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VOICE OF THE GURU

JAGADGURU SRI CANDRAŚEKHARENDRA SARASVATĪ SVĀMĪ

THE GURU TRADITION



2008

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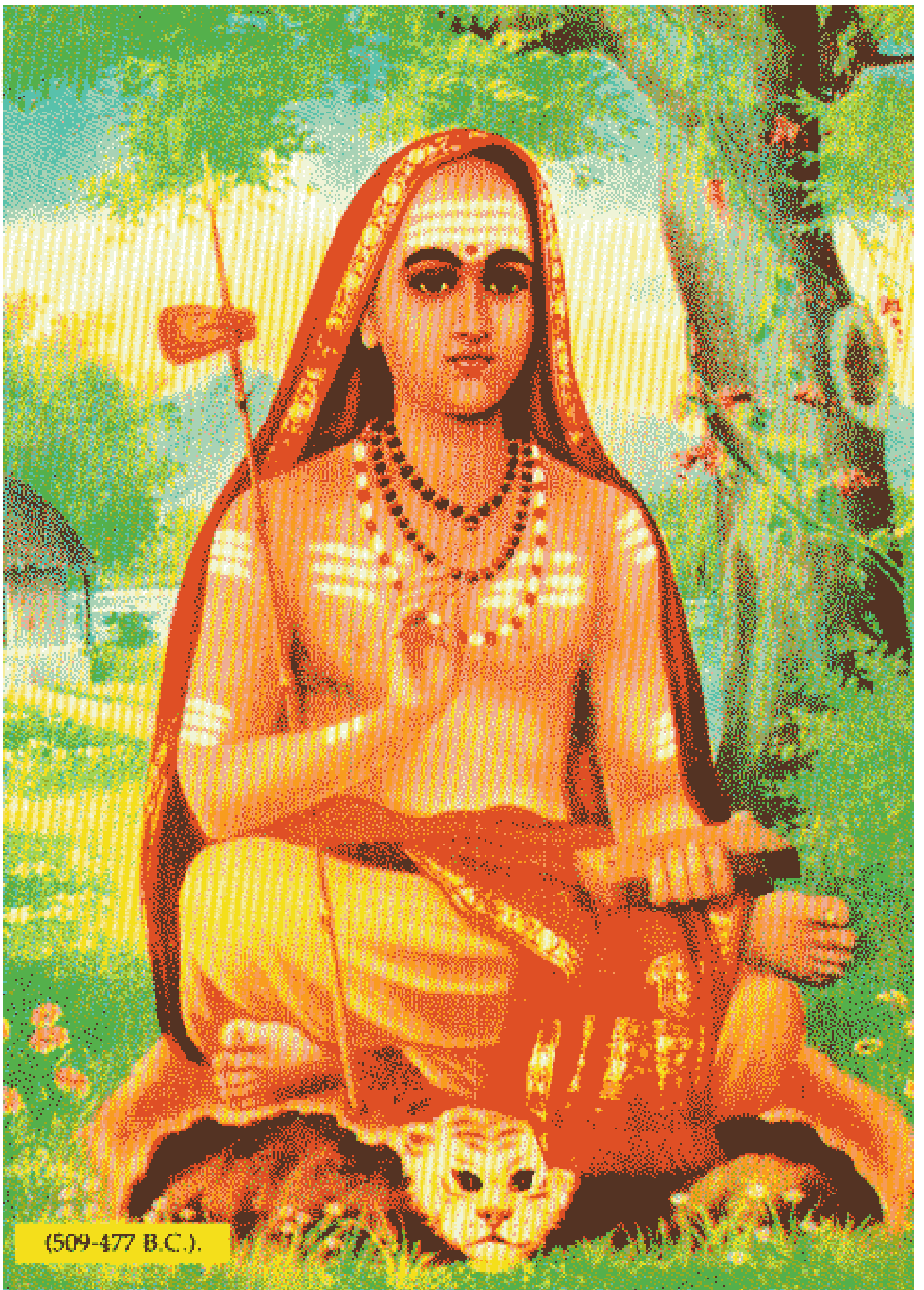
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FOREWORD

Guru according to Hindu way of thinking is an incarnation of God in human form for the Shishya. God is universal, the Guru is personal in relationship. Education in the true sense enlightens the person undergoing the process. The inner eye does not open and learning does not get transformed into knowledge until the blessings of the Guru are showered.

Shri Jagadguru Chandrasekharendra Saraswati is accepted by His devotees as a living God. People close to Him adore Him as a Jiwan-Mukta. The fortunate ones among the people have his darshan. Those who have the privilege of living around Him are the blessed.

The Jagadguru has been living all through His life for the benefit of mankind. He takes the load off from everyone who goes with his woes to Him.

"Voice of the Guru" contains the blissful advice of the great Jagadguru for the people of the world. Liberal and benevolent, the Master does not discriminate between religion and religion. Himself the greatest living seer of today, He proceeds to give a taste of good living to mankind.

These parables are very apposite, thought-provoking and impressive. The message goes direct to the heart and achieves the purpose.

When made available to the reader in the printed form, Voice of the Guru is bound to provide outstanding reading material of loftier quality and enduring value.



(Ranganath Misra)

॥ श्रीः ॥

Introduction

This volume of the *Voice of the Guru*¹ is an excellent translation of the lectures on Guru-tattva – the concept of the Educator – delivered in Tamil by Pujyasri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Svami, Acharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha, popularly known as “Periyaval”, during the long sojourn of the Acharya in the metropolitan city of Madras and its suburbs between October 1957 and about the end of the year 1959. The translation into English has been done by R.G.K., formerly assistant editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.

I feel that I am quite unsuited to the noble task of writing an introduction to this work. 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 apology for an introduction.

It may not be out of place to state here that my ears have been fortunate to hear some of the discourses that are found translated in this book. It has been a still greater good fortune for me to have listened to the Great Acharya’s remarkable lectures on a variety of subjects delivered at the Sanskrit College, Mylapore, Madras, during the last three months of 1932. These lectures, which I prefer to call by the name of “Rain of Pearls” and which were listened to with rapt attention and in utter silence by a vast concourse of people comprising leading jurists, erudite scholars, officials and students, not to speak of ordinary men and women of all ages, cannot but still be ringing in the ears of those who had the opportunity to hear them and are still alive.

The translation of the speeches on the Guru-tattva printed in this volume is elegant. It is so simple as can be easily understood. The Gurudeva’s discourses on the concept of the Guru covered in this work encompasses the entire ambit of preceptors and teachers from the sage-gurus, the preceptors of gurukulas of the distant past and adhyapakas of pathasalas down to the college professors and schoolteachers of the present time. The patient reader will not fail to note the wide gulf separating the value-based, devoted, disciplined and systematic study that prevailed in olden times – with the consequent attainment by the student of good and perfect knowledge for its own sake – and the educational set-up of today which is devoid of any affectionate or intimate contact between teacher and taught and which has for its aim the securing of degrees – deservedly or otherwise – as passports to mere material prosperity with the resulting decay in human values and the rise of problems like indiscipline in our educational institutions.

The Acharya’s radiant face further lighted up with a smile whenever he made a humorous remark. These occasions find mention in this work. While speaking of the Paramaguru’s smile, I am reminded of the observations of Arthur Koestler, author

¹ The present volume is the first in a projected series in English of the discourses delivered by the Sage of Kanchi in Tamil.

of *Darkness at Noon* and other works, who had an interview with our Great Acharya in Madras on January 10, 1959. Mr Koestler writes:¹ "... a smile transformed his face into that of a child. I had never seen a comparable smile or expression; it had an extraordinary charm and sweetness. Later, on my way back, I wondered why in Western paintings of saints entranced, blessed or martyred, I had never encountered anything like that enchanted smile." And it is to be noted that the above three sentences are the words of a foreign scholar who spent only about a couple of hours with the Sage of Kanchi.

Translating matter spoken or written in one language into another is a hard task. R.G.K. must be congratulated on his having translated the Acharya's discourses into English for the benefit of those who cannot read them in the original Tamil. It is my humble request to teachers and students of colleges as well as schools to get a copy of this valuable work and reap the rich benefit of going through it.

I would like to conclude by offering prayers to the Divine Mother of the Universe and to the Sage of Kanchi to grant my friend a long, healthy and prosperous life for producing further volumes of our Gurudeva's discourses rendered into English.

A. KUPPUSWAMI

Kanchipuram,
October 8, 1990

¹ From *The Lotus and the Robot*

Translator's Note

This is a time of social and intellectual ferment in India. Western education, with its Judaeo-Christian bias, has produced during the past two centuries a large number of rootless people throughout the land who function as the ruling class. The rise of nationalism admittedly inspired a certain degree of pride in the heritage of the nation but it was an empty pride since there was no serious effort to understand this heritage or to rediscover elements in it to be applied in practical life.

During British rule, those who took part in the national movement believed, not without reason, that European colonialism was responsible for most of our ills. But today political freedom has not succeeded in rousing the creative energies of the nation; on the contrary, it has led to a weakening of the social structure and to much discord and mental indolence. While we have not made much headway economically or culturally, we have morally so declined as to be unworthy of our past. Some hold the view that India has lost something of itself. No, not just something. The fear is that India has lost that which makes India India or, in plain terms, India has lost – or is in the process of losing – its very spirit.

How can India regain itself or how can India become India again? This is a question that our leadership has been reluctant to answer. Indeed our leaders do not even ask the question. India can regain itself only through education. Not through any education. But through national education, national vidya; that is by following the tradition of our hallowed system of education with its emphasis not only on knowledge but on character. People who speak eloquently about our culture often forget that it is the guru tradition that has given the country its true character and made it glorious. And this work is all about guru and shishya and vidya. It is about man discovering his true nature and about the function of the guru in making him free, in making him himself.

The translator too has been a victim of the ills of his generation. He is acquainted to a small extent with Western thought and literature and has been exposed to modern science and psychology and modern social and political movements. These have produced painful conflicts in his mind and he has groped for a meaning in life. It was in the course of his humble quest of his roots and an understanding of his heritage as an Indian that he came under the spell of Bhagavan Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Svami. He turned to him for light as the authentic voice of Hinduism, as the authentic voice of India. He at once realised that the Great Acharya was a universal man, a universal guru, one who transcended all considerations of sect and religion and country. Indeed, to use a Jungian term, the Jagadguru seemed to him a numinous figure.

Pujyasri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Svami is adored by millions of his devotees as "Periyaval" (a Tamil word meaning "the Great One") or as "Maha-Periyaval". He is one of the most attractive gurus of modern times, one of the most inspiring, one so godlike and yet human. His very presence in our midst is reassuring as a dispeller of darkness and ignorance and sorrow. The translator

can do no better than reproduce what he wrote about the Great Acharya in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* ten years ago:

He is cast in a classic mould and the term *taptakanchana*, burnt gold, comes to mind when I think of him. And there is also something feminine about him reminding me of Amba, the universal mother, and her compassion. He has unusually large ears and his feet are the feet of a master worthy of being touched. But, above all, it is his eyes that contain all the goodness and saintliness and wisdom of the teacher.

It is difficult not to be attracted by such a teacher. We talk glibly of charisma with reference to political leaders. To say that the Acharya possesses charisma, magic or magnetism is to downgrade him. To be with him even for a few moments would be a means of *chittasuddhi*, the cleansing of the consciousness which also is the way to *jnana* or enlightenment. For those who are specially devoted to him, even to think of him can be a mystical experience...

There is no better way of gaining an insight into Hindu thought than reading the discourses of Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati. Here you become acquainted with a great mind and a luminous spirit. The myths and symbols of our civilisation acquire a profound meaning in his explanations. And our gods and goddesses, petrified in the hands of unimaginative worshippers, become lively with a wave of the magic wand of his interpretations. He uses tradition creatively, imaginatively, and he has points of view that are refreshing... Above all, he does not stand for one sect, not even for one religion. He is a universal man and a man for all time. He is a great unifier of our time, one who can reconcile different and opposing systems...

The range of the Acharya's mind is amazingly vast. He is naturally a master of the religious and philosophical traditions of India. But, at the same time, he has a remarkable grasp of other fields like mathematics, astronomy, science, architecture, archaeology, history, art, literature, linguistics, music, dance, the folk-arts. But it is not his astonishing erudition alone that makes the Sage of Kanchi a great guru but his insight, his intuitive grasp of the inner meaning of things and his capacity to illumine. He does not merely speak about the Brahman. He knows the Brahman and thus he is the Brahman: *Brahmavid Brahmaiva bhavati*. The whole point of his teaching is *anubhava*, that is the realisation of knowledge, the realisation of the Self.

The Great Acharya is the finest example of what he himself says in these discourses about the function of the guru. Like Brahma the guru creates *jnana* in his disciple; like Vishnu he nourishes the *jnana* that he has created in him; and like Mahesvara he destroys his ignorance. Thus he releases his sishya from the bondage of worldly existence and unites him with the Great Light or the One and Only Reality.

This work on the Guru Tradition is a translation of the Sage of Kanchi's discourses on Guru-tattva contained in the second, third, fourth and fifth volumes of

the Tamil *Daivattin Kural* ("Voice of God" or "Voice of Divinity") published by Vanati Patippakam, Madras. Sri Ra. Ganapati has done what must surely be a monumental job by compiling the discourses delivered by the Great Acharya in the course of more than two generations. It needs not only scholarship but devotion of a high order to bring together the Gurudeva's lectures. In this noble task he has been helped by numerous devotees who had taken care to note down the discourses or otherwise to remember them. Alas, it has not been possible to find out the names of all these devout men and panditas. The translator bows to them for having preserved *Guruvartta*. We must also be grateful to the publisher of *Daivattin Kural*, Sri A. Tirunavukkarasu of Vanati Patippakam.

It was with the utmost diffidence that the translator approached his work. The Great Acharya has himself remarked about the difficulties – and hazards – of translation. While speaking about the importance of learning the Vedas in their original language and form and also of preserving them as such, the Svamiji says:

"What does it matter if the Vedas are in Sanskrit? They could be translated," so it might be thought. Nowadays many books are being translated into various languages. In the process the original form or character of the works is changed or distorted. If the words spoken by an individual are preserved in the original their meaning will be fully understood if not today at some time later. If there is a beautiful word to convey an idea in one language, there may not be an equivalent, equally beautiful, in other languages. And sometimes it may be necessary to express the idea conveyed by that word in a roundabout manner. It may be that the opinion expressed through the original word in its original context may not come through in the translation. Secondly, there is the further disadvantage of the translation being circumscribed by the knowledge or mental make-up of the translator. The translation done by one man may not seem correct to another and the latter may be persuaded to attempt his own translation. The translation of a work will be in accordance with the viewpoint of the translator and his proficiency in the two languages concerned. A number of translations of the same work are likely to appear and we may be at a loss to know which of them is acceptable. We will thus be obliged to go back to the original.

The translator of the present work is not proficient either in Tamil or in English and his knowledge of Sanskrit is extremely limited. Naturally he found his job daunting. In the opening stanzas of the *Raghuvamsam* Kalidasa says that his attempt to recount the story of the Raghu dynasty is like trying to voyage across an ocean in a small ferry-boat. It would be ridiculous on the part of the translator to compare himself even remotely to the great poet. However he will say this: he took the plunge into the vast ocean of thought of the Paramaguru without knowing how to swim even in a little pond. He was out of his depth throughout but he was encouraged by the belief that with the *aru¹* of the Great Acharya – which of course he hardly deserved – he would be able to sustain himself. But he would like to add

1 This beautiful Tamil word means grace or blessing.

that one who takes the plunge into this ocean would like to remain immersed in it to partake of its bliss.

The translator is conscious of the inadequacies of his work. He has not succeeded in reproducing the vigour, simplicity and beauty of the original. The discourses are in a rich conversational Tamil and some of the colloquialisms are untranslatable. The Paramaguru's mother tongue is Kannada¹ but his knowledge of Tamil is such as to take one's breath away. In his discourses two streams mingle together beautifully, the Sanskrit and the Tamil, providing eloquent testimony to the common heritage of India. How to reflect all this in a translation, all the shades of meaning, all the nuances of the original?

The translator wished to be as faithful to the original as possible. A "free translation" would have perhaps made the work more readable. But that would have meant distortion of the original. It was decided not to sacrifice accuracy for elegance: the translator is unsure about how far he has succeeded in truly reflecting the voice of the Paramaguru. *Guruvachana* to be *Guruvachana* must be preserved in the original. Any translation, especially by an incompetent hand like the present translator, would mean trifling with it. The translator hopes that the clumsy job he has made of his work will be reason enough for more talented devotees of the Paramaguru to attempt better translations. (As a matter of fact good translations of some of the Acharya's discourses are already available.)

The lectures included in this work must have been given at different places and in different years. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to give an indication of these. The reader is perhaps likely to feel that there are repetitions but there was no question of "editing" them out because even the *apparent* repetitions serve to shed fresh light on some aspect or other of Guru-tattva or vidya. The Sage of Kanchi is a great story-teller. He often rambles along, takes a diversion, goes into lanes and bylanes. He covers a vast territory without the listener (or the reader) being aware of it – because the Jagadguru takes him on his travels with such skill. And with what supreme art does the Acharya return to his main theme. Only a guru like him can connect things the way he does, connect things that seem to have no connection otherwise. For him there are no compartments of knowledge.

The translator found strength in the belief that he had the blessings of Pujoyasri Jayendra Sarasvati Svami of Kanchi and Pujoyasri Sankara Vijayendra Sarasvati Svami of Kanchi, though he hardly merited them.

Sri Ranganath Misra, Chief Justice of India, is not only a jurist of distinction but one steeped in Indian culture and philosophy. That a man of his wisdom, learning and devotion – he is a great devotee of the Sage of Kanchi – found the time to write the Foreword is indeed fortunate. The translator is in deep debt to him.

¹ On second thoughts it does not seem right to ascribe any particular language to the Paramaguru as his mother tongue. As a universal guru all languages are like his mother tongue. As a matter of fact the Acharya is a master of a number of languages, Indian and foreign.

Sri Mettur Swamigal is one of the gentlest and kindest of souls the translator has known. He in fact exudes serenity all round. He made valuable suggestions for this work and was a great source of encouragement. Sri A. Kuppuswami, a great devotee of the Paramaguru, was throughout associated with the translation. He is a man of remarkable learning and conversant with Indian thought and traditions. There are few as self-effacing as he is and few as perspicacious. He is besides a lucid interpreter of the Great Acharya's teachings and one who follows them in practice. Sri Kuppuswami was an unfailing guide, always available for consultation. Without his help this work would have remained unfinished. The translator is greatly indebted to him but it must be made clear that the translator alone is responsible for all the shortcomings of this book.

The translator should not fail to mention a number of friends who have been associated with this work – and they are all devotees of the Paramaguru. Sri P.N. Krishnaswamy, formerly of *The Economic Times*, and the translator have worked for many years in the same newspaper publishing house. It was he who brought the translator to the sacred presence of the Paramaguru for a long audience. It was he who initiated talks with the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for the publication of this book.

Sri V. Krishnamurthi, the dynamic secretary to Kamakshi Seva Samithi, has always been a support, organising help for the translator at every step and bringing him cheer whenever things did not seem to go smoothly for the translation. There is hardly anyone who has toiled for this work as much as Sri R.S. Mani. He did a wonderful job of making a "fair copy" of the original typescript of the translation with all its corrections which he alone could decipher. He also did an astounding amount of leg-work. Without his ungrudging help this book would not have appeared in time.

It is fitting that Bhagavan Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Svami's discourses on guru and vidya should be published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The Paramaguru is himself a repository of Bharatiya vidya and one of his main concerns is the preservation and propagation of this vidya. Sri S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, generously agreed to print and publish this translation. He was always gentle and courteous and ever helpful. Sri Ramakrishnan has done much for the spread of Bharatiya vidya himself and is now identified with the institution founded by Kulapati K.M. Munshi. We are indebted to him as well as to Sri T. Parameshwar, Joint Director of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, and an administrator of great drive.

Thanks are due to Sri K.V. Gopalakrishnan (General Manager of BVB's Books Sales and Publications Division) and his colleagues Sri Rajan Pillai and Sri S. Shankar (both printing executives). A dedicated team of workers and artists have also helped in the production of the book. Sri G. Srinivasan did a fine job of composing and correction.

In all humility the translator places this work at the sacred feet of Jagadguru Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Svami. Let us in reverence repeat before him what the Paramaguru himself says in the concluding part of this work. He prays to the guru in the same way as Sri Sankara Bhagavadpada prays to Mata Lakshmi in the *Kanakadharastavam*:

Guro, we wish to have nothing other than our namaskara to you as our wealth. We do not want to possess anything else. We do not want to have the right to anything else. The act of namaskara must always abide with us. There is no other possession or asset or wealth we own other than that of laying our body down before you and offering our heart at your lotus feet.

Tasmai Sri Gurave namah

"CHINNAVAN"

Bombay.

June 11, 1991

Words and Meanings – Spelling and Pronunciation

The difficulty of translating the word “dharma” into English or any other language is universally admitted. But there are a great number of other Indian words that are equally difficult to translate. Are there exact equivalents to “Ātman” and “Brahman”? Or take another word for example, “upadeśa”. Do you comprehend by it “imparting a lesson”, “teaching” or “giving advice”? Is there a substitute for the word “guru” in any other language? In this work “teacher” and “preceptor” are used as approximations. The fact is each word, whatever the language, has a “personality” of its own and is not easy to define. Lewis Thomas, a distinguished biologist who is also interested in linguistics, has said somewhere that the ambiguities of speech contribute to the richness of a language. (What the Paramaguru himself has spoken about the difficulties and hazards of translation is quoted in the “Translator’s Note”.)

Often the words in the original Sanskrit are retained in this work and, as often, their English equivalents are used. Is “God”, which word belongs to the Semitic tradition through not etymologically, an exact equivalent of “Īvara”? This is a question that has troubled the translator throughout. Words like “God” and “spiritual” come in handy and it is difficult to avoid their use. But the translator recognises that “spiritual” does not convey fully what is meant by “concerning the Ātman” or “relating to the Ātman”. At the same time “Ātmaic” would be a hybrid formation which is also not euphonious. The translator faced such problems all through.

