his means of sustenance. The worry or concern then was about one's duty. If obtaining the means of livelihood were the only goal of life, the less well-off would be jealous of those who are affluent and occupy high places in the society. It would also lead to misunderstanding and quarrels. If each man is concerned only about his duty and about doing it well, questions of status will not arise. But if money and status are the objectives, it will naturally mean that the man who has more money and occupies a higher place is superior to the man who is less prosperous and occupies a lower position. The point is such differences do not exist in true varna dharma. Even if the social order of jatis were abolished and together with it the quarrels among the various communities came to an end, society would have to face another problem, that is class conflict. We see this phenomenon all over the world today.

Our society must be one in which there are no differences of high and low. All will then live in harmony as the children of Isvara without fighting among themselves. They will live as a united family helping one another and spreading a sense of peace and happiness everywhere. I ask you to follow the old dharma so that we may achieve such an ideal society. If we take a small step now towards such a goal, Isvara will give us a helping hand for us to go further ahead. I keep praying to him.



## My Work

I could live in solitude in some village somewhere, performing puja and meditating. For the conduct of the Matha it is not at all necessary to have so much money as I receive from people in the cities. In my opinion the mathas ought to have only the minimum of strength in terms of money and men. A large entourage and a battalion of hangers-on are not essential to their maintenance. A matha's financial support and strength are nothing but the quality of the individual presiding over it.

If I leave my life of solitude and come to the city it is not because you give me a lot of money. You have great affection and devotion for me and you are so glad that I am present here at your request. You wanted me to come here and you are happy that I am in your midst. This is your business. But I have my own business, my own work, in coming to this city . What is it?

I have come with the hope of making some arrangement according to which Brahmins will not give up the Vedic dharma and will continue to practise it without a break. The purpose of my being here is to ask to prepare a scheme for the promotion of the Vedic dharma which is the source and root of all our systems of thought and ways of life; the scheme must ensure that the dharma does not become extinct in this generation itself. The Vedas which know no origin should be kept shining for ever their original authentic form. The Brahmin must be a servant who will keep holding up this light, this torch, to illumine all the world. This is a duty he cannot but perform not only for today but for the generations to come.

"Brahmanya" or Brahminhood did not come into being for Brahmins to lord it over others or for their own individual advancement. Its purpose is that the Brahmin should serve as a peon to hold up the Vedic lamp and show the path of Vedic dharma to mankind. If I come to the cities it is to urge the Brahmin community there not to extinguish this lamp, for to put out this light would be to plunge the whole world in darkness for all time.

In the towns and cities people come to listen to me in their thousands. So I am able to talk directly to a large number of people. It is with this idea in mind that I come to the big towns though it means some detriment to the observance of the rites associated with the Matha.

You spend a lot of money on constructing pandals in locality after locality for people to gather and listen to me. You come to hear my discourses in the midst of all your problems. However, my conscience does not permit me to give an entertaining talk without speaking to you about what is wrong with your way of life and perhaps causing you hurt thereby. It would serve you no purpose if I take all your money but fail to tell you about what is good for you and the world. That is why I keep asking you again and again to protect the Vedic tradition and to practise the ancient dharmas. Whether or not I will succeed, I have come here to urge you again and again to do it.

You honour me with a "shower" of gold coins and celebrate with much pomp the day of my installation on the Pitha. You do so because of your great affection for me. You appoint committees, collect money and toil day and night for the purpose. But how are we to be sure that the acaryas who will succeed to the Pitha in the future will also be similarly honoured? If the Vedic dharma becomes extinct why should there be a matha at all or a mathadhipati ( head of the matha)? So I tell you: "I see that you are so enthusiastic about honouring me with a shower of gold coins to celebrate the day of my ascending the Pitha. Why don't you have the same enthusiasm to work for the preservation of the Vedic dharma? Why don't you appoint committees for the purpose, draw up schemes, raise funds?"

"It does not matter if you are unable to create conditions in which Brahmins henceforth will make the pursuit of the Vedic dharma their lifelong vocation. All I ask you is the minimum you can do, make arrangements to impart to your children the Vedic mantras, to teach them the scripture for at least one our a day from the time they are eight years old until they are eighteen. Teach



them also the prayoga (the conduct of rites). Do this on a cooperative basis in each locality. If you succeed in this you will have truly honoured me with a shower of gold coins."

Nothing is achieved without effort. If we take up some work for own sake we are ready to suffer any amount of hardship. There is a university in a distant land and you are told that if you take a degree from it you will get a very attractive job. What do you then? You get the syllabus from that institution by post at once, manage to go and study there. Must we abandon our dharma on the plea that its pursuit involves a great deal of trouble? If there is trouble it means the benefits yielded will be proportionately greater- also it should be a matter of greater pride.

I have come to give you trouble in this fashion. I wonder why I should not stay here and keep giving you trouble until you agree to complete the arrangements to carry out my suggestion. After all, I have to stay somewhere, so why not here?

It gives me joy that more and more bhajans are conducted in the towns than before, that work connected with temples is on the increase and that puranic discourses are given more often than before. But we must remember that the Vedas constitute the basis of all these. If our scripture suffers a decline, how long will the activities based on it survive? The Vedas must be handed down from father to son, from generation to the next. It is because we have forgotten this tradition that our religion itself has become shaky. All the trouble in the world, all the suffering and all the evil must be attributed to the fact that the Brahmin has forsaken his dharma, the Vedic dharma.

I am not worried about the system of jatis destroyed, but I am worried about the setback to the welfare of mankind. I am also extremely concerned about the fact that, if the Vedic tradition which has been maintained like a chain from generation to generation is broken, it may not be possible to create the tradition all over again.

The good arising in a subtle form from the sound of the Vedas and the performance of sacrifices is not the only benefit that constitutes "lokaksema" or the welfare of mankind. From Vedanta are derived lofty truths that can bring Atmic uplift to people belonging to all countries. How did foreigners come to have an interest in our Vedanta? When they came to India they discovered

here a class of people engaged in the practice of the Vedic dharma as a lifetime calling. They were curious to find out in what way the Vedas were great that an entire class of people should have dedicated themselves to them all their life. They conducted research into these scriptures and discovered many truths including those pointing to the unity of the various cultures of the world.

The Vedas bring universal good. This is not all. In the beginning, in my opinion, the Vedic culture was prevalent throughout the world. Others also, it is likely, will arrive at the same view on a thorough inquiry into the subject. The fact that there is something common to all mankind should be a source of universal happiness and it should also contribute to a sense of harmony among the various religions. Apart from this, I feel that people belonging of the truths of the Vedic religion.

If a separate class of people ready to sacrifice everything for the cause of the Vedic tradition did not exist, how would you expect people of other countries to become interested in this tradition? If we ourselves discard something that is our own, thinking it to be useless, how can we expect others to take an interest in it? Because of our neglect we have been guilty of denying others the benefits to be earned from the Vedas. It is the responsibility of the present generation to ensure the continuance of the Vedic tradition not only for the happiness of people belonging to all castes in this country but for people throughout the world. Without this task accomplished, no purpose is going to be served by honouring me with a shower of gold coins.

Why then did I agree to the kanakabhiseka? Had I not agreed to it, would you have gathered in such large numbers to listen to me?

To dispel the hatred, anger and bitterness that vitiate our social life people whose duty it is to sustain the Vedic dharma must remain true to it and set an example to others by living a life of virtue and tranquillity. The benefits that come from such a life may not be immediately perceptible. What happens when there is a hartal? All shops are closed and people have to suffer much inconvenience. Think of what will happen when the work of preserving the Vedic dharma come to a stop? The ill effects suffered by society will not be felt immediately but over a period. People then will realise the advantage of having an exclusive class that is devoted to Vedic learning as a lifelong

mission. If you(Brahmins) alone do not fall in your duty, one day all the present hatred in society will be wiped away and happiness will reign instead.

In the hoary past it was in the Tamil country that Manu lived. It was here that Vedic learning, Atmic enlightenment and devotion attained their heights of glory. "Dravidesu bhurisah," they say. We had not only saints like Tayumanavar and Pattinattar in Tamil Nadu, but also great men belonging to other religions like Vedanayagam Pillai and Mastan Sahib who became Vedantins because of the special quality of the Tamil soil.

The original home of the Vedas is this land. It is believed that, as the age of Kali comes to a close, Kalki (the tenth incarnation of Visnu) will be born in the Tirunelveli region of the Dravida land with the mission of protecting the Vedas. He will be born the son of a Brahmin who will be steadfast in performing the duties of his birth- so it is mentioned in the Puranas. In a land like this there ought not to be any opposition to the Vedic dharma. I have come here, to this city [Madras], to remind you that Brahmins hold the key to the Vedas, to the continuance of the Vedic tradition.

Our religion places on its followers more restraints than any other faith does on its, but these are meant to elevate man to his true state, to take him to his true destination. There are restraints to be observed by the individual as well as by the community. Any restraint is like the embankment of a lake or a river. If the embankments are damaged, or if they are swept away, the whole area will be devastated. Today there are no restraints at all in the life of the individual or of society, no restraints in a religion that once imposed the maximum number of restrictions on its followers.

I go from place and keep giving discourses. I do so to keep Brahmins under some check or restraint because they are expected to be pathfinders for the rest of the entire society. There is a general belief that Brahmins are more attached to me than are others- whether or not Brahmins themselves think so or I think so. So, if I first succeed a little in binding them to their dharma, I will have the strength to teach others their dharma.

In brief, what do I ask of Brahmins? Before giving up his mortal frame, the Acarya composed five stanzas that contains the essence of his teachings. I keep telling Brahmins today what the Acarya says right at the start: Veda nityam adhiyatam". The same exhortation is made by the saint-poetess

Auvvaiyar. It reads almost like a Tamil translation of the words of the Acarya- "Odamal orunalum irrukkavendam". What the Acarya says in a positive manner ("You must chant the Vedas every day"), Auvvaiyar puts in a negative way ("Not a single day should you pass without chanting the Vedas"). In Tamil the Vedas are called "Ottu". The Thirukkural has also the same term. The place where the Vedas worshipped Isvara is known as Vedapuri: in Tamil it is "Tiruvottur" ("Tiru-Ottu-ur"). Vedic chanting has survived up till now from the time of Brahma's creation. I keep visiting places to give people trouble and make them spend money during these visits. I do so only to impress upon them that the chanting of the Vedas must go on for ever.

So many thousands of you are gathered here. It is my hope that my words will have made an impact on at least ten or twenty of my listeners and that these ten or twenty will remember them and try to act according to them.

It was only after people emigrated to the big towns and cities that they found themselves compelled to lead a life contrary to the teachings of their dharma. It is in urban centres that you see some of the worst aspects of modern civilization. That is why I had decided not to come to such places, preferring to stay in the villages. But people from these urban centres insisted that I should visit them and, though I was touched by their affection, I was at first reluctant to accede to their request. I told them: "I shall come if you agree to return to our old ways of life, even if it be to a small extent. You need not take lessons in the Vedas all at once. But, as a beginning, you must adopt the external symbols of our Vedic dharma. The peon wears a uniform, doesn't he? The Brahmin must wear the pancakaccha and sikha. There are not symbols proclaiming his superiority; on the contrary, they denote that he is a servant of all other communities, a servant of the Vedas. You must wear these symbols if you want me to come to your city."

It was in vain that I had laid down these conditions. Perhaps there was no desire on the part of the Brahmins. I had spoken to change their style of dress or their outlook or perhaps they did not have the courage to do it. But they requested me again and again that I should visit them. Eventually, I reconciled myself to accepting their invitation even though they had not acted on my words. "They still have some respect and affection for me," I told myself. "I will agree to their request and see whether my purpose will be served if I go into their midst and speak to them directly again. After all, what is the Matha for? It is meant for the welfare of the people, to cure

them of their ills and turn them to the right path. It is my duty to speak to them again and again- whether or not they like it- about how in my opinion they have gone wrong".

Thus I started visiting the towns again. When people welcome me in great joy, honour me wherever I go, decorate the roads with bunting, how can I wound their feelings by speaking about what is wrong with them? Everybody has problems in life. The world is plunged in turmoil and people face all sorts of hardships. In the midst of all this they come to me hoping to forget their problems. Is it right for me to remind them of their faults? Or am I to keep everybody happy by turning my religious discourse into an entertaining performance?

Am I to speak to people about what is good for them, what is good for society, or am I to make them happy for the moment by making my talk a kacceri-like performance? But there are musicians for kacceris and why should I be invited to perform something similar? If I were to give a kacceri-like performance for the sake of money, I would have to make the listeners happy for the time being. But my purpose is not money. If money comes, it is spent in feeding more than the usual number of people, in holding assemblies of the learned, etc. The affairs of the Matha could be managed with the smaller amounts received in the villages. However, an effort must be made, all the same, to speak to the entire community of people about what is good for them, for their life. Is this not the very purpose of the Matha?

Thinking on these lines, I came to this conclusion: "It is up to them (the people I am to address in the towns) to listen to me and act on my advice. Whether or not they like it, I will speak to them about their duties, about what they should do for spiritual uplift as well as for the happiness of mankind. "I can do no more than speak to them about their duty. I have no authority to punish them if they fail in this. Even in political parties which believe in the oneness and equality of all, disciplinary action is taken against erring members- some are expelled like untouchables. I have no authority to excommunicated anyone for any of their offences. Nor do I ask for myself such authority to be exercised over men. The only right I ask for is to have the ears of people. I cannot but do what I can do- that is why I am here.

Sufficient it would be even if a single individual somewhere paid heed to my words and acted according to them. He would be the starting point in the

direction of the desired growth. Have not movements that do not have an iota of justification behind them grown with just ten people to start with? For a good cause also it would be enough if ten people joined together initially.

I keep speaking in the hope of finding such people. You must not feel unhappy thinking that I am very much dissatisfied with you. I am not unaware of the complexities and problems of modern life. If one is trapped in it, I know how difficult it is to be freed from it. In the midst of all this, you make arrangements in a big way for kumbhabhisekas, bhajans, discourses, etc. I am happy about it all. I feel encouraged by it to speak to you about that which is the very basis, the very life-breath, of these activities of yours. It is that of fostering the Vedic dharma.

Though there is much room for offences against the sastras in the present way of life and though there is cause for worry about the future. I am reassured by certain signs that promise our well-being. Instead of lamenting that "all is lost", the proper thing to do is to promote the good aspects in present-day life and to speak about what still needs to be done. In this way those who have taken the wrong path will sooner or later see the light and turn to the path of wisdom.

All this gives me the confidence to speak about the old ways of life and the old customs. I do not claim that all that is old is necessarily good. At the same time, I feel that nothing should be rejected merely because it is old. An object (or deed) is to be judged not on the basis of whether it is old or new; it is to be accepted or rejected after finding out how useful it is. Let us accept what is good in the new and reject what is bad in the old. Likewise, let us reject what is bad in the new and accept what is good in the old. Kalidasa says the same thing.

You have invited me with much affection and treated me with much honour. So I feel reluctant to tell you about what is bad in your present way of life. I have dealt with many subjects- about devotion, jnana, culture, and so on. True, they are edifying topics. But they are all like the branches, flowers and fruits supported by something deeper, supported by the root constituted by the Vedas. Nothing grows with this root, without the Vedic tradition being nourished. It is pointless to speak about other matters after leaving out this vital subject. The preservation of the Vedic dharma is the basic service we render to our religion, and while on the subject, we have necessarily to do well

on the drawbacks in the present way of life. After speaking to you about other matters, about mixing with you. I have become friends with you and I feel I could take up then topic of the Vedas since I feel I need not be as reluctant as I was before in telling you about what is wrong with your way of life.

The very purpose of my visit is this. But is it proper for me to speak about it right at the start? Since you have done your job by honouring me and pleasing me, I feel I can now do my job by speaking about the importance of sustaining the Vedic way of life. I have given you so much trouble for this purpose and put you to a lot of expense. As if this were not enough, I am asking you, like Vinoba Bhave, for "sampatti-dana".

Every Brahmin must learn the Vedas and teach his sons the same. Necessary though this is, there is something even more important to be done as a matter of priority: it is to make sure that the schools that teach the Vedas (the pathasalas) which are gasping for breath as it were are not closed down but given new life. For this purpose both teachers and taught must be given monetary help. More Vedic schools must also be established not only to teach the mantras but also their meaning and to conduct examinations. During the years of study the students must be given a stipend. On passing their examinations they must be given substantial awards, the amount depending upon their marks. You have to do all this to maintain the Vedic dharma. Naturally, you need capital for it.

Trusts have been created for this purpose. A number of people have made gifts of land (bhudana)- like Vinoba Bhave I too have received bhudana. Now ceilings of landowning have come into force. It is difficult to foresee how the rights of landowners will be affected in the future. That is why I am asking for sampatti-dana.

Everyone of you must put one rupee in a piggy bank every month on the day on which your janma-naksatra falls. Think of me as you do it for, after all, it is I who am asking you to do it. After twelve months you must send the Rs 12 so collected to the Veda Raksana Nidhi. On your janma-naksatra, the Matha will send you prasada (vibhuti-sacred ashes-kumkum, mantraksata). You will be the recipient of the blessings of Candramaulisvara if you contribute to the Veda Raksana Nidhi year after year.

You pay taxes and spend so much on so many things. Take this contribute to the Veda Raksana Nidhi as a tax imposed by me: pay one rupee every month for my sake. If everyone agreed to do so, it would mean great support to the task of preserving the Vedic dharma. The maintenance of the Vedic tradition is uppermost in my mind and it is a duty we have to carry out for the good of future generations.

If you ask me why the Vedic dharma must be perpetuated, the answer is that the sound of Vedic mantras and the conduct of Vedic rites like sacrifices will bring universal material and spiritual well-being. Second, if people in every country of the world are to know that the Vedic religion was once a universal religion and, if unity and peace are to be achieved on the basis of such awareness, there must be a class of people in our country who will devote themselves solely to Vedic learning. I maintain that fostering the Vedic dharma is of the utmost importance because it will bring prosperity and inward tranquillity to people not only in our country but all over the world.

There should not be even a single Brahmin in the next generation who will not be able to chant the Vedas. We need the Brahmin not to exercise authority over others, but to carry out the duty of protecting the primordial dharma- and this not only for the unity of our land but for the oneness of the whole world.

How can we claim that a small group of people in this country (dedicated to maintaining the Vedic tradition) can create happiness throughout the world? Well, take the case of a powerhouse. Only four or five work in it but the entire town receives light. If these four or five people do not work, the whole town will be plunged in darkness. In the same way only a few people are required to keep the auspicious world lamp of the Vedas burning. My mission here is to protect somehow the seed capital necessary for it. For the sake of this, I agreed to all the festivities you conducted in my honour. The chant of "Jaya-Jaya Sankara, Hara-Hara Sankara" heard during these festivities brought so many people here to listen to my discourses. Those who conducted the festival in my honour must pay heed to what I wish to say. You exert yourself in many ways in the cause of so many things. Why not to exert yourself a little for my sake also? You do so much for yourself: you go to your office; you have your own pastime; and you conduct all kinds of businesses. For my sake do this job of protecting the Vedic dharma.



Why should I speak differentiating between you and me ["For your sake" and "my sake"]. My work is also your work. Maintaining the Vedic tradition is the one job that ensures the supreme good of all. Doing this duty means well being for you- and I shall be earning a name as a result!



### The Cure for the Disease called Modern Civilisation

People are caught between two groups holding opposing views. On the one side they feel the pull of individuals like us who maintain that they must take to the path shown by the sastras; on the other they find themselves drawn in the opposite direction by the reformers who want these sastras to be changed. From a youthful age people nowadays are used to reading reports extolling the changes that go by the name of reforms. It is all due to the influence of modern education. All this notwithstanding, people have not altogether given up the old customs. A fraction of the dharmas laid down in the sastras and followed for ages is still to be seen in our domestic and social life. On the one hand, there is the habit formed by custom and, on the other, the habit now being learned through the new system of education.

It is universally recognised that contentment is lacking in the modern way of life. People don't dispute the fact that the peace that once existed in the previous generations no longer obtains today. They have more money now -or that at any rate is the belief. But are they yet free from poverty? The claim is made that everything is in abundance, that we grow more food than what is needed. Yet there is anxiety everywhere about the supply of essentials.

In the place of the old thatched hut or modest titled house now stands a multistorey building. Then we had just four or five utensils to cook, a basket made of palm-fronds, containers made of gourd shells. Now the house is crammed with all sorts of articles and gadgets that are part of today's "civilized" life. People enjoy new comforts and make new acquisitions, yet they are not as happy and contented as were their forefathers.

Even now there are people who at heart long for a life of peace lived according to the old tradition. But they do not have the courage to give up either the trammels of modern life or the feeling of pride in the changes effected under the reformist movement. They are in an awkward predicament because they are not fully committed either to the traditional way of life or to the new. Let me tell you how people cannot decide for themselves-how they are neither here nor there. In most homes you will see Gandhiji's portrait and mine. Now Gandhiji advocated widow marriage-and I ask people to wear a sikha. Those who respect Gandhiji do not, however, have the courage to marry widows nor do they have the courage to wear a sikha. Poor people, they have no moorings and keep swinging between one set of beliefs and another. We must have the courage of our convictions and unflinching faith in the sastras.

If we start making small compromises in our adherence to the sastras, it will eventually mean following only such scriptural practices as we find convenient in our everyday life. Some people tell me with all good intentions: "The dharmasastras are the creation of rsis. You are like a rsi. You must make changes in the sastras in keeping with the times. " Their view is that just as we remove weeds from the fields we must change our customs and duties according to our times. If I take out some rites and observances from sastras now, thinking them to be "weeds", later another man will turn up and remove for the same reason. At this rate, a time will come when we will not be able to distinguish the weed from the crop and the entire field will become barren.

It is important to realise that if we are to remain true to the sastras it is not because they represent the views of the seers but because they contain the rules founded on the Vedas which are nothing but what Isvara has ordained. That is the reason why we must follow them. It is my duty to see that the sastras are preserved as they are. I have no authority to change them.

We must not give up the sastric way of life thinking it to be difficult to follow. If we are not carried away by the glitter of modern mundane life, if we reduce our wants and do not run after money, there will be no need to abandon the customs and rites laid down by our canonical texts. If we are not obsessed with making money there will be plenty of time to think of the Lord. And peace, contentment and happiness will reign.

Money is not essential to the performance of the rites enjoyed by the sastras, nor is pomp and circumstance essential to worship. Even dried tulasi and bilva leaves are enough to perform puja. The rice we cook for ourselves will do as the naivedya. "Marriage is also a sastric ceremony. We spend a lot of money on it. What about such expenses?" it is asked. All the lavish display we see at weddings today are unnecessary and do not have the sanction of the scriptures. Specifically, the dowry that forms such a substantial part of the marriage expenses has no scriptural sanction at all. If money were important to the performance of the rites enjoyed by our canonical texts it would mean that our religion is meant for rich people. In truth it is not so.

Of the four aims of life - dharma, material acquisitions, desire and liberation - we seek gratification of kama alone (in the form of pleasure, love, etc. ). And to have our desires satisfied we keep struggling to acquire material things. Our efforts must be directed towards obtaining liberation through the practice of dharma. All that we need to do for this ideal is to resolve to live a simple life. There should then be no compulsion to run after money and other material goods and other. It would naturally become easier for us to practice dharma and reap the ultimate fruit, that is eternal bliss.



## Religion and Society

While adherence to the tenets of our religion entails certain inconveniences in our workaday life, following the rules of the dharmasastras, people feel, creates difficulties in social life. On this pretext reformers want to change the sastras.

Unfortunately, they are not aware either of the truths on which the dharmasastras are founded or their ultimate purpose. By "social life" they-the reformers-do not have in mind anything relating to the Self. They take into account political orders that keeps changing every now and then, the sciences, trade and commerce, fashion, etc. If our worldly existence alone were the objective of social life, the rules pertaining to it would also be subject to change. But our scriptures do not view social life as having such an objective alone. They (the sastras) are meant for the Self, for the Atman, and their goal is our release from worldly existence. That which has to do with mundane life is subject to change but not the truths relating to the Self. The injunctions of the sastras have the purpose of establishing changing society on the foundation of the unchanging Truth; they cannot be subject to change themselves.

If our goal were but a comfortable and happy life in this world, matters concerning social life could be changed now and again. But ours is an exalted goal and it concerns the Self. The rules of worldly life are in keeping with this high purpose and they cannot be changed according to our convenience. The sastras do not regard happiness in this world as of paramount importance. They teach us how we may experience joy in the other world even by suffering

many kinds of hardships or discomforts here. So it is not right to seek changes in them to suit our worldly existence.

The views of the reformers must have been shaped by our present system of education and so it is no use blaming them. In other countries no contradiction exists between their religion and their system of education. Unfortunately, the schools established by the British in India had nothing to do with our religion. People were compelled to take to Western education for the sake of their livelihood. Soon a situation arose in which they came to be steeped from childhood itself in an alien system of instruction. They had therefore no way of developing acquaintance with, or faith in, our ancient sastras. And, since they were kept ignorant of their scriptures and their underlying purpose, they persuaded themselves to take the view that the sastras could be changed according to their convenience.

Our youngsters are exposed to the criticism of our religion and our sacred texts from a tender age. They are told that the Puranas are a tissue of lies, that the sastras help the growth of superstition. How can they have any attachment to our faith, to its rites and traditions?

Faith in religion and God must be inculcated in people from their childhood. They must get to know about great men who lived and continue to live an exemplary life true to the tenets of our religion. Faith in the works of the seers must be instilled in them, works based on the experience of the seers themselves, experience beyond a life of sensation, and pointing the way to spiritual uplift. They must also be helped to believe that the rsis formulated the sastas in such a way as to make worldly happiness and social life subservient to the advancement of the Self. Only then will people recognize that the rules of religion have a far higher purpose than the comforts and conveniences of temporal life.



### Neither too Much Ease nor too Many Comforts

Now people want to live in comfort and to be provided with all sorts of amenities. There is no end to their unseemly desires. In America, it is said, everybody has a bungalow, car, radio, telephone, etc. But are people there contented? No. There is more discontent in that country than in our own. There the incidence of crime is more than anywhere else. It is all right that every American has a car. But today's car is not good enough for them tomorrow. More and more new models keep coming in the market and each new model offers more comfort than the previous one. This means that the American citizen is compelled to earn more with the appearance of each new car. A time may come when aircraft will be used in the U. S. for people to fly from house to house.

Similarly, we see such a progression all over the world in the matter of housing. First there was the hovel or the hut; then came the dwelling with the tiled roof; afterwards houses with cement and concrete walls. The flooring also changed over the years. First the floor was wiped with cowdung; then it was plastered and cemented; the mosaic flooring came later; and the search is on for smoother and shinier surfaces. It is the same case with clothing - better and finer fabrics are being made everyday. Although we are already living in comfort we are all the time using our ingenuity to discover objects and gadgets that will make our life still easier. However, all the time we are likely to have the feeling of uneasiness with all the comforts we already possess and this means there will be no end to our yearnings. Not knowing any contentment or peace of mind we are compelled to earn more and more. It is like thinking that fire can be extinguished by pouring petrol on it; we keep discovering

newer and newer objects but in the progress we keep further inflaming our longing for ease and comfort.

This truth was known to our sages, to our forefathers. They taught us that we ought not to seek more than our bare needs. In recent times Gandhiji impressed upon the people the same lesson.

In this century, people seek ostentatious living in the name of progress. So long as the hunger for new comforts continue neither the individual nor society will have contentment. There will always be feelings of rivalry, jealousy and heart-burning among people. In the varnasrama dharma, the Brahmin and non-Brahmin are equal economically speaking. In spite of the caste differences, the same simple living is enjoined on all. The ideal of equality can be achieved only if all people live a simple life. In this order every individual experiences contentment and inner happiness and no one has cause of envying others their prosperity.

No man, whatever his vocation, should have either too much money or too many comforts. Above all what is important is that for which all these are intended but that which cannot be truly obtained through them: contentment and a sense of fullness within. Only when there is inner satisfaction can one meditate on the Lord. And only in the mind of a man who has such contentment is the Ultimate Truth realised as a reality. When a person has too many comforts he will be incapable of going beyond the stage of sensual pleasures. If he is addicted to enjoyments, without any need for physical exertion, he will do injury to his mind, and his inner being. Hard work and the capacity to suffer discomforts are essential for those who yearn for Atmic uplift. They will then learn to realise that there is comfort in discomfort and in hard work.



### Sastra or Conscience?

The goal of dharma is universal welfare. The great men who produced the works on Dharmasastra didn't have a trace of self-interest in them and had nothing but the thought of the happiness of all creatures. These treatises are the authority on which dharma is founded. You find the form of things, the image, with your eyes; you perceive sound with your ears; you know dharma with the help of Dharmasastra.

The Vedas (Sruti) are the root of all dharma. After Sruti comes Smrti. The latter consists of the "notes" based on Smrti. It is the same as Dharmasastra. Another guide for the dharma is the example of great men. The Puranas provide an answer to how great men conducted themselves. Then there is sistacara to guide us, the life of virtuous people of noble character. Not everybody's conduct can be a guide to us. The individual whose life is an example for the practice of dharma must have faith in the sastras and must live in accordance with their ordinances. Besides, he must be free from desire and anger. The conduct of such men is sistacara. Another authority or guide is what we know through our conscience in a state of transparency.

In matters of the Self, of dharma and religion, the Vedas are in the forefront as our guide. Next come the dharmasastras. Third is the conduct of the great sages of the past. Fourth is the example of the virtuous people of our own times. Conscience comes last in determining dharma.



Now everything has become topsy-turvy. People give importance first to their conscience and last to the Vedas. We must consult our conscience only as a last resort when we have no other means of knowing what is dharma with reference to our actions. Why is conscience called one's "manahsaksi"? Conscience is fit to be only a witness(saksi), not to be a judge. A witness often gives false evidence. The mind, however, doesn't tell an untruth - indeed it knows the truth of all things. " There is no deceit that is hidden from the heart(mind), " says Auvvai. Conscience may be regarded as a witness. But nowadays it is brought in as a judge also in dharmic matters. As a witness it will give us a true report of what it sees or has seen. But on the basis of it we cannot give on what is just with any degree of finality. "What I think is right, " everybody would try to satisfy himself thus about his actions if he were to be guided only by his conscience. How can this be justified as the verdict of dharma?

We often hear people say, "I will act according to what my conscience tells me. " This is not a right attitude. All at once your conscience cannot be given the place of a judge. It is only when there is no other way open to you that you may tell your mind: "You have seen everything as a witness. Now tell me your opinion. " The mind belongs to each one of us as individuals. So it cannot be detached from our selfish interests. The place it has in one's personal affairs cannot be given to it in matters of religion. On questions of dharma the opinion of sages alone is valid, sages who were concerned with universal welfare and who transcended the state of the individual concerned with his own mind [or with himself].



## The Basic Texts of Hinduism : Our Ignorance of Them

There are books aplenty in the world dealing with a vast variety of subjects. The adherents of each religion single out one book for special veneration, believing that it shows them the way to salvation. The followers of some faiths even build temples in honour of their holy scriptures. The Sikhs, for instance, do so; they venerate their sacred book, calling it the "Granth Sahib" [and enshrine it in temples].

Thus the followers of each religion have come to have a work showing them the way to their spiritual uplift. Such books are believed to enshrine the utterances and commandments of God conveyed through the founders of the respective faiths. For this reason they are called the revealed texts. We call the same "apauruseya" (not the work of a human author). What men do of their own accord is "pauruseya" and what the paramatman reveals, using man as a mere instrument, is "apauruseya".

What is the authoritative work of our Vedic religion? People of other faiths are clear about what their sacred books are. Buddhists have the Tripitaka, Parsis(Zoroastrians) the Zend-Avesta, Christians the Bible, and Muslims the Qur'an. What work is basic to our religion, common to Saivas, Vaishnavas, Dvaidins(dualists) and Advaitins(non-dualists) and the followers of various other (Hindu) traditions? Most of us find the answer difficult. Why?

There is an important reason. People born in other religions are taught their sacred texts in schools. Or they receive instructions [at home] in their respective faiths for two or three years, and then have what is called "secular" education. So even at a youthful age they are fairly conversant with the religion into which they are born. We Hindus receive no religious instruction at all. How has this affected us? Whenever adherents of other faiths go seeking converts, we become a convenient target for them. How is it that people belonging to other religions do not leave their faith to embrace another in any considerable numbers? The reason is that they learn about the tenets of their religion in childhood itself and remain firmly attached to it. In contrast, we are not taught even the elements of our religion in our early years. Worse, we speak ill of our scriptures and have no qualms about even destroying them.

Our education follows the Western pattern. We want to speak like the white man, dress like him and ape him in the matter of manners and customs. We remain so even after our having won independence. In fact, though we keep speaking all the time about our culture, about swadeshi and so on, we are today more Westernised than before. Remaining a paradesi (alien) at heart we keep talking of swadeshi. Religion has been the backbone of our nation's life from time immemorial. If we wish to remain swadeshi, both inwardly and outwardly, we must receive religious instructions from childhood itself. The secular state is of no help in this matter because, in the secular set-up, education continues to be imparted to our children on the Western pattern, and the children are taught that our sastras are all superstition. The result is that most of us do not know what the sacred text is, that is common to all Hindus.

Our Atma-vidya (science of the Self) is extolled by people all over the world. (In our country learning even subjects that are apparently mundane like political economy, economics, dance, etc, has a transcendent purpose). Foreigners come to India in search of our sastras and translate them into their own languages. If we want to be respected by the world we must gain more and more knowledge in such sastras as have won the admiration of the world. We cannot earn more esteem than others for achievements in fields like science and technology. We feel proud if one or two Indians win Nobel prize but the rest of the world hardly takes any notice of it. Its attitude may be expressed thus: "The strides we have taken in science and technology do not give us satisfaction. So we go to the Hindus seeking things that are

beyond. But they themselves seem to forsake the philosophical and metaphysical quest for our science and technology". We must be proud of the fact that our country has produced more men who have found inner bliss than all countries put together have. It is a matter of shame that we are ignorant of the sastras that they have bequeathed to us, the sastras that taught them how to scale the heights of bliss.

Many Hindus are ignorant of the scripture that is the very source of their religion - they do not know even its name. "What does it matter if we don't know? " they ask. "What do we gain by knowing it? "

Though we are heirs to a great civilization, a civilization that is universally admired, we are ignorant of its springs. "Who cares about our culture? Money is all that we need, " such is the attitude of our people and they keep flying from continent to continent in search of a fortune. Some of them come to me and tell me: "People abroad ask us about our religion, about the Vedas, about the Upanishads. They want to know all about the Gita and yoga, about our temples and Puranas and about so many other things. We find it difficult to answer their questions. In fact we seem to know less than what they already know about these matters. We are indeed ashamed of ourselves. So would you please briefly put together the concepts of our religion and philosophy? "

What does this mean? We are proud of living as foreigners in our own land, but the foreigners themselves think poorly of us for being so. We are inheritors of the world's oldest religion and culture; yet we have no concern for them ourselves. How would you then expect foreigners to have any respect for us?

Perhaps it would have mattered much if we were an unlettered people. Others would have thought us to be ignorant, not anything worse. But what is the reality today? We read and write and talk a great deal. Science and technology, politics, cinema, fiction -- these are our interests. Yet foreigners think poorly of us because we ignore what is unique to our land, the sastras relating to the Self.

There are so many books on our religion but we seem to have no need for any of them. All our reading consists of foreign literature. We know all the works of Milton and Wordsworth, but know precious little of the poetry of Bhavabhuti and Ottakkuttar. We are acquainted with the history of the Louis

dynasty and of the Tsars, but we know nothing of the solar and lunar dynasties of our own country. Why, we do not know even the names of the seers of the various gotras. We are thoroughly acquainted with things that are of no relevance to us, but of the subjects that have aroused the wonder of the world we are ignorant, ignorant even of the names of the sastras on which they are founded. Even if men learned in the scriptures come forward to speak about them we refuse to listen to them. It causes me great pain that our country and countrymen have descended to such abysmal depths of ignorance.

The reason for this sorry state of affairs is that we are not as anxious to know about our culture, as we are to find out how much it would fetch us in terms of money. Indeed the true purpose of earning money and other activities of ours must be to know this culture fully, live in consonance with its spirit and experience a sense of fulfilment. Why should we care to know about our religion? A question like this absurd. Religion itself is the purpose of all our actions --it is its own purpose. There need be no purpose for religion although the performance of religious rites brings us great benefits such as tranquillity of mind, affection for all and, finally, liberation. Unmindful of all this, we want to know whether it would fetch us money. If we were truly interested in religion and truly attached to it, we would never be worried about the purpose served by it.

"Brahmanena niskarano dharmah sadango Vedadhyeyo jneyasca, " so say the sastras. It means that a Brahmin must learn the Vedas and sastras not because there is any reason for it, not because there is any purpose served by the same. It is only in our childhood that we learn the subject without asking question about how useful it is. A schoolgoing child does not ask : "Why should I learn history or geography? "

Our religious texts must be taught early in life. When a child grows up and goes to college, he believes his studies will prove useful to him. If he reads for a B.L. or L.L.B. degree, it is to become a lawyer. Similarly, if he reads for an L. T (or B. Ed. ) degree or an M. B. B. S. , it is to become a teacher or a doctor. If you ask a teenager to study our religious texts, he would retort: "Why should I learn them? How will it help in my career? " So religious texts should be taught in childhood itself, that is before the youngster is old enough to question you about their utility [or harbour doubts about the same]. Only then will we develop an interest in our religion and

sastras. Do we pay our children for their being interested in sports, music or cinema? Similarly, they must be made to take an interest in religion also and such interest must be created in the same way as in sports and entertainment. If children take to sports and entertainment which afford only temporary pleasure, they are bound to take religion which will confer on them everlasting happiness. The present sorry state of affairs is due to our basic education being flawed.

Today we have come to such a pass that people ask whether knowledge of religion is of help in their upkeep. This is a matter of shame. The sastras admonish: "Do not ask whether Vedic education will provide you food. We eat and live but to learn the Vedas. " Your approach must be based on this principle. A child born in a faith which has such high ideals is cut off from all opportunities of religious instruction at his very birth. Our concern is imparting him worldly knowledge from very start. Our children must be brought up properly and faith in God inculcated in them early in life.

We spend so much on our youngsters- but what do we spend on their religious instruction? A father spends thousands on his son's upanayana. But if he were to spend one tenth of the sum towards achieving what constitutes the very purpose of the upanayana ceremony - making the child a good brahmacharin - faith in our religion would be kept alive. To repeat, far better would it be to spend money on achieving the goal of upanayana than on the upanayana ceremony itself. The child must be given religious instruction by a private tutor and taught the duties of the brahmacharin. Why should teachers conversant with such matters be denied an income? If religion is taught in childhood itself, people will be free from doubts as they grow up and the teacher too will be benefited. Today the situation is so lamentable that most of us do not know even the name of the text that forms the foundation and authority of our religion.

The fact that our people are not taught religion at an early age is one reason why there are so many differences among them. One man is a theist and another an atheist. One performs religious rites without devotion while another is devoted but does not perform any rites. The differences and disputes are many. As for the doubts harboured by people about our religion there is no end. If our religion were taught in childhood itself there would be unanimity of views and freedom from doubts. We know it for a fact that there are not so many doubting people among followers of other religions as there are among

ours: the reason is that, unlike us, they are better informed about the concepts of their respective religions.

What is the book of our religion? A definite answer even to this question seems to be a difficult task for people these days. However, if we follow the truths of that book which is the basic work of our religion there will be universal uplift.

Followers of most religions point to a single book as their sacred text even if the matters mentioned in it are dealt with in other works of theirs also. A man may write one book today, tomorrow a second man will come up to write another. There may be good as well as bad points about them and it would be difficult to determine the value of each. So is it not to our advantage if a single book is accepted for all time as our basic religious text? That is why every religion treats such a single book as its prime scripture.

What are the works that tell us all about our religion? The libraries are chock-full of books on Hinduism; indeed there are hundreds of thousands of them. The subjects that come under our religion are also numerous. It all seems to cause confusion. But we must remember that there are a few texts that constitute a common basis for all the other numerous works.

By practising the tenets of our religion many have had the beatific experience and remained in tranquil samadhi, without knowing death and oblivious of the outside world. We see such men even today. There are books from which we learn about Sadasiva Brahmendra, Pattinattar, and similar realised souls. Other religious systems have not produced as many realised souls as has our own faith. Is it possible that a religion that has been a source of inspiration for such a large number of great men should have no authoritative texts?



## Why Religion?

Why do we need religion? Why do we listen to a religious teacher? We do so hoping to have our problems solved and our faults corrected. We do not seek a preceptor when we are not in trouble or when we feel that there is nothing lacking in us. The more we are besieged by troubles the more often we go to worship in temples or seek the darshan and advice of great men.

We approach great men, saintly persons, hoping to find a remedy for our suffering and to have our doubts cleared. When we are harassed by difficulties, we try to find solace in books or in listening to the advice of men of wisdom and virtue. Or we go on pilgrimage and bathe in sacred ponds or rivers. Thus we hope to find mental peace by and by. Those who know utter tranquillity remain in bliss. It does not matter to them in the least whether they are stabbed or injured otherwise, whether they are honoured or maligned.

Great men arise in all jatis, great men who experience inner peace. What is religion? It is that which shows the way to santhi, the peace that passeth understanding. Religion is known as "mata" or "dharma". Dharma is the means to attain the ultimate good that is liberation -- and it is the same as "mata".

The pursuit of dharma is first meant for happiness and well-being in this world. When it is practised, without desiring happiness here, it will lead to liberation. Yes, this is dharma; this is mata.



"Dharma" which is the term used by the sastras for religion denotes all the moral and religious principles that constitute the means to obtain fullness of life. We have many a work that teaches us this dharma, but we remain ignorant of them. Since they deal with matters that are the very basis of dharma, they are called "dharma-pramanas". "Pramana" is that which establishes the truth or rightness of a thing (or belief). We have fourteen basic sastras that pertain to dharma, that is canonical texts that deal with what has come to be known as Hinduism and what has been handed down to us from the time of the primordial Vedas. These treatises tell us about the doctrines and practices of dharma.

*Angani Vedascatvaro mimamsa-nyayavistharah*

*Puranam dharmasastram ca vidya hyetascaturdas*

--- Manusmrti

*Purana-nyaya-mimamsa-dharmasastrangamisritah*

*Vedah sthanani vidyanam dharmasya ca caturdasa*

--- Yagnavalkyasmrti

The term "caturdasa" occurs in both verses. It means "fourteen". We learn from these two stanzas that we have fourteen authoritative works on dharma embracing all aspects of our religion.

"Vid" means "to know". From it is derived "vidya" which means a work that imparts knowledge, that sheds light on the truths of religion. That there are fourteen treatises on vidya is mentioned in the above two stanzas: "vidya hyetascaturdasa" and "vidyanam dharmasya ca caturdasa". The fourteen are not only sastras that impart knowledge but also treatises on normal principles. That is why they are called "vidyasthanas" and "dharmasthanas" : "sthanani vidyanam dharmasya ca caturdasa". Though "vid" means to know, the word does not connote every type of knowledge. The "vid" in "vidya" means knowledge of truth. The English words "wit" and "wisdom" are derived from this root. And it is from the same root that we have "Veda", which term may be said to mean literally the "Book of Knowledge". As sources of knowledge the fourteen sastras are called "vidyasthanas", that is they are "abodes of

knowledge or learning". The dharmasthanas("abodes of dharma") are also the abodes of vidya.



### The Fourteen Abodes of Knowledge

The fourteen "abodes" of knowledge are: the four vedas; the six Angas or limbs of the Vedas; Mimamsa, Nyaya, the Puranas and Dharmasastra. You must have seen at least references to the Vedas and the six Angas. The Tamil work Tevaram says: "Vedamodarangamayinanai". According to this devotional work Isvara is the form of the four Vedas and the six Angas.

The fourteen dharma-pramanas (authorities of dharma) are called "caturdasa-vidya". The well-known poetic work 'Naisadham' mentions that Nala was conversant with these fourteen branches of learning. The poet (Sriharsa ) plays on the word "caturdasa": he says that "Nala accorded caturdasa to the caturdas-vidya", meaning he gave the fourteen branches of learning four dasas: reading, understanding what is read, living according to the teachings contained in what is read, and making others also live in accordance with them.

*Caturdasatvam Krtavan kutah svayam*

*Na vedmi vidyasu caturdasasvapi*

--Naisadham, 1. 4

All religious knowledge is encompassed by these fourteen branches of learning.

There are yet four more vidyas. If you add to the fourteen already mentioned, you will have eighteen vidyas - astadasa-vidya which are all-inclusive. Of them, the fourteen already mentioned are directly concerned with dharma. The remaining four - Ayurveda, Arthashastra, Dhanurveda and Gandharvaveda - do not directly deal with dharma. They are not dharmasthanas (abodes of dharma) but they qualify to be vidyasthanas (abodes of knowledge). The first fourteen, as already mentioned, are both dharmasthanas and vidyasthanas (abodes of dharma as well as abodes of knowledge).

The dharmasthanas and vidyasthanas are together commonly known as the sastras. The word "sastra" means an order or commandment. We speak of a royal "sasana", meaning a royal "edict". There is a chapter in the Mahabharata in which Bhishma expounds the ordinances of dharma to Yudhishthira and it is called "Anusasana-parva". Aiyanaar is called "Sasta" because he keeps the hosts of Siva under his control (through his orders). Works on sastras incorporate the ordinances that are calculated to keep us disciplined and ensure that we tread the right path.

While all the fourteen sastras are basic and authoritative texts, the Vedas are their crown. Just as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism (Zarathustrianism), Christianity and Islam have the Tripitaka, the Zend-Avesta, the Bible and the Qur'an respectively as their scriptures, we have the Vedas as our prime scripture.

Of the fourteen branches of learning the first four (the four Vedas) form the basis for the subsequent ten. Together they constitute the complete corpus of sastras on which our religion is founded.



### Past Glory and Present Shame

The fourteen branches of learning were taught in our country from the remote past until the inception of British rule. Let me tell you something interesting about them. You must have read about the Chinese pilgrim Fahsien and Hsuan Tsang. The former visited India early in the fifth century A. D. and the latter in the seventh century A. D. They have both recorded impressions of their travels here and given particularly glowing accounts of the big universities of Nalanda and Taksasila. We learn about these institutions from archaeological investigations also. They were at the peak of their glory when Buddhism flourished in the country. It is noteworthy that syllabuses of both these universities included the caturdasa-vidya. Ofcourse Buddhist religious texts were also taught, but only after the student had learned the fourteen Hindu sastras. The reason : acquaintance with Vedic learning was a help to any religious community in acquiring knowledge and in character building. The

Buddhists thus believed that education to be called education must include a course in the Hindu caturdasa-vidya.

In the South also these sastras were taught at ghatikasthanas and other institutions established by the rajas of Tamil Nadu. In the copper-plate inscriptions, dated 868 A. D. , there is a reference to an educational institution at Bahur, between Cuddalore and Pondicerry, where it is stated that the fourteen vidyas were taught. Similarly, there was a school at Ennayiram, between Vizhupuram and Tindivanam, where the ancient sastras were part of the syllabus as evidenced by an inscription of Rajendra Cola (11th century). There are many more similar examples.

Nowadays considerable research is conducted into Tamil history. It has inspired stories and novels. However, nobody seems to have dealt with the information that I have gained from my own historical inquiries -- that the Tamil rulers supported the Vedas and sastras in a big way. There is much talk about the need for impartiality in all matters and about the importance of having a scientific outlook, but we do not see any evidence of it in practice. The Buddhists were opposed to the Vedas, but they believed that an acquaintance with the fourteen Hindu sastras was necessary to nurture the intelligence and shape the moral character of the students learning in their institutions. But people here who claim to have faith in our religion ( it does not matter that they do nothing to promote our sastras) maintain silence about the work done by Tamil kings in the past in the cause of Vedic learning.

We have come to such a pass that, if we are asked about our vidyas, we can do no better than keep silent. Indeed we do not even know what is meant by "vidya". In all likelihood we think it to be jugglery, witchcraft or magic. Vidya and kala are the same. Kala means knowledge that waxes like the moon. Now most people think that "kala" means only dance.

we must no longer be ignorant of our sastras our indifferent to them and we must try to be true to ourselves. That is why I want to speak briefly about the fourteen--or eighteen--branches of learning. You must atleast learn their names.

Siksa, Vyakarana, Mimamsa, and Nyaya are among the fourteen sastras. You may find these subjects somewhat tiresome and think that they do not serve the Self in any way. But I ask you, what about all your daily activities? You

take so much time to read the newspaper which has a whole page or two on sports. What purpose does it serve in your daily life? Or, for that matter, in your inward growth?

One day, some years ago, I happened to be in a certain town. It was noontime and, as I went out, I saw a big crowd in front of a shop. The radio was blaring out the news and I was told that the crowd had gathered to listen to it. I asked a passer-by what was so exciting about the news. He said that a cricket match was being played somewhere, some thousands of miles away across the seas in a far-off continent, and that the latest score was being announced.

The fact is that people are prepared to spend their time, money, and energy on things they fancy but are of no practical value to them. Now I ask you to take an interest in our sastras. They are certainly more useful than cricket and such other things. They may not seem to bring you any direct spiritual benefit. While their ultimate purpose is to take us to the path of enlightenment, they are essential to our knowledge and to making us mature.

Knowledge is a treasure and it is a gift of the Lord. If you sharpen it with good education and the spirit of inquiry, the Ultimate Reality will be revealed to you in a flash. Man alone is the recipient of the divine blessing called speech. If it is used wisely he will have an abundance of good will. That is why so many sastras relating to speech like Vyakarana, Nirukta, Siksa have been developed. Everyone of you must have atleast a basic knowledge of these subjects.



## The Root of our Religion

The Vedas -- Rgveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvanaveda -- are the first four of the pramanas (authoritative texts) of our religion and also the most important. Of the remaining ten, six are Angas of the Vedas and four are Upangas.

Man possesses a number of angas or limbs. In the same way the Vedas personified -- the Vedapurusa -- has six limbs. ( It must be noted that the Vedas are also spoken of as Vedamatha, Mother Veda. ) The four Upangas, though not integral to the Vedas, are supporting limbs of the Vedapurusa. The Angas, as already stated, are six in number -- Siksa, Vyakarana, Chandas, Nirukta, Jyotisa and Kalpa. The four Upangas are Mimamsa, Nyaya, Purana and Dharmasastra.

The Vedas are fundamental importance; the Angas and Upangas derive their importance from them. Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Arthasasthra and Gandharvaveda are called Upavedas, subsidiary Vedas. Their connection with the prime scripture is thus obvious.

The Vedas must be learned along with the Angas and Upangas. Such a thorough study of the scripture is called "Sa-Anga-Upanga-adhyayana" (study of the Vedas with the Angas and Upangas). The term "sangopanga", which has come into popular usage, is derived from this. If a speaker deals with a subject thoroughly, whether it be politics or something else, we use the word "sangopanga" in describing his performance. The term refers to the ancient caturdasa-vidya (the six Angas plus the four upangas). We have

totally forgotten the old system of education but our culture is so steeped in it that we still use the term (*sangopanga*) to refer to any full scale treatment or exposition of a subject. The inference is clear. That for centuries the Vedas, together with their *Angas* and *Upangas* formed such an intimate part of life in Tamil land that a term associated with this tradition, "*sangopanga*", is still used by the common people there. But the irony of it is that today we do not know even the names of these old *sastras*.

The Vedas form the core of our religion and are the direct authority for our dharma and for all our religious practices. They are our Bible, our Qur'an, our *Granth sahib*. But, of course, the Vedas are far far older than these scriptures of other faiths. All of them originate from truths found in the Vedas. The very word "Veda" connotes what is authoritative. There is a practice of referring to the Bible, the Quran and other scriptures as the "Christian Veda", "Mohammedan Veda", "Parsi Veda", "Sikh Veda" and so on. Christians in India refer to the Bible as "Satya-Veda".

It is rather difficult to speak about the Vedas as a topic. One does not know where to begin and how to conclude. It is a bewildering task. The magnitude of our scripture is such -- and such is its glory.

"*Pramanam Vedasca*", says the *Apastamba Dharmasutra*. The Vedas are indeed the sources of all dharmas as well as the authority on which they are founded. A book that has been cherished by the great men of the Tamil country from the earliest times is *Manu-dharma-nul (Manusmriti)*. Throughout India, *Manu's dharmasastra* is held in the highest esteem. In Tamil Nadu there was a king who earned the name of "*Manu-niti-kanda-Cola*" for the exemplary manner in which he administered justice. Once a calf got crushed under the wheel of the chariot ridden by his son. The king was so fair and strict that, when the aggrieved cow, the mother of the calf, sought justice, he ordered his son to be crushed to death under the wheel of the same chariot. For us "*Manu-niti-sastra (Manusmriti)*" is the authority on dharma. But does it claim that it is the authority for all dharma? No. "*Vedo'khilo dharmamulam*", says *Manu*, i. e. the Vedas constitute the root of all dharma. They prescribe the dharma for all time, he says.

We must obey the dictates of the Vedas. When we are asked to accept a statement without questioning it, it is customary to remark; "Is that the word of the Vedas?" This confirms the fact that the common people believe that



the word of the Vedas, or their injunction, must be obeyed without being questioned. The "Vedavak" (the word or pronouncement of the Vedas) has been our inviolable law for thousands of years.



Eternal

It is not possible to tell the age of the Vedas. If we say that an object is "anadi" it means that nothing existed before it. Any book, it is reasonable to presume, must be the work of one or more people. The Old Testament contains the sayings of several Prophets. The New Testament contains the story of Jesus Christ as well as his sermons. The Qu'ran incorporates the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. The founders of such religions are historical personalities and their teachings did not exist before then. Are the Vedas similarly the work of one or more teachers? And may we take it that these preceptors lived in different periods of history? Ten thousand years ago or a hundred thousand or a million years ago? If the Vedas were created during any of these periods they can not be claimed to be "anadi". Even if they were created a million years ago, it obviously means that there was a time when they did not exist.

Questions like the above are justified if the Vedas are regarded as the work of mortals. And, if they are, it is wrong to claim that they are "anadi". We think that the Vedas are the creation of the rsis, seers who were mortals. So it is said, at any rate, in the text book of history we are taught.

Also consider the fact that the Vedas consists of many "Suktas". Jnanasambandhar's Tevaram consists of number of patigams. And just as each patigam has ten stanzas, each sukta consists of a number of mantras. "Su+ukta"="sukta". The prefix "su" denotes "good" as in "suguna" or "sulocana". "Ukta" means "spoken" or "what is spoken". " Sukta" means "well spoken", a "good word" or a "good utterance" (or well uttered).

When we chant the Vedas in the manner prescribed by the Sastras, we mention the name of the seer connected with each sukta, its metre and the deity invoked. Since there are many mantras associated with various seers we think that they were composed by them. We also refer to the ancestry of the seer concerned, his gotra, etc. For instance, "Agastyo Maithravarunih", that is Agastya, son of Maithravaruna. Here is another : "Madhucchanda Vaisvamitrah", the sage Madhucchanda descended from the Visvamitra gotra. Like this there are mantras in the names of many sages. If the mantras connected with the name of Agastya were composed by him it could not have existed during the time of Mitravaruna; similarly that in the name of Madhucchandana could not have existed during the time of Visvamitra. If this is true, how can you claim that the Vedas are "anadi"?

Since the Mantras are associated with the names of sages, we make the wrong inference that they may have been composed by them. But it is not so as a matter of fact. "Apauryeya" means not the work of any man. Were the Vedas composed by one or more human beings, even if they were rsis, they would be called "pauruseya". But since they are called "Apauryeya" it follows that even the seers could not have created them. If they were composed by the seers they (the latter) would be called "Mantra-kartas" which means "those who 'created' the Mantras". But as a matter of fact, the rsis are called "Mantra-drastas", those who "saw " them.

When we say that Columbus discovered America, we do not mean that he created the continent : we mean that he merely made the continent known to the world. In the same way the laws attributed to Newton, Einstein and so on were not created by them. If an object thrown up falls to earth it is not because Newton said so. Scientists like Newton perceived the laws of Nature and revealed them to the world. Similarly, the seers discovered the Mantras and made a gift of them to the world. These Mantras had existed before the time of their fathers, grand fathers, great grand fathers,. . . . . But they had remained unknown to the world. The seers now made them known to

the mankind. So it became customary to mention their names at the time of intoning them.

The publisher of a book is not necessarily its author. The man who releases a film need not be its producer. The seers disclosed the mantras to the world but they did not create them. Though the mantras had existed before them they performed the noble service of revealing them to us. So it is appropriate on our part to pay them obeisance by mentioning their names while chanting the same.

Do we know anything about the existence of the mantras before they were "seen" by the rsis? If they are eternal does it mean that they manifested themselves at the time of creation? Were they present before man's appearance on earth? How did they come into being?

If we take it that the Vedas appeared with creation, it would mean that the Paramatman created them along with the world. Did he write them down and leave them somewhere to be discovered by the seers later? If so, they cannot be claimed to be anadi. We have an idea of when Brahma created the present world.

There are fixed periods for the four yugas or eons, Krta, Treta, Dvapara and Kali. The four yugas together are called a caturuga. A thousand caturugas make one day time of Brahma and another equally long period is his night. According to this reckoning Brahma is now more than fifty years old. Any religious ceremony is to be commenced with a samkalpa("resolve") in which an account is given of the time and place of performance in such and such a year of Brahma, in such and such a month, in such and such a fortnight (waxing or waning moon), etc. From this account we know when the present Brahma came into being. Even if we concede that he made his appearance millions and millions of years ago, he can not be claimed to be anadi. How can then creation be said to have no beginning in time? When creation itself has an origin, how do we justify to the claim that the Vedas are anadi?

The Paramatman, being eternal, was present even before creation when there was no Brahma. The Paramatman, the Brahman are the Supreme Godhead, is eternal. The cosmos, all sentient beings and insentient objects, emerge from him. The Paramatman did not create them himself : he did so through the agency of Brahma. Through Visnu he sustains them and through Rudra he

destroys them. Later Brahma, Visnu, Rudra are themselves destroyed by him. The present Brahma, when he became hundred years old, will unite with the Paramatman. Another Brahma will appear and he will start the work of creation all over again. The question arises : Does the Paramatman create the Vedas before he brings into being another Brahma?

We learn from the Sastras that the Vedas has existed even before creation. Infact, they say, Brahma performed his function of creation with the aid of Vedic mantras. I shall be speaking to you about this later, how he accomplished the creation with the mantras manifested as sound. In the passage dealing with creation the Bagavatha also says that Brahma created the world with the Vedas.

Is this the reason (that Brahma created the world with the Vedic mantras) why it is said that the Vedas are anadi? Is it right to take such a view on the basis that both the Vedas and Isvara are anadi? If we suggest that isvara had made this scriptures even before he created the world, it would mean that there was a time when the Vedas did not exist and that would contradict the claim that they are anadi.

If we believe that both Isvara and the Vedas are anadi it would mean that Isvara could not have created them. But if you believe that Isvara created them, they cannot be said to be without the origin. Everything has its origin in Isvara. It would be wrong to maintain[according to this logic]that both Isvara and the Vedas have no beginning in time. Well, it is all so confusing.

What is the basis of the belief that the Vedas are anadi and were not created by Isvara? An answer is contained in the Vedas themselves. In the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad(2. 4. 10) ---the Upanishads are all part of the Vedas---it is said that the Rg, Yajus and Sama Vedas are the very breath of Isarva. The word "nihsvasitam" is used here.

It goes without saying that we cannot live even a moment without breathing. The Vedas are the life-breath of the Paramatman who is an eternal living Reality. It follows that the Vedas exist together with him as his breath.

We must note here that it is not customary to say that the Vedas are the creation of Iswara. Do we create our own breath? Our breath exists from the

very moment we are born. It is the same case with Iswara and the Vedas. We can not say that he created them.

When Vidyaranya swamin wrote his commentary on the Vedas he prayed to his guru regarding him as Iswara. He used these words in his prayer : "Yasya nihsvasitam Vedah" (whose --that is Isvara's -- breath constitutes the Vedas). The word "nihsvasitam" occurs in the Upanishads also. Here too it is not stated that Iswara created the Vedas.

The Lord says in the Gita : "It is I who am known by all the Vedas "(Vedaisca sarvair aham eva vedyah). " Instead of describing himself as "Vedakrd" (creator of the Vedas), he calls himself "Vedantakrd" (creator of philosophical system that is the crown of the Vedas). He also refers to himself as "Vedavid" (he who knows the Vedas). Before Vedanta that enshrines great philosophical truths had been made know to mankind, the Vedas had existed in the form of sound, as the very breath of Isvara -- they were ( and are) indeed Isvara dwelling in Isvara.

The Bhagavata too, like the Gita, does not state that the Lord created the Vedas. It declares that they occurred in a flash in his heart, that they came to him in a blaze of light. The word used on this context is "Sphuranam", occurring in the mind in a flash. Now we can not apply this word to any thing that is created a new, any thing that did not exist before. Bramha is the premordial sage who saw all the mantras. But it was the Parmatman who revealed them to him. Did he transmit them orally? No, says the Bhagavatha. The paramatman imparted the Vedas to Bramha through his heart : " Tene Bramha hrdaya Adikavaye" says the very first verse of that Purana. The Vedas were not created by the Parmatman. The truth is that they are always present in his heart. When he nearly resolved to pass on the Vedas to Bramha the latter instantly received them. And with their sound he began the work of creation.

The Tamil Tevaram describes Isvara as "Vediya Vedagita". It says that the Lord keeps singing the hymns of various sakas or recensions of the Vedas. How are we to understand the statement that the "Lord sees the Vedas"? Breathing itself is music. Our out-breath is called "hamsa-gita". Thus, the Vedas are the music of the Lord's breath. The Thevaran goes on : "Wearing the sacred thread and the holy ashes, and bathing all the time, Isvara keeps singing the Vedas". The impression one has from this description is that the

Lord is a great "ghanapathin". Apparsvamigal refers to the ashes resembling milk applied to the body of Isvara which is like coral. He says that the Lord "chants" the Vedas, " sings " them, not that he creates ( or created ) them. In the Vaisnava Divya Prabandham too there are many references to Vedic sacrifices. But some how I donot remember any reference in it to the Lord chanting the Vedas.

In the story of Gajendramoksa told by the Puhazhendi Pulavar ( a Tamil Vaishnava saint - poet), the elephant whose leg is caught in the jaws of the crocodile cries in anguish. "Adimulame" [vocative in Tamil of Adimula, the Primordial Lord]. The Lord thereupon appears, asking "What? " The poet says that Mahavisnu "stood before the Vedas" ("Vedattin mun ninran"). According to the poet the lord stood in front of the Vedas, not that he appeared at a time earlier than the scriptures. The Tamil for "A man stood at the door" is "Vittin mun ninran". So "Vedattin mun ninran" should be understood as "he stood at the commencement of all the Vedas". Another idea occurs to me. How is Perumal (Visnu or any other Vaisnava deity ) taken in procession? Preceding the utsava-murthy ( processional deity) are the devotees reciting the Tiruvaymozhi. And behind the processional deity is the group reciting the Vedas. Here too we may say that the Lord stood before the Vedas ("Vedattin mun ninran").

In the visnava Agamas and puranas, Mahavisnu is referred to specially as "Yajnaswaroopin" ( one personifying the sacrifice) and as "Vedaswaroopin" ( one who personifies the Vedas). Garuda is also called "Vedaswarupa". But non of these texts is known to refer to Visnu as the creator of the Vedas.

It is only in the "Purusasukta", occuring in the Vedas themselves, that the Vedas are said to have been "born" "(ajayatha)". However, this hymn is of symbolical and allegorical signifcance and not to be understood in a literal sense. It states that the Parama-purusa (the Supreme Being) for sacrifice as an animal and that it was in this sacrifice that creation itself was accomplished. It was at this time that the Vedas also made their appearance. How are we to understand the statement that the Parama-purusa was offered as a sacrificial animal? Not in a literal sense. In this sacrifice the season of spring was offered as an oblation (ahuthi) instead of ghee : summer served the purpose of samidhs (fire sticks); autum havis (oblation). Only those who meditate on the mantras and become absorbed in them will know there meaning

inwardly as a matter of experience. So we can not construe the statement literally that the Vedas were "born".

To the modern mind the claim that the breath of Isvara is manifested in the form of sound seems nonsensical, also that it was with this sound that Bramha performed his function of creation. But on careful reflection you will realise that the belief is based on a great scientific truth.

I do not mean to say that we must accept the Vedas only if they conform to present-day science. Nor do I think that our scripture, which proclaims the truth of the Paramatman and is beyond the reach of science and scientist, ought to be brought within the ken of science. Many matters pertaining to the Vedas may not seem to be in conformity with science and for that reason they are not to be treated as wrong. But our present subject -- how the breath of the Parmatman can become sound and how the function of creation can be carried out withit -- is in keeping with science.



### Sound and Creation

What is sound? According to modern science, it is vibration. "If you examine the core of an atom you will realise that all matter is one. " This Advaitic conclusion is arrived at according to nuclear science and the concepts of Einstein. All this world is one flood of energy (sakti); everything is an electromagnetic flow. But how do we account for the manifestation of different objects? It is to be attributed to different type of vibrations.

Where there is vibration there is a sound. Conversely, to produce a sound the vibration corresponding to it must also be created. The scientific concept that the different vibrations of the same energy are the cause of creation is the same as the belief that world was created with the breath of the Paramatman manifesting itself as the sound of the Vedas.

Consider human beings and other creatures. What is it that determines their health and feelings? The breath that passes through our nadis, blood vessels, during respiration produces vibrations and on them depends the state of our health. Those who keep their breathing under control through the practice of yoga are healthy to an amazing degree. They do not bleed even if their veins are cut. They are able to remain buried in the earth in samadhi stopping their pulse and heartbeat. They are not poisoned even if they are bitten by a snake or stung by a scorpion. The reason is that they keep the vibrations of the nadis under control during breathing.

Breath is vital not only to the body but also to the mind. The mind which is the source of thought and the vital(pranik) energy that is the source of breath are the same. Healthy or unhealthy thoughts are to be attributed to different vibrations of the nadis. You may test this for yourself. See for yourself how you breathe when you are at peace before the sanctum of a deity or in the presence of a great and wise person and how you breathe when your mind is quickened by desire or anger. The happiness you experience when you take part in something divine, like a bhajan or atemple festival, must be different from the pleasure that sensual gratification gives you: the vibrations of the nadis concerned will also be correspondingly different.

When you experience joy of an elevated kind the passage of breath will be through the right nostril, but when you are enjoying sensual pleasure it will be through the left. When you meditate, with increasing concentration, on the Reality Serene which is the source of all your urges and feelings, the breath will pass through both nostrils slowly, evenly and rhythmically. When you are absorbed in the object of your meditation breathing itself will cease, but there will still be life. The great awareness called jnana will then be in bloom as it were.

The inert body of a man and the awareness that is the vital essence of his life are both dependent on the course of his breathing. They grow or decay



according to it. The course of a man's breath keeps his inner vibrations in order.

Is it not from the Paramatman that so many countless inert objects and so many sentient beings have originated and grown? The movements appropriate to these should have also occurred in the Ultimate Object that is the Paramatman.

Even according to non-dualism, the Brahman that is utterly still and is unconditioned and has no attributes (nirguna) manifests itself in the countless disguises of this cosmos with the power of Maya, Maya that cannot be described. Disguises or no disguises, we have to concede the existence, in a mundane sense, of the inert world and of the sentient beings. But we must remember that even Maya has its source in Isvara who is "Mayin". But the power of Maya apart, all that we see have arisen from the vibrations in the Object called the Parabrahman. At the same time, with all these vibrations, this Object remains still and tranquil inwardly. This stillness notwithstanding, there are movements that are apparent to our perception. They are not disorderly movements but constitute a system embracing vast heavenly bodies like the sun at one end and the tiniest of insects on the other or even something as humble as a blade of grass.

It is this orderliness that goes to make worldly life happy. The Paramatman has created this by bringing all powers of nature within an orderly system. But if you sometimes see flaws in it and the natural forces going against us, it is because he likes to be playful now and then.

The human mind can go astray to any length. Indeed it keeps wandering aimlessly like a goblin or an imp. Whatever the extent to which cosmic life is orderly, it (the human mind) breaks free from all control and runs about like a mad dog.

When the powers of nature are unfavourable to us, is there a way to change their behaviour and make them favourable to us? Is there also a means by which our mind could be brought under control when it goes haywire? If everything is caused by vibration, by sound, there must be a way of making the forces of nature favourable to us and of purifying our mind and bringing it under control through this very sound. The Vedas constitute such sound.

By controlling our breath through the practice of yoga, it is possible to gain access to the breath of the Paramatman and by this means perform such actions as can uplift our own Self as well as mankind. Here the vibrations of the nadis do not produce the sound that is audible to us. Science tells us that there are sounds outside the range of human hearing in the same way as there is light that does not pass through the lens of the human eye.

However, it is possible to bring within us (within our reach) that which is without. When a musician sings on the radio, the sound of his music is converted into electromagnetic waves which travel through space. But how do we hear music? The receiving set captures the electromagnetic waves and reconverts them into sound waves.

(Science is not opposed to religion. It seems to me that it even helps in the growth of religion. A century ago, before the radio and the telephone were invented, it would not have been easy to counter the arguments of an atheist who dismisses claims made on behalf of the sound of the Vedas as absurd. Now the discoveries of science have come to our rescue. )

It is possible for humans to earn the power of energy possessed by such an inert object as the radio set. Indeed we can earn much more, do much more. It is tapas, ascetic endeavour, that will give us such energy. What is tapas? It is the determination to find the truth: it is keeping the mind one-pointed in this search, forsaking food, sleep, home, everything. But when you are a seeker like this, you must remain humble and erase the least trace of egoism in you. You must realise that the truth you seek will be revealed to you only with the grace of Isvara. The sages performed austerities in this manner and attained to the highest plane of yoga. They could perceive the vibrations in creation, that is the course taken by the breath of the Supreme Godhead. Besides, they also knew them as sound capable of being heard by the human ear in the same manner as electric waves converted into sound waves. It is these sounds that they have passed on to us the mantras of the Vedas.

The Vedas are called "Sruti. " That which is heard is Sruti. "Srotra" means the "ear". The Vedas have been handed down orally from generation to generation and have not been taught or learned from any written text. That is how they got the name of "Sruti". Why were these scriptures not permitted to be written down? Because the sound of the Vedas cannot be properly transcribed. There are sounds or phonemes that cannot be accurately

represented in any script. For instance, the one between "zha" and "la". Such sounds have to be learned by listening. Besides there are svaras for Vedic mantras (tonal variations, proper accentuation): "udatta" (raised syllable), "anudatta" (lowered syllable) and "svarita" (falling syllable). Mistakes in enunciation are likely even if diacritical or some other marks are used in the printed text. Wrong chanting will not bring the desired results. There is much difference in the vibrations caused by pronouncing a syllable laying stress on it and pronouncing it without any stress. Correspondingly, there will be changes in our feelings and urges and the divine forces that rule nature. There is a story in the Taittiriya Samhita of the Vedas which illustrates how wrong chanting can produce results contrary to what is intended. Tvasta, the divine carpenter, chanted a mantra with the object of begetting a son who would be the slayer of Indra. But he went wrong in the intonation of some syllables. So, unwittingly, he prayed for a son who would be slain by Indra instead of one who would slay that celestial. And his prayer (that had gone wrong in the intonation) was answered. When the wavelength shifts even minutely on our radio we receive the broadcast of a different transmitting station. Fine-tuning has to be done to get the required station. So is the case with the intonation of Vedic mantras. There should not be the slightest mistake in the svaras. Just as we receive a different station on our radio when the wavelength is changed, so the result is different when we go wrong in the intonation.

This is the reason why it is of the utmost importance to learn the Vedas by listening - hence the name "Sruti", in Tamil "Ezhutakkilavi" (unwritten old text). Another explanation occurs to me for the name "Sruti". The sages heard, did they not, the sound of the divine vibrations that cannot be perceived by the common people? Did they read the Vedas in any book or did they compose them themselves? Sruti is an apt name for the Vedas since they were made known to the world after they had been first heard by the sages.

The Vedic seers have the name of "mantra-drastas" -- a "drasta" is one who sees. In Tamil it is "parppavan". "Parppan" also means the same thing. If the sages "saw" the mantras it would mean that they did not "hear" them. Which of the two versions is correct? Did the sages see the mantras or did they hear them? If they saw them, in what script did they appear? There was no script at the time, neither Devanagari nor Grantha nor Brahmi, the basis of all. But, then, the sound of Vedas, their svaras, cannot be truly written down in any script.

The answer to this problem is that when the sages were meditating the mantras of the Vedas appeared to them in a flash in their hearts. It may be that in this state of theirs they could neither see nor hear anything. The mantras must have appeared in a flash in the inner recesses of their minds.

"Seeing" or "looking" does not denote merely what is perceived by the eye. It is a term that covers a variety of perceptions and experiences. When we say that a man has "seen" all sorrows in his life, does the term "seen" imply only what he "saw" with his eyes? Does it not mean what he has "experienced"? The term "mantra-drasta" also could be taken in a similar manner as referring to what is perceived through experience. It is further believed that the sages were able to hear the Vedas with their divine ears.

Arjuna wished to see the Lord's cosmic form (visvarupa). The Gita has it that Krsna Paramatman said to him: " You will not be able to see my cosmic form with this eyes of yours. I will give you a celestial eye. . . . . "

Just as Arjuna was endowed by the Lord with a divine eye, the sages must have been invested with celestial ears to grasp the sound emanating from the Paramatman and pervading the vast space.

The vibrations of the Vedas serve the purpose not only of creation and the conduct of life. There are indeed Vedic mantras that help us to transcend this life and become one with the Ultimate Truth. When a man returns by the same way as he comes, does he not arrive at the starting point? In the same way when we go seeking how creation came about, we are led to the point where there are no vibrations, no movements, where there is utter stillness. Some mantras that create vibrations in our nadis accomplish the same noble task of taking us to such a goal. Such are the Upanisadic mahavakyas and Pranava.

In sum, the Vedas are not anyone's compositions. The sages did not create them, nor were inscribed by the Paramatman on palm-leaves.



## Western Vedic Research

In the present sorry state in which the nation finds itself it has to learn about its own heritage like the Vedas from the findings of Western scholars called "orientalists" and from Indians conducting research on the same lines as they. I concede that European scholars have made a very valuable study of the Vedas. We must be thankful to them for their work. Some of them like Max Muller conducted research out of their esteem for our scriptures. They took great pains to gather the old texts and published volume after volume incorporating their findings.

Two hundred years ago Sir William Jones, who was a judge of the Calcutta high court, started the Asiatic Society. The number of books this institution has published on Vedic subjects should arouse our wonder. With the help of the East India Company, Sir William published the Rgveda with the commentary of Sayana and also a number of other Hindu works. Apart from Englishmen, indologists from France, Germany and Russia have also done outstanding work here. "The discovery of the Vedas of the Hindus is more significant than Columbus's discovery of America, " thus exclaimed some indologists exulting in their findings.

These foreigners discovered Vedic and Vedantic texts from various parts of the country. They translated the dharma-, grhya- and sruta - sutras. The Kundalini Tantra gained importance only after Arthur Avalon had written extensively on it. A number of Westerners have contributed studies of other aspects of our culture also. It was because of the Protection of Ancient Monuments Act that came into force during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon

that our temples and other monuments were saved from vandals. Fergusson took photographs of our artistic treasures (sculptures) and made them known to the world. Men like Cunningham, Sir John Marshall and Mortimer Wheeler did notable work in Indian archaeology. It was because of the labours of Mackenzie who gathered manuscripts from various parts of India that we come to know about many of our sastras. The department of epigraphy was started during British rule.

We suffered in many ways at the hands of the British but it was during their time that some good was also done. But this good was not unmixed and had undesirable elements in it. The intention of many of those who called themselves orientalist or indologist was not above reproach. They wanted to reconstruct the history of India on the basis of their study of the Vedas and, in the course of this, they concocted the Aryan- Dravidian theory of races and sowed the seeds of hatred among the people. Purporting to be rationalists they wrongly interpreted, in an allegorical manner, what cannot be comprehended by our senses. In commenting on the Vedas they took the view that the sages were primitive men. Though some of them pretended to be impartial, their hidden intention in conducting research into our religious texts was to propagate Christianity and show Hinduism in a poor light.

A number of Westerners saw the similarity between Sanskrit and their own languages and devoted themselves to comparative philology.

We may applaud European indologists for their research work, for making our sastras known to a wider world and for the hard work they put in. But they were hardly in sympathy with our view of the Vedas. What is the purpose of these scriptures? By chanting them, by filling the world with their sound and by the performance of rites like sacrifices, the good of mankind is ensured. This view the Western indologists rejected. They tried to understand on a purely intellectual plane what is beyond the comprehension of the human mind. And with this limited understanding of theirs they printed big tomes on the Vedas to be preserved in the libraries. Our scriptures are meant to be a living reality of our speech and action. Instead of putting them to such noble use, to consign them to the libraries, in the form of books, is like keeping living animals in the museum instead of in the zoo.



### Date of the Vedas : Inquiry not Proper

The idea that the Vedas are eternal does not fit into the mental outlook of Western indologists. Their claims to impartiality and to conducting research in a scientific manner notwithstanding, they are not prepared to accord an elevated status to the Hindu texts. Many Hindu research scholars have also found themselves unable to accept the view that the Vedas are eternal.

Modern historians have adopted chiefly two methods to determine the date of the Vedas: the first is based on the astronomical references in the scriptures and the second on the morphology of the language of the same. But have they, using either method, come to any definite conclusion? Each investigator has arrived at a different age. Tilak has assigned the date 6000 B. C to the Vedas. According to some others it is 3000 B. C or 1500 B. C.

There is no difference of opinion among historians about the dates of the scriptures of other religions. They are agreed that the Buddhist Tripitaka was written during the time of Asoka but that the teachings of the Buddha included in it belong to an earlier time. There is similar unanimity of view in that the New Testament is 2000 years old. And all are agreed that the Qur'an was composed 1, 300 years ago. In the case of Vedas alone have historians not arrived at a decisive date.

I mentioned that two methods were adopted in reckoning the age of the Vedas. There are references in these scriptures to the position of certain heavenly bodies. The date of the Vedas, fixed at 6000 B. C. or so, is based on an astronomical conjunction mentioned in them.

But is it right to say that such an astronomical conjunction would not have occurred earlier too? Conjunctions similar to the one on the basis of which the date of 6000 B. C. has been arrived at must have occurred not only before the present creation, but even far far earlier. Which of these is to be taken as the one mentioned in the Vedas? The sages had a vision that could penetrate through the eons. So such calculations will not hold in the case of the Vedas which the great sages brought together with their trans-sensual powers of perception. We find thus that the internal astronomical "evidence" found in the Vedas and made much of by modern researchers does not help in fixing their date.

The second method is linguistic. Here we have to consider not only the language but also the script. Brahmi is the source of all the scripts in use today in most parts of the country. Devanagari and the Tamil scripts may seem totally unrelated, but the fact is otherwise. A study has been conducted on the changes the Brahmi script has undergone during all these centuries on the basis of the edicts found throughout the land. A chart made from the results of this study shows that the scripts in use today in different parts of the country, though seemingly unrelated, were evolved from the original Brahmi. An amusing thought occurs to me that the scripts prevalent today are Brahmi letters with moustaches and horns. Something like a moustache affixes itself to the middle of Brahmi letters. The Devanagari (u and u) appear similarly formed. Many letters of the Tamil alphabet look like Brahmi letters that have sprung horns. From the edicts and inscriptions we can find out with some precision the period taken for each alteration in the script. It is in this manner that the dates of some edicts have been determined.

The Vedas, however, have never been inscribed on stone anywhere. So there is no question of our fixing their date on the basis of any of the scripts. Other aspects of language have to be considered in this context. The morphology of words and the character of their sound keep changing with time. Many Tamil words belonging to the Sangam period have changed thus. It is a phenomenon common to all languages. An erosion takes place in the case of some sounds. Sometimes their meaning also does not remain the same. Take the Tamil word "veguli": it means a "simpleton", but earlier it meant "anger" or "an angry man". In the old days the Tamil "manda" did not mean "dead": a Tamil scholar told me that it meant "famous". Such instances are to be met with in Sanskrit also. We do not understand the Vedas the same way as later poetical works in Sanskrit. Compared to other languages such changes are not



numerous in our own tongues. Even an Englishman cannot follow one line of Anglo-Saxon English (Old English) which is only 1, 000 years old. In the course of about 3000 years English has changed so much in America as to merit a name of its own, "American English".

The period over which a phoneme changes its character has been calculated. But the time taken for a change in the meaning of a word has not been determined with the same definiteness. Scholars have tried to fix the date of the Vedas by examining the character of the sound of their words. " Every two hundred years the sound of a word undergoes such and such a change, " observes one authority of linguistics. " A Vedic sound, in the form we know it today, is the result of a number of mutations. If it has undergone ten mutations, it means that the Vedas are 2, 000 years old. Or, if thirty, they are  $30 \times 200 = 6, 000$  years old, which would mean [according to this logic] that our scripture did not exist before 4000 B. C" We hear such views expressed frequently.

One example would be enough to prove how wrong such a basis of calculation is to fix the date of the Vedas.

We have so many utensils at home. We use some of them more often than others. The bell-metal in which cook rice morning and evening has to be washed twice a day. So it wears faster. Suppose we have another vessel, quite a big one, an "anda" for instance. It is kept in the store room and not used except perhaps during a wedding or some other festive occasion. Since it is washed only at infrequent intervals it does not wear as fast as the bell-metal vessel which we perhaps bought as recently as last year. The anda must have come as part of grandmother's dowry and must be very old. Even so, it does not show any sign of wear. Are we to infer that the bell-metal pot was bought before the anda? The dinner-plate and the rose water sprinkler came together as your daughter-in-law's dowry. In ten years, the plate has gone out of shape but the sprinkler retains its glitter and polish.

The same is the case with the sounds of words of everyday speech on one hand and the Vedic words on the other, the difference between them being similar to that between the two types of vessels mentioned above. Words in common daily use undergo erosion in many ways. Though the Vedas are chanted everyday special care is taken to preserve the original sound of their words. I shall tell you later about the Vedangas, Siksa and Vyakarana and about how a

system was devised by our forefathers to preserve the sound of each Vedic syllable from undergoing any mutation. The Vedic sounds are not subject of erosion like the utensils in daily use or the words in common speech. They are like the anda which, though old, is well preserved.

Modern indologists have also put forward the view that the Rgveda is the oldest of the Vedas, that the Yajurveda, the Samaveda and the Atharvaveda came later ( in that order). They also believe that in each recension or sakha of a particular Veda, the Samhita is the oldest part, the Brahmana and Aranyaka being of later origin. They try to fix the date of these different texts on the basis of the differences in their language. Also they have carried out research into how certain words used in the Vedas are seen in a different form in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the works of poets like Kalidasa.

The linguistic research conducted by these indologists will not yield true results because they ignore the basic differences that I have pointed out between the sound of the Vedas and that of other works. The slight changes perceived today in certain Vedic sounds, despite all the care taken to preserve them in the original form, could not have come about in 200 years but over some thousands of years. If you realise that the "wear and tear" we speak of cannot apply to the Vedas but may be to other works or to spoken languages, you will agree that to fix the date of the Vedas, as modern indologists have tried to do, is not right.

Hindi is only some centuries old. However, since it is spoken in a large area and contains Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian words, it has changed in a comparatively short period. Tamil, though spoken in a smaller region, has not changed so much. Even so you will not understand Kamban's Ramayana to the same extent as you will the songs of Tayumanavar. As for Jnanasambandhar's Tevaram itself you will not understand it as easily as Kamban's Ramayana. And then there is the Thirumurugarrupadai which is more difficult than the Tevaram. So Tamil has also not remained the same all these centuries. Though Sanskrit was known all over India it was not a spoken language like Hindi or Tamil. It was a literary language and has not changed even to the extent Tamil has. As for the Vedas, they have been preserved with greater care than the poetical works and it is rarely that you see changes in them. So, according to linguistic experts, if it takes 1000 years for certain changes to occur in other languages, it should take 100, 000 years for the same in the Vedas.

The Vedas have been preserved with the utmost care in the firm belief that the mantras will be efficacious only if each syllable is chanted with precision so far as its sound and textual correctness are concerned. It was for this purpose that a separate caste was assigned with the mission of caring for them. Research conducted without realising this truth will not serve any purpose. Modern investigations have not succeeded in establishing that the Vedas are not eternal. Faith in the belief that they are anadi will be strengthened if you appreciate the care with which they have been preserved during all these ages and also consider the different ways in which their sound has been kept alive.



### Methods of Chanting

Our forefathers devised a number of methods to preserve the unwritten Vedas in their original form, to safeguard their tonal and verbal purity. They laid down rules to make sure that not a syllable was changed in chanting, not a svara was altered. In this way they ensured that the full benefits were derived from intoning the mantras. They fixed the time taken to enunciate each syllable of a word and called this unit of time or time interval "matra"; . how we must regulate our breathing to produce the desired vibration in a particular part of our body so that the sound of the syllable enunciated is produced in its pure form: even this is determined in the Vedanga called Siksa. The similarities and differences between the svaras of

music and of the Vedas are dealt with. So those differences between the sounds voiced by birds and animals on the one hand and the Vedic svaras on the other. With all this the right way is shown for the intonation of Vedic mantras.

A remarkable method was devised to make sure that words and syllables are not altered. According to this the words of a mantra are strung together in different patterns like "vakya", "pada", "karma", "jata", "mala", "sikha", "rekha", "dhvaja", "danda", "ratha", "ghana".

We call some Vedic scholars "ghanapathins", don't we? It means they have learnt the chanting of the scripture up to the advanced stage called "ghana". "Pathin" means one who has learnt the "patha". When we listen to ghanapathins chant the ghana, we notice that he intones a few words of a mantra in different ways, back and forth. It is most delightful to the ear, like nectar poured into it. The sonority natural to Vedic chanting is enhanced in ghana. Similarly, in the other methods of chanting like karma, jata, sikha, mala, and so on the intonation is nothing less than stately, indeed divine. The chief purpose of such methods, as already mentioned, is to ensure that even not even a syllable of a mantra is altered to the slightest extent. The words are braided together, so to speak, and recited back and forth.

In "vakyapatha" and "samhitapatha" the mantras are chanted in the original (natural) order, with no special pattern adopted. In the vakyapatha some words of the mantras are joined together in what is called "sandhi". There is sandhi in Tamil also; but in English the words are not joined together. You have many examples of sandhi in the Tevaram, Tiruvachakam, Tirukkural, Divyaprabandham and other Tamil works. Because of the sandhi the individual words are less recognisable in Sanskrit than even in Tamil. In padapatha each word in a mantra is clearly separated from the next. It comes next to samhitapatha and after it is kramapatha. In this the first word of a mantra is joined to the second, the second to the third, the third to the fourth, and so on, until we come to the final word.

In old inscriptions in the South we find the names of some important people of the place concerned mentioned with the appellation "kramavittan" added to the names. "Kramavittan" is the Tamil form of "kramavid" in the same way as "Vedavittan" is of "Vedavid". We learn from the inscriptions that such Vedic scholars were to be met throughout the Tamil country.

In jata patha, the first word of the mantra is chanted with the second, then the order is reversed-the second is chanted with the first. Then, again, the first word is chanted with the second, then the second with the third, and so on. In this way the entire mantra is chanted, going back and forth. In sikhpatha the pattern consists of three words of a mantra, instead of the two of jata.

Ghanapatha is more difficult than these. There are four types in this method. Here also the words of a mantra are chanted back and forth and there is a system of permutation and combination in the chanting. To explain all of it would be like conducting a class of arithmetic.

We take all kinds of precautions in the laboratory, don't we, to protect a life-saving drug? The sound of the Vedas guards the world against all ills. Our forefathers devised these methods of chanting to protect the sound of our scripture against change and distortion.

Samhitapatha and padapatha are called "prakrtipatha" (natural way of chanting) since the words are recited only once and in their natural order. The other methods belong to the "vikrtipatha" (artificial way of chanting) category. (In krama, though the words do not go in the strict natural order of one-two-three, there is no reversal of the words-the first after the second, the second after the third, and so on. So we cannot describe it fully as vikrtipatha). Leaving out krama, there are eight vikrti patterns and they are recounted in verse to be easily remembered.

*Jata mala sikha rekha dhvaja danda ratho ghanah*

*Ityastau-vikrtayah proktah kramapurva maharsibhih*

All these different methods of chanting are meant to ensure the tonal and verbal purity of the Vedas for all time. In pada the words in their natural order, in krama two words together, in jata the words going back and forth. The words tally in all these methods of chanting and there is the assurance that the original form will not be altered.

The benefits to be derived from the different ways of chanting are given in this verse.

*Samhitapathamatreya yatphalam procyate budhah*

*Padu tu dvigunam vidyat krame tu ca caturgunam*

*Varnakrame satagunam jatayantu sahasrakam*

Considering that our ancestors took so much care to make sure that the sound of the Vedas did not undergo the slightest change, it is futile for modern researchers to try to establish the date of our scriptures by finding out how the sounds of its words have changed.



[Word of God](#)

We must not distrust the belief that the Vedas are not the work of mere mortals. Followers of other religions too ascribe divine origin to their scriptures. Jesus says that he merely repeats the words of God and, according to Muslims, the prophet speaks the words of Allah. What we call

"apauruseya" is revealed text in their case. The word of the Lord has come through the agency of great men to constitute religious texts.

Whatever our field of work, must be dedicated to it with one-pointedness of mind for its truths to be revealed. They say that such truths come to us in a flash. A professor told me that the Theory of Relativity occurred to Einstein in a flash, that he knew it intuitively. If we accept such claims, how can we dismiss the belief that Vedas are not the work of mortals, that they revealed themselves to the seers in their heart-space, seers who were inwardly pure?



### The Vedas are Infinite

If the cosmos of sound (sabda-prapanca) enfolds all creation and what is beyond it, it must naturally be immensely vast. However voluminous the Vedas are, one might wonder whether it would be right to claim that they embrace all activities of the universe. "Anantah vai Vedah", the Vedas themselves proclaim so (the Vedas are endless). We cannot claim that all the Vedas have been revealed to the seers. Only about a thousand sakhas or recensions belonging to the four Vedas have been revealed to them.

Brahma, the Creator, alone knows the Vedas in their entirety. Before the present Brahma there was a great deluge and, preceding it, there was another Brahma. And, similarly, before him too there must have been another Brahma. But through all these vast vistas of time, through successive deluges, the vibrations caused by the Paramatman's breath have existed in space, the vibrations that urged the first Brahma to do the work of creation. These

vibrations are indestructible. The Brahma who appears after each great deluge performs his function of creation with them.

The sounds we produce are never destroyed. I remember reading that what Jesus Christ spoke 2, 000 years ago could still be recaptured in his own voice and that efforts are being made for the same. I don't know how far these efforts have succeeded. But I do know that there does exist such a possibility (of receiving a voice or sound from the past). We know that a sound, once it is produced, remains in space without ever being destroyed.

Brahma created this world with the sound of the Vedas and this sound is not destroyed even during a great deluge. We build a village or town with stone, earth, timber, iron, etc. All these materials are derived from the will of the Paramatman, from his thought, from the vibrations that are his will or thought. Brahma saw the sounds corresponding to these vibrations as the Vedas and the chanted them and brought all the world into existence.

We often see reports in the newspapers of trees flowering or fruiting in abundance in response to the vibrations of certain sounds. Some vibrations have also the effect of stunting the growth of plants. Here is proof of the fact that sound can create, sustain and destroy.

Brahma could create the universe with the sound of the Vedas because of his power of concentration. A siddha can cure a sick man if he intones the Pancakasara mantra - the mantra that we mutter every day - and applies holy ashes to the patient's body. He is able to do it because he has greater power of concentration than we have. If the mantra is to be efficacious it has to be chanted without any tonal error whatsoever. Only then will it bring the desired result. Brahma had the power of concentration to the full since he came into being as an "instrument" for creation.

Much could be accomplished from the void of space through electricity. From the spiritual reality called the Nirguna Brahman (the unconditioned Brahman without attributes) emanates everything. During the deluge, this spiritual reality goes to sleep. Take the case of a sandow. When he is asleep his strength is not evident. But when we see him wrestling with an opponent we realise how strong he is. Similarly, during the time of creation, the spiritual reality is revealed to perform manifold functions. From the Nirguna Brahman comes a flow of energy to perform such functions. Brahma came into being as



a part of this flow. Since he was all tapas all concentration, he could grasp all the Vedas with his extraordinary power. He created the world with their sound. The Vedas are infinite and so too creation takes forms that are countless.

The great sage Bharadvaja kept chanting the Vedas over three lifetimes. Paramesvara appeared before him and said to him: "I will grant you a fourth life. What will you do during it? " The sage replied: "I will keep chanting the Vedas again. " It is not possible to learn the Vedas in the entirety even over many, many lifetimes. Paramesvara took pity on Bharadvaja for all his efforts to accomplish a task that was impossible to accomplish. Wanting to change his mind, Paramesvara caused three great mountains to appear, took a handful of earth and said to the sage: "The Vedas you have learned all these years are like this handful of earth. What you have yet to learn is vast, like these mountains. " It is believed that Vedagiri or Tirukkazhukkunram is the place where the Vedas appeared in the form of these mountains. When I was circumambulating the hill there, people accompanying me intoned instead, "Veda, Veda, Mahaveda".

The story of Bharadvaja occurs in the Kathaka of the Vedas. We learn from it that the Vedas are so infinite. The classification into the four Vedas and the one thousand or so recensions was a later development. Brahma came into being, his heart was filled with all Vedic sound. The Vedas showed him the way to perform his function of creation. he recognized that the sound of the Vedas pervaded everywhere. To him occur all Vedas. Only some mantras have revealed themselves to the sages and these constitute the Vedas that are our heritage.

At the time of chanting a mantra we usually mention the rsi associated with it, its chandas or metre and the name of the deity invoked. In the Telegu country they mention the three for all mantras. The sages learned the mantras with the power of concentration acquired through austerities. They were bestowed with celestial ears, so they could hear the mantras in space. It is said in the science of yoga that if our heart-space becomes one with the transcendent outward space we will be able to listen to the sounds in it. Only those who have attained the state of undifferentiated oneness of all can perceive them. It is in this way that the seers became aware of the mantras and made them known to the world. It must be remembered that they did not

create them. They brought us immeasurable blessings by making the mantras known to us.

If someone offers us water from the Ganga(Ganga-tirtha, Gangajal) we receive it, prostrating ourselves before him. The man did not of course create the Ganga, but all the same reverence him in recognition of the fact that he must have travelled a thousand miles to bring us the few drops of the holy water. We cannot adore the seers sufficiently for their having made us the gift of the mantras which are beyond the grasp of our ears. That is why before chanting a mantra we hold the sacred feet of the rsi concerned with our head.



### Mantrayoga

The fourteen worlds constitute an immensely vast kingdom. It has an emperor and all living beings are his subjects. This kingdom as well as its ruler is eternal and it has its own laws. If the kingdom and the king-emperor are eternal, the law also must be so. This law is constituted by the Vedas. Though the kingdom, the cosmos, is called "anadi", it is dissolved and created again and again. The only eternal entities are the Paramatman and his law, the Vedas.

The world comes into being, grows and is dissolved in the deluge. Thus it alternates between being and non-being. The emperor and the law remain eternal. At the time of every creation the emperor, the Paramatman, also creates authorities or "officials" and invests them with the yogic power necessary for them to function. In the yoga sastra is taught the truth that

one's ears are not to be differentiated from outward space. When we meditate on this truth we acquire a celestial ear. It is with this ear and with the grace of the Paramatman that the authorities appointed by him obtain the sound waves that are always present in outward space. They were the first to know the Vedas and they are the maharishis (the great seers or sages) of the mantras.

Vedic chanting is a mantrayoga. The vibration in each nadi creates certain feelings or urges in the consciousness. Sensual desire is aroused by some, sloth by some and sorrow by some others. To reverse this, when there is sensual desire there is a vibration in some nadis, and when there is anger there is vibration in some other nadis, and so on for each type of feeling or emotion or urge. We know this from actual experience. When we are at ease there is a special glow on our face and this glow is caused by some nadis being cool and unagitated. There is a saying "One's inner beauty is reflected outwardly on one's face". Our emotions cause their own reactions in our nadis. If we succeed in bringing the nadis under control we shall be masters of our urges and feelings. There will then be no need to depend on any external agency for the purpose.

One way of acquiring control over the nadis is the practice of Rajayoga of which pranayama is the most important feature. Mantrayoga is another. When we vocalize a syllable, the vital breath is discharged through the space intervening our throat, tongue, lips, the upper and lower parts of the mouth, etc. It is then that the syllable is voiced or the "aksara dhvani" produced. Vibrations are created in the nadis located in those parts of the body where the vital breath courses through as a consequence of the aksara-dhvani.

What are the Vedic mantras like in this context? Chanting them means only voicing such syllables as would cause beneficent vibrations of the nadis, beneficent vibrations that would produce such mental states as would lead to well being in this world and the hereafter and ultimately to liberation. No other type of vibration is caused by the chanting of the mantras.

What is a mantra? "Mananat trayate": that which protects you by being turned over again and again and again in the mind. By birth the Brahmin is invested with the duty of chanting mantras again and again and producing such vibrations in the nadis as would bring Atmic well being. Through the power of

the mantras he must create this well-being not only for himself but also for all creatures.

How are the mantras to be chanted so that we may master them and derive the full benefit from them? But first let us consider the faulty ways of chanting.

*Giti sikhri sirahkampi tatha likhitapathakah*

*Anarthajno lpakanthasca sadete pathakadhamah*

"Giti" means one who chants a mantra as he likes setting it to tune, as it were, like a raga. The Vedas must be recited only in accordance with the tones appropriate to them. "Sikhri" is one who hurries through a hymn. To derive the full benefit from the mantra the right matras must be maintained in the chanting. "Sirahkampi" denotes one who keeps shaking his head as the chants. There must be a certain poise about the man who chants the Vedas. The nadi vibrations must be such as are naturally produced in the course of the intonation. There must be no other vibrations. If the head is shaken as in a music recital the nadi vibrations will be affected. The "likhitapathaka" is one who chants, reading from the written text. As I have said so often the Vedas must be taught and learned without the help of any written text. The "anarthanjna" is one who does not know the meaning (here one who does not know the meaning of what he chants). All those belonging to these six categories are described as "pathakadhamah" belonging to the lowest types among those who chant the Vedas.



## Sound and Meaning

An interesting thought occurs to me here. In Sanskrit the suffix "taram" is used for the comparative degree. "Viryavat" means "strong", "Viryavat taram" means "stronger". It is said in the Chandogya Upanishad (1. 1. 10) that he who meditates on the truth of Omkara (Aumkara) with a knowledge of its meaning, will gain benefits that are "viryavat taram". The implication here is that those who practice such meditation without knowing the meaning will obtain benefits that are "viryavat". In his commentary on this Upanishad, Sankaracharya remarks that those who meditate on Omkara, even without grasping the principle behind it, will gain much benefit though it may not be the same measure as that gained by those who meditate on it knowing its meaning.

We may or may not know the meaning or significance of a religious rite, but we will be duly rewarded if we perform it in deference to great men who have urged us to do it or because we follow the example of our forefathers who have done it. What matters is the faith inspiring our action. This applies particularly to mantra upasana (worship through chanting mantras) more than to anything else. The reason is that in such worship the proper voicing of the syllables of the mantra and the vibrations created are what matter in bringing beneficial results. The meaning of the mantras comes later.

In this context it seems to me that performing a rite without knowing its meaning yields results that are "viryavat taram", that is more potent than performing it with a knowledge of its meaning (the benefits in the latter case are "viryavat"). The chanting of mantra, or the muttering of it, without

knowing it's meaning, is also more rewarding than chanting or muttering it knowing the meaning. How?

A man sends a petition to the collector through his lawyer. Another man, an unlettered peasant, has his petition written by somebody else but he personally hands it to the collector. He requests the official to treat his case sympathetically. The latter is moved by the man's simple faith and decides to help him. If we approach the collector through a lawyer and if he takes it amiss, he might turn against us. Also, if he finds that we have knowingly committed a wrong, he will have greater reason too to be displeased with us. But if he realises that we have committed a mistake unknowingly, he may be inclined to forgive us.

We must not refuse to perform a rite because we do not know its meaning, nor must we ask why we should perform what is prescribed in the sastras. Conducting a ritual without knowing its significance, it occurs to me, is "viriyavat taram".

You may take it that this observation of mine has not been made in any seriousness. But, when I see that intellectual arrogance and deceit are on the increase and that the ignorant are being deprived of their one asset, humility, it seems to me that doing things in mere faith is to be lauded.

You must, in fact, be intellectually convinced about the need to perform a religious duty and, at the same time, you must be humble. The mantras are the laws of the dharmasastras. If we knew their meaning we would be better able to live according to them.

The term "alpakantha" in the verse quoted above [in the previous chapter] means one who has a thin voice (one who chants the Vedas in a thin voice). The Vedic mantras must be intoned full-throatedly, sonorously and their sound must pervade space to the maximum extent possible.

The sound of the mantras does good to the man chanting them as well as to the listener by producing vibrations in the nadis of both. As it fills the air it will be beneficent both in this world and in the next. This is the reason why the Vedas must be chanted with vigour, so that their sound reaches the utmost limits possible.



## The Glory of the Vedas

The Vedas are eternal and the source of all creations and their greatness is to be known in many different ways. As I have already stated, their sound produces in our nadis as well as in the atmosphere vibrations that are salutary not only to our own Self but to the entire world. Here we must understand "lokakshema" or our welfare of the world to mean the good of mankind as well as of all other creatures. This concern for all creation that finds expression in the Vedas is not shared by any other religion. "Sanno astu dvipadesancatuspade"-- this occurs in a mantra: the Vedas pray for the good of all creatures including bipeds, quadrupeds etc. Even grass, shrubs, trees, mountains and the rivers are not excluded from their benign purview. The happy state of all these sentient creatures and inert objects is brought about through the special quality of the Vedas.

The noble character of their sound apart, the Vedas are also notable for the lofty truths that find expression in the mantras. The tenets of these scriptures have aroused the wonder of the people of other lands, of other faiths. They are moved by the poetic beauty of the hymns, the subtle manner in which principles of social life are dealt with them, the metaphysical truths embedded and expounded in them, and the moral instruction as well as scientific truths contained in them.

Not all mantras that create benign vibrations are necessarily meaningful. In this context we have the example of the music. The alapana of a raga (the elaboration of a musical mode) is "pure" sound, that is, it has no words, but it is still is capable of producing emotions like joy, sorrow, etc. During the

researches conducted by a university team, it was discovered that the vibrations created by the instrumental music quickened the growth of the plants and resulted in a higher yield. Here is a proof that the sound has the power of creation. Also to be noted is the fact that the instrumental music played to the plant does not obviously have any verbal contact--- this establishes that the sound has its own power.

The remarkable thing about the Vedas is that they are of immeasurable value as much for their sound as for their verbal content. While the sound has its creative power, the words are notable for the exalted character of the meaning they convey.

There are Tamil hymns of a very high order. To read them is to be moved by them; they touch our hearts with their intense devotion. But we have recourse only to a few of them for repeated incantation to expel a poison or to cure a disease. The authors of these hymns like Nakkirar, Arunagirinadhar and Sambandamurti have composed poems that are more moving and beautiful. But the sound of the hymns chosen for repeated incantation are potent like mantras. Among our Acharya's works are the Saundaryalahari and the Sivanandalahari. the recitation of each stanza of the Saundaryalahari brings in a specific benefit. The same is not said about the Sivanandalahari. The reason is the special mantrik power (of the sound) of the former.

There are mantras that are specially valuable for their sound but are otherwise meaningless. Similarly there are works pregnant with meaning but with no mantrik power. The glory of the Vedas is that they are a collection of mantras that are at once notable as much for the energising character of their sound as for the lofty truths they proclaim. A medicine, though bitter, does the body good, while some types of food, though delicious, do harm. Are we not delighted to have something like kusmanda-lehya, which is sweet to taste and is at the same time nourishing to the body? Similarly, the Vedas serve a two fold purpose: while they have the mantrik power to do immense good to each one of us and too the world, they also contain teachings embodying great metaphysical truths.

It must here be emphasised that on the doctrinal level the Vedas deal both with worldly life and the inner life of the Self. They teach how to conduct ourselves in such a manner as to create Atmic well-being. And their concern is not with the liberation of the individual alone; they speak about the ideals of



social life and about the duties of the public. How the Brahmin ought to lead his life and how the king must rule his subjects and what ideals women are to follow: an answer to these-stated in the form of laws-is to be found in these scriptures. The Vedas indeed constitute the apex of our law-books.



### Yajna or Sacrifice

I spoke about the glory of the Vedas, about the features that contribute to their greatness as a scripture. One such feature yet to be dealt with is yajna or sacrifice.

What is a yajna? It is the performance of a religious duty involving Agni, the sacrificial fire, with the chanting of the mantras. The word itself is derived from the root "yaj" meaning "to worship", to evince devotion. The performance of a yajna is meant to please the Paramatman and the various deities. Yajna is also called "yaga".

We have already seen the definition of the word "mantra" : "mananat trayate iti mantrah" (that which protects us by being repeated and meditated upon). "Tranam" means to protect. All of you must be familiar with the words in the gita: "paritranaya sadhunam" (to protect the virtuous). "Mananam" means repeating, turning over something in the mind. There is no need to vocalise the words of the mantra. Even if it is repeated mentally, healthy vibrations will be produced in the nadis. If the same --the Vedic mantra -- is chanted loudly ("Vedaghosa") it will give divine joy to the listeners even if they do not understand the meaning. Such a sound has the power to make mankind happy.

Mind, speech and body are dedicated to the Vedas when you mutter a Vedic mantra mentally and vocalise it outwardly during the performance of a rite involving the body. Of the Vedic rites of this kind yajna or yaga is the most important.



### Not in Other Religions

The concept of yajna or sacrifice is not present in other systems of worship. There is a big difference between our religion, the "Vedic mata", and other faiths. Religions like Christianity and Islam speak of one God. The Vedas too proclaim that there is but one God and that even an ordinary mortal is to be identified with him. This Paramatman, this Godhead, is to be realised as an experience by constant inquiry conducted with our inner being. It needs much wisdom and maturity to attain this state. When we unite with this one and only Reality, all those world disappears for us.

How do we prepare ourselves for such a state? The answer is: now itself, when we are deeply involved in worldly affairs. In the very midst of our mundane existence we must live according to the dictates of dharma and the teachings of the sastras. In this way our consciousness will be purified. We will become mature within and will be severed from the world. The duties and rites that will take us to this goal are enshrined in the Vedas. The most important of the rites is yajna. There is a very old Tamil word for it - "velvi". In yajna, offerings are made to different deities instead of to the one and only Paramatman. This sacrament is unique to our religion.

In a yajna we are enjoined to offer various materials in the sacred fire with the recitation of mantras. Making such offerings in the sacrificial fire is called "homa". Though the materials are placed in the fire it does not mean that they are necessarily offered to Agni. Only such materials as are placed in the fire with the chanting of mantras invoking Agni himself are meant for that deity. But the oblations meant for other deities like Rudra, Vishnu, Indra, Varuna, Matarisvan(Vayu), and so on are also made in the holy fire. Agni conveys them to the deities invoked. Just as letters addressed to various people are put in the same letter-box, the oblations meant for various deities are conveyed through one devata, Agni.

An important difference between the Vedic religion and other faiths is this: while followers of other religions worship one God we worship many deities and make offerings to them in the sacrificial fire.

We often say, don't we, that the Lord is pleased if we keep helping one another? Reformists forsake puja and ritual, saying, "Serving people, serving the poor, is as good as serving God". We will receive the Paramatman's blessings if we serve the devas also through sacrifices, for they too are His creation.

The Vedas proclaim that the one Brahman, call it the Truth or Reality, is manifested as so many different devatas or deities. Since each devata is extolled as the Paramatman we know for certain that monotheism is a Vedic tenet. It is wrong to believe that the Vedas subscribe to polytheism merely because they speak of many deities. In doing so they mean that the one and only Brahman is revealed as many deities. It is for the conduct of the affairs of the cosmos that the Paramatman has created the various divine powers. These (divinities) deities are also in charge of the forces of nature, the feelings and urges of man. The Supreme Godhead has created them in the same way as he has created us. He fashioned us out of himself - which means that he is that came to be so many human beings also.

This is the reason why non-dualism proclaims that the Paramatman and the jivatman (the individual self) are one and the same. In the same way, it is he who is manifested as the many deities. However, until we are mature enough to recognise the truth of non-dualism and realise it within, and until we reach the state in which we realise that we are not separate from the Paramatman, we have to perform rituals and help one another. In the same way the deities

are also to be looked upon as separate entities and are to be worshipped through sacrifices. This is the law of the Vedas.

If we and all other creatures are to be happy in this world, we must have the blessings of the deities who govern the cosmic forces. It is for this purpose, to propitiate and please them for their grace, that the Vedas impose on us the duty of performing sacrifices.

If we attain jnana, the wisdom to realise within the oneness of all, there will be no need for these deities. We may worship the Paramatman directly. However, so long as we make efforts to find release from this pluralistic cosmos, we have to worship the deities as separate entities.



### The Threefold Purpose of Yajna

The Vedic sacrifices have threefold purposes. The first is to earn the blessings of the deities so that we as well as all other creatures may be happy in this world. The second is to ensure that, after our death, we will live happily in the world of the celestials. But our stay in devaloka, the celestial world, is not for all time. It will last only until such time as we exhaust the merit earned by us in this world. The joy known in the celestial world is also not full or entire unlike the bliss experienced by great devotees and jnanins. It is nowhere equal to the bliss of the Atman: which is also described as "experiencing" Isvara.

Sankara has stated in his Manisa-Pancaka that the joy that Indra knows is no more than a drop in the ocean of Atma-ananda or the bliss of Self-

realisation. However, life in svarga, the paradise of the celestials, is a thousand times happier than life on earth with its unceasing sorrows. The second purpose of performing sacrifices is to earn residence in this paradise.

The third purpose is the most important and it is achieved by performing sacrifices, as taught by the Gita, without any expectation of reward. Here we desire neither happiness in this world nor residence in paradise. We perform sacrifices only because it is our duty to invoke the blessings of the Gods for the welfare of the world. In this way our consciousness will be cleansed, a pre-requisite for enlightenment and final liberation. In other words the selfless performance of sacrifices means that we will eventually be dissolved in the Paramatman.

Sankara, who has expounded the ideals of Self-realisation and jnana, says: "Vedo nityam adhiyatam taduditam karma svanusthiyatam" (Chant the vedas every day. Perform with care the sacrifices and other rites they enjoin upon you). The Acharya wants us to conduct sacrifices not for happiness in this world, nor for the enjoyment of the pleasure of paradise. No, not for any petty rewards. Sankara exhorts us to carry out Vedic works without our hearts being vitiated by desire. This, according to his teaching, is the way to make our mind pure in order to realise the Self.



### [The Celestials and Mortals Help Each Other](#)

The sacrifices, you will have seen, are of the utmost importance to our Vedic religion. The Lord himself has spoken about them in the Gita. When Brahma created the human species he also brought the yajnas or sacrifices into

existence, bidding mortals thus: "Keep performing sacrifices. You will obtain all good fortune. May these sacrifices of yours be the cow (Kamadhenu) that grants you all you desire"

*Saha-yajnah prajah srstva puro'vaca Prajapatih*

*Anena prasavisyadhvam esa vo'stvista-kamadhuk*

If we assume that Brahma "created humans and with them sacrifices", it is likely to be construed that he first created human beings and then sacrifices. But actually it is stated in the Gita that Prajapati created yajna along with humankind (saha-yajnah prajah srstva). Yajna is mentioned first and then praja (mankind).

Since the mantras of the Vedas are the source of creation, the vibrations produced by chanting them will bring the divine powers invested with the authority of performing certain functions. To recite such mantras at a sacrifice is like writing the address on an envelope. It is by performing homa in this way that the oblation is conveyed to the deity invoked by Agni.

The dog is stronger than the cat, the horse stronger than the dog, the elephant stronger than the horse, and the lion stronger than the elephant. To extend this sequence, who are stronger than men? The devas, or celestials. While in this world they remain dissolved in the five elements, in the celestial world they exist in a visible form. Those who have obtained siddhi or perfection by chanting the mantras can also see them in their gross form in their celestial abode besides receiving their blessings in their subtle form. The gods emanated from the Paramatman as a result of the vibrations produced by the mantras. We may therefore describe the mantras as the "sonic" form of the deities.

The deity appears during a sacrifice when he is invoked with mantras. Those who are wise and mature will perceive them with their eyes. Even if they do not, the power of the deities will be subtly revealed to them. However, offerings cannot be made directly to them. When you write a letter you have to stick a stamp on it or put the seal of the registrar. According to the "regulations" of the Vedas, any oblation intended for the celestials must be offered in the sacred fire in a form acceptable to them.

What remains after the sacrificial fire has consumed the offering ("yajnasista") is taken as prasada by the performers of the sacrifice. The question is asked: how does the same reach the deities invoked? We should not entertain such doubts. The deities are not like us created of the five elements. So they do not require food in the gross form. Even in our case the food we eat is burned (digested) by the gastric fire. Its essence alone is conveyed to all parts of the body in the form of blood. The subtle essence of the offerings are conveyed by the sacrificial fire to the deities invoked.

You know how a toast is proposed to the guest of honour at a dinner or banquet. The host and invitees drink to his health. This means that, when a group of people drink or eat ceremonially, the benefit goes to someone else. Do you ask how this is possible? Such things can be explained only on the basis of a certain mental attitude. Good intentions and good thoughts have their own creative power.

When the thought waves of the Paramatman have come to us in the form of mantras, they must truly be pregnant with the utmost power for good. The offerings made to the deities with the chanting of mantras will increase their strength. The celestials are of course strong but they are neither almighty nor full. They too have their wants and desires and these are met by the sacrifices performed by us. If they help us by making our mundane existence happier we have to help them by performing sacrifices. If we conduct yajnas so that they may flourish, they will in return bless us with well-being. Sri Krsna says in the Gita:

*Devan bhavayata'nena te deva bhavayantu vah*

*Parasparam bhavayantah sreya param avapsyatha*

Our religious texts are replete with accounts of how people have merited the grace of Isvara and pleased the celestials by performing sacrifices.

If the celestials bring us rains, bless us with food, health, etc, why should we perform sacrifices so as to provide them with food, we are asked. " Why should we feed the deities when we ourselves are dependent on them for our food and clothing? Why cannot they manage to obtain food on their own? How would you explain the Lord's statement (in the verse quoted above), 'Parasparam bhavayantah'? To say that we must regard the celestials as

great beings and make obeisance to them seems reasonable enough. So let us worship them. But, instead of this, why are we seemingly elevated and placed on an equal footing with them? What is the meaning of our being told: 'You sustain them and let them sustain you - you feed them by performing sacrifices and let them bless you with rains'? "

When I consider such questions, it seems to me that the world of the celestials is like England and that they themselves are like Englishmen. Is there much agricultural land in England? No. Yet Englishmen lorded it over the world. They boasted: "The sun never sets on our empire. " What was the secret of their world dominance?

England is poor in food resources. It has plenty of coal and chalk - coal that is black and chalk that is white. These are the main resources of Englishmen but they cannot eat them. If machines and factories are to be installed in countries where food crops are grown in plenty, they will need a lot of coal and chalk. That coal is essential to industry is well known. (Petrol and electricity came later. Now there is atomic power also. ) For some industries like cement, chalk (limestone) is essential.

Englishmen thought up a shrewd plan. They induced other countries to start factories using machinery and fomented new, unnecessary desires among people there. And they sold lumps of coal and chalk to these countries and got in return foodgrains, cotton, etc, in abundance. In this way they brought country after country under their heel.

There are no agricultural lands in the celestial world. The vedas have no means to feed themselves. "Durbhiksam devalokesu manunam udakam grhe", so it is said in the first prasna (first part) of the Taittiriya Aranyaka. Rain is produced when the clouds precipitate. It is only on earth that rain can be made use of - it fills the rivers, lakes and wells. The celestials have to come to our households for water. On earth alone there is plenty because of cultivation carried on by irrigating the fields. There is famine in the celestial world since it has no agricultural land: this is the meaning of the words quoted from the Aranyaka.

However, we need the grace of the gods if we are to be blessed with rains. To deserve such grace we must perform sacrifices. Otherwise there will be no rains on earth. The result will be famine or the rain will fall into the sea and



not on land, or it will be either ativrsti (too much rain) or anavrsti (no rain). We have to depend on the denizens of the celestial world to send us the right quantity of rain to create abundance on this planet.

Just as England has plenty of coal but does not have sufficient agricultural land, the celestials have an abundance of grace but no crops to grow - they cannot also sustain themselves with their power of grace. Because they send us rain we are able to raise crops and sustain ourselves. For our part we can enhance their power of grace by chanting the Vedas. The oblations offered in the sacrificial fire with such chanting become their nourishment.

Our country grows cotton. When our spinning mills did not prosper, the English took our cotton to Lancashire, made "nice" cloth and sold it to us, making in the process four times profit. The celestials produce rain for us from the water vapour formed from our own seas. But, unlike the English, they do not make any profit out of it (in the transaction). In fact the blessings they give us are far more than the sustenance we give them. As I said earlier, the celestials are much stronger than we are. The Lord has assigned us the duty of performing various rites and the celestials have to find satisfaction in them. By doing so, it seems, he has raised us to the level of the celestials. "Parasparam bhavayantah" he says in the *Gita*. The gods and mortals support each other.



### The Capacity to Work and the Capacity to Protect

The Lord has endowed us with the capacity to work and the celestials with the capacity to protect. There is a similiar division of functions in this world also.

The field and the factory are associated with labour. The police station, the lawcourt and other offices have the function of protection. The administrative offices are meant to ensure that what is produced in the field and in the factory is made available to the households in an equitable manner. The offices do not "produce" anything, nor do they have any crops to harvest. They are free from the noise of the machines and from crowding and dust. Those who work in an office need not make their hands and nails dirty and can spend their time sitting comfortably on chairs with the fans whirling over them. There is hardly any bodily exertion-it is all pen-pushing. The celestial world is like this: it is the office that affords protection to all the worlds. We do not find fault with people who man offices for not ploughing the fields or operating the machines. If they start doing such work, they will not be able to do their duty of protecting us. The celestials resemble these officials.

The earth is the field as well as the factory. It is all slush and mud, all din and noise, and it is oily, sticky, dusty. We have to toil here all day long. Performing the rites according to the canons means suffering all this, like the smoke of the sacrificial fire, exhaustion due to fasting-indeed you have to sweat through the elaborate rites.

The Lord does not regard the celestials as belonging to a higher plane nor does he think that we mortals belong to a lower one. The peasant and the factory worker produce food and other articles. The official sitting stylishly in his cubicle will starve and will be denied essential goods but for the work done by the peasant and the factory hand. All the same, it is because of the protection afforded by the official that the corn harvested by the farmer and other essential articles produced by the factory worker are made available to all members of society.

The engineer gives the order to dig irrigation canals. The agricultural officer supplies pesticides. , Another official issues the license to start a factory. The government, which means also the police, assists in the just distribution of the goods manufactured by it. (It is for this purpose that the government is constituted, no matter how it functions in practice. ) Thus it is a system in which one is dependent on another. A contributes to B's happiness and B to A's.

It is against such a background that we have to consider the words of the Gita, "Parasparam bhavayantah". Though the devas look to us for our help, it

must not be forgotten that they belong to a higher plane and that we must be respectful towards them.

In other religions the one God is worshipped directly by all. They do not have a system of sacrifices meant to please a number of deities. Among us, only sanyasins worship the Paramatman directly. Others have to please and propitiate the various deities and obtain well-being through their blessings. It is to please the deities that we perform a variety of sacrifices.

A big king is not directly approached by all. The subjects have their favours granted by the officials appointed by him. These officials do not function on their own; they look after the welfare of the people under royal orders. Some customs of our religion are reminiscent of such a system. Paramesvara is the supreme king-emperor. We, human-beings, are his subjects. Varuna, Agni, Vayu and such celestials are his officials. We have to obtain a number of benefits through them and we perform sacrifices with a view to enhancing their power to do us good. The oblations we make in the sacrificial fire constitute their food:"Agnimukhah devah".

We say "na mama" (not mine) when we offer any material in the sacred fire. Such an oblation is consumed by Agni and conveyed to the celestials invoked. It is thus that they obtain their sustenance. In this way we also propitiate our fathers(pitrs), those belonging to our vamsa or clan. The Vedas contain directions about how rites meant for pitrs are to be performed.



[Rites for Celestials and Rites for Fathers](#)

The rites meant for the deities must be performed with devotion and those meant for the pitrs or fathers must be performed with faith. What is done with devotion is yajna and what is done with faith is sraddha. While performing the former, the sikha must be gathered into a knot and the sacred thread must rest on the left shoulder, and while performing the latter the sikha must be worn loose and the sacred thread must rest on the right shoulder.

The sikha and the sacred thread are meant for these two purposes. Sannyasins do not have either. When they renounce the world they also renounce the rites for the fathers and cease to worship a number of deities. They adore the Paramatman directly without any worldly desire in their hearts. The followers of other religions too wear neither a sikha nor a sacred thread and they worship the Supreme God directly [that is without going through the stages in which the various deities are worshipped].

Let me tell you about the two positions of the sacred thread while performing the rites for the celestials and the fathers. We must face the east as we conduct various rituals. The north is the direction in which we make the passage to the celestials. This path is called "'uttarayana". Our departed fathers reside in the south. The saint-poet Tiruvalluvar calls them "tenpulattar", those dwelling in the south. "Dakshinayana" is the way to the world of the fathers. Bhagavan Krsna speaks of the two paths in the Gita.

When we sit facing the east to perform rites for the pitrs, which shoulder is to the south? The right one. So the sacred thread must rest on it.

To do "pradakshina" means to go facing the south. (In majority of temples the raja-gopuram-the main entrance tower -is in the east. When you enter it and start circumbulating you will be facing the south. )

When we sit facing the east to perform rites for the gods our left shoulder is to the north. So the sacred thread must rest on it. When we are not engaged in either of these two rites- that is when we are doing our office work or something else- the sacred thread must not rest on either shoulder and must be worn like a garland. (No one seems to observe this rule in practice now. Except during the rites for the fathers, most people have their sacred thread resting on their left shoulder. )



## The Purpose of Sacrifices

Why is it that religion alone has the rites called yajnas or sacrifices?

If a crop grows in surplus in our place we trade it with what is available in plenty in another and is not produced in our own. The carpenter, the blacksmith and other artisans make useful articles and serve us in many ways. In return we give them what they need for their upkeep. We feed the cow grass and it yields us milk. We pay the government taxes and it gives us protection. The affairs of the world are conducted on the basis of a system of exchange. Similarly, we conduct an exchange even with worlds other than our own. Engineers and other experts can canalise water obtained from the rains but they cannot produce the rains. If we want the rains to come, we have to despatch certain goods to the abode of the celestials. It is this kind of exchange that the Gita speaks of:

*Devan bhavayatanena te deva bhavayantu vah*

*Parasparam bhavayantah sreya param avapsyatha*

It means: " You keep the devas satisfied with the performance of sacrifices. And let them look after your welfare by producing rain on earth. Thus, helping each other, be more and more prosperous and happy. "



### Is Sacrificial Killing Justified?

A yaga or sacrifice takes shape with the chanting of the mantras, the invoking of the deity and the offering of havis (oblation). The mantras are chanted (orally) and the deity is meditated upon (mentally). The most important material required for homa is the havis offered in the sacrificial fire-- in this "work" the body is involved. So, altogether, in a sacrificial offering mind, speech and body (mano-vak-kaya) are brought together.

Ghee (clarified butter) is an important ingredient of the oblation. While ghee by itself is offered as an oblation, it is also used to purify other sacrificial materials - in fact this is obligatory. In a number of sacrifices the vapa(fat or marrow) of animals is offered.

Is the performance of a sacrifice sinful, or is it meritorious? Or is it both?

Madvacharya was against the killing of any pasu for a sacrifice. In his compassion he said that a substitute for the vapa must be made with flour and offered in the fire. ("Pasu" does not necessarily mean a cow. In Sanskrit any animal is called a "pasu". )

In his Brahmasutra, Vyasa has expounded the nature of the Atman as found expressed in the Upanishads which constitute the jnanakanda of the Vedas. The actual conduct of sacrifices is dealt with in the Purvamimamsa which is the karmakanda of the Vedas. The true purpose of sacrifices is explained in the Uttaramimamsa, that is the jnanakanda. What is this purpose or goal? It

is the cleansing of the consciousness and such cleansing is essential to lead a man to the path of jnana.

The Brahmasutra says: "Asuddhamiti cen na sabdat". The performance of sacrifices is based on scriptural authority and it is part of the quest for Self realisation. So how can it be called an impure act? How do we determine whether or not an object or an act is impure or whether it is good or bad? We do so by judging it according to the authority of the sastras. Vyasa goes on to state in his Brahmasutra that animal sacrifice is not sinful since the act is permeated by the sound of the Vedas. What is pure or impure is to be known by the authority provided by the Vedas or rather their sound called Sabdapramana. If sacrifices were impure acts according to the Vedas, they would not have accepted them as part of the Atmic quest. Even if the sacrificial animal is made of flour (the substitute according to Madhvacharya) it is imbued with life by the chanting of the Vedic mantras. Would it not then be like a living animal and would not offering it in a sacrifice be taken as an act of violence?

Tiruvalluvar says in his Tirukkural that not to kill an animal and eat it is better than performing a thousand sacrifices in which the oblation is consigned to the fire. You should not take this to mean that the poet speaks ill of sacrifices.

What is in accordance or in pursuance of dharma must be practised howsoever or whatsoever it be. Here questions of violence must be disregarded. The Tirukkural says that it is better not to kill an animal than perform a thousand sacrifices. From this statement it is made out that Tiruvalluvar condemns sacrifices. According to Manu himself conducting one asvamedha (horse sacrifice) is superior to performing a thousand other sacrifices. At the same time, he declares that higher than a thousand horse sacrifices is the fact of one truth. If we say that one thing is better than another, the implication is that both are good. If the performance of a sacrifice were sinful, would it be claimed that one meritorious act is superior to a thousand sinful deeds? You may state that fasting on one Sivaratri is superior to fasting on a hundred Ekadasis. But would you say that the same is better than running a hundred butcheries? When you remark that "this rite is better than that rite or another", it means that the comparison is among two or more meritorious observances.

In the concluding passage of the Chandogya Upanishad where ahimsa or non-violence is extolled you find these words, "Anyatra tirthebhyah". It means ahimsa must be practised except with regard to Vedic rites.

Considerations of violence have no place in sacrifices and the conduct of war.

If the ideal of non-violence were superior to the performance of sacrifices, it would mean that "sacrifices are good but non-violence is better". The performance of a thousand sacrifices must be spoken of highly but the practice of non-violence is to be regarded as even higher: It is in this sense that the Kural stanza concerning sacrifices is to be interpreted. We must not also forget that it occurs in the section on renunciation. What the poet wants to convey is that a sanyasin does better by abstaining from killing than a householder does by conducting a thousand sacrifices. According to the sastras also a sanyasin has no right to perform sacrifices.

There are several types of sacrifices. I shall speak about them later when I deal with "Kalpa" (an Anga or limb of the Vedas) and "Grihasthasrama" (the stage of the householder). What I wish to state here is that animals are not killed in all sacrifices. There are a number of yagnas in which only ghee (ajya) is offered in the fire. In some, havisyanna (rice mixed with ghee) is offered and in some the cooked grains called "caru" or "purodasa", a kind of baked cake. In agnihotri milk is poured into the fire; in aupasana unbroken rice grains (aksata) are used; and in samidadhana the sticks of the palasa (flame of the forest). In sacrifices in which the vapa of animals is offered, only a tiny bit of the remains of the burnt offering is partaken of - and of course in the form of prasada.

One is enjoined to perform twenty-one sacrifices. These are of three types: pakayajna, haviryajna and somayajna. In each category there are seven subdivisions. In all the seven pakayajnas as well as in the first five haviryajnas there is no animal sacrifice. It is only from the sixth haviryajna onwards (it is called "nirudhapasubandha") that animals are sacrificed.

"Brahmins sacrificed herds and herds of animals and gorged themselves on their meat. The Buddha saved such herds when they were being taken to the sacrificial altar," we often read such accounts in books. To tell the truth, there is no sacrifice in which a large number of animals are killed. For vajapeya which is the highest type of yajna performed by Brahmins, only



twenty-three animals are mentioned. For asvamedha (horse sacrifice), the biggest of the sacrifices conducted by imperial rulers, one hundred animals are mentioned.

It is totally false to state that Brahmins performed sacrifices only to satisfy their appetite for meat and that the talk of pleasing the deities was only a pretext. There are rules regarding the meat to be carved out from a sacrificial animal, the part of the body from which it is to be taken and the quantity each rtvik can partake of as prasada (idavatarana). This is not more than the size of a pigeon-pea and it is to be swallowed without anything added to taste. There may be various reasons for you to attack the system of sacrifices but it would be preposterous to do so on the score that Brahmins practised deception by making them a pretext to eat meat.

Nowadays a large number of animals are slaughtered in the laboratories as guinea-pigs. Animal sacrifices must be regarded as a little hurt caused in the cause of a great ideal, the welfare of mankind. As a matter of fact there is no hurt caused since the animal sacrificed attains to an elevated state.

There is another falsehood spread these days, that Brahmins performed the somayajnas only as a pretext to drink somarasa (the essence of the soma plant). Those who propagate this lie add that drinking somarasa is akin to imbibing liquor or wine. As a matter of fact somarasa is not an intoxicating drink. There is a reference in the Vedas to Indra killing his foe when he was "intoxicated" with somarasa. People who spread the above falsehoods have recourse to "arthavada" and base their perverse views on this passage.

The principle on which the physiology of deities is based is superior to that of humans. That apart, to say that the priests drank bottle after bottle of somarasa or pot after pot is to betray gross ignorance of the Vedic dharma. The soma plant is pounded and crushed in a small mortar called "graha". There are rules with regard to the quantity of essence to be offered to the gods. The small portion that remains after the oblation has been made, "huta-sesa", which is drunk drop by drop, does not add up to more than an ounce. No one has been knocked out by such drinking. They say that somarasa is not very palatable. .

The preposterous suggestion is made that somarasa was the coffee of those times. There are Vedic mantras which speak about the joy aroused by drinking

it. This has been misinterpreted. While coffee is injurious to the mind, somarasa cleanses it. It is absurd to equate the two. The soma plant was available in plenty in ancient times. Now it is becoming more and more scarce: this indeed is in keeping with the decline of Vedic dharma. In recent years, the Raja of Kollengode made it a point to supply the soma plant for the soma sacrifice wherever it was held.



### [Animal Sacrifice in the Age of Kali](#)

An argument runs thus: In the eons gone by mankind possessed high ideals and noble character. Men could sacrifice animals for the well-being of the world because they had great affection in their hearts and were selfless. They offered even cows and horses in sacrifice and had meat for sraddha. As householders, in their middle years, they followed the karmamarga (the path of works) and performed rites to please the deities for the good of the world. But, in doing so, they desired no rewards. Later, they renounced all works, all puja, all observances, to become sannyasins delighting themselves in their Atman. They were men of such refinement and noble character that, if their brother, a king, died heirless they begot a son by his wife without any passion in their hearts and without a bit detracting from their brahmacharya. Their only motive was that the kingdom should not be plunged in anarchy for want of an heir to the throne.

In our own Kali age we do not have such men who are desireless in their actions, who can subdue their minds and give up all works to become ascetics and who will remain chaste at heart even in the company of women. So it is contended that the following are to be eschewed in the Kali age: horse and

cow sacrifices, meat in the sraddha ceremony, sannyasa, begetting a son by the husband's brother. As authority we have the following verse:

*Asvalambham gavalambham sanyasam palapatrikam*

*Devarena sutotpattim kalau panca vivarjayet*

According to one view "asvalambham" in this verse should be substituted with "agniyadhanam". If you accept this version it would mean that even those sacrifices in which animals are not killed should not be performed. In other words it would mean a total prohibition of all sacrifices. The very first in the haviryajna category is agniyadhana. If that were to be prohibited it would mean that, apart from small sacrifices called "pakayajnas", no yajna can be performed.

According to great men such a view is wrong. Sankara Bhagavatpada, whose mission in life was the re-establishment of Vedic dharma, did not stop with the admonishment that Vedas must be chanted every day ("Vedo nityam adhiyatam"). He insisted that rites imposed on us by the Vedas must be performed: "Taduditam karma svanusthiyatam." Of Vedic rites, sacrifices occupy the foremost place. If they are to be eschewed what other Vedic rites are we to perform? It may be that certain types of sacrifices need not be gone through in the age of Kali.

If, according to the verse, agniyadhana is interdicted, and no big sacrifice is to be performed in the age of Kali, why should gavalambha (cow sacrifice) have been mentioned in the prohibited category? If agniyadhana is not permissible, it goes without saying that gavalambha also is prohibited. So, apart from certain types, all sacrifices are to be performed at all times.

According to another verse quoted from the Dharmasastra, so long as the varnasrama system is followed in the age of Kali, in however small a measure, and so long as the sound of the Vedas pervades the air, works like agniyadhana must be performed and the sannyasasrama followed, the stage of life in which there is no karma. The prohibition in Kali applies to certain types of animal sacrifices, meat in sraddha ceremonies and begetting a son by the husband's brother.



## The One Goal

Briefly told, a yajna is making an oblation to a deity in the fire with the chanting of mantras. In a sense the mantras themselves constitute the form of the deities invoked. In another sense, the mantras, like the materials placed in the fire, are the sustenance of the celestials invoked. They enhance their powers and serve more than one purpose. We pay taxes to the government. However, the various imposts - professional tax, land tax, motor vehicles tax, and so on - are collected by different offices. There are also different stamp papers for the same. Similarly, for each karma or religious work there is an individual deity, a separate mantra, a particular material, etc, but the ultimate goal of all these is dedication to the Supreme God. We know that different departments are meant for the same government. Similarly, we must realise that the sacrifices performed for the various deities have behind them one goal, the Paramatman.

The king or president is not personally acquainted with us who pay the taxes. But Paramesvara, the Supreme Monarch, knows each one of us better than we know ourselves. He also knows whether we pay the taxes properly, the taxes called sacrifices. Paramesvara cannot be deceived.

As mentioned before, for each sacrifice there are three essential requirements: the mantra, the material for oblation, and the deity to be invoked, the three bringing together speech, hand [body] and mind.



### Those who conduct Sacrifices

One who performs a yajna or sacrifice spending on the material and dakshina is called a "yajamana". "Yaj" (as we seen already) means to worship. The root meaning of "yajamana" is one who performs a sacrifice. In Tamil Nadu nowadays we refer to a "mudalali" as yajaman. It is the mudalali who pays the wages. So it is that we have given him the same place as the yajamana who pays dakshina in sacrifices. That even common folks refer to the mudalali as yajaman shows how deep-rooted the Vedic culture is in the Tamilland.

There is another word which also testifies to the fact that Tamil Nadu is steeped in the Vedic tradition. A place where people are fed free is called a "cattiram" by Tamils. In the North the corresponding word for the same is "dharamsala"(dharmasala).

How would you explain the use of the word cattiram in the South? It is derived from "sattram" which is the name of a type of Vedic sacrifice. In other sacrifices there is only one yajamana who spends on the material and the dakshina. The priests recieve the dakshina from him and conduct the sacrifice on his behalf. In a sattra all are yajamanas. As we have mentioned earlier any sacrifice brings benefits to all mankind and also serves to cleanse the mind of all those who participate in it - even those who witness the rites are benefitted. But the merit accrues chiefly to the yajamana.

The speciality of a sattra is that all the priests conducting it are yajamanas. It is a kind of socialist yajna in which the merit is equally shared. From this type of sacrifice has originated the term signifying a place or establishment

where anyone can come and eat as a matter of right. In a cattiram the one who feeds does not consider himself superior to the one who eats. There is reason to believe that satras had a special place in the tradition of Tamil Nadu.

Among the rtvik Brahmins there are three classes. The "hota"(hotr) chants the rks, the hymns from the Rgveda in praise of the deity, invoking the devata to accept the oblation. Because of the high place accorded to him in a sacrifice we hear even today the remark made with reference to anyone occupying a high position, "hota".

The Rgveda is replete with hymns to various deities. The Yajurveda contains mostly the methods and directions for the conduct of sacrifices. The Brahmin who looks after the conduct of the sacrifice is the "adhvaryu". The "udgata"(udgatr) intones the mantras of the Samaveda to please the deities. There is a Brahmin supervising the sacrifice and he is called the brahma.

The Vedas themselves are called "Brahma". That is why one who learns them (the student) is called a "brahmacharin". The supervisor of the sacrifice, brahma, performs his function in accordance with the Atharvaveda. Thus the hota, the adhvaryu, the udgata and the brahma represent the four Vedas in a sacrifice. In later times, however, the opinion emerged that the brahma is not connected with the Atharvaveda to the same extent as the hota, adhvaryu and udgata are connected respectively with the Rg, Yajur and Sama Vedas. In actual practice also we see that those taking part in sacrifices are conversant with the first three Vedas only and not with the Atharvaveda. For this reason the view is put forward that all sacrifices, from the somayaga to the asvamedha, are to be performed only on the basis of the Rg, Yajur and Sama Vedas.

There are sacrifices which come independently under the Atharvaveda. According to Valmiki's Ramayana, Indrajit performed the Nikhumbhila sacrifice mentioned in this Veda. The other three Vedas have a far wider following. Though we customarily speak of the four Vedas (Caturveda), the Rg, Yajur and Saman are bracketed together and specially spoken of as "Trayi".

(There are three types of sacrifices mentioned in the Atharvaveda: "santikam" for peace; "paustikam" for strength; and "abhicharikam" to bring injury to enemies).