

a practice of beggary at the feet of a noble ideal, however transcendental it may be but he defines it openly as a constant and consistent effort at raising the ego centre from the welter of its false values to the memory and dignity of Selfhood.

In thus, defining bhakti, Śaṅkara cannot be criticised, at least not by those who understand what he says. Bhakti as it has come down to us today, represents almost a superstitious conception, stinking in its decadence, a moral dread, a disgusting intellectual slavery, a crawling mental attitude, a blind dependence upon a supreme God to take us away from all our self-created mischief. So, we find a self ruined society being faithfully courted by a profit seeking priest class, functioning generally from spiritually polluted centres, which have come to be called temples. Those who visit temples with seeming symptoms of devotion, after psychoanalysis, are found to be a set of helpless personalities with neither the courage to face life nor the conviction to renounce, neither the mental stamina to live nor the intellectual vigour to enquire, neither the imagination to believe nor the daring to disbelieve. They are mainly a crowd of men flocking towards the sanctum, half in fear and half in deluded hopes.

Such a devotee, in the presence of his brimstone raining God who will be angry at every weakness of the mortal, but can be a convenient abettor of the devotee's own criminal intentions in society and life, cannot be expected to grow spiritually or to gain any satisfaction from his religion. This is an ugly caricature of the great theory of bhakti as expounded by Vyāsa in his *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*. According to the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* God-devotion has been described as para-anurakti, the supreme unquestioned, unmotivated love for the Lord, which seeks no reward.

As Khalil Gibran beautifully puts it, 'Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but itself, love possesses naught, nor would it be possessed, for love is sufficient unto love.' This being so, the best of love is in the lover's attunement with the

beloved. The attunement is successful to the degree the lover identifies himself with the beloved.

Thus, identification is the measuring rod of love. When the identification is complete, love is fulfilled. Identification of the little ego with all its weaknesses, imperfections and limitations, with the absolute Reality, Perfection, Bliss, Knowledge, is achieved through a constant remembrance of the nature of the Self. When the finite ego gets released from its false notions of limitations, it discovers itself to be nothing other than the Supreme and in this self-discovery, it experiences complete identification with the Self. Then alone is love entirely fulfilled.

This process is accomplished through a constant awareness of the Divine in us, which can be maintained only if we maintain in ourselves an unbroken stream of divine thoughts. So *anusandhāna* when it is unbroken, it increases the frequency of divine thoughts in us and when the frequency of such thoughts comes to the degree of frequency with which the ego-idea now persists in our hearts, we shall be able to experience the Divine as intimately and freely as we experience now our egocentric life.

Therefore, when we re-read the verse with a correct understanding of the practical implication of *ātma-vicāra* and the suggestions of *bhakti-mārga*, we find that Śaṅkara is only too right when he says that for those who want to walk the path of knowledge and reach the Ultimate, the most efficient technique is *bhakti*, restated in its correct meaning.