The reader is requested to note

Sanskrit words, since they occur throughout, are not italicised in this work. But names of works in Sanskrit (as well as works in other languages like Tamil) are italicised. But the names of classics like the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Bhagavadgītā (or the Gītā) are not italicised. The word “Upanisads” appearing by itself is not italicised but the names of particular Upanisads are.

No uniform style is adopted in spelling Sanskrit words. Words like “sannyāsin”, “Ātman”, “Brahman”, “brahmacarin” are used in their stem form, but other words like “karma” and “raja” in the nominative singular.

“Sannyāsin” instead of “sarṇnyāsin” is preferred. So too “Śankara” instead of “Śaṅkara”. “Brāhmin”, which is better understood with reference to the first varṇa, is used instead of the more strict “Brāhmaṇa”; also “Brāhminic” as in the phrase “Brāhminic lustre”.

The Hindi “darshan” is sometimes used instead of “darśana”.

The word “vidyā-s” in plural sounds somewhat odd; that is why the hyphen. Similarly “bhakti-s”.

“Ācārya” with a capital “A”, unless otherwise indicated, refers to Śrī Śankara Bhagavadpāda (Ādi Śankara).

“Paramaguru” refers to Śrī Caṇḍraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmin, Ācārya of the Kāñcī Kāmakoti Pīṭha.

To ensure correct pronunciation, Indian words (Sanskrit, Tamil, etc) are transliterated with diacritical marks. Here is a guide:

ā	(आ)	as in ācāra, vidyā, Umā
ī	(ई)	as in Īṣvara, Sītā, Pārvati
ū	(ऊ)	as in Ūrmīla, pūjya, Pūrvamimānsā
r	(ऋ)	as in Ṛgveda, Kṛṣṇa, grhasṭha
m	(-)	as in samskāra, hamsa, Mīmānsā
h	(ः)	as in namaḥ, guruḥ, Viṣṇuḥ
c	(च)	as in ācāra, caraṇa, citta, Cāṇakya
ch	(छ)	as in chatra, Chandas, Chāndogya
ñ	(ञ)	as in jñāna, Pañcakṛtya
t	(ट)	as in ghaṭikā, kukkuta
th	(ठ)	as in kamaṭha, pāṭha
ḍ	(ड)	as in bādham
ṅ	(ण)	as in Kṛṣṇa, vīṇa, bāna
ś	(श)	as in Śiva, Śakti, śākha
ṣ	(ष)	as in aṣṭaka, saṣṭi, Sanmukha
l	(ळ)	as in aru/, Tamil, Vaḷḷuvar
kṣ	(क्ष)	as in Lakṣmī, Kṣatriya, rākṣasa

If some Sanskrit words are hyphenated it is only to make them easier to read.

In case a second edition is printed we hope to include an Index in it as well as brief notes on the saints, poets and historical characters referred to in the text. A glossary of Indian words appears at the end.



वटमूले सुरगसीनं निन्दुद्वाङ् तमोन्दुदम् ।
सन्तसीदिन्दुनं वन्दे दक्षिणास्ये जगद्गुरुम् ॥

CONTENTS

Foreword by Sri Ranganath Misra, Chief Justice of India	i
Introduction	iii
Translator's Note	v
Words and Meanings	xi
PART ONE	1 to 28
Story of a king and a queen -- Guniparampara -- The subject of "Dravida" -- The hunter is the king : the jiva is Brahman -- Devotion to the guru -- Gurukulavasa -- Surrender above all	
PART TWO	29 to 52
Guru, acharya -- Who is a guru? -- The "inward" guru and the "outward world" -- Diksha -- The grace of Ambika is diksha -- Many paths for the same fulfilment -- Guru and acharya : the two are the same -- Acharya is Isvara -- Follow the family dharma -- The gods as students -- Adi Sankara's guru-bhakti--Disciples of Sankara -- In the Ramanuja sampradaya - Guru-bhakti among Sikhs	
PART THREE	53 to 97
Guru, acharya, "vattiyar" -- The Vedic connection -- Upadhyaya and acharya -- Teaching for a livelihood -- Guru and acharya : they are the same and yet different -- Learning at home and in the gurukula -- How mother and father are great -- The guru young in years -- Mother, father, teacher--Adhyapaka -- How the upadhyaya got "promoted" -- Teaching : worship of Isvara -- "Receiving" -- What other countries do not have -- Good "secular" teachers too -- Better than institutionalised -- Kulapati -- The rise of the ancient teaching system -- Language, a discipline of sound -- Teaching without writing -- Kula, sakha, chhatra, charana -- Guru-dakshina -- The arts and sciences of old -- Dharma and the Brahman -- All subjects are Vedic -- Education for all castes -- Compulsory education -- The deserving alone -- Education in later times -- No caste bias -- Vidya and the fourth caste -- The supreme gift of knowledge -- Length of terms -- Why upakarma for grihasthas? -- Holidays -- Is it right to beat a student -- Qualities of a student -- Promoting health -- Individual teachers mostly -- The individual teacher and his greatness -- Drawbacks of institutional education -- Examples in the Upanishads -- Sraddha, pariprasna -- Testing students -- Gurupatni or guru's wife -- Taught by divine powers, but... -- Independent thinking -- Krishna and his acharyas -- Learning by questioning -- The guru is moulded by the disciple -- The gurupithas -- A sannyasin who is on his own and a pitha-guru	
PART FOUR	99 to 134
Institutionalism : Sankara's work for a necessary evil -- Big educational institutions of old -- The new religions and big educational institutions -- Peculiar circumstances -- Different syllabuses -- Two different stories -- Brahmins during the Buddha's time -- Kshatriyas and Brahmins -- How the fourth varna respected the Vedic tradition -- National unity fostered by Vedic dharma -- Advaita and the state -- Restraint even in conflict -- Opposition based on knowledge -- The big schools and the new religions -- Gurukulas for Brahmins -- "Manava", "Manakkan" -- System of labour not affected -- Buddhism and Jainism never took root on a nationwide basis -- Leadership and the common people -- The great work of Adi Sankara -- Comparing past and present -- Buddhist - Jaina education	

PART FIVE

135 to 184

Big Vedic universities -- The gurukula elements in big schools -- Kanchi as a centre of education -- "My research" regarding ghatikas -- Why the name "ghatika"? -- The antiquity of ghatikas -- Stone temples -- The temple and the ghatika -- In the eight century -- Format of a sasana -- 7,000 students -- In Andhra and Karnataka -- In the Chola land -- In Maharashtra -- "Ghatika" and "ghatikara" -- Ghatikachalam -- Rewarded at last -- In Prayaga in the 5th century BC -- Light on name -- A little bit of Sanskrit -- Appropriateness of the pot -- Vedic schools in Tamizhakam -- Atharvaveda -- Respect for many sastras -- The Vedas and Agamas -- Harmony -- Temples and vidya -- Pride and shame -- A plan for national vidya -- The right method -- Village statistics -- The essential statistics -- Literacy and crime -- Is education necessary? -- White men and Muslims -- In the communist countries -- Vidya and humility -- Gurukulavasa to curb "aham" -- Why not possible? -- Responsibility of the public -- For the progress of Veda-vidya -- Learning and money -- Bhikshacharya -- Preserving the ideal -- Weekly meal -- One or two enough -- "Their" sacrifice and "our" sacrifice -- Vedabhashya, Vedanga, Vedanta -- Comparative philosophy -- Similarities and dissimilarities -- The Puranas -- Agama-sastra -- Vastu-sastra -- Silpa-sastra -- Village arts, folk-lore -- Moulding teachers for ancient arts and sciences -- Vidya that transcends the laws of nature -- Medical science -- Yoga-sastra -- Only theory, no practice -- Vedanta -- What is to be done -- Learn and teach -- Propaganda -- Financial aid and social prestige -- Be vidvans all of you -- To curb "aham" -- Be a learner, not an idler -- When most people were vidvans -- Age no bar to learning -- Not through the state -- Support for half knowledge -- A request to vidvans -- Ideal scholars -- For the future -- Make it part of life -- Gurukulavasa in all fields -- May Amba bless us all

PART SIX

185 to 227

Isvara and guru : the enduring legacy -- Devotion to Isvara and the guru -- Jnana realised -- The intellect and the heart -- The Vedas, reasoning and experience -- Two bhaktis? -- Isvara, giver of the "fruit" -- Two types of compassion? -- The one recipient of all obeisance -- One bhakti and one kripa -- "Yasya deve para bhaktih" : meaning of the verse -- Isvara or guru? -- Human nature and the desire for change -- Exclusive devotion : the ideal -- Exclusive devotion : the difficulties -- Isvara as guru and guru as Isvara -- How to accept the guru as Isvara -- Noteworthy aspects of guru worship -- "Yathoktakari" -- The "divine desas" of Kanchi -- Origin of Pallavas -- Saivism and Vaishnavism under the Pallavas : the Vaikuntha Perumal temple -- The Perumal of Tiruve'ka : his greatness -- Story of Kanikannan -- Bhagavan did as bidden -- The guru who fetches Isvara -- Somasimara Nayanar -- Sundaramurti -- The ways of the great -- The riverside amaranthus -- The test of Isvara -- Even if the guru be imperfect -- Advantages of guru-bhakti -- Three attitudes -- Isvara's grace as reward for guru-bhakti -- Guru and sishya : symbols of two great dharmas -- Isvara's grace -- Knowledge through the guru

PART SEVEN

229 to 268

Gurumurti and Trimurti : the three Murtis not understood as the Supreme Godhead -- Temples for Brahma? -- Why no puja for Brahma? -- Idols in Vaishnava temples -- Brahma in the Agamas -- Brahma's function is one of kindness -- Rudra, Siva (Sivam, Nataraja), Mahesvara -- In Vaishnavism -- "Gurave namah" -- Why namaskara? -- No offering made for the three functions -- Deities that are supreme -- Why exception for Brahma -- The inclusion of Brahma among the Trimurti : the reasons -- Why Sarasvati has no temple -- Savitri, Gayatri, Narada -- Brahma in the guruparampara -- No reason for namaskara -- True meaning of the "Gurur-Brahma" verse -- Worthy of namaskara -- Guru as the Parabrahman -- The one who has reached the other shore -- Sankara's definition of an acharya -- The guru as Brahman : still entitled to namaskara -- The namaskara that is itself wealth -- Father, mother -- Blessings of namaskara -- A correction -- Not for "me" alone -- Guru of the three worlds -- Guru vandana and nindana -- Guru's exertions

Cover by Padmashali

॥ श्री गुरुभ्यो नमः ॥

Story of a king and a queen

Once upon a time there was a king. And, if there was a king, there should naturally have been another king in the story who was his foe and the conflict between the two must have inevitably led to war. So it was that the king in our story was confronted by another king in battle and, as luck would have it, defeated by him.

Some kings, unable to face the humiliation of defeat, give up their lives on the battlefield itself. For them the choice is between victory now or heaven earned through dying a valorous death. There are other kings who, on suffering defeat, flee the scene of battle and go into hiding. It does not necessarily mean that such rulers are not valorous enough. Remember the tiger that lunges forward to pounce upon its prey also crouches. Similar is the case with kings who suffer defeat in war. They go into hiding in order that they might later avenge their defeat. There are instances of gallant Rajput kings, who valued their honour above all else, having gone into hiding during times of Muslim onslaught to gather an army big and strong enough to face the enemy.

The king in my story was also one who, when he saw defeat staring in his face, did not kill himself but fled the battlefield. He rode away taking with him his wife who was then pregnant. In those times too people went "underground" as they do now. Our king's most trusted minister did the same, realising that his master had escaped with his queen.

As the fleeing king was riding towards the forest, his enemy despatched his cavalrymen to give chase to him. The unfortunate fugitive realised that the enemy's men were in hot pursuit and would catch up with him. In desperation he looked around and saw the hovel of a hunter near by. At once a plan formed in his mind. Getting off from the horse along with his queen, he said to her: "The enemy will not spare me. They are so many in number that it would be futile for me to fight. My end is certain, but you must not perish with me. Listen. You are now going to have a child and, may be, it will be a son. He will grow up and one day vanquish our enemy and restore our kingdom to our dynasty. Faithful wife, though you are, do not die with me. It would be nobler for you to continue to live, rear our child and fulfil my wish. Take refuge in this hunter's hovel and somehow sustain yourself."

What the king had suggested was painful beyond measure for the queen to carry out, but she well knew the royal dharma with its code of honour and could not go against her husband's wishes. "What the husband says is law for a wife, the Veda for her. Were he to ask me to die I would have been ready to die. Now, when he himself prefers death to life, he tells me, 'Don't die, you must live'. I must respect his wish". So thinking, she consoled herself somehow and went into the hunter's hovel.

The enemy's men caught up with the king – that was the end of his story. They

The Guru Tradition

did not know that he had, during his flight, taken his queen with him. He had not minded exposing himself to danger and had kept his queen concealed in front of him so that the cavalymen would not know that she too was astride the horse. So, naturally, without looking for the queen they departed, happy in the thought that they had accomplished their mission.

In the hunter's dwelling lived his old mother and she heartily welcomed the queen who was in advanced pregnancy. The poor and the unlettered are usually more helpful and more trustful than the learned and the so-called civilised. The old woman cared for the queen, treating her like one sprung from her loins. In due course, a son was born to the queen but she herself died in the childbirth, as if she had fulfilled her duty, and there was no more to be done.

Years passed. The usurper king still ruled the land. But the subjects were not happy. They did not know that their rightful ruler, after suffering defeat, had escaped with his wife and that a son had been born to her in the forest.

They bore their hardships with fortitude. Only the minister, who had gone underground, knew about the escape of the royal couple. He thought to himself: "If, by the grace of God, a son has been born to the queen and if he is growing up somewhere, he must now be twelve years old. The hereditary heir to a king is old enough to lead an army at twelve years, to wage wars and to rule his land with the advice of his minister. Let me look for the prince and train him as best as I can in the arts of war. Later the subjects will join together to get rid of the usurper under his leadership."

So the minister secretly formed a group and searched for the old king's child. He chanced upon the hovel of the hunter. There he saw among the children a boy who seemed to him a prince in the attire of a forest-dweller, wearing tiger's claws and playing with the other children. His face had the lustre of one born to a king and indeed he resembled the old king in appearance. So the wise minister's suspicions were aroused. The old woman, the hunter's mother, was still living. The minister approached her in disguise and asked her about the boy. You see the forest tribals are guileless, truthful people and are devoid of intrigue. The old woman told the minister the story of the pregnant woman who had come to them for refuge and how she had died during the childbirth without having revealed her identity. "I myself have been mother to the child," she told the minister, "and am bringing him up. Although we could guess that he was an heir to royalty, we could not discover his identity. So we have brought him up as one among us, as one of our own." The minister at once put two and two together and realised that it was the prince of his land who was growing up here.

The minister revealed the identity of the boy to the hunter's family and said he wanted to take him away with him. The hunters found it difficult to part with the boy, because of the affection they had formed for him during these years they had brought him up. Why, even great sages like Kanva and Jadabharata suffered because of attachment of one kind or another. They could not easily get over their affection for their foster-children. Eventually, the hunter's family, recognising that

The Guru Tradition

the question raised pertained to royal affairs, agreed to part with the boy in a spirit of sacrifice.

The prince was playing with the hunters' children and he refused to go with the minister. He preferred the company of the hunters to that of this big man. "These are the boys of my hunter's clan. I cannot come with you leaving them," so saying he left to join his companions.

But the minister did not give up and getting hold of him again told the boy the truth about him. "You are a prince," the minister said to him. "Before your birth, the king, your father, who had come here as a fugitive was killed. And, after giving birth to you in the hunter's dwelling, your mother too passed away. Since then you have been growing up here. You are born to rule a kingdom, my prince. We want to recover the kingdom from the usurper and for that purpose we want to fight with him under your leadership. You are born to occupy a position far more elevated than now. Will you say no to it?" Thus speaking the minister roused the inborn valour of the boy and his filial affection, and inspired in him the determination to recover the kingdom that was rightly his.

Once he had realised that he was a prince he grew in strength, acquired the dignity of appearance and lustre natural to him by birth. It was now easy for him to learn the arts of war.

With the help of the minister, the prince gathered together an army, and the loyal subjects, enthused by the fact that a scion of the ruling family was there to lead them, joined him in strength.

Loyalty to the king is different from the sort of loyalty witnessed in this republican age. Now some individual or other is idolised as a leader and a lot of noise made by holding countrywide demonstrations in his favour. And before long the same leader is cast away. Loyalty to the king was more enduring and was based on sincerity of feeling. To deserve such loyalty the kings too cared for their subjects as if they were their own children and functioned in a disciplined manner. Hereditary monarchs were different from those who suddenly find themselves rulers and, having tasted power, act according to their whim, against all norms of dharma. Even if some kings found themselves rulers all of a sudden, like the prince in this story, their inborn goodness and sense of discipline saved them from acting whimsically and contrary to the welfare of their subjects.

In the Purāṇas there are instances of kings who acted against kingly dharma like Veṅa and Asamanjasa. But such instances are one or two in a hundred and it must be remembered that kings like them were thrown out by the subjects themselves. Altogether, it was a case of like king, like subjects. The rājās as much as the prajā (the subjects) were anxious not to offend against dharma.

"Are those who make laws themselves men of right conduct and action and do they submit themselves to the laws of the One, that is Parameśvara, who is above all man-made laws and is king of all the three worlds?" such a question naturally arises in our minds. It is only when the ruler and the ruled are bound by the dharma or the laws of the Lord that the well-being of the world is ensured. Such was the case in the

The Guru Tradition

old days when the ruler as well as the ruled showed us the path of dharma by both becoming subservient to it. This was how people naturally, as if by instinct, felt a deep sense of loyalty to the kings. "They are *my* people," so felt the rājā and "He is *our* king," so felt the people.

To come back to my story. When the people concerned knew that the prince was preparing to vanquish the usurper in battle according to the plan of action drawn up by the minister, they got ready for the fight. And defeating the usurper in battle was now an easy task and, that accomplished, the boy was crowned king. He was now not at all conscious that he had once been a hunter. Now he was a king and nothing but a king.

This story is not mine. It has been told by a great ācārya, who was among the ancient founders of Advaita, in the course of expounding the meaning of the term "guru" and "guru-tattva." I have just "touched it up" a little, added some frills here and there, that is all.

Guru-paramparā.

When the ācāryas of Advaita are mentioned, the name of Śrī Śankara Bhagavadpāda suggests itself to everybody. He was the one who, as an incarnation of Parameśvara, expounded Advaita and established it as an unassailable and unshakeable system. This does not mean that he was the first to discover the Advaita siddhānta. Long before him Advaita had already existed as part of the world's oldest text, the Vedas.

The concept of Advaita is frequently explained in what is known as the crest of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads. Kṛṣṇa Paramātmā proclaims Advaita as the final goal in his Gītā. The Gītā is now famous as the Bhagavadgītā. But if you read the Purāṇas their conclusions too point to Advaita.

Beginning with Dakṣiṇamūrti, it is customary to mention Dattātreya, Nārāyaṇa and Brahmā in the tradition of Advaita ācāryas. Following these divine teachers were Vasīṣṭha, Śakti, Parāśara and Vyāsa. They were ṛṣis who received instruction in the father-to-son line. You cannot include ṛṣis among the ācāryas who were mortal, because the ṛṣis, with their powers transcending human faculties, perceived what humans cannot hear and do what humans cannot do. They have the power to grasp the mantras which manifest themselves as sound waves or vibrations in the ether and bring them to us. So they are not to be equated with mere mortals.

The idols installed in temples have been divided into four categories: divine, human, demonic (āsuram) and pertaining to ṛṣis (ārṣam). Those installed by the gods are divine. In Kāñcīpuram the divine Ambā herself shaped the earth into a linga and installed it. Similarly, in Tiruvīzhimizhalai, Mahāviṣṇu himself installed a linga. Indra is said to have worshipped Īśvara or Viṣṇu so as to wipe away the doṣa (sin) attaching to him.

These idols are divine. In contrast to these are the idols installed by asuras at Tirīṣipuram (Tirucirāpalli), Onakāntantaḷi in Kāñcīpuram, etc. It is obvious that the idols installed by kings and other men are to be taken as human.

Ārṣam means related to ṛṣis or created by ṛṣis. Some idols installed by ṛṣis: by

The Guru Tradition

Agastya at Kutrālam, by Vasiṣṭha at Śikkil, by Durvāsas at Tirukkalar, by Jamburṣi at Jambukeśvaram (Tiru-ānai-kāvil). I have mentioned a few that come to mind.

We usually speak of deva-jāti, asura-jāti and manuṣya-jāti. But in this classification of idols ārsam is separate and not part of manuṣya-jāti. They are to be understood as a separate category. The installation of Bṛhadīśvara by Rājarāja Coḷa belongs to the human category. But he did not perform the installation directly himself but had the prāna-pratiṣṭhā¹ performed by a siddha belonging to Karuvūr. Nowadays temples are so often built in some "colony" or other, some suburb or other. The kumbhābhiṣeka² of the temple is conducted by some svāmin or other. However, the prāna-pratiṣṭha is conducted by Śivācāryas or Bhaṭṭas. Such are the mantras recited at the time – mantras with a power of their own – and such are the ceremonies performed that the idol is imbued with the living presence of the deity invoked, with the very vital airs of the god or goddess. In this manner the well-being of the world is ensured.

I said that ṛṣis belonged to a special category. When oblations are offered you speak of deva-tarpana, pitr-tarpana and ṛṣi-tarpana. This confirms the fact that ṛṣis are regarded as a separate class.

In the tradition of Advaita, after Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Dattātreyā, Nārāyaṇa and Brahmā and other such deities come Vasiṣṭha, Śakti, Parāśara and Vyāsa, the ṛṣis who were gurus. Śuka was the son of Vyāsa and he is regarded as being above the class of men, ṛṣis and devas. He is indeed called Śukabrahman. Śuka, who was regarded as Brahman, was a brahmacārin (a celibate), so after him the line of gurus is not from father to son but from preceptor to disciple.

Gauḍapāda and his disciple Govinda Bhagavadpāda come after Śuka: they were sannyāsins and not ṛṣis. All ṛṣis were not sannyāsins. They lived with their wives. You must have read about Arundhati being the wife of Vasiṣṭha Maharṣi and of Anasūyā being the wife of Atri Maharṣi. Ṛṣis perform yajña and wear the yajñopavīta, that is the sacred thread. Sannyāsins do not perform yajñas, nor do they wear the sacred thread. After the two sannyāsin-gurus, Gauḍapāda and Govindapāda, come Śrī Śankara Bhagavadpāda whom we call just "Ācārya." The ācāryas from Śuka downwards who renounced the world are called "Parivrājakas." We then speak of "Paramahansa-parivrājakas."

Our Ācārya Śankara was a human incarnation of Parameśvara and, living like a human, he did works like a human. It was his special greatness that, living like a human, and with his great intellectual and spiritual strength he established the Vedic dharma and Advaita. Govindapāda is specially important because he was the immediate guru of Śankara. In the hymn we refer to as "Bhaja Govindam", the Ācārya says "Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam" thrice. In saying so he must have had in mind his guru also, apart from Kṛṣṇa. The Lord or Bhagavān has so many names, but if Śankara chose "Govinda" it must have been because Govinda was also his guru.

There is a verse in which all the great teachers of Advaita are mentioned and

1 & 2 See glossary.

The Guru Tradition

obeisance paid to them. The names, thus given are those of Nārāyaṇa, Padmabhu or Brahmā, Vasīṣṭha, Śakti, his son Parāśara, Vyāsa, Śuka, Gauḍapāda, Govinda-Yogiśvara and his disciple Śrī Śankarācārya and his disciples Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka, Toṭaka.

Nārāyaṇam, Padmabhuvam, Vasīṣṭham
Śaktim ca tatputra-Parāśaram ca Vyāsam Śukam Gauḍapādam mahāntam
Govinda-yogīndramathāsya śiṣyam
Śrī Śankarācāryamathāsya Padmapādam ca
Hastāmalakam ca śiṣyam
Tam Toṭakam vārttikakāram anyān
Asmat gurūṅ santatam ānato smi

The teachers belonging to the Advaita lineage are called creators of the Brahma-vidyā tradition. Of this lineage, we have first mentioned Nārāyaṇa, then Brahmā who is Padmabhuvā or born of the lotus, and then Vasīṣṭha, Śakti, Parāśara and Vyāsa. While going on with other names like those of Śuka, Gauḍapāda and Govindapāda the adjective "mahāntam" is used for Gauḍapāda and "yogīndra" for Govindapāda. For Śankara there is the honorific of "Śrī" apart from his being specially exalted with the title of "Ācārya." After him his disciples Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka and Toṭaka are mentioned. Sureśvara is not mentioned by name but referred to as "vārttikakāra." He has composed the text called "vārttika." Generally speaking a "vārttika" is similar to a "bhāṣya", a "vyākhyāna," exposition of a text. Śankara has written a bhāṣya on the Upaniṣads. Sureśvara has further commented upon his master's bhāṣya in the form of a vārttika on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Taittirīya Upaniṣads*. The verse concludes by paying obeisance to all preceptors up to "our guru" without mentioning the names of the teachers (between Toṭaka and "our guru").

(I have mentioned here the lineage of gurus of people for whom Śankara Bhagavadpāda is Ācārya. People belonging to other traditions must know the guru-paramparā pertaining to them and pay obeisance to their gurus in the appropriate manner.)

The tradition of ācāryas is essential to make the light of the Ātman in us fully radiant and to teach us the way to attain the state in which we will be free from sorrow. One ācārya authorises another ācārya to do this after him. Thus is formed the ācārya-paramparā. We must remember these teachers with reverence and gratitude because they show us how to preserve the treasure that keeps the light of the Ātman ever shining. We must meditate upon the names of those who have handed down this treasure and obtain their grace. Knowledge of the guru-paramparā is especially essential to those concerned with the Ātma-tattva.

We must remember and utter every day the names of all those who have shown us the way to this "empire of the Ātman" (Ātma-sāmrājya) and pay them obeisance by reciting the verse given above.

I have mentioned here *Ātma-sāmrājya*, "the empire of the Ātman. I began by speaking about the hunter lad finding an empire. Then I strayed into the subject of the lineage of Advaita-gurus. What is the connection between the two, the story of the hunter lad and the Advaita-paramparā? I will tell you.

In the verse quoted above, two gurus (teachers of Advaita) before Śankara are mentioned (and they belong to the human category): of the two one is the guru of Śankara himself and the other is his guru's guru, that is Govinda and Gauḍapāda, respectively. Although these two gurus are more familiar to us there are a few other gurus (belonging to the human category) who taught Advaita before Śankara and after Śuka.

Like Advaitins, the followers of other siddhāntas also pay obeisance to the line of gurus mentioned above from Nārāyaṇa to Śuka as the prime teachers of their siddhāntas. But Gauḍapāda and Govindpāda, who maintain that Advaita alone is the ultimate truth, are ācāryas only for Advaitins. Thus even before Śankara there were gurus who composed texts exclusively for the teaching of Advaita. Let me mention at least their names for your benefit. One of them is Ātreya Brahmānandī; another is Sundara Pāṇḍya (does the name sound like that of a Southern king?) Bharṭṛ-Prapañca, and Bharṭrahari are two others. We know that the guru Brahmādatta has written a sūtrabhāṣya. Then there is Dravidācārya. (The followers of Viśiṣṭādvaita claim that Dravidācārya supported their siddhānta!)

We do not have in our possession the full texts of the works of any of the gurus mentioned above. But a number of expounders of Advaita, including Śankara, have referred to them.

Of them it is with Dravidācārya that our story is concerned.

The subject of "Drāviḍa"

"Draviḍa" or "Drāviḍa" is indeed Tamizh (Tamil). The first syllable "ta" becomes "tra". It is sometimes customary to add a "r" to some letters. Sometimes the name Totaka mentioned in the verse quoted above is pronounced as "Trotaka". (Following this practice some people "over-Sanskritise" words like "deham" into "dreham!")

The "ta" in *Ta-mi-zh* has become "dra." "Mi" has become "vi." Philologists give many examples of "ma" and "va" interchanging. This may be seen in Sanskrit itself. For instance, "sāḷagrāva" becomes "sāḷagrāma". The Sanskrit "Maṇḍōdarī" becomes "Vandōdarī" in Tamil. "Draviḍa" is also pronounced as "Dramiḍa". The interchanging of "zha" and "ja" is common. If you go to the Madurai and Rāmanāthapuram districts you will hear people speaking thus: "Vāḷai paḷattil vaḷukki viḷuntitapōre". (Strictly it should be "Vāzhai pazhattil vazhukki vizhuntitapōre". It means: You will slip on the banana and fail.) Close to "zha" and "ja" is "ta". In the Vedas themselves (in the R̥gveda) "Agnimīte" becomes "Agnimīḷe." It is in this way that the "zha" in "Tamizh" becomes the "da" of "Draviḍa".

"Ta" becomes "Dra," "mi" becomes "vi," "zha" becomes "da." Altogether "Tamizh" becomes "Draviḍa."

The Guru Tradition

Some people are happy nowadays to see a Tamil link in everything. While speaking about Dravidacārya I thought I too would be happy to show them the connection of his name with Tamil.

Śankara himself uses the term "Draviḍa-śiṣū" in his *Saundaryalahari* as he tells the goddess, "Mother, you suckled the *Tamizh* child."

It would be wrong to interpret the fact that "Draviḍa" is derived from "Tamizh" to arrive at any racial theory involving Āryans and Draviḍians. You will find no basis at all in the Vedas and śāstras for the theory of two races, Āryans and Draviḍians. The white man concocted it in pursuit of his policy of divide and rule.

What do the śāstras say? There is no mention in them of any race called "Āryans." The term "Ārya" means "one worthy of respect" – that is all. Arjuna who, according to the present race theory, is an Āryan, is addressed in the Gītā thus by Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa: "Like a coward, why have you become unĀrya, and lost your mental courage?" "UnĀryan" means "one who is not an Āryan". (You derive the antonym of a word in Sanskrit by adding the prefix *an* – अन् – to it. The same is the case with English. For instance, the opposite of "happy" is "unhappy".

What Bhagavān means by "unĀrya" is "one not worthy of respect" and not unĀryan in any racial or ethnic sense. If you read old poetic or dramatic works you see that the queen addresses her king as "Āryaputra". If you accept the present belief that the term "Ārya" denotes a race, the queen who addresses her husband as "Āryaputra" must be a "Draviḍaputri" as against "Āryaputra." If a girl belonging to the Ayyar sect marries a young man from the Ayyangār sect, she will perhaps call him "O son of the Ayyangār clan or household." If she were also an Ayyangār, she wouldn't address him thus. Sītā calls Rāma "Āryaputra". If you accepted the race theory it would mean Sītā belonged to the Draviḍian group. This is absurd. Here also "Ārya" means "worthy of respect". "Āryaputra" means "a citizen worthy of respect".

In no śāstra does "Ārya" denote anything racial. "Draviḍa" also does not mean anything racial.

The people of India belong to one single race and it is this common race that is divided into two classes. Those living north of the Vindhya are "Gauḍas" and those living south of the Vindhya are "Draviḍas". There is no racial difference indicated by the two terms. Instead of being divided on the basis of race, the people of India, belonging to one race, are divided on a geographical basis.

In the beginning, the region north of the Vindhya was called "Gauḍadeśa" and that south of the Vindhya was called "Draviḍadeśa". Later, the people of Gauḍadeśa, the "Gauḍas", were again divided into five groups according to sub-regions. Similarly, the people belonging to Draviḍadeśa, the "Draviḍas", were also divided again into five groups. Thus we have "Pañca-Gauḍas" and "Pañca-Draviḍas". The Pañca-Gauḍas : those belonging to Kāśmīr were called "Śārasvatās"; those belonging to Punjāb were called Kānyakubjas; those belonging to the east (in and about modern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) were called Mithilas; and those belonging to Orissa were called Utkalas.

The Guru Tradition

Finally, the Gauḍas of Bengāl were not given any separate name and they remained just "Gauḍas". In the region south of the Vindhya the Drāviḍas were divided into "Gūjaras" ("Gujaratis"), "Mahāraṣṭrians", "Āndhras", "Karnājakas" ("Kannaḍigas") and "Drāviḍas". If "Keralites" ("Malayālis") are not specially mentioned it is because the language Malayālam originated only about a thousand years ago. Before that time Keraḷa belonged to the Tamiḷ region.

Gauḍas and Drāviḍas are not two separate races. The same race of people have been divided into ten groups on a regional basis. What was common for each of the two halves was specially applied to people of the easternmost part (Gauḍas) and those of the southernmost part (Drāviḍas).

Today Gauḍas are instantly recognised as Bengālis. Śrīkrṣṇa Caitanya belonged to Bengāl. That is why his matha is called Gauḍīya Matha. There is an interesting point to be noted. It was in Bengāl and in the Tamiḷ country that the English language and European culture spread rapidly first. Bengālis and Tamiḷs went to all parts of British India as clerks.

Those who have emigrated from one region to another are usually known after their original place. In Mahāraṣṭra a number of people have today the surname "Telang". Their forefathers were Telugus who had gone and settled in Mahāraṣṭra. "Telang" is a distortion of Telugu or Telangu. Similarly, some Brāhmins in certain places in North India like Kāsī have the caste name of "Draviḍ". They are descendants of people who must have emigrated long ago from the Tamiḷ region. One must note that these "Draviḍs" are all Brāhmins. According to the race theory, Brāhmins are different from Drāviḍas; in fact they are their opponents or enemies. As a matter of fact, in the North, the name "Draviḍ" is applied only to Brāhmins from the Tamiḷ region. Should we not realise from this that the term "Drāviḍa" denotes a region, not a race?

In accordance with the pronunciation customary in the Tamiḷ land "Draviḍa" becomes "Tamiḷh". There is an ellipsis of the *ra-kara* or the *ra* which appears conjointly with some letters in Sanskrit, as in "dra" or "tra." The Sanskrit "Śramaṇa" becomes "Camaṇa" in Tamiḷ; "pravāja" becomes "pavaJam" (coral).

I started with Draviḍācārya and I went on to speak to you about so many other things. I told you that he was an Advaita siddhāntin who lived before Śankara.

The hunter is the king: the jīva is the Brahman

Śankara and other commentators who came after him have quoted Draviḍācārya, while explaining "madhu-vidyā" and "samvarga-vidyā" in their commentaries on the *Chandogya Upaniṣad* (the third and fourth chapters). It is in this Upaniṣad that the great pronouncement ("Mahāvākya")¹ "Tat tvam asi" occurs. Uddālaka Āruṇi, the father and teacher of Śvetaketu, tells his son again and again (nine times actually): "You are the Brahman, dear son."

¹ See glossary.

The Guru Tradition

Tat-tvam-asi. "Tat" is the Paramātman or the Brahman; "tvam" is the jīvātman. Śvetaketu is the jīva personified here; "asi" means "you are", "you exist". "You are the Brahman," says the father to his son. It does not mean that Śvetaketu is going to become the Brahman after undergoing sādhana some time in the future. No, not in the future. Now and ever (not only Śvetaketu but) all people and all things are the Brahman. Not that you or anybody else is to become the Brahman hereafter.

If such were the truth, the question arises: why should there be sādhana? Even if we be the Brahman we are not aware of the truth that we are it. We are not aware of ourselves. If we had known the truth about ourselves we would never experience all this sorrow, all this desire, all this anger and fear. Should we not be peacefully immersed in the ocean of bliss that rises so high touching the sky that it does not break into waves? Are we not tottering about without even knowing that such a state exists? When we are in such a predicament of ignorance how can we accept the statement: "You are the Brahman even now"?

It is to make us accept this fact, realise this truth, that Dravidācārya has told the story of the prince who appeared to be the hunter lad.

In his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II-1-20), Śankara comments on the mantra which speaks about the spider weaving its web from threads drawn from its own body; about Agni creating sparks from itself; and about the entire cosmos born out of the Ātman. While explaining the mantra in detail he hints at the story of the hunter. But he does not mention the name of Dravidācārya. Instead he states respectfully that "there is a story like this told by great men who knew the tradition" ("Atra ca saṁpradāyavida ākhyāyikām saṁpracakṣate"). It is Ānandagiri, in his elaboration of the commentary of Śankara, who says that the story referred to by Śankara is by Dravidācārya.

Did the hunter boy in the story change into a prince? Was he transformed? Even when he thought himself to be a young hunter he was a prince, wasn't he? He himself did not know it in the beginning; so he lived like a hunter. But once he knew the truth about himself, the boy who had always been a prince realised through his real experience that he was a prince. There were no two: hunter and prince. The one did not change into the other. It was the one and the same being who lived in the beginning without knowing himself who he was. Subsequently he knew himself. Unknowing, he lived as the hunter on a lower plane. Knowing, he became elevated to a higher plane as the prince. Then he fought to dethrone the usurper king and became master of an empire.

Like the prince in the guise¹ of the hunter all of us are in the disguise of our jīvātman, living a worldly life. But in truth we are also the Brahman. Whatever the guise, the reality within us even now is the Paramātman. We go a-hunting drawn by the senses. We must have the realisation that we are the Brahman.

Even if we recognise this as a principle, the senses lead us astray preventing us

¹ Here the Paramaguru shows how the Sanskrit word "veśa", "guise" or "disguise", is pronounced as "veṣa" in Tamil.

from realising what we are in reality. To attain kingship the prince learnt the art of warfare, vanquished his enemies, and became the lord of an empire. Though we are always the Brahman, we do not realise it. Starting with karma, following the path of bhakti, practising the sādhana of jñāna, triumphing over our inner conflicts, we too can attain the empire of the Ātman. The Upanisads proclaim the jñānin as a "saṁrāt", that is a king-emperor.

Ice and glass look alike superficially. Ice melts and becomes water, but not glass: What was water in reality takes the form of ice. That which was water has frozen into ice and realises its true form again as water. The Brahman has frozen into jiva; if this jīvātman does not melt, it cannot again become the Brahman in actual experience (it cannot realise itself).

Ice melts of its own accord. We refuse to melt. The great saint Tāyumanavar sang (came down to our level to sing for us): "Even a stone will melt at some time or other; but my mind (heart) does not melt."

Some instrument is needed to make us melt. Just as in the story the mantri or minister came to make the prince in the guise of the hunter in reality the prince, we need someone to melt us and make us the "real we" (to make us know ourselves and be ourselves). The hunter boy at first refuses to go with the minister, but the minister drew him to himself (to make him realise his true Self). We who refuse to approach the Supreme Reality need someone to draw us (so that we too will realise our true Self). Is there one like that? Is there one who can make us our real Self, the true "we"?

Yes, there is.

The one who told the hunter boy, "You are a prince", and taught him the arts of warfare and took more trouble than the boy himself to make him king (that is to make him realise himself), the minister in the story, is a metaphor for such a one. Who is a guru? It is he who teaches us the reality about ourselves (tells us what or who we are) and instructs us in the sādhana by which we may realise this reality. To expend what remains of our karma he helps us by spending the power of merit he himself has earned through his austerities. Such one is a guru.

Devotion to the guru

They say: "One's guru is greater than Īśvara." Why? No one has seen Īśvara. An individual who is present before us in person, who is all the time pure of heart and mind, who possesses jñāna and is blameless, an individual whose mind is not fickle — if we are fortunate to have such a man for a guru, he will give us the same peace of mind and happiness that we otherwise seek from Īśvara. That is the answer to the question.

Gurur-Brahmā gurur-Viṣṇuḥ gurur-devo Maheśvaraḥ." It is significant that no distinction is made in this verse between the guru and the Paramātman¹. Incidentally, there is another important point to be noted in the verse. Śiva and Viṣṇu are mentioned in it and, if we pay obeisance to the guru,

1 This is explained in detail in Part Seven.

reciting this verse we will learn not to differentiate between the two gods.

Īśvara has many functions like creating and sustaining the universe. The guru does not have these functions. Īśvara has an "office". The guru has none. Instead of bothering someone who has an "office" we could have our purpose fulfilled easily by seeking one who has no "office." All those excellent qualities that belong to Īśvara are present in the guru also. The guru is pure, not addicted to untruth; he has compassion and is a great jñānin. Besides, we see him in person unlike Bhagavān whom we are unable to see before us. So if we grasp the sacred feet of the guru and become devoted to him we will receive all such blessings as are to be gained by becoming devoted to Īśvara. That is why devotion to the guru is said to be lofty in character.

However, we should not be forgetful of devotion to God. After all, it is the Lord who brings the devotee and the guru together. Without the grace of the Lord how can we obtain our guru?

Durlabham trayamēvaitat Devānugrahetukam

Manuṣyatvam, mumukṣutvam, Mahāpuruṣasamśrayaḥ

"Three great and rare opportunities or boons are obtained only by the grace of the Lord: the first is birth as a human; the second is the desire to know the truth; and the third is obtaining a great man as one's guru." So says Śankara in the opening verses of his *Vivekacudāmaṇi* ("The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination").

For all – and at all times – Īśvara is the guru; Dakṣiṇāmūrti is the guru.

"Sa pūrveṣāmapī guruḥ kālenānvachedāt"

How have our guru and the guru of our guru and his guru attained jñāna that is entire? If you go tracing back in this way, from one guru to another in a succession, you will at last realise that Īśvara himself must have become a guru and imparted jñāna to the first guru in this lineage. That is why it is said, the Lord should never be forgotten.

There is another way in which the idea could be put. Instead of regarding the guru and Īśvara as two separate entities, if we believe that Īśvara himself has come to us in the form of the guru, there is no need for us to become devoted to the guru and Īśvara separately. Looking upon the guru as Īśvara we may go for absolute refuge to the guru alone, the guru who is Īśvara. Even if the guru is not a man of ideal character, we will be blessed by Īśvara if we worship him (Īśvara) through this guru, for Īśvara is eternally pure and is the highest of the highest. It is for this reason that the guru is described as the Parabrahman, the source of all three, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

Gurur-Brahmā, Gurur-Viṣṇuḥ, Gurur-devo Maheśvaraḥ

Guruḥ- sāṅṣāt Param-Brahma tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ

In a description of Vyāsa, who is foremost among the teachers of the Brahma-vidyā, the meaning of the "Gurur-Brahmā" śloka is told in a more interesting manner.

*Acaturvedano Brahmā, Dvibāhuraparo Hariḥ
Aphālalocanaḥ Śambhuḥ Bhagavān Bādarāyaṇaḥ*

Bādarāyaṇa is another name of Vyāsa. He is "acaturvedano Brahmā", Brahmā without the four heads (that is he has only one head); he is "dvibāhuraparo Hariḥ", that is he is Hari with only two hands (not with four hands); he is "aphālalocana Śambhuḥ", that is he is Śiva without the eye on his forehead.

There is no one higher than the guru. We must come to have full faith in him. If we truly believe that Īśvara himself has come to us in the form of the guru there is no need for us to worship Īśvara apart from the guru. It is the faith based on such belief, such devotion to the guru, that will take us across the ocean of samsāra.¹

For Vaiṣṇavas too devotion to the ācārya is very important.

If we sin against Īśvara it is not necessary that we must pray to him for forgiveness. If the ācārya forgives us Īśvara will be appeased. But if we offend the guru in any way, it is no use approaching Īśvara for redemption. We must go to the guru himself for forgiveness, for redemption. Īśvara himself will tell us to do so. If the guru intercedes on behalf of his disciple the anger of the Paramātman will vanish and He will bless the disciple. But if the guru himself is angry with his disciple there is no one who can save him. This is mentioned in a verse²

This is the reason why the śāstras speak of devotion to guru in exalted terms. Even if your guru is not a man of great qualities, regard him as a pathfinder and, at the same time, be devoted to Īśvara. Neither our guru nor Īśvara stands to gain by our devotion. It is we alone who receive the rewards. What sort of reward or benefit? I will tell you now.

We are full of impurities and our minds are fickle. We are unable to keep our minds trained on a spot even for one moment. It is only when we meditate on one who is ever pure, who is abounding in knowledge, and who is still and steady like a log of wood that we will attain the same state of equipoise and stillness as exemplified by that one. We will ourselves become "he" (we will attain identity with him). It is not that Īśvara alone is to be thought of in this manner. Whether it is an entity possessing the qualities mentioned above or a human being like us with these qualities we must be devoted to that entity or to that human being as our guru and in that way we will become that entity or that human being. It is only when the mind becomes still that the Ātman will shine and our real state of bliss revealed. It is to still the mind that our śāstras point to the need for devotion to Īśvara, devotion to the guru.

1 Wordly existence; the cycle of birth and death: "the round of transmigration"

2 *Guruḥ pitā gurumātā gurur-Daivam gurur-gaṇiḥ
Śive nuste gurustrīṭhā gurau nuste na kaścana*

(The guru is father, the guru is mother, the guru is God, the guru is the refuge. If Śiva becomes angry the guru will come to your rescue. But if the guru is angry there is no one to help you.)

The *Chândogya Upaniṣad* declares that jñāna will be obtained only through the grace of the guru. "Ācāryavān puruṣo veda" — he alone will attain jñāna who has an ācārya. This truth is explained in a little story. Imagine that a man belonging to Gāndhāra (modern Kandahar, in Afghanistan, is derived from this word) is blindfolded and taken to a deserted place? How will he return home? Will he not be helpless, disoriented? It is thus that Māyā has blindfolded us and consigned us to this world.

To go back to the story. A man comes up to the blindfolded person, removes the bandage and tells him how to go to Gāndhāra. Now he is freed from sorrow and fear. He arrives at his destination as directed by the man. The *Chândogya Upaniṣad* says that, like the blindfolded man in this story, we too will find our way back to our home with the advice of the ācārya, that is we will return to the Paramātman, the "place" we started from.

Śankara Bhagavadpāda, famous as "Jagadguru", speaks again and again about the importance of the guru. He asks: "What does it matter if a man is important in many ways? Of what use is it if his mind is not bound to the lotus feet of his guru?" Śankara repeats "tataḥ kim?" (of what use?) four times: "Tataḥ kim?" "Tataḥ kim?" "Tataḥ kim?" "Tataḥ kim?". In fact, in the hymn to the guru (it is in eight stanzas and is called *Gurvāṣṭakam*) he asks the question four times at the end of each stanza – so altogether thirty-two times.

Finally, before shuffling off his mortal coils, Śankara imparts his upadeśa through this śloka:

Sadvidvān upasrpyatām
Pratidinam tatpādūke sevayatām
Brahmaikākṣaram arthyatām
Śrutiśiro vākyaṁ samākarmyatām – from "Upadeś-Pañcakam"

It means: "Choose a noble (sāttvika) vidvān as your ācārya. Worship at his feet every day. Be advised by him on the Praṇava mantra (AUM), on the Mahāvākyās of the Upaniṣads." (With regard to the injunction of performing pūjā to the gurupāda, the lotus feet of the guru, even now worship of the lotus feet of Śankara Bhagavadpāda is performed every day without fail, at the Kāñcī Maṭha.)

The mention here is about the sannyāsi-guru who initiates his disciple into sannyāsa. It is in the sannyāsaśrama that one seeks mokṣa by meditating on the Praṇava and the Mahāvākyas. This is the last of the four āśramas. First in the brahmacaryāśrama, one seeks a householder guru and learns the Vedas and the duties laid down by the śāstras from him and through the subsequent stages one comes to the last āśrama, that is sannyāsa: such is the advice of Śankara.

First let us consider why there should be Vedic karma. The message of Praṇava and the Mahāvākyas emanating from the guru must lead one to the ultimate human goal of mokṣa and for this one's mind must be kept in control and tranquil. It is no use listening to the guru without the mind being fully integrated within. The

seed sprouts when it is sown in a field that has been well ploughed. We listen to countless religious and philosophical discourses, we read the Gītā and other scriptures. Why then do we still experience sorrow? Why do we not become illumined with jñāna? It is because we listen to religious discourses or read the scriptures without cleansing our citta or consciousness that we do not attain the everlasting fruit thereof.

The Ācārya says in the beginning of his upadeśa: "Devote yourself to Śvara, performing Vedic karma again and again. Without caring for reward do it as worship of Bhagavān." He says so to show us the means of achieving mental tranquillity and purity of consciousness (citta-śuddhi). The mind must be ploughed by Vedic karma. That is the foremost requirement. Should we not, after the ploughing, water the field, that is the mind? Such an act is bhakti or devotion. It is bhakti that waters the heart. One must be devoted to Śvara and to one's ācārya. If we are devoted to our guru our mind becomes serene. If we read something before our elders or before other great men or if we listen to them, an impression is made in our mind. It is so because our mind becomes calm in their presence. It is not so in a club or a library: what we read or listen to there is not retained. If the mind is moistened by devotion to the guru the fruit thereof is immediate. That is why we must seek the advice of, and inspiration from, great men and learn from a guru. We read so much. Even so ajñāna or ignorance is not dispelled from the mind. We have to go to the place where our veil of ignorance will be removed and jñāna will arise — the place where the ācārya is present.

During the brahmacaryāśrama we must learn the Vedas from a guru in order to cleanse our consciousness. During the āśrama of the gr̥hastha or householder we must observe the rites according to the Vedas and remove all impurities from our minds. Having done this we must learn the Mahāvākyas from a guru who is a sannyāsīn. In this way what one learns germinates and grows. In other words the jīva unites with the Brahman. To find the way for this goal we need the guru both at the beginning of our quest and at its conclusion.

It is for this reason that devotion to the guru is universally extolled.

Gurukulavāsa

The state or government (in a monarchy or whatever) is intended to ensure our well-being during our mundane existence. The rājā was installed in order to protect the virtuous and the innocent from the wicked; to make sure that the weak did not come to harm from the strong. The function of the rājā was not only giving such protection to the people but providing them conveniences and amenities for their worldly life. (Nowadays, we have the ministry or the cabinet in his place — let it be whatever.) In return for the protection and facilities provided by the rājā, we served him and paid him various taxes.

This world is not eternal. We must ensure ourselves a place in another world that is eternal and imperishable. Six wicked "people," six strong "people" (that is

six evils personified) – kāma, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, mātsarya¹ prevent us from attaining this eternal, imperishable world. We will attain this everlasting world only if we protect ourselves from them and advance ourselves through devotion, meditation and knowledge. Although this eternal world is within us, reaching it is an extremely difficult task. Just as to live happily in this world we need a rājā (or a ministry), to go to the other world, which of course is the inner world of the Ātman, we need an ācārya. It is not enough to live well in this world. Indeed, it does not matter at all that we live well here. But after departing from this world it is imperative that we arrive at that other eternal world without having to return to this world again.

We must discover a way to attain this imperishable other world even during our life in this perishable world. Indeed we must prepare ourselves for it right from the beginning of our life. Initiation into the brahmacaryāśrama from childhood itself was for this purpose and that was why the child was made to live with his guru.

This does not mean that a student was taught from his childhood itself that this world is unreal, that the Paramātman alone is real. Nor does it mean that he was turned back from this world. It is true that in gurukulavāsa he was taught the science of the Ātman, Ātma-vidyā. But it is not to be understood that the young student was asked to turn away from worldly life. Many arts and sciences (including sciences known to modern times), poetry, drama, etc. were taught in the gurukula. Our forefathers knew that in the great drama of this world there were stages like the bud growing into a flower, the flower becoming fruit and the fruit ripening and mellowing. There were rare cases of individuals becoming jñānins in childhood itself, and becoming engaged in meditation, but the vast majority had to ascend to a higher life step by step.

One must be helped to ascend in this step-by-step process and not allowed to descend. That is the basis of the system of āśramas: after brahmacarya, grhasthāśrama (householder's stage) during which the husband and wife live together and procreate children, then vānaprasthāśrama in which the couple leave the household with a certain degree of detachment from family life but without abandoning the Vedic rites and, finally, the sannyāsaśrama (stage of the ascetic who has renounced his life). The progression towards sannyāsa is akin to that of the flower naturally becoming a fruit and ripening.

One cannot forsake worldly life at the start itself. But, at the same time, the eternal life of the other world should be kept in mind. It does not matter that a man does not rise to heights all at once, but he should not, all at once, tumble down to the depths also. That is why he has been shown the path by the Dharmāśāstras: whatever the stage of his life, whatever the āśrama in which he is, he must reflect upon the Self or the Ātman. He must cultivate love of Īśvara, learn to conduct himself virtuously and be helpful to others. From the beginning itself the seed must be sown for the ultimate goal of life. Only then will a man (though he may not at

¹ Desire; anger or wrathful passion; covetousness; delusion; rut or lustful passion; jealousy or spirit of rivalry.

The Guru Tradition

once dedicate himself to the ultimate goal) try to rise through gradual steps instead of descending to a lower level even while leading a worldly life. It is for this reason that during the brahmacaryāśrama itself he is taught the Vedas and the Upanisads. This does not mean though, that he must immediately put his lessons into practice, reflecting upon the Ātman and trying to become a jīvanmukta.

The knowledge gained in the brhmacaryāśrama is like a bank deposit. It is enough if the gets an interest on it until he reaches the age when he mellows and becomes a mature person. He may, in good time, withdraw the entire deposit. The important thing is he must make the deposit in the early years of his life so as to ensure a long period of interest. Otherwise he will become useless because of the temptations of youth, the urges of middle age, the ups and downs of life and the disabilities of old age.

Just as today boys and girls receive in schools and colleges that type of education which helps them to earn a livelihood, in the old days also a trade or occupation was taught. However, the education then did not stop with teaching an occupation; along with that students were taught Adhyātma-vidyā, the lessons relating to the Ātman. Today, people are taught only the means of filling their belly and not taught anything to improve their moral conduct and to raise their Self. But in the old days the goal of the other world, dharma and morality were kept as a firm basis of education and, at the same time, the students were taught ways of earning their livelihood.

A boy was not, without paying any regard to human nature, all of a sudden bound to the way of the Ātman or to a life of resignation in his childhood itself. Nor was he abandoned, to a life of recklessness and irresponsibility. With sympathy and with understanding of human nature, the āśramas have been so arranged, and the dharma appropriate to each āśrama has been so fixed, as to conform to human nature. At the same time, care has been taken to ensure that the Ātman is not rendered futile.

One gets to know this (the wisdom of the division of the āśramas) from the words of Kālidāsa. First, "Śaiśave abhyastavidyānām." The poet says that one must start learning vidyā in childhood itself. One must study the Vedas and the Upanisads, etc, during these early years. That is the age when an impression is easily made in the mind. But this does not mean that, for the sake of learning everything, one should plunge into a reflection on the Self and a life of meditation, that one should run away from life. Next Kālidāsa says: "Yauvane viṣayaiṣiṅām." During youthfulness one must experience the joys and (sorrows too) of family life (householder's life). There is no suggestion here yet that the happiness of family life is in reality unhappiness.

One thing must be remembered: the disciplined life of brahmacarya led by a student in the gurukula, the knowledge of the Vedas and the Upanisads, etc, gained then, all this will keep him in check, prevent him from abandoning himself entirely to carnal pleasures. Grhasthāśrama is also the time when a man earns money and acquires goods to some extent. But the desire for wealth will not grow

into greed. The education he received during his brahmacarya will again ensure that he does not deviate from the path of dharma. Also the performance of Vedic rites and yajñās and the study of the Vedas will keep him disciplined and protect his citta or consciousness from changing for the worse.

(What is said above applies to Brahmins. But, whatever your caste, your citta will be cleansed by doing your allotted work, by leading a life free from greed and jealousy and by dedicating yourself to Īśvara.)

"Dharmāvīruddho bhūtēsu kāmosmi," so says the Lord in the Gītā. The śāstras themselves accept that certain natural urges must be satisfied in youth, without violating dharma and without detriment to moral conduct. In due course and with the increasing strength obtained from religious observance, passions like desire and anger will begin to wane on their own.

Next a man is on the threshold of old age. "Vārdhakeye munivṛttinām," says Kālidāsa about this stage. When old age approaches a man must receive advice from munis and other ascetics, efface his desire and engage himself in meditation of the Lord, practise austerities and reflect upon the Ātman. (The state in which all desires have ceased is called "virāgam" or "vītarāgam". The man then must meditate long on Bhagavān and practise austerities and contemplation of the Self. During vānaprastha he must leave his home and children to live in the forest, with his wife, and no one else, a life in keeping with the teachings of the Vedas. The wife is a helpmate in this life of Vedic discipline — she is not meant for the satisfaction of his carnal pleasure. Then the final stage — "Yogenānte tānutyajām" — that is relinquishing Vedic rites, the man becomes a sannyāsin. He shuffles off the body without the least sorrow, embracing death and being inseparably united with the Paramātman in the state of supreme bliss.

Where was the foundation laid for that mokṣa of surpassing bliss? The answer is "śaiśave abhyastavidyānām" — it was laid during childhood. The moral foundation laid during the time will stand a man in good stead all through his life. It helps him to attain the goal he had been taught as a child, the goal shown by the Upaniṣads, that is the union of the jīva with the Brahman.

Discipline and good conduct must be enforced during childhood itself. What is the first trait of disciplined good conduct? *Pañiva*, (a Tamil word meaning humility) and modesty — these are necessary for a man to advance in good conduct. The effacement of the ego (*aḥamkāra*) is essential to humility. And humility is the fountain of good conduct.

More important than medicine is *pathya* (literally that which is liked), that which is good for the body during treatment. More important than the medicine called education is the *pathya* of humility. In the old days it was humility that was regarded as the foremost quality of the student. Indeed the student was called *vineyaṇ*. It was to acquire this quality of humility that he was sent to an *ācārya* to live with him in the gurukula. After his *upanayana* was performed (in common parlance the sacred thread ceremony) the student was sent to the gurukula before he was eight years old.

What is upanayana? "Nayana" means the act of leading. (A blind man is led by another. From this one may learn that it is the eye, the nayana, that leads one. That is how it has got the name "nayana".) "Upa" means "near". "Upanayana" means "leading near", leading towards the guru. Upanayana thus is a ceremony preliminary to taking the student to the gurukula.

The child who was playing about as he liked enters an āśrama with a sense of responsibility and discipline. ("Āśrama" here does not mean a dwelling made of leaves but a stage in life.) This first stage in life is called brahmacaryāśrama. In this the guru is all-important. In the final āśrama of sannyāsa another guru will come into his life. This other guru will sever the sacred thread that he now wears. This second guru will be a sannyāsīn and he will help his disciple to realize through actual experience the Upaniṣadic goal of the Brahman. The lineage of gurus (guruparamparā) to whom we pay obeisance consists of such teachers who were sannyāsīns.

The guru under whom we became qualified to seek the second guru in the final stage was the one who taught us all vidyā-s during the brahmacaryāśrama. This first guru need not be a sannyāsīn like the second one. He is usually a householder. The second guru is called a Brahmaavid (one who knows the Brahman) and the first guru a Vedavid (one who knows the Vedas). The Vedavid too has knowledge of the Brahman but has not actually realised it. He too has to seek a Brahmaavid, after renouncing his life, to attain the Brahman.

All this does not mean that the first guru is inferior in any sense. He lives according to what is proper to his āśrama. If the student is to become humble this guru must be such as is capable of inculcating humility in the disciple and his life must be such that he naturally earns the student's respect. He must not swerve from Vedic observances and must be strictly attached to dharma. While being strict in correcting the conduct of his pupil, who has come to him leaving his home and parents, he must also have affection for him. Like *vineyan* the student has another name "antevāsī" which means "one who lives with". Just as "upanayana" (leading near) means "leading near the guru", "antevāsī" (living with) must be taken to mean "one who lives with the guru". Strictly speaking "antē" does not mean "with or by the side". It means "in" or "within" in the same way as it means in the words in "antaranga", "antarātman", "antaryāmin". The "anta" here means "in the mind". The ācārya must, in keeping with this meaning, harbour the student in his mind so to speak, which suggests that he must have deep affection for him.

The ācārya has a great responsibility towards his student. If he does not fulfil it, he will himself come to great harm. Teachers nowadays say: "What does it matter whether or not the student is doing well? We get our salary. That is what really matters." Those who conducted the gurukula in the old days could not have the same attitude because the guru-śiṣya relationship was not governed by anything like a business contract. Indeed, education today is one step worse than what is implied by the phrase "business contract". In business, if you pay a price, you must receive something in return for it. Now the teacher is not bothered by the

failure of his student who has paid his fees (that is the price). In contrast the ācārya who conducted the gurukula in ancient times shouldered a great responsibility. What was that?

“Śiṣyapāpam gurum vrajēt,” so proclaim the law-books (nīti śāstra). It means that the sin committed by the student attaches itself to the teacher. The guru imparts not only learning to his disciple, he takes the responsibility upon himself to ensure his discipline and good conduct. If he does not discharge this responsibility there is a penalty to be paid for it. If he cannot make his student meritorious and if the latter commits a sin it passes on to the guru because of his failure to correct him.

If the wife is guilty of lapses the sin thereof attaches to the husband who has failed to lead her on the path of virtuous conduct. Similarly, if a citizen commits a wrong in the affairs of the nation, the sin thereof is visited upon the king for his failure to correct him. If the king himself commits an improper act or sin his purohita who has failed to correct him will have to suffer the consequences. The nīti śāstras thus invest the husband, the king and the ācārya with an awesome responsibility:

*Rājānam rāṣṭrakṛtam pāpam rājapāpam purohitam
Bhartāram strīkṛtam pāpam śiṣya-pāpam gurum vrajēt*

The husband is not to exercise authority over his wife by creating fear in her, nor is the king to rule over his subjects by creating fright in them. It is the same case with the guru-śiṣya relationship – fear has no place in it. The husband, the king and the ācārya have to care for those under them and have the duty to ensure their good conduct. If they fail in this duty they will incur the sin for the wrongs committed by those under them (that is the wrongs committed by the wife, the subjects of the king and the student respectively).

“Śiṣyapāpam gurum vrajēt.” How would have the guru, who understood this law, conducted himself in the past? He would have made himself strong within so as to be able to correct the behaviour of the student under him. Which means the preceptor would have been an exemplar and shown the right path to the student by following it himself. In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* the guru tells his disciple. “Asmākam sucaritāni” (Follow our own example of good conduct).” The student (a jīva) must be entrusted from his childhood itself to the care of such a noble teacher.

In those days the father in every family was learned in the Vedas and the śāstras. Even so he entrusted his children to the care of a guru instead of teaching them himself. Why? The father-son relationship is such that there is the risk of the son being given too much freedom. The father is likely to spoil the child with his excessive fondness. The son, because of the freedom at home, will live without being disciplined and without a sense of humility. What use is education without the basic quality of humility? Or for that matter any learning?

When you read the Upaniṣads you will realise this. Bhāradvāja was a great man. But his son Sukeśa goes, samit in hand, looking for a guru and eventually finds one in Pippalāda. The *Praśnopaniṣad* begins with this story.

"Samit" means sticks or twigs (for the sacred fire). Gurus in those days were easily pleased by this gift of samit because it was an important requirement for sacrifices. There are many other examples like that of Sukeśa. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* speaks about the brahmacārin Śvetaketu. After receiving his vidyābhyāsa from his father he goes to the court of a king. The Brahmin Pravāhaṇa there asks him questions on various subjects. Śvetaketu is unable to answer any of them. This story seems to suggest indirectly that it is not enough to be taught by one's father.

Humility is not easily acquired. Indeed from another story of Śvetaketu we learn that the more one is educated the more does one's ahamkāra increase. "Aha, I am a man of knowledge," one would be inclined to boast thus. This story also appears in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Śvetaketu learns at the feet of various teachers for twelve years and returns to his father feeling proud about his knowledge. Now it is his father who curbs his pride. He questions the son on Brahma-tattva (the reality of the Brahman). The son realises that he knows nothing about the subject and, in all humility, requests his father to give him upadeśa.

One purpose of gurukulavāsa is instilling humility in the pupil. That is why children were sent to the gurukula to live and study away from their homes. Nowadays, the student is sent to the hostel but what do we see? His behaviour in the hostel is even worse than it would be were he to grow up in his home. If such was not the case in the old days the reasons were: first, the exemplary life led by the master himself; second, the rules that the brahmacārin had to observe. Of the latter, particular mention must be made of bhikṣācārya which means begging for alms (begging for one's food). Immediately after a boy's upanayana his father exhorts him, "Bhikṣācāryam cara." In effect it means, "Give the alms you have collected to your guru and learn to observe the rule of subsisting on the share he gives you". Even if a man was the owner of many acres of land he had to send his son for gurukulavāsa with its rule of bhikṣācārya. When the father says to his son, "Bhikṣācāryam cara", the latter, who has just been initiated, should reply, "Bādham", which means "I will do so".

However rich his father, during gurukulavāsa, the student wore a kaupīna and went begging for alms, saying on the doorstep of each house he visited: "Bhavati bhikṣām dehi" (Lady, give me alms). What was the purpose of such discipline? It was to check the student's ahamkāra and prevent him from nursing the feeling of pride that he was learned. The purpose of "bhikṣācārya" was thus to help the student to reap the real fruits of education by instilling humility in him.

The student would hand over the alms he had collected to his guru. The guru in turn would hand it to his wife for it to be cooked.¹ The guru had to feed his students. If the student were to eat at home and go to school or college he would tend to ignore his teacher. But if he were to be fed by the teacher he would be obedient to him. The alms brought by the students would be enough to maintain the guru and his family. But, according to the code of gurukulavāsa prevalent then, it was not to seem as if the student fed the teacher. It was to be the other way round.

The brahmacārin could have his fill. But he was not to eat merely to satisfy his palate or to eat the sort of food likely to affect adversely the betterment of his Self or

¹ Cooked food is also given as bhikṣā.

Ātman. Today, in the hostel, the student is free to eat what he likes and his mental development is affected. In gurukulavāsa the teacher would not feed his students food likely to do harm to their mental and spiritual development.

Normally, it would take twelve years to study a Veda, its Angas and other subjects. That means a child who started at eight years old would live in the gurukula until he was twenty. At fourteen or fifteen years of age a boy's mind is awakened to new feelings or urges. In Tamil this age is called "*kālaiparvam*" – that is the time when the boy would want to break free like a bull and roam at will. When the student does bhikṣācarya during this time under a guru – a guru who is serene by nature and full of affection and of exemplary conduct – his senses will be under check and he will acquire Brahma-tējas (Brāhmanic lustre).

But to impose the discipline of gurukulavāsa and bhikṣācarya on the student at the very time his urges manifest themselves would be to invite unfortunate consequences. When you try to raise the banks of a river at the time of a rising flood, the riverbanks as well as the men trying to raise them will be swept away. That is why our śāstras enjoin the parents to send their sons for gurukulavāsa when they are still children of eight years old. Before kāma disturbed his mind, it would be imbued with the Gāyatrī and would begin to get purified and illumined by the mantra. The other rules of the brahmacaryāśrama would further teach the student humility and discipline. He became a true brahmacārin, not one merely in name.

I said earlier that, just as there is a king (or state) concerned with life in this world, there is a guru with regard to the conduct of the other world. I also mentioned that in the sannyāsāśrama, the guru shows the disciple straightway the path to the other world. The vidyābhyāsa-guru, who laid the foundation of the pupil's education in the beginning, is as important as the second guru. Do we not serve the king or the state? Do we not pay taxes? In the same way we must serve both the first and the last ācāryās. We must pay them a dakṣiṇā. We cannot receive a benefit from anyone without giving him something in return. Whatever the commodity received, we must pay its price if it is to remain with us, if it is to be enduring. The sannyāsa-guru does not have to be paid a big dakṣiṇā and serving him is more important. The guru who teaches you in the beginning (vidyābhyāsa-guru) must be served and paid a dakṣiṇā too. He has a family to look after. The food brought from bhikṣācarya would not be a sufficient dakṣiṇā. The vidyābhyāsa-guru performs sacrifices and other rites. So the materials needed for them must be given in the form of dakṣiṇā.

Nowadays the student pays his fees during his education, with the result that he feels a certain pride in the fact that his teacher is maintained out of the payment he makes. This results in diminished devotion and respect for the guru. It is laid down in the śāstras that a student must pay the dakṣiṇā asked for by the teacher on completion of his studies in the gurukula. Although it is not possible to compensate the guru for the education he has imparted, the student can, to the best of his ability, serve him in addition to offering him a dakṣiṇā.

So long as the student was quiet by nature and humble he progressed in his vidyā. To disturb his mind and arouse his feelings and urges there have appeared today the cinema, apart from story books and other diversions.

The student today does not go through the brahmacarya stage without his mind being aroused by kâma and other passions. He has another enemy to contend with and it is anger: it creates instability of mind. Today's political parties inflame his anger right from his days of schooling. Tranquillity and humility are absent from the life of a student. And because of his ego and sense of pride there is no development of true vidyâ.

If the boy is coached at home by a tutor it amounts to his being the yajamâna (master) – that is the teacher is as good as the student's servant. This feeling of pride that the student is the yajamâna is at the back of his going on strike in college or hostel. Worse, he even beats up the warden and the professor. The reason for this is that they receive their salaries out of the fees paid by him. In gurukulavâsa dakṣiṇâ was given on the conclusion of the course of studies. The psychological insight of our forefathers in such matters was remarkable indeed. After spending many years with the guru in a relationship of affection, the student asked himself with feelings of gratitude: "What can I give the guru? Is there anything that I should not give him?"

Some gurus have asked their students to fetch the ear-rings of Indrâṇî as dakṣiṇâ or a jewel guarded by a snake, but such gurus were few and far between. Those who demanded such seemingly impossible types of dakṣiṇâ knew the capability of their students and, indeed, by making such demands they felt they were honouring them. Usually no guru asked for a dakṣiṇâ out of greed. Most gurus were easily pleased with what little they received.

Tadviddhi pranipâtena paripraśnena sevayâ

Upadekṣayanti te jñānam jñāninaḥ tattva-darśinaḥ

so says the Lord in the Gtâ.¹ "If you wish to know the truth of the Paramâtman you must seek such masters as have an awareness of It themselves. Serve them in humble reverence. Learn from them by questioning them again and again. If you conduct yourself in this manner you will surely receive "jñānopadeśa." Since this deals with the seers of the Ultimate Reality no mention is made of dakṣiṇâ. Only service to the master is mentioned. In the *Taittirîya Upaniṣad* it is stated clearly that "after completing your education you must give the guru the dakṣiṇâ that is pleasing to him" ("Acāryāya priyam dhanam āhṛtya"). This does not mean that the guru was avaricious and demanded a big sum. If the student was judged by some criteria, so too was the guru.

The *Taittirîya Upaniṣad* contains the upadeśa given by the guru to the student when the latter was about to return home on completing his education. This is described in jest as the convocation address of the Upaniṣadic period. It says: "Speak the truth. Conduct yourself according to dharma. Do not abandon the study of the Vedas (it means no one should abandon the occupation that is based on his svadharma). Since this Veda-dharma is to prevail for all time, become a gr̥hastha or householder; procreate children and bestow on them the treasure of the Vedas (or hand down the occupation that is laid down by the Vedas for the welfare of the world). Never forsake that which is to be performed in honour of the devas and the

¹ Chapter IV - 34.

pitrs (ancestors). May your mother be your deity. May your father be your deity. May your guest be your deity. Perform actions that are not contrary to what is laid down in the Vedas." Having said all this the guru goes on: "Conduct yourself in accordance with the virtuous manner in which we conduct ourselves. Do not deviate from this path."

From this it is clear that the guru must have been a man of exemplary character.

Since pointing to his own conduct as an example to be followed would be construed as vanity, the guru, immediately after giving the above advice, tells his student how to conduct himself before Brāhmins superior to them (that is superior to the gurus). This is to emphasise the fact that the ācārya must possess very humility that he holds up as an ideal to be followed by his student. We must take it that the teacher who gave such advice was himself a man of the highest qualities.

If doubts arise in the mind of the student about what he should do or how he should conduct himself (in any situation) the teacher exhorts him to follow the example of others. Who are these "others"? "Those who have the capacity for thorough inquiry into subjects and form clear views, those who go along with what is laid down in the śāstras, those who are not subject to the dictates of others and are not cruel by nature (that means affectionate and kind-hearted people), those who are not addicted to carnal pleasures and are adherents of dharma. Live like them, live like those men who are well versed in the Vedas and who are devoted to the inward life."

You must take from this that the ācāryas themselves possessed the qualities about which they spoke. The student had all these years lived with his teacher in the gurukula and was familiar with the manner in which the latter had lived. Now he was leaving him and going home. He must continue to conform to the same discipline and the same virtuous way of life after leaving the gurukula. This is what the Upanisadic ācārya told the student. The life-breath of gurukulavāsa was the devotion the disciple formed for the guru who was himself an exemplar of all the noble qualities mentioned here. Guru-bhakti is the source of the student's humility. It is through devotion to the guru that he conquers his senses. The subsequent reward he obtains by going step by step ahead in his devotion to the Lord and the advancement of the Ātman – the inspiration for all this is guru-bhakti.

It matters little that the guru does not have such qualities as inspire devotion. The young student as he is being taken to such a guru must be told: "He is your guru. He is like God to you." The boy must be made to observe bhikṣācārya and he must eat the food given by the guru out of his (the student's) bhikṣā. If this is ensured, devotion to the guru will naturally grow in the student's mind. If a pupil receives education in this way, with devotion to the guru, it will be beneficial not only to him but to the world. It will also mean that there will no longer be the sort of indiscipline that we witness today. The present trend in education is contrary to the ideal I cherish. I have been pondering over the question whether the system of gurukula education could somehow be revived.

Let me express my wish here. Children should live and study in a gurukula and

observe bhikṣācārya at least for one year. Parents should agree to children setting apart one year thus and this one year could be regarded as the period lost due to failure in the annual examination. Gurukulavāsa over a period of twelve years may perhaps be altogether unacceptable to you. That is why I propose only one year's gurukulavāsa for your children. The rewards will be considerable even though the stay in the gurukula is only for a short period. Though I said that this period of absence from the "regular" school could be taken as equivalent to losing one year due to failure in the annual examination, in reality there is no loss or waste at all.

In one year of gurukulavāsa and bhikṣācārya the student will acquire the keenness of intelligence equivalent to what he will otherwise take three years to gain. Within the next one year he will earn a "double promotion", thereby finding compensation for not having gone to the regular school for the short period. Also as a result of staying with the guru for one year he will have learned good habits like bathing in the morning, performing sandhyā-vandana, etc – habits which will become part of his life thereafter.

These days you send your children away for a month or a fortnight for their scouts camp. I ask you to agree to a similar but longer stay away from home for your child. Let him live for one year with an ācārya observing bhikṣācārya. He will during this time learn many a good habit and learn also to be disciplined – all as a result of guru-bhakti.

We need a social awakening to create an order in which the teachers will be happy to keep their students in their homes and teach them. This awakening will similarly induce parents to send their children to live with such teachers. I ask for your help in this matter. The well-to-do must contribute to the education of children of poor families who cannot afford to pay a dakṣiṇā. Poor parents are more likely to send their children for gurukulavāsa. To help them, small groups consisting of ten people or so could be formed. By this I do not mean that there should be no "establishment" of any sort at all for the purpose. But there is no need to wait hoping to carry out the scheme on a big scale. We must act right away, starting with what we can do now. What is important is that we take a personal interest in the matter and do our best. Such an attitude is the need of the hour.

We have come to such a pass that the more people are educated the more atheistic they become – and the more indisciplined. They also deviate further from the conduct enjoined by the śāstras. Inculcation of devotion to the guru is the only means of changing this state of affairs. Let us inspire guru-bhakti at least as an example, an example that will be like an exhibit in a museum. Devotion to the guru is cultivated only through the gurukula system of learning.

Until the previous generation, at least music was taught according to the gurukula tradition. Now, the gurukula system does not obtain even in music.

We must exert ourselves to the full for the reintroduction of the gurukula system. We should not wait for others to join us. If we are sincere in our efforts at least some ten students will benefit from our work. Devotion to Īśvara — and devotion to guru to sustain the devotion to Īśvara for all time, — must be kept unwavering so that the well-being of mankind is ever assured.

Surrender above all

I have spoken at length about the qualifications essential for a guru. Character and bhakti are important among them whether he is the guru who is the disciple's first teacher, that is a Vedavid, or the guru who is a Brahmaid and finally imparts the knowledge that unites the Ātman with the Paramātman. I also said that the guru who points to you the path to the other world must be like Īśvara visible (pratyakṣa) and that his citta and mind must not be unsteady in the least. Besides he must be a great jñānin, must be compassion personified, and must be utterly pure of heart and mind. If you find such a guru, I further said, you do not need even Īśvara.

But one wonders whether it will be possible for everyone to find either a vidyābhyāsa-guru with the qualifications mentioned here or a guru possessing the qualities of Īśvara to give the ultimate upadeśa of Ātma-vidyā. The śāstras proclaim that if a man has a burning desire to be pure, the Lord himself will send him a worthy guru. Īśvara himself became a guru for Māṅikkavācakar¹ and gave him upadeśa sitting under the *kurunta*² tree. In his *Tirūvācakam*, Māṅikkavācakar himself has referred to this in a number of passages. Even if we are aware of such instances of the Lord's concern for us we are uneasy in our mind about finding a worthy guru.

Suppose the guru we seek and find turns out to be a false teacher, what should we do? Or how can we make sure that our guru has a flawless character? We go to him as disciples, believing him to be pure of character — but what should we do if he appears to us to be different later? What is the assurance that we will not be disappointed if we accept another man as our guru? We are thus racked by doubts. There is so much wickedness in this world and you are misled by tales of slander. Even a guru of excellent character may be the victim of slander. But students who depend on such a guru are afraid that the slander might be proved true. "And what will be our fate then?" they ask themselves in their worry.

What do we do in the event? The problem is not grave in the case of the vidyābhyāsa-guru even though we expect in him qualities associated with men of the highest class. Since he is a householder there is no possibility of his being guilty of the sort of lapses that are likely to be a serious blot on the character of the sannyāsa-guru. Also it is as a child that a student joins the vidyābhyāsa-guru. At that time the young mind does not go into the character of people nor is it capable of judging them. If the impression is formed in the young mind that the guru is like Īśvara it will remain unerasable because of the devotedness behind it.

The problem is about the other guru whose function it is to purify our Self and help us to attain mokṣa or salvation. How can we believe that he is a guru who is total or pūrṇa in all respects? What do we do when we come to know that he has shortcomings? We took him for our guru and if we leave him now in the belief that he is not a man of character, will it mean disloyalty to him? Will we be guilty of committing a sin? On the other hand, suppose we have gone wrong in thinking him to be a man lacking in character?

I will tell you what I feel we should do when faced with such a dilemma? (In my proposal to face the dilemma) I am withdrawing the statement I made earlier about

1 Great Tamil saint-poet. 2 See glossary.

the qualifications required for a guru: I now ask you not to worry about these qualifications at all. Just as the young student has unquestioning faith in his vidyā-guru, so too must have the aged disciple implicit faith in the guru who is to show him the path of mokṣa. Never mind if others call such devotion blind faith.

We felt the need for a guru and sought him. We went to him for refuge believing him to be pure of character and complete in every respect (pūrṇa). When we came to him as a student we never thought him to be wanting in character or incomplete in any respect. Had we thought so we would not have, in the first place, become his student. Now that we have doubts about him, what do we do? We may go seeking another guru, but we may be worried about finding him too. Moreover, we will be gripped by a new fear. After becoming the disciple of the present guru how can we leave him and go to another? Will it not be disloyalty or gurudroha, akin to a wife's unfaithfulness to her husband?

The only solution in such a situation, it seems to me, is not to worry about the guru's qualifications. We looked for a guru, we found him and we sought refuge at his feet. Does it not mean then that there is the hand of Īśvara in our finding such a guru? We may take it that way. According to the śāstras, one must have faith in the fact that not merely does Īśvara send us our guru, but that the guru himself is Īśvara. It is only when we regard our guru as a mortal that the question arises whether or not he has drawbacks. There is no such question if he is Īśvara. Is there anything about Īśvara that can be described as a fault? If there seems to us any such it means that there is something wrong in how we look at him. If our present guru is Īśvara himself there is no question of our leaving him to seek another. After all, there is only one Īśvara. And is it not ridiculous to go from one Īśvara to another Īśvara?

After we find refuge under a guru, we must serve him untiringly. We should not bother about what he is like and our devotion for him must be unwavering throughout. If we do so, Īśvara himself will, through him, make us pure within and bestow jñāna on us. Whether or not the guru himself attains mokṣa, we will.

The world will perhaps ridicule us for being devoted to a guru of bad habits¹. Never mind if it does. Never mind if we come to lose anything. In the end we will have the supreme recompense. Without caring for our own profit or loss and without caring for personal honour or dishonour, if we surrender to someone in full faith, Īśvara will give us the supreme and ultimate gain of Ātma-jñāna. What we regard as profit or loss is not in reality of an enduring nature but ephemeral in character. We may care for profit and loss in other matters. But we must go to the guru for refuge without caring for any gain or loss.

*Bhūmau skhalitapādānam bhūmirevāvalambanam
tvayi jātāparādhānām tvamevāvalambanam*

If you fall from upstairs the earth will support you. If you fall from a tree the same will be the case. But if you trip over something and fall to the earth it will again be the earth that will support you. If you are guilty of disloyalty or if you are guilty of a sacrilege to Īśvara you may wash away the sin thus accruing to you by atoning for

¹ The Paramaguru uses the word "dhūrta" here, meaning, among other things, a dissolute person.

The Guru Tradition

it before your guru. But if you are guilty of disloyalty to your guru there is nothing that you can do but atone for it before your guru himself.

It is our duty to look for a guru. If we, in this quest, look for a great man it is because we want to feel assured about him for all time. But if we dedicate ourselves whole-heartedly to our guru without worrying about his qualities, it is immaterial who he is. One may go to the extent of asking, "What is remarkable about our being devoted to a guru who is good in all respects?" On the other hand, if we submit ourselves to a guru even when he does not possess any good qualities, we will acquire maturity of mind. We should take it that Īśvara has brought us to such a guru, wanting to test us and make our mind steady. There is greater merit in being devoted to a preceptor who does not possess good qualities. If there is a fresh spring in the Mahāmagha pond (in Kumbhakonam), even a white man will be ready to bathe in it. The test of real bhakti is that, however muddy or dirty the pond, you will bathe in it thinking it to be a sacred tīrtha. We may test ourselves in this manner.

If we want a guru, who is assuredly great, it is because we are too lazy to put our maturity of mind to the test. If our guru is great it is not a matter of credit to us. Our devotion to the guru is also relevant here. Imagine that the pūjāri or arcaka in a great temple is not a man of good character. Do we, on that account, decide not to worship in it? True gain for us lies in our sense of dedication (to the deity or the guru as the case may be). Our merit is enhanced if we remain steadfast in our devotion to the guru even if he be not a great man.

It is enough if we keep our mind under control, without letting it wander, and surrender to our guru. We sought the guru first in the belief that he would protect us. If we are steadfast in our devotion to him in any event and ever remain in an attitude of surrender to him, we will receive from him that for which we sought him first — and receive it as the grace of Īśvara.

Part Two



Part Two

Guru, ācārya

We generally use the words "guru" and "ācārya" in the same sense. But, according to men of learning, there is some difference between the two.

"Ācārya" is related to words like "ācaraṇa", "ācāra", "cara". "Cara" literally means to walk, to go. "Carita" and "caritra" mean conduct. A continuous course of events can mean either "deśa-caritra" (history of a nation) or "jivya-caritra" (biography, life history). Going, instead of standing still, in an order of movement, is a "walk". "Caritra" means walking along a path, a certain order.

In Tamil they say "ozhukuvatu", that is flowing along a way or in a direction. When water flows, it flows in a stream or in a continuous cascade. "Ozhukuvatu" applied to human conduct means going along according to certain rules. "Ozhukkam" is derived from it. The Sanskrit root "cara", meaning to walk or go, becomes "ācāra" which has the same connotation as the Tamil "ozhukkam", that is a stream of conduct in keeping with the dictates of dharma. This is ācaraṇa.

What is important to an ācārya is setting an example through his life of orderly moral conduct. Ahimsā, truthfulness, etc, are part of the common dharma. The Hindu religion contains in its fold many traditions or sampradāyas for each of which there are separate śāstras which enjoin upon their followers separate ācāras. The Vaiṣṇavas have one ācāra, the Mādhvas have another. There are then the followers of other religious leaders like Caitanya and Nimbārka who have their own respective ācāras, customs, habits. For each sampradāya there are texts containing the rites to be conducted by its adherents and how they are to be conducted. In Śaivism there are a number of sub-sects like Vīraśaivism, Kāśmīrī Śaivism, Pāśupata and Siddhānta (Śaiva Siddhānta). As for Vaiṣṇavas, they have Ekāntins, Vaikhānasas and Pāñcarātrins. Each has a set of rules to observe. Advaitins follow the rules contained in the original Smṛtis.

An ācārya is one who lives according to the śāstras of a particular tradition, sect or sub-sect. Indeed he shows through the example of his life the practices of the tradition to which he belongs. Some of you must be familiar with the śloka defining the word "ācārya".

*Ācinoti hi śāstrārthān
Ācāre sthāpayatyapi
Svayam ācarate yaśca
Tam ācāryam pracakṣate*

An ācārya is one who inquires into the meaning of the śāstras ("instructing others in the śāstras" is understood here though not explicitly mentioned), lives in

The Guru Tradition

accordance with them and makes others live according to them (through the example of his own life). That is what is meant by the words precept and practice. To explain, the *ācārya* does not merely speak about the *śāstras* or write about them: he sets an example to others by living according to the *śāstra* or rules of his *saṁpradāya*.

We speak of "*ācāra-anuṣṭhāna*" as a joint term, also "*śāstra-saṁpradāya* – (words often used as pairs). The words here are interconnected. Indeed, a *saṁpradāya* or tradition has evolved according to the rules codified in the *śāstras* and to be observed in life. There are many beliefs or concepts on which the *śāstras* are based. Different *saṁpradāyas* have been evolved by separating particular beliefs and giving shape to them. In the same Vedic religion there are the Śankara, Rāmānuja and other *saṁpradāyas*.

When we use the words "*śāstra*" and "*saṁpradāya*" we think of another kind of division. That is a "*śāstra*" is like a book of law of an enduring nature while a "*saṁpradāya*" has nothing legal about it but consists of customs or beliefs followed by all the members of a given community including those who are conversant with the *śāstras*. "*Śāstra*" is scripture while "*saṁpradāya*" is tradition, usage, what is known as *marapu* in Tamil. *Śāstra* is common to all; but what has come into usage as *saṁpradāya* may differ from region to region. Customs and observances may be different in different *kulas* or clans or families and in different lands. You have thus "*kulācāra*" and "*deśācāra*"

A man who lives a disciplined life according to the *ācāras*, customs and practices governed by the *śāstra* and *saṁpradāya* to which he belongs is an *ācārya*. Apart from living according to the rules of the *dharma* common to all, an *ācārya* must set an example to others — he is proficient in the *śāstra* of a *saṁpradāya* and lives according to it. But it is not enough that he lives according to the *śāstras*. As you know, an *ācārya* to be an *ācārya* must have a disciple. He must teach the *dharma-ācāras* of his *saṁpradāya* or sect and inspire him to live according to them. If he is to be a teacher he must be a profoundly learned man, a *vidvān*. Besides, he must be able to clear the doubts of people with regard to the *śāstra* in which he is learned; he must also answer criticism of his *saṁpradāya* and system. A disciple has to be trained long under him to learn all this.

Today in the place of the *ācāryas* of old there are school- and college-teachers. But they are not concerned with any *dharma* either in their own life or in their teaching. In the old days too there were *ācāryas* who taught the natural sciences and the arts. Even those who taught *Dhanurveda* (or the art of warfare) were called *ācāryas* in the old days, e.g. *Kṛpācārya* and *Dronācārya*. These *ācāryas* too were conversant with the *Dharmaśāstras* and *saṁpradāyas* and they were respected not only for their erudition and skills but for their conduct according to the *ācāra* laid down for them.

Who is a guru?

Living with an ācārya and studying at his feet – such vidyābhyāsa is called “gurukulavāsa”. We do not speak of “ācāryakulavāsa”. One is led to think from this that the ācārya and the guru are one and the same. Note the name “Jagadguru Śankarācārya”. We may infer from this that the same individual can be both a guru and an ācārya. And for the same reason (since the two appellations, “guru” and “ācārya”, are used for the same person) it also seems to follow that the ācārya and the guru are different.

What is the literal meaning of the word “guru”? We have already defined the word “ācārya”; but how do we define “guru”? “Guru” means “weighty”, “big”. In other words one who has greatness, one who is important. (The British title “Right Honourable” is usually put as “Mahaghanam” in Tamil.) Like “guru”, “Brahman” also means “great” or “big”. How do you call a great man “great”? Is a great man great because he is big-built? “Mahān” also means a great man. Great or big in what? You call me “guru”. You call me “Periyava”¹ (“Periyavar”). If your respect for me is a degree higher, you even address me as “Mahān”. Considering my weight, my build, it is not logical or reasonable to call me a “Mahān”. If a man is called by any of these names it means he is “weighty” or great inwardly because of his learning, experience or grace. For the simple reason that the name of Śankara Bhagavadpāda attaches to me you are misled into believing that I share his qualities of greatness and call me “guru”, “Periyava”, “Mahān” and what have you in praise of me.

Altogether, we come to the recognition that “guru” means one who is very great inwardly. An ācārya’s qualities or qualifications are outwardly discernible in his role as a teacher and in his conduct. Although it is true that it is his inner character that is revealed as his outward conduct and although he does not merely pretend to be a man of noble character, his relationship is with the outside world in that he has to demonstrate through his own life the ideals he preaches or places before the world.

What about the guru? He need not “do” anything outwardly perceptible for the world. He need not be a learned man in any mundane sense, nor need he be so erudite as to have seen the frontiers of śāstric knowledge. It is also not necessary that he should, like the ācārya, be an example through his life of the teachings of any of the śāstras or traditions of any sect or sampradāya. Why, he need not open his mouth and teach people or give them upadeśa. After all, there have been so many mauna gurus, or gurus absorbed in silence.

1 “Periyava”, “Periyavar”, “Periyavāl” – the terms mean the “Great One” in Tamil.

The Guru Tradition

There may be someone somewhere remaining all by himself, who is alone, who is all "himself in himself". People who come to recognise the force of his inner light will choose him as their guru. It is not necessary that he should teach them lessons from the śāstras. But the quickness of his anugraha or grace manifests itself in their lives. He may not regard them as his "śiṣyas" in any formal sense. But those who regard themselves as his disciples will receive that which they seek as a blessing from him.

There have been so many gurus who were strangers to such things as study or learning. Also gurus who never taught any classes. The very first guru (Ādiguru) Dakṣiṇāmūrti never opened his mouth. Also there have been a number of gurus not bound by the rules of any śāstra. Some of them were like ghosts, paisācas, lunatics, madmen who roamed the world as "ativarnāśramis" (those who are beyond varnāśrama). The one who was a skyclad Datta is spoken of in very exalted terms as "Avadhūta--guru".

An ācārya is one who represents a "system". He represents a particular śāstraic tradition. He must have studied systematically the works belonging to this tradition and questions relating to it. Besides, he teaches them in a systematic manner to others. Above all, he himself must live systematically and set an example to others.

There is no compulsion for a guru to be like an ācārya. His is a world of inner experience or realisation. It is because he has realised himself that he is called "mahān". And it is the "weight" of this inner experience or realisation that entitles him to be called a guru. The guru is beyond any notion of character and conduct. Do we investigate the "conduct or character" of Bhagavān? The same is the case with a guru. Gurus need not act according to the śāstras. They are jñānins who are one with the Ātman or the Brahman. They may be in "touch" with the Great Power called Īśvara or Bhagavān or they may be yogins who, keeping their minds under control, go into samādhi.

Gurus who, as described above, are great inwardly may, at the same time, be ācāryas outwardly who shine with knowledge, teach their disciples, and act according to the śāstras. Śankara Bhagavadpāda and the ācāryas of systems other than his were in this way both gurus and ācāryas.

Although the vidyābhyāsa-ācāryas of the past did not perhaps go as far as to realise the Self or Īśvara or go into yoga-śamādhi, they too were great in respect of their inward life. That must be the reason why learning under them (in their āśramas) was called gurukulavāsa. There were also gurus who, though not bound by any particular system, gave upadeśa on their own or upadeśa based on the śāstras.

Although during his own lifetime what an ācārya taught may not have been known as a śāstraic system, later it may have assumed the form of a systematised

śāstra. It would then be named after him and he himself recognised as its original ācārya. Many ācāryas who were outwardly associated with this or that system were inwardly gurus of an exalted character. Also there have been gurus whose names are not associated with any system.

The "inward" guru and the "outward" world

A guru may not want to teach systematically, but he invariably wants to give his blessings (to his disciples and devotees). There may be a mahātman who has transcended this function of the guru of blessing his disciples who have sought refuge under him. In such cases Śvara himself will bless them through the guru for the reason that the disciples who have sought the guru with full faith in him should not be forsaken.

So even if a guru does not seek "gurutva" on his own, when he has a disciple, a relationship is created through the grace he imparts him. In this context another meaning of the word "guru" will seem to be very apt.

I gave you one meaning of the word guru: the guru is one who is "weighty" inwardly without relating himself to the outward world. Since his concern is all about the inward life there is nothing that the guru has to do. What is the other meaning? "Gu" means darkness; "ru" denotes that which banishes (something): thus "guru" means one who dispels darkness. In Tamil they say "kummirittu" which means utter darkness ("ku" stands for "gu"): here "ku" or "gu" means darkness. We see again that "guru" means one who removes darkness. "Deva" is one who shines — "prakāśarūpī". Darkness is ajñāna, ignorance. "Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya": tamas or darkness is ajñāna; jyotis is jñāna. It is customary to say that ajñāna-māyā is darkness, that jñāna is light. Jñāna and ajñāna-māyā are not used in the context of the Self alone. Take any subject or topic: ignorance about it is the darkness of not knowing; knowledge or awareness of it is light (buddhi-prakāśa). A subject illumined by the guru is grasped or understood by his student with his intelligence or mind. The guru is one who sheds light. Most importantly, it is the guru who gives the illumination of jñāna to his disciple towards the close of the latter's life.

A great man may not have learned the śāstras; he may not act according to the śāstras; and he may not teach the śāstras. But, even so, if one looks upon him as one's guru he will dispel one's darkness within. As a result of this great man's grace light will be shed even on subjects or vidyā-s one has not studied.

When we define a guru as one who dispels darkness, it means that his function is one of removal of something. His inner strength or greatness now works significantly outwardly. Instead of being by himself, he now relates to another. Giving upadeśa orally or through the example of his life or by grace (it may be that he himself does not consciously bestow this grace but does so through Śvara) he dispels the ignorance of his disciple, ignorance in matters small or in matters big like those relating to the Self.

The Guru Tradition

If the guru performs a function for his disciple there must be a link between the two. There must be a wire to connect the powerhouse with the bulb that burns in our home. If the water in the Red Hills¹ is available on tap in our house it means there is a pipeline connecting the two. Similarly if the disciple's intelligence is to shine and if a flow of knowledge is to be created in him there must be a link between him and his guru. When a subject is orally explained by a guru, his words constitute the link with his student. When knowledge is gained through the example of the guru's life, that is also a kind of communication, a kind of link. Even if something is not made known openly by the guru and its meaning suggested only inwardly, it is upadeśa, because whatever the guru does to banish his disciple's ignorance must be called upadeśa. Upadeśa given by a guru not through lectures but by the example of his life is different from a "verbal message": here the guru's life itself is a message. The link of upadeśa between the guru and the disciple obtains in a gross form as well as in a subtle form.

The teacher who has the duty of teaching a student orally and through the example of his life is called an ācārya. I said so in the beginning. I also said that even if the guru does not give upadeśa to his disciple either verbally or through the example of his life, his grace becomes a connection between the two and that also is upadeśa.

Anything that removes ignorance and lights the lamp of knowledge is upadeśa.

Usually, the spiritual power or energy of a guru's blessings suffuses the student through the link established by the upadeśa given in the form of a mantra. We also see that mahatmans, who don't lecture or explain any doctrine or śāstra, give only mantropadeśa to their disciples. We read in stories of some disciple or other waiting long at the feet of a great man hoping to be elevated by him. And one day the great one imparts a mantra to him. From that moment he experiences the light of jñāna in him. People have wanted to obtain mantropadeśa from the mouth of their guru somehow and have performed austerities for the purpose or resorted to stratagems.

Kabīrdās longed to receive the Śrīrāma-mantropadeśa from the saint Rāmānanda. He was a Muslim – they say he was born a Hindu but was brought up as a Muslim in a Muslim household. Kabīr feared that Rāmānanda might not give him upadeśa. He resorted to a stratagem. One day, in the small hours of the morning, that is during the Brāhmamūhūrta² when it was still dark, he lay down on the steps of one of the *ghāts* of the Gangā across the path usually taken by Rāmānanda. When the saint came for his early morning bath, it was dark and he did not see Kabīr on the steps and unwittingly trod on him. Kabīr took it as "pāda-dīkṣā". (I will come to the subject of dīkṣā later.) Rāmānanda knew at once that it was a human he had unwittingly trod on. It is customary to cry spontaneously "Śiva! Śiva!" or "Rāma! Rāma!" as atonement for a transgression. The guru was Rāmānanda. In his remorse for treading on a living creature (a human in this case)

1 One of the reservoirs supplying water to the city of Madras.

2 The muhūrta before sunrise. A muhūrta is 48 minutes, though the Brāhmamūhūrta is taken to be two hours.

he cried out loudly "Rāma! Rāma!" Kabīrdās took it as upadeśa. He had lain on the *ghat* purposely so that Rāmānanda, unwittingly treading on him, would utter the Tāraka-mantra of Rāma-nāma. In this way he would obtain his upadeśa.

The purpose of my telling this story is that even when a guru does not intend to speak a word, he establishes a live connection with his disciple through mantropadeśa. This mantropadeśa is called "vārta" or "*Tiruvārtai*" (in Tamil). The term "*oru vārtai*" (one word) occurs in some songs: which means even if other words are not needed for upadeśa, the mantra of one word is enough. Tāyumanāvar voices this when he says that for one who begins (his journey of devotion) with *mūrti* (deity), *talam* (the sacred place where the deity is enshrined) and *tirtham* (holy river or pond connected with the sacred place), there is the chance of the Supreme Being speaking one word: (*ōr vārtai*) as the true guru.

He who imparts a mantra has come to be called a guru. A man who is great inwardly becomes a guru by virtue of his being connected with his disciple. This relationship is established mainly through mantropadeśa. It is enough if a guru gives mantropadeśa once. It is not necessary that he should make his disciple sit at his feet and explain the mantra to him. Such long-term training is part of the responsibilities of an ācārya. A great guru may utter a mantra as if accidentally and depart. Even so, a link is subtly established between him and the disciple (who is within the hearing of the guru). Through the mantra the energy of the guru's grace starts to work in the disciple (or one might say that the power of the mantra is the source of the grace).

If the guru is of a lofty character and the disciple himself is mature in mind and ready to receive light, there is no need for any verbal mantropadeśa. But there must be some kind of a link between the two. How is this link then created in such cases? If the guru glances at his disciple even once, that itself becomes upadeśa and the necessary link. The *katākṣa* (sidelong glance) of the guru goes into him and works for his enlightenment. The guru touching the student or placing his hand is also upadeśa. But sometimes none of these acts is needed. If the guru thinks to himself, "This child must be well... (blessed)," it becomes an upadeśa and a link is created between him and the disciple.

Dikṣā

I have described the connection or link created in various forms between the guru and the disciple through upadeśa. In the śāstras the term used for it (the technical term) is "dikṣā". In Tamil it is "*dikkai*". They speak of "initiation". That which originates from the guru and is transmitted into the disciple, inspiring him to go on an intense seeking along a particular path or "*mārga*", is "dikṣā". This act on the part of the guru is called "initiation" since it is the initial impulse for the disciple to enter upon a particular *mārga* or path. But, after the act of initiation, this impulse or power does not spend itself. It helps the disciple all through the way, inspiring him to go higher and higher until he attains the goal and is rewarded with *siddhi*.

If a guru keeps even a moment's link with his disciple, either through a mantra, through a sidelong glance, through touch or through remembrance imbued with

The Guru Tradition

grace, the anugraha so conveyed remains a permanent connection. You turn the switch once and the bulb keeps burning by itself. The dikṣā administered by the guru is like that. The ācārya, by his sthūla presence ("sthūla" means "gross"), has to keep long-term contact with his student to train him in his studies and conduct. But for the guru the gross connection need only be momentary or it may not even be altogether necessary. The "sūkṣma" or subtle contact through dikṣā will have more than a long-term effect: it will be lifelong. Indeed such contact will ultimately mean the end of saṁsāra for the disciple, the end of his reincarnations in this world. The contact will last until he attains siddhi, liberation.

Administering dikṣā is believed to be the most important of the guru's characteristic functions. "Dikṣā-guru", "guru-dikṣā" are terms often used. It is also customary to regard any individual who gives dikṣā as a guru. If you refer to the epics like the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas and the poetical works of old, you will find that the father is mentioned as the guru. Whether or not he (the father) is inwardly great and has the "weight" of the guru, is he not equivalent to God so far as his son is concerned? Is he not "*munnarī Daivam*"?¹ Because of this, he must have been spoken of in elevated terms. [Similarly, the teacher is also to be regarded as God. There is a saying in Tamil that "the one who teaches the alphabet (writing) is God." The Vedas exhort the student²: "Pitṛdevo bhava" ("May your father be God to you") and "Ācārya devo bhava" ("May your teacher be God to you"). Such is the Vedic injunction and this must be the reason for the father being raised to the position of a guru.] There seems another reason for regarding the father as a guru. What is the first upadeśa given to a child (to a jīva)? It is the Gāyatrī. This mantra is imparted by the father in the rite of Brahmopadeśa which is to say the Gāyatrī-dikṣā must be given by the father. It is likely that the tradition of looking upon the father as a guru originated from this practice.

[There is akṣarābhyāsa³ for people not entitled to the Gāyatrī upadeśa. The father gives the upadeśa of the "Aṣṭākṣara"⁴. ("Aum Namō Narāyaṇāya") or the "Pañcakṣara" "Namah Śivāya" — mantras of eight letters and five letters respectively and initiates the child into the alphabet. By administering this mantropadeśa the father is entitled to be called a guru.]

If you go to your father for refuge or a teacher who does not possess the weight of inward experience of the Self and if you go to either firmly believing that he is your guru, you will receive the gift of jñāna from him however unworthy he may be as a guru and however inadequate the weight of his experience within. This is because of your attitude of surrender. Surrender, "śaraṇāgati"⁵, has its own "weight". Bhagavān gives his blessings to a disciple through a guru, who has realised himself but does not have the desire to give anugraha to his disciple. In the

1 The deity first known to a person.

2 Also mentioned in an earlier section on Gurukulavāsa.

3 Initiating a child in the alphabet.

4 Obviously eight and five letters written in Devanāgarī.

5 See "Surrender above all" in Part One.

The Guru Tradition

same way Bhagavān will bestow his grace on the disciple who has surrendered to a guru who does not have the power in the least of blessing anybody. If the disciple goes to a guru for refuge, a guru who may be unworthy, if he places his trust unquestioningly in him and if he does not by speech or action lower the prestige of his master, he will be elevated by such conduct, whether or not the guru himself is elevated.

When I think of this type of guru-bhakti, I am reminded of an incident which took place in the Kāñcī Maṭha. Once I asked two students of the pāṭhaśālā of the Maṭha — they were small children — whether their teacher had come. One said "No". The other said "Yes". It transpired that the first boy had told the truth. I asked the second boy: "Why did you tell a lie?" The boy courageously replied: "It was indeed time for the class and the teacher was yet to come. But I thought if I said he had not come it would be openly pointing to a lapse on his part. It occurred to me that finding fault with the guru was a bigger fault than the fault of the guru." I agreed that he had spoken rightly.

I have told this story to illustrate the importance of devotion to the guru. Whatever the character of the master, if the student surrenders to him, the benefits that are expected to be received from the guru will be received in the form of the grace of Īsvara.

When we learn a subject by ourselves there is no sense of dedication and surrender in our efforts. Instead of humility we develop the opposite quality, that is ahamkāra, arising from the feeling that we are able to learn ourselves without anybody else's help. Vidyā in the true sense must be able to remove ahamkāra, ego sense. Learning an art or vidyā without the help of a teacher, taking up a mantra oneself (without a guru), performing a meritorious work or rite by oneself — these are not permitted by the śāstras. A guru is needed for all these. May be, we are able to study and understand a subject ourselves, but the knowledge thus gained does not help the advancement of the Self. The idea of how a guru is indispensable is conveyed through a simile. It is a simile that brings the message with a sting! Knowledge gained without a guru is like begetting a son by one's wife's paramour. Son though he is he is not qualified to perform any Vedic karma.

As I said before, a guru complete in all attributes, one who is weighty by virtue of his being a realised man, may not want to administer dīkṣā except in rare cases. But, even he, I repeat, gives dīkṣā in one manner or another. Of these verbal dīkṣā is mantropadeśa. "Cakṣu-dīkṣā is initiation administered through the eye, by a glance of the guru. It is also called "nayana-dīkṣā". Sparśa-dīkṣā is initiation by touch.

Sparśa-dīkṣā is of different kinds. The guru places his hand on the disciple's head transmitting his spiritual energy (the power of the Ātman) into him: this is called "hasta-mastaka dīkṣā". [In all kinds of dīkṣā the guru makes a sacrifice — tyāga — of the power of his inner experience (or the power derived from his Self-realisation) to bless his śiṣyā.] Touching the disciple with the foot is pāda-dīkṣā. (From Rāmānanda Kabīrdās obtained both pāda-dīkṣā and mantra-dīkṣā.)

The guru placing his foot on different parts of his śiṣya's body, particularly his

head, is considered a very great blessing. This is called "*Tiruvadi dīkkai*" in Tamil. One must practise meditation imagining that the guru's feet are always placed on one's head. "*Adiyar*" in Tamil means he who has experienced pāda-dīkṣā not in a verbal manner, not even as a feeling, but as a profound experience of the knowledge that the two feet of Īśvara, the guru of gurus, are placed on his head. In Sanskrit we say "Pāda" or "Śrīcaraṇa": "Bhagavadpāda" means he who holds the feet of Bhagavān on his head and becomes himself those feet. Now we must wear Bhagavadpāda Śankarācārya himself on our head. A guru need not render upadeśa orally from a high pedestal, nor need he touch, or glance at, his disciple. Sitting somewhere in a remote place, he may merely think of him: this "smaraṇa-dīkṣā" will be enough to raise his disciple.

The grace of Ambikā is dīkṣā

Ambā indeed is jñāna. We often hear the term "sat-chit-ānanda" (saccidānanda). In this term, "cit" that is the supreme knowledge or jñāna is Ambikā. They call her "Cāitanyarūpiṇī," the form made up of cit. In the Laḷitā-Sahasranāma (One Thousand Names of Laḷitā) the name "Cidekarasa-rūpiṇī" occurs. This goddess shines as Jñānāmbā at Kājahasti (in Andhra Pradesh).

Great men have known from experience – and spoken about it – that it is Ambā who comes in the form of the guru. "Deśika-rūpeṇa-darśidābhyudayām:" Ambā manifests the grace of her compassion in the form of a guru. "Deśika" also means a guru. It is another word like ācārya meaning one who takes us on to the right path. Vedāntadeśika is the the originator of the Vaḍagalai sampradāya of Vaiṣṇavas. People belonging to that sect do not say "Deśikar" which is the plural form of the name denoting respect but say "Deśikan" in singular. The singular is more natural when you address, or refer to, someone you love and not merely respect.

Bhagavān is addressed in Tamil as "Nī" (Thou), not as "Nīnga/" in plural. So out of love for Deśika his followers call him "Deśikan". Śankara Bhagavadpāda's disciple, Totakācārya, concludes every line of his hymn to his guru with "Śankaradeśika mē caraṇam"¹.

It is said that Ambā appears in the form of Deśika and imparts knowledge to the disciple. In particular, she administers dīkṣā by touch, through glance and remembrance, appearing in a different form for each type of initiation.

Sparsā-dīkṣā is also called "kukkuṭa-dīkṣā." "Matsya-dīkṣā" is another name for nayana-dīkṣā while smaraṇa-dīkṣā is also known as "kamaṭha-dīkṣā." The three alternate names could be translated as "hen initiation," "fish initiation," and "tortoise initiation".

One is amused by the three types of dīkṣā being called after the hen, the fish and the tortoise respectively. But in what is apparently amusing there is a deep meaning.

If the dīkṣā given to the disciple is potent he gives up the meaningless life he has

1 "Deśika" literally means one who knows every bit of his land and is a pathfinder. It also means one who has a profound knowledge of a śāstra.

led hitherto and starts a new life as a seeker of the Ultimate Truth. It is like being born again, born into a higher order of life. After the initiation into the Gāyatrī mantra, a student takes a second birth as a Brāhmin. He is now called a "dvija", "twice-born".

It is not, however, entirely correct to say that there is a janma before dīkṣā and another after it. This view is expressed in a different way. According to it, even though in his present janma a man is in a state of ignorance, within himself, without his being aware of it, he is one with the Brahman. Like the shell covering the embryo in an egg, his ignorance conceals his identity with the Brahman. Like the mother bird hatching the egg, the guru, by administering dīkṣā, breaks his disciple's shell of ignorance and makes him aware of his true Self.

Like a bird he flies away realising himself, which means there are no two separate births. Before the dīkṣā the śiṣya was in the state of being hidden in the egg-shell of ignorance and after it in the state of being freed from the shell and made capable of flying away on his own.

There are three ways in which the shell is broken or the egg is hatched by the mother. It is here that hen, fish and tortoise come in. What does the hen do? It sits on the egg to incubate and bring forth the young one. Sparśa-dīkṣā is similar to this – touching a disciple and breaking open his shell of ignorance.

The fish lays its eggs in the water. It keeps swimming in the water instead of remaining still at a place. The egg too keeps floating from place to place. The fish does not sit on the egg to bring forth its young. I do not know what modern biology or zoology has to say about this. I will just repeat here what our śāstras and poetic tradition have to say in the matter. The mother fish looks intently at the egg and the young one breaks out of the shell. That is why the dīkṣā administered by the guru's glance is called matsya-dīkṣā. What is kamaṭha or tortoise-dīkṣā? The mother tortoise, it is said, lays its eggs on the shore and then returns to the water. The egg is deposited in one place and the mother goes somewhere else. However, it always keeps thinking about its egg, worried about whether its young one will break out of the shell without difficulty. It seems, as a result of such intense thinking, its young one breaks out of the shell. This is similar to the smarāṇa-dīkṣā given by the guru – and hence the second name of kamaṭha-dīkṣā.

How does Ambā confer these three types of dīkṣā? Ambā manifests herself in three different forms in three different famous temples and each of these forms represents the beauty of her eyes, the beauty of her sidelong glances. The forms are Kāmākṣī, Mīnākṣī and Viśālākṣī. Ambā resides in Kāncipuram as Kāmākṣī, in Madurai as Mīnākṣī and in Kāśī as Viśālākṣī. Although we speak of the beauty of her eyes and sidelong glances in all her three forms or aspects, it does not mean that she confers nayana-dīkṣā in all these manifestations of hers. Mīnākṣī, fish-eyed, administers jñāna-dīkṣā with her sidelong glance. This is matsya-dīkṣā. Kāmākṣī makes her devotee a jñānin by touching him and placing her foot on his head. The deity invoked in Śankara Bhagavadpāda's *Saundaryalaharī* is Kāmākṣī. Kāmākṣī manifests herself as a goddess with four arms holding in her hands the bow of sugarcane, the arrow of flowers, the noose (a length of rope) and the goad.

The Guru Tradition

In the *Saundaryalaharī* Śankara implores the goddess thus:¹ "O Mother, your sacred feet are held by the Upaniṣads which constitute the crest of the Vedas. Be compassionate towards me, Mother, and place the same feet on my head."

*Śrutīnām mūrdhāno dadhati, tava yau śekharatayā
Mamāpyetau Mātah śirasi dayayā dehi caranau*

The Upaniṣads constitute the Vedānta. The jñāna-mārga of Śankara is called Vedānta-sampradāya. It therefore follows that Śankara meditates upon Kāmākṣī as a personification of jñāna and prays to her to place her feet on his head. In other words he prays to Kāmākṣī to confer on him sparśa-dīkṣā or kukkuṭa-dīkṣā. Viśālākṣī in Kāśī thinks of her devotees in an attitude of grace and administers kamaṭha-dīkṣā to them.

Many paths for the same fulfilment

Thus there are several types of dīkṣā and the paths along which the student is led by the different types of initiation are also varied. But the final goal is one and the same. At the time of the dīkṣā different gurus lead their disciples along different paths. It may be the same guru leads different disciples along different paths. However, the ācārya initiates his student only in one system (the system of which he is an ācārya). A guru may, on different occasions, give dīkṣā to the same student in different mārgas (paths, systems), depending upon the latter's mental proclivity, strength of sādhana and spiritual progress.

There are gurus who initiate disciples in different śāstras like those of mantra, tantra, yoga, Dvaita, Advaita, and so on. Tāyumanavar declares that his guru is guru for all paths and concludes thus: "O Mauna-guru who belongs to the Mūlan tradition!" Tirumūlar, author of *Tirumantiram*, mentions all mārgas or paths and finally arrives at yoga and jñāna. There is a guru-paramparā commencing with him. Among the gurus of this paramparā is Śāramāmuni who established a maṭha at Tirucirāpaḷli. Maunagurusvāmin, who became head of this maṭha (maṭhādhipati), was the guru of Tāyumanavar who lived in the 17th century. (After Maunagurusvāmin the maṭha went under the control of the Dharmapura ādhīnam.)

Mentioning his immediate guru Maunagurusvāmin, Tāyumanavar observes that all paths lead to mauna or silence. In his hymn there is a suggestion that he sings the praises of Dakṣiṇāmūrti who bestows the grace of Advaita through his silent upadeśa.

This state of mauna or silence is our true nature. But we are forgetful of it and, losing our true self, we are trapped in various states of unreality. This is called Māyā. Māyā, it is said, is Ambā. And Ambā that is Māyā manifests herself as Jñānāmbikā to dispel this very Māyā. She comes as a guru and imparts us jñāna. The Mother becomes the guru and suckles us, nourishing us with the milk of jñāna. She delights herself in creating various objects, creatures in various forms. There are many species of birds, many species of animals. Of flowers there is an infinite variety and they are of many colours, many shapes and scents. Similarly, the human mind is of many strange kinds. To suit each of them there are different jñāna-gurus and different ācāryas. It is all the work of Jñānāmbā. She reveals

1 84th verse.

herself as the gurus pertaining to the different forms of speech, writing, the different arguments, the many kinds of action, etc, and finally as mauna-guru. But all have one and the same gurutva within. After all the Truth is one.

Guru and ācārya: the two are the same

To sum up. The two teachers who give us jñāna are called by the names of guru and ācārya. The guru is so called because he is great within. The greatness of the ācārya consists in his conduct, in his learning and in the fact that he teaches and trains others. The guru transcends anything like a system while the ācārya is part of it. The first confers jñāna on his disciple mainly through his grace while the other helps the student to obtain knowledge by means of his erudition in the śāstras and in a particular sampradāya and through the example of his ācāra or conduct and observances.

Despite such a differentiation, if the ācārya is fully qualified he too becomes a guru. He is a teacher of exemplary character as far as his outward life is concerned and, besides being a man of learning, he leads a life that conforms to a particular system. At the same time he may be beyond any system, *as far as his own life is concerned*, and has the realisation of the Ātman and Īśvara and the power of bestowing grace. All our ācārya-puruṣas belong to this type.

If an ācārya lives according to the tenets of conduct and ācāra of a system, ever conscious that he is bound by it, he is a student rather than an ācārya. Disciplined conduct must form a natural part of a man's life, not imposed as a law from outside. Only then will it shine in all its fullness and purity of character. When a disciplined life is led spontaneously and not out of any compulsion from outside it will result in the happiness and fullness integral to freedom.

A certain degree of compulsion is needed in the beginning when the mind keeps wandering. We have then to learn to live according to certain rules of conduct and discipline. However, until there is this compulsion (until we are conscious of this compulsion), we remain students. In due course, what we started with under compulsion will become part of our natural character subject to our own will. When a man follows a life of discipline on his own, without any conscious effort on his part to do so, he will be capable of leading others also into the same life. And it is only when he is in such a state that the instruction he imparts will create a deep impression on them and help them shape their lives according to his teachings.

Present-day teachers, who have taken the place of the ācāryas of old, need to have only learning. Conduct or anuṣṭhāna is of no consequence to them. In the old days it was with the combination of learning and anuṣṭhāna that one became eligible to be called an "ācārya". Even this anuṣṭhāna is not an end in itself since it is merely outward conduct. There is something else to make it complete, some other stage in which the anuṣṭhāna finds fulfilment – that stage is the realisation of the Self. When one attains this stage of realising the Self, right conduct becomes part of one's nature.

Just as learning becomes complete when united with anuṣṭhāna, anuṣṭhāna in its turn has to be based on the experience within for it to gain strength and fullness.

To say that a man who has realised himself is a guru and that another who lives a life of anuṣṭhāna is an ācārya, to make such a distinction is not to reveal a true knowledge of the subject. An ācārya to be an ācārya cannot be imperfect in his anuṣṭhāna; he cannot go only half way in his religious observances. Until he has realisation of the Self he is not complete in himself. Where is the question of fullness if he practises anuṣṭhāna under compulsion? So it means a true ācārya adheres to a life of anuṣṭhāna and, at the same time, has anubhava or realisation of the Self. An ācārya also is he who leads a life of anuṣṭhāna as far as his outward life is concerned. Indeed, the teacher, who inwardly is beyond any system, lives according to a system for outward purposes so as to discipline those who live without any aim or purpose in life and to be an example to them. And, even as he remains silent within, he performs outwardly the function of giving upadeśa and upanyāsa.

The guru and the ācārya are the same. The true ācārya cannot but be a guru. In our ignorance of the subject at first, we speak of the guru and the ācārya as not being different. But then, as I said in the beginning: "It is not so; learned people say there is some difference between the two". I also mentioned the differences. Now (to complete the cycle) I say that it is clear to people who are not only learned but have insight that there is no difference between the guru and the ācārya.

From the very beginning no distinction has been made between a guru and an ācārya. The two words have been taken to be synonymous. In the Upaniṣads, which are the crest of the Vedas, the word "ācārya" is used throughout. They say: "Ācārya-devo bhava." The student is enjoined to give to the ācārya the dakṣiṇā as desired by the latter. Only he who is an "ācāryavān" (one who learns at the feet of an ācārya) attains jñāna. The word "guru" is not used. But the practice of students living with their ācārya for their education is called "gurukulavāsa". We do not come across the term "ācāryakulavāsa". The day on which the ācārya is worshipped and remembered with gratitude is called "Guru-Pūṇimā". Vyāsācārya, Śukācārya, Gaudapādācārya, Govinda Bhagavadpādācārya, Śankarācārya, Śureśvarācārya, Toṭakācārya—all such ācāryas are taken together as forming the "guru-paramparā" (not "ācārya-paramparā"). In the same way the term "guru-vandana" is used by the followers of Rāmānujācārya, Vallabhācārya and Mādhvācārya.

Ancient Tamil life was entirely centred on the Vedas. "Maṭr, pitr, ācārya devo bhava" is expressed in Tamil as "*Mata, pita, guru daivam*". From this it is clear that the ācārya himself has been considered the guru. ("Ācārya" is *āśān* in Tamil.) Teachers belonging to the Śaiva Śiddhānta tradition are all called by the title "ācārya" – Meykaṇḍācāryār, Santānācāryār, Śivaācāryār. However, their ārādhana (rites, worship, performed on the anniversary of the siddhi or passing of the ācārya) is called "guru-pūjā" (not "ācārya-pūjā").

Ācārya is Īśvara

We must remain devoted to our ācāryas because they are, unlike us, not men of attachment, and are indeed gurus who are free deep within themselves. If they function as ācāryas it is only to teach us, through their example, a disciplined life.

We will be quickly rewarded if we devote ourselves to our ācārya or guru, regarding him as Śvara come in the guise of a teacher to give us the grace of jñāna. Is not Śvara all and does he not become all and everything? Stone, earth, everything is Śvara. What objection can there be then to his being present in the person of a guru or an ācārya?

If we look at the subject from this angle, the question arises as to who we are if we too are not Śvara. If we are each one of us Śvara the next question is why we should be devoted to another person and regard him as ācārya and Śvara.

Everything is He, but one's own Śvaratva (quality of being the Lord) is not recognised by oneself. Do we realise even a bit of our Śvaratva? If we knew, would there be so much desire, so much anger, so much fear, so much sorrow, so much untruth, so much sinfulness? Though He is everything (or everything is He), without knowing ourselves fully that we are Śvara we exist as the disguises or forms He has adopted. All of us, in our disguise of ignorance, are unable to recognise (or identify) the Original Person. The one whom we call ācārya is not in such a ridiculous guise as we are. In him it is possible to recognise this Original Person. So if we become devoted to the Śvaratva in him we too can realise this Śvaratva. That Śvaratva which cannot be discerned in ourselves can easily be discerned in him. Śvara has specially appeared in the person of the ācārya, the Śvara who has appeared in many forms, so that we who are so dull-witted become intelligent and wise. If we realise this truth and become devoted to the ācārya, Śvara will cast off his disguise and reveal himself to us in his true form. Then and then alone will he remove the guise of ignorance we are donning and finally grant us, in all grace, the realisation of the truth that the Lord and we are one and the same.

To attain this ultimate goal (and there is nothing to be obtained further) we must **HERE AND NOW** regard our ācārya as Śvara and live according to his upadeśa.

Follow the family dharma

The śāstras have it that our birth is determined by Śvara according to our previous karma. We must accept the religion, sect or tradition in which we are born as having been determined by Śvara according to our karma and we must make efforts to raise ourselves and expend our karma. It is enough if each one of us lives according to the advice of the ācārya who preserves the tradition and ācāra of our caste or sect. It does not matter if the doctrines or tattvas of such a tradition are not complete in character.

This jīva is not full because of the karma still attaching to it. But the religious tradition into which it is born, however incomplete, will help in wiping out its karma completely. Śvara will never forsake a man if he has unwavering faith in him and prays to him in steadfast devotion: "You gave me this life and I am taking refuge at the feet of an ācārya of my sampradāya." If he thus follows the ācāra appropriate to his caste, Śvara will grant him fullness of being...

We must have faith in the belief that the ācārya is Śvara. Whoever be the guru, if we surrender to him we will receive the reward of our having surrendered to Śvara. Surrender to the guru is surrender to Śvara and equally rewarding. This is

said in the "śānti" passage of the Upaniṣads:¹

*Yo Brahmāṇam vidadhāti pūrvam
Yo vai Vedāmsca prahinoti tasmai
Tam ha devam Ātmabuddhiprakāsam
Mumukṣurvai śaraṇamaham prapadye
– Svetaśvatara Upaniṣad*

The cleverness of a genius will bring only ruin upon him if he is not bound by a "system". From such geniuses (as are not bound by a system) there would be more danger than from fools. Śankara Bhagavadpāda states this in his *Upadeśasāhasrī* and declares that whoever does not belong to the sampradāya of a guru is like a fool, which means that for attaining jñāna devotion to the guru is more important than book learning.

The gods as students

We are all of us not sufficiently devoted to our guru. We must follow the example of exalted preceptors, who were the originators of various sampradāyas, and important other gurus of these traditions, who were themselves devoted to their gurus.

The very first guru is Dakṣiṇāmūrti. But even he had to serve a guru in all humility and become devoted to him so as to receive upadeśa from him. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is none other than Paramēśvara himself. And he received upadeśa from his son, the upadeśa of Praṇava, devoting himself to him in submissiveness.

Ambā is jñāna personified. She too became a disciple – a disciple of her husband Īśvara — and received upadeśa from him. Īśvara imparted to her in the form of upadeśa the works of Āgama and Tantra.

*Śrī-Rāma-Rāma-Rāmeti Rāme Rāme Manorame
Sahasranāma-tattulyam Rāma nāmavarānane*

This verse proclaiming the greatness of Rāmanāma (the name of Rāma) was taught to Ambā by Īśvara (the muttering of the name thrice is as efficacious as reciting the entire *Sahasranāma*). People who are conversant with the *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma* ("The One Thousand Names of Viṣṇu") know this.

Ambā receiving upadeśa from Īśvara is mentioned in a number of accounts associated with temples (śthalapurāns) like Jambukeśvara (Tiruvānaikkā).

Mahāviṣṇu in his incarnations of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa lived the life of a humble disciple: as Rāma in the gurukula of Vaṣiṣṭha and as Kṛṣṇa in that of Sāndipani. With his class-mate Sudāma, Kṛṣṇa Paramātman went to the forest to gather firewood, in rain and storm, for their guru Sāndipani. Rāma ruled his kingdom

¹ The one who first created Brahmā, the Creator, and delivered to him the Vedas. He who is without parts, without activity, ever tranquil and who is without any lapse or taint, who is like a fire that has consumed its fuel and who is the highest bridge to immortality – in that one, who is illumined by his own thought, I take refuge, seeking liberation.

guided by the advice of his guru Vasīṣṭha. In the Citrakūṭa mountain he said to Vasīṣṭha who had come with Bharata (rejecting his plea to return to Ayodhya): "I will not return to my kingdom." It was with humility that he conveyed his decision to the sage and indeed he had taken that decision after receiving his preceptor's consent.

Dattātreya, who has an exalted place in the lineage of gurus, says in the *Bhāgavata* that among his twenty-four gurus were the earth, water, a python, a wasp, a courtesan, a hunter and a little child. He also mentions the lesson he learned from each one of them.

Ādi Śankara's guru-bhakti

The very mention of "Ācārya" brings to mind Śankara Bhagavadpāda who is remembered and celebrated all over the world. It is not easy to give an account of his guru-bhakti. It is said that he saw his guru Govinda Bhagavadpāda and his guru's guru, Gauḍapāda, in Badrinath in the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti and composed the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-aṣṭaka* to pay obeisance to them. He bows to them in each verse of this composition. Śankara himself, it must be remembered, was an incarnation of Dakṣiṇāmūrti.

While extolling the greatness of his guru, Śankara says in one passage: "If you say that the guru transforms the minds that are like brass into shining gold (like the philosopher's stone that turns base metals like brass into gold), it would not be an adequate measure of the true extent of the guru's greatness. The philosopher's stone can turn only brass kept in the alchemist's shop into gold. But the disciple who is transformed by the guru into gold becomes a guru himself, attaining pūrṇatva (completeness) and turns others also into gold. So the guru is nobler than the philosopher's stone."

In Kāśi, when Parameśvara appears before Śankara in the guise of a caṇḍāḷa, Śankara declares: "He who has realised the Ātman (Ātma-jñānin) need not necessarily be a Brāhmin. He may have been born a caṇḍāḷa. But he is my guru." Śankara, who has received the title of "Jagadācārya", humbly makes this declaration in public — standing right in a public thoroughfare, so to speak.

Rāmānuja's guru-bhakti

You must have heard that Rāmānujācārya gave upadeśa to all people against the advice of his guru Tirukottiyūr Nambi. However, according to accounts of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, he had totally submitted himself to the same guru. Before giving upadeśa to Rāmānuja, Tirukottiyūr Nambi, it seems, made his disciple walk eighteen times from Śrīrangam to Tirukottiyūr. Rāmānuja did so without showing any trace of reluctance or discomfort.

It is customary for Smārtas to prostrate themselves four times before their guru. But Vaiṣṇavas make similar obeisance again and again until the ācārya himself says, "Enough, enough." Once Tirukottiyūr Nambi was standing in the cool water

of a river. The sands of the riverbed, however, were burning like embers in the sun. On such burning sands Rāmānuja kept long, prostrating himself before his guru, not minding the suffering. Nambi had wanted to test Rāmānuja's guru-bhakti but, unable to see his disciple suffering, stopped him from making further obeisance.

Disciples of Śankara

The disciples of Śankara and Rāmānuja were very great men themselves, but they were, at the same time, extremely devoted in turn to their gurus. One of the disciples of Śankara, Totakācārya, extols Śankara thus: "You are Paramēśvara himself ('Bhava eva Bhavān'). You are the one with the Bull (Nandi) inscribed on his standard (that is Śiva)." Totakācārya sings the praises of Śankara in the belief that his guru is the very incarnation of Ívara. Another disciple of Śankara, Padmapāda, says when Vyāsa comes to Śankara in the guise of an aged Brāhmin to hold disputations with him: "What is it, they go on arguing among themselves endlessly? Who could be these men of unrivalled learning (paṇḍita-simhas, paṇḍit lions)?" Meditating with devotion he himself answers the question: "Śankara is Śankara (Śiva) himself while Vyāsa is Nārāyaṇa himself " (Śankarah Śankarah, sāksāt Vyāso Nārāyaṇaḥ svayam"). Vyāsa has come in disguise to hold a debate with Śankara on the *Bhāṣya* written by the latter on his *Brahmasūtra*. Finally, when Padmapāda says, "He is Viṣṇu, Śankara is Paramaśiva", Vyāsa reveals himself and declares that Śankara's *Bhāṣya* is in full accord with his *Brahmasūtra*.

Subsequently, Padmapāda wrote a commentary on Śankara's *Bhāṣya*. Of it only the first five sections called *Pançapādikā* have survived. In this Padmapāda pays obeisance to his guru, describing him as Paramēśvara ("apūrva-Śankaram").

This disciple earned his name Padmapāda on account of his great guru-bhakti. His original name was Sanandana. He was a Brāhmin from the Tamil land, a "Coṇāṭṭavar" (from the land of the Coḷas). He became a disciple of Śankara when the Ācārya had begun his mission (life's task) in Kāśī, that is before Śankara was sixteen years of age. After completing his *Bhāṣyas* at the age of 16, Śankara resolved to put an end to his bodily journey. It was then that Vyāsa appeared, held disputations with him and blessed him. He also impressed upon Śankara that it was not enough to have written the *Bhāṣyas* and that he must hold debates with scholars everywhere and propagate his siddhānta throughout the country and firmly establish his system. He blessed Śankara with another sixteen years of life. Let that story pass.

One day, when Śankara was staying in Kāśī, he and Sanandana happened to be on opposite banks of the Gangā. The disciple was drying his master's clothes. Śankara wished to make known to the world his disciple's guru-bhakti. He bathed in the river and, wearing his wet clothes, called to his disciple on the opposite bank to bring him his dried clothes. Sanandana, impelled by his devotion for his guru, thought to himself: "If the Ācārya asks me to do something, I must do it at once." It pained him that his master was wearing clothes dripping wet. He was now like one possessed, possessed of love and devotion for his guru. It was no time for

reasoning, for rational thinking. It did not occur to him that he must take a boat across. He was oblivious of the turbulent Gangā flowing by. So, naturally, the idea of taking a boat to ferry him across did not occur to him. The one thought that possessed him was that his guru had asked him to bring his clothes. So, as if he were on firm earth, he walked on the river without any thought that he might be drowned or that his guru's clothes would get wet again, which would be defeating the very purpose of carrying out his master's bidding.

When there is such devotional fervour in a disciple will not Īśvara exalt it to the plane that it deserves? (It was Īśvara indeed who was present in the form of Ācārya Śankara before him.)

A miracle happened. As Sanandana walked on the river, Gangādevī placed lotuses for him to walk upon. In other words the lotuses blossomed underfoot as he took each step. He himself was not aware that he was walking on the lotuses. It was like the firewalker not being aware of the burning coals that he treads upon.

People stood agape with wonder over Sanandana's guru-bhakti as he crossed the big river and brought his guru his clothes. Śankara asked him in jest: "How did you, my boy, cross the Gangā?" Even then it did not occur to Sanandana to turn back and look.

Padmapāda said to his master: "By merely thinking about you, the vast ocean of sañsāra is reduced to knee-deep water. When you had bidden me do something what was remarkable about my crossing the Gangā?"

It was then that Śankara showed him the lotuses. And since they had borne Sanandana's feet he called him "Padmapāda." On one plane Śankara was Īśvara himself. But on the other plane he was the lotus feet of Īśvara. So it is fitting that Bhagavadpāda's disciple himself should become Padmapāda.

In the Rāmānuja sampradāya

A number of Rāmānujācārya's disciples were also excessively devoted to their guru.

Self-abasement is part of the Vaiṣṇava tradition. So Vaiṣṇavas conduct themselves in an extremely polite manner before all and also speak extremely courteously to people. Where we (that is non-Vaiṣṇavas) say "you" (in plural) they say "*Devarīr*."¹ They call themselves "dāsas" and prostrate themselves again and again saying, "I serve you." They address elders who do not belong to the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition as "Svāmī" and older people belonging to their own sect as "Perumāḷ."² They carry courtesy to excess.

An amusing story is told in this connection. A disciple wanting to do away with his guru and take his place on the pīṭha has prepared a pit for his master to be buried in. Even when his intention is evil, he approaches his guru and tells him respectfully: "Will *Devarīr* come on his own into the pit or should this humble self cause your honour to fall into it?"

1 & 2 See glossary

The Guru Tradition

There are stories told of the Vaiṣṇava guru-paramparā which are cherished and read every day by the followers of the system. They touch our hearts with their telling description of guru-bhakti. In the Perumāḷ¹ (Vaiṣṇava) temples, the sannidhis² of Āzhvārs,³ particularly that of Āṇḍāl, are important. Devotees worship here. Worship is conducted at the sannidhis of the Maṇavāla-Māmunis and Pillai-Lokācāryas⁴ in Tenḡalai⁵ temples and at the sannidhi of Vedāntadeśika in Vaḡagalai⁶ temples. At the birthplace of Rāmānujācārya, Śrīperumbudur, Perumāḷ or the Lord takes a place second to Rāmānuja. Vaiṣṇavas refer to their ācārya Rāmānuja as *Uḡayavar*⁷ which shows the high place in which they hold him. He is also worshipped every day and a ten-day-long utsava or festival is held in his honour. Above his sannidhi is built a golden vimāna.

Similarly, at Śrīvilliputtūr, Āṇḍāl is given a special place. She is honoured as "Kotai" and as "Kotaināyaki". In the temple at Madurai, Mīnākṣī comes first and Sundarēśvara (her consort) comes second. Indeed the temple is called "Mīnākṣī temple." In the same way, at Śrīvilliputtūr, Raṅgamaṇṇa (Kṛṣṇa) is given the second place and precedence is given to Āṇḍāl: The temple itself is called after her. The birthplace of Nammāzhvār was originally called "Kurukūr". Later, it came to be called "Āzhvār Tirunagari" in his honour. The festival conducted for him here is worth mentioning. All other Āzhvārs are similarly celebrated.

The chief teachers of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, those who preceded Rāmānuja and those who came after him like Nāthamuni, Ālavandār, Maṇakkāl Nambi, Tirukkacci Nambi, Kūrattāzhvār, Bhaṭṭar, Nañcīyar: there are idols installed for them in temples and pūjā is conducted for them.

Importance on the same scale has not been given in the Śaiva temples to the Nāyanmārs,⁸ Māṇikkavācakar, and the authors of works of the Śaiva tradition like Śrīkaṇṭhācārya, Meykaṇḡa Śivan and Umāpati Śivam.

If we turn to Advaita teachers before and after Śankarācārya we find that they are hardly honoured in the form of temple idols or by way of worship. An exception is the case of Śankarācārya himself of whom there are a few idols. In Kāñcīpuram and its neighbourhood there are a number of such idols. At Māṅḡāḡu, Tiruvottiyūr and some other places also there are idols of Śankara. But, on the whole, if you take a census of temple images to study the influence of a siddhānta or a system you will arrive at the finding that there is no such Vaidīka *mata*⁹ (Vaidika religion, a religious system founded on the Vedas) in India called Advaita.

The reason for this is that Advaitins are Smārtas who do not belong either to Śaivas or Vaiṣṇavas but who accept the systems of both up to a point.

I wanted to speak to you about the great devotion of the followers of the Rāmānuja sampradāya for its ācāryas. Rāmānuja's immediate disciples were greatly devoted to their master. Some of them were prepared to lay down their

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 8 See glossary.

9 In the South "mata" usually means "religion."

lives for their guru. Such was the example of Kūrattāzhvar. He belonged to a village called Kūram near Kāñcīpuram. I mentioned earlier that even Vaiṣṇavas, who are known for their courteous speech, do sometimes, in their extreme devotion, use the singular while referring to a respected person. I mentioned the example of Desikan for "Deśikar." In the same way Kūrattāzhvār is called "Kūrattāzhvān."

The Coḷa king who reigned during the time of Rāmānuja was an ardent devotee of Śiva. As for Rāmānuja, he propagated the siddhānta that only Viṣṇu was to be worshipped and not Śiva. The Coḷa king decided to hold a meeting of learned men and in their midst to ask Rāmānuja the basis or authority for holding the view that no deity other than Viṣṇu should be worshipped. At the time Gangaikoṇḍacolapuram was the capital of the Coḷa kingdom. The king sent a man to fetch Rāmānuja to an assembly of learned scholars to be held there. Rāmānuja was then staying at Śrīrangam.

When Kūrattāzhvar saw the royal servant, he became agitated. He thought to himself in fear and anxiety: "The king is a Śaiva and he has built many Śiva temples. Our guru says that Śiva should not be worshipped. For that reason the king must bear ill-will for our guru. We don't really know what the rājā will do to our master on the pretext of inviting him to the assembly of learned men. The king can do anything. What can be done in case there should be some danger to the life of our ācārya?"

Thinking thus Kūrattāzhvār came forward to sacrifice his own life for the sake of his guru. He decided to go to the assembly of the Coḷa king wearing the saffron clothes of his guru, and pretending to be Rāmānujācārya. He prayed before Rāmānuja and persuaded him to agree to his plan saying: "Whatever the risk, let me face it. With your grace, permit me to have the good fortune to do you this service." Rāmānuja changed his saffron clothes for the white vēṣṭi¹, fled the Coḷa kingdom and went to Tirunārāyaṇapura (Melkote) in Kaṇṇaṭaka. Here a festival is held in his honour called *Vellaicattupadi* (the donning of white).

Wearing saffron Kūrattāzhvār went to Gangaikoṇḍacolapuram and presented himself as Rāmānuja. The assembly of learned men was held there. Kūrattāzhvār refused to subscribe to the doctrine of Śaiva supremacy. So, as he had feared, his eyes were gouged out as punishment. He gladly suffered the agony because he, instead of his guru, had become the victim of the royal outrage.

Later, after the death of this Coḷa king, Rāmānuja returned to the Tamil land and was filled with sadness that his disciple had lost his eyes for his sake.

Although, in later years, Rāmānuja lived in Śrīrangam, in the beginning he had resided in Kāñcīpuram and served Śrī Varadarāja devoting himself to the Lord as his chosen deity. Even when he lived in Śrīrangam, where he laid down the code of worship for Śrīrangānātha, he had a special place in his heart for Varadarāja. So out of his devotion for Varadarāja (and out of his concern for his disciple) he said

¹ South Indian dhoti.

The Guru Tradition

to Kūrattāzhvār: "For my sake you lost your eyes. So for the peace of my mind, if not for your sight being restored, you must pray to Varadarāja." Kūrattāzhvār thereupon sang the praises of the Perumāḷ (Varadarāja) at Kāñcīpuram. In reality he did not want his sight restored. Indeed, he believed in the śāstras, according to which to have darshan of the Lord one must control one's senses or indriyas. He said to himself: "I am blessed by the royal punishment. I am not likely to be spoiled at least through one of my indriyas (spoiled by seeing all sorts of undesirable things). And what is there to see of the outward world with my sight restored? But I must obey the bidding of my master. I must not be the cause of his sorrow." He prayed to Varadarāja Perumāḷ thus: "Give me my sight back. But I do not wish to see everything. Give my eyes the power to see only the divine form of my ācārya and your auspicious idol." Varadarāja granted him his prayer.

Ālavandār was one of the great figures of Vaiṣṇavism who lived before Rāmānuja. His attaining the paramapada or supreme state was delayed because of the karma earned during his previous birth. (Vaiṣṇavas describe the attainment of the paramapada as "decorating the sacred realm of Viṣṇu.) One of Ālavandār's disciples¹ then suffered the fearsome pain of a carbuncle thereby expending his master's remaining karma.

There is another interesting story relating to the guru tradition, a story that is tinged with humour. One of Rāmānuja's disciples² was warming the milk for his guru at home. Outside, the procession of the Lord Śrīranganātha was being taken out. "Come and have darshan of the Lord," Rāmānuja called out to his disciple from outside. But the disciple, ignoring the call, remained inside minding the milk. The Lord had now passed the house. Rāmānuja came in and scolded his disciple: "Why didn't you come out to worship Perumāḷ?" The disciple replied: "It was all right for you to worship your Perumāḷ. But for that reason why should I abandon the worship of my Perumāḷ midway..."

Devotion to the guru enables the disciple to bear cheerfully any suffering for the sake of his master. Karṇa came to Paraśurāma, who bore ill-will against Kṣatriyas, disguising himself as a Brāhmin to learn archery under him. One day as the guru was sleeping with his head placed in the lap of his disciple, a wasp stung him (Karṇa) viciously. The young archer did not wince a bit nor try to ward off the insect lest he should disturb his guru in his sleep. He bore his pain stoically. You know the rest of the story.

Then there was Ēkalavya whose story we still keep telling. Ēkalavya became devoted to a guru to gain a skill. But after acquiring it he could not practise it because of the dakṣiṇā sternly demanded by the guru and gladly given by the student.

Madhurakavi was one of the Āzhvārs. He composed only one hymn, a hymn consisting of eleven *pāsurams*. It is not addressed to Mahāviṣṇu (as Vaiṣṇava hymns usually are). Even so it has been included in the *Nālāyira-*

¹ He was an untouchable called Māranār Nambi.

² This disciple of Rāmānuja was Vaḍuka Nambi.

prabandham (The Book of Four Thousand Hymns) and Madhurakavi has been raised to the rank of an Āzhvār. It is his guru-bhakti that brought him such great honour. The song Madhurakavi sang is in praise of Nammāzhvār. In the Rāmānuja siddhānta all Āzhvārs have a place similar to that of ācāryas. Of them Nammāzhvār has a special place as "Prapanna-Jana-Kūṭastha".¹

Nammāzhvār was a non-Brāhmin and Madhurakavi was a Brāhmin. As Madhurakavi was travelling in the north he saw a ray of light emanating from the south. Following that ray of light he travelled a thousand miles and reached Tirukkurukurai (now called Ažhvār-Tirunagari, in Tirunelveli district). There, under a tamarind tree, the ray of light became absorbed in a cave (or was lost in it). It was inside this cave that Nammāzhvār had for many years been in meditation.

The story is told that Madhurakavi roused him from meditation and asked him questions relating to the Ātman in sign language and that Nammāzhvār also replied through signs. (If I were to speak about these questions and answers it would take long to explain them to you. Also doubts would arise as to whether or not the meaning would be understood. So I will revert to our subject which transcends all philosophical inquiries, that is guru-bhakti.) The replies of Nammāzhvār brought Madhurakavi illumination or jñāna in the same way as mantropadeśa. He surrendered to Nammāzhvār who was "Prapanna-Jana-Kūṭastha" and sang his praises in the form of the *pāsurams*. He declares that he has no svāmin other than Nammāzhvār ("Devu mattariyen"). "Let Nammāzhvār worship Mahāviṣṇu as his svāmin. For me my svāmin is Nammāzhvār and I will sing about him. I will not sing the praises of even Perumāl," so he said in his unsurpassed devotion for his guru.

In the Vaiṣṇava siddhānta the Āzhvārs are next only to Perumāl. Madhurakavi was exclusively devoted to Nammāzhvār, most important of the Āzhvārs. For this reason the great men belonging to the Vaiṣṇava sampradāya included his songs on Nammāzhvār in the *Nāḷāyiraprabandham* taking them to be equivalent to hymns in praise of Perumāl. Madhurakavi was himself elevated to the position of an Āzhvār.

Just as Madhurakavi said that he knew no God other than Nammāzhvār, Vedāntadeśika said that he recognised no devata here other than his ācārya (Rāmānuja).

Guru-bhakti among Sikhs

If you have an ācārya, you do not need even God. In all systems or traditions there have been examples of men who were devoted to their guru thus in the belief that even God is not equal to their ācārya. The Sikh religion is based on the belief that if there is a guru there must be a śiṣya as well as śikṣā (a disciple as well as education or discipline).

When Guru Gobind Singh established the Khālsa he asked for human sacrifice or narabali. At once, one of his disciples rose and went with the guru to offer his head in sacrifice. After taking him aside the guru returned with his knife dripping with blood and asked for one more human sacrifice. As before another disciple

1. See glossary

The Guru Tradition

rose and went with him and the guru returned again with the knife dripping with blood. In this manner five of his disciples offered to lay down their lives. They believed that obeying the word of the guru was dearer to them than their life. Later, Guru Gobind Singh brought all the five men to the assembly and told them that he had asked for the sacrifice only to test their devotion and loyalty. In reality no one had been killed and the blood shown was that of a goat. The five men who had not hesitated to lay down their lives were made the chief members of the Khāsla.

Thus in all religions there have been disciples who looked upon the great men belonging to their respective faiths as God. In the very process of guru-bhakti they have earned the qualities of the guru. Even after themselves attaining a high spiritual status, they have spoken in exalted terms of the great men who had uplifted them.

Part Three



Part Three

Guru, Acārya, "Vāṭṭiyār"

We use the words "guru" and "ācārya"¹ in an elevated sense (that is we use them to denote teachers belonging to a higher plane). By the term "vāṭṭiyār" in Tamil we mean an ordinary teacher. By "ācārya" we mean one who administers us dikṣā, initiating us into a mantra or a pūjā or one who performs a yajña or homa on an elaborate scale. In Tamil we say "vāṭṭiyār" ordinarily for one who officiates at a śrāddha or a pūjā on Caturthī or Dvādaśī (fourth and twelfth days of the moon).

The term "guru" denotes a teacher who, over a number of years, teaches us philosophy or some śāstra or science or art like music. On the other hand a school- or college-teacher (one out of many who teach different subjects) is known commonly as a "vāṭṭiyār". In written language and in formal speech we use the terms "school āśiriyār" and "college āśiriyār". But in common parlance we say "vāṭṭiyār" and not "āśiriyār". Actually, it is "ācārya(r)" that has become "āśiriyār" in Tamil.

In Tamil Nāḍu alone it has somehow become the practice to call story-writers and editors "kathāśiriyars", "patrikāśiriyars" respectively. This practice must have arisen from the fact that a connection is seen between those who teach reading and writing in schools (they are called "āśiriyars") and those whose profession is writing. Or it may be from the belief (whatever the truth) that those who write stories and conduct journals foster wisdom and enlightenment, occupying the seat of ācāryas.

In ordinary speech, the word "vāṭṭiyār" (and not "āśiriyār" or "ācāryar") is used to denote the teacher of any subject, whether it is connected with religion, a śāstra or any of the arts. The Tamil word "vāṭṭiyār" is derived from the Sanskrit "upādhyāya(r)". What is the meaning of "upādhyāya"? "Upādhyāya" is "upa + adhyāya".

The Vedic connection

You would perhaps think that "adhyāya(m)" is an instalment of a serial story appearing in a magazine week after week: this is contemporary usage. "Adhyāya" applied to a section of a book is a later meaning of the word. In the beginning "adhyaya", "adhyayana" and "adhyāya" were applied to Vedic learning. The Vedas were neither to be written down nor to be "read" but only to be listened to and learned (that is orally transmitted).

Many things in our life are connected in one way or another with the Vedas. So, in later times, "adhyāya" was used to signify any portion demarcated for reading

¹ Also discussed in earlier sections.

The Guru Tradition

in a work of fiction, poetry, a secular subject like science, or any study of knowledge relating to the Ātman. "Adhyāya" also came to be used for a section or division of a book, or a sub-section. A book is also divided into big and small parts called "kāṇḍa", "khaṇḍa," "sarga," "pāṭala," "parvan," "paricchēda," "ucchvāsa," "ullāsa," "anga" "prakarana," "skanda" and so on. Among these names of divisions "adhyāya" is connected with the Vedas.

I will give another example to illustrate how widely connected the Vedic tradition is. We say "pāṭha" for "lesson". For us a lesson whether it refers to geography or some other subject is pāṭha. Even the history written by our researchers claiming that the "Vedas are a lie"! Similarly, we describe a school as a pāṭhaśālā: note how the term contains the word "pāṭha". Even if we establish a school to teach atheism it will be called a "pāṭhaśālā"! However, the original meaning of "pāṭha" is "chanting the Vedas". Indeed among one's daily observances there is "Brahma-yajña", studying the Vedas, which is "pāṭha".

A man who is learned in the Vedic texts and who reproduces them orally (or chants them) is a "pāṭhin". For instance, there is the "ghanapāṭhin" who chants a Veda word by word in the manner called "ghana". A student who learns the Vedas together with another is called a sahapāṭhin (equivalent to "class-mate" or "fellow student"). Nowadays a fellow worker in any field is called a sahapāṭhin and in ordinary speech it is not necessary that the term should have any connection with the study of the Vedas. I mention this to show how deeply rooted Vedic life and the Vedic tradition are in Tamil Nāḍu.

Upādhyāya and ācārya

We were speaking about "vādhyār" ("vāṭṭiyār"), "upādhyāya" and "adhyāya". An "adhyāpaka" is one who imparts Vedic education, "adhyaya". Teaching the Vedas is "adhyāpana", learning is "adhyayana". The teacher is an "adhyāpaka". "Upa-adhyāpaka" is "upādhyāya"; that is instead of "upādhyāpaka" we have "upādhyāya". The prefix "upa" connotes many things. Chiefly, "upa" denotes what is subsidiary to a subject of primary importance, or something that assists it, a subject taught on a secondary level. To illustrate: "anga"—"upānga"; "purāṇa-upāpurāṇa" "janādhipati-upajanādhipati". That which does not have the prefix of "upa" is superior in relation to that which has the prefix of "upa" ("upa" is used to distinguish the "inferior" from the "superior" or the smaller from the bigger.)

The "upādhyāya" comes next to the "adhyāpaka", as an assistant or co-worker. The śāstras have it that an "upādhyāya" does not have the same standing as an adhyāpaka and is regarded as being a little lower to him in rank. I will tell you how.

The Guru Tradition

According to the Smṛtis, there are two categories of Vedic teachers, the ācārya and the upādhyāya. The differences between the two are mentioned in the *Manusmṛti* which is accorded a very high place among the Smṛtis.

The ācārya is not one who teaches for his livelihood. He establishes his gurukula and teaches for one reason alone: to carry out his Brāhminic duty of making sure that the vidyā in which he is proficient does not cease with him but is kept alive for ever. When a student joins his gurukula he does not utter a word about fees or dakṣiṇā. It is only after a student has completed his education or after the student himself mentions it that the ācārya asks for the dakṣiṇā. Ordinarily it takes twelve years to complete the course. There is a saying: "Keep a flower in place of gold" (that is a flower sincerely offered is as good as gold).

Thus it is that the ācārya will be satisfied with any dakṣiṇā he is offered. And how does an ācārya perform his function? He exerts himself to the utmost (his throat goes dry teaching his students and he does not mind it) and sees to it that the right vidyā is passed on to the right student. He is not like the present-day teacher who disperses his class after school hours in his anxiety to be free from a bother. The students live with the ācāryā in his gurukula for several years and it is his responsibility that they grow up as disciplined and virtuous individuals.

One feels proud that once upon a time there were many gurukulas throughout this land (with the type of ideal teachers mentioned above). If we who call ourselves "ācāryas" speak about this subject tirelessly it is only because of our anxiety that this tradition of teaching, the gurukula system, does not altogether cease to exist.

Teaching for a livelihood

The *Manusmṛti* says that one who teaches for a livelihood – instead of for the noble purpose of preserving vidyā for posterity – is an upādhyāya. He is not the same as an ācārya. One who teaches for a fee is a bhṛtaka adhyāpaka (he works for wages) according to the *Manusmṛti*. He teaches one part of the Veda-vidyā and receives a salary for it in return.

*Ekadeśam tu Vedasya Vedāṅgānyapi vā punaḥ
Yofadhyāpayati vṛttyārtham upādhyāyah sa ucyate*

There were very few preceptors in the old days who taught merely for a livelihood. The gurukulas were under good ācāryas and they were untainted by any sort of money transaction. Even so those who taught for wages like "coolies" are mentioned in the Dharmasāstras.

Guru and acārya: they are the same and yet different

Who is a "guru"? Who is an "ācārya"? Who is an "upādhyāya"? These terms are defined in the Dharmasāstras.

According to one definition, he is a guru who, starting with the Brahmopadeśa

(the imparting of the Gāyātrī mantra), goes up to the stage of teaching Vedāntic philosophy. And an ācārya is he who, without having given Brahmopadeśa to a pupil, teaches him the śāstras in their entirety or in part. For example, it was Gargācārya who performed the upanayana of Kṛṣṇa but it was Sāndīpanī who gave him his vidyābhyāsa.

It is generally understood that, while the word "guru" means one who is not strictly bound by a system but one who teaches through his grace, an ācārya is one who, by virtue of his erudition, gives a particular group of people instruction in a well-ordered system or subject. In keeping with this view it is mentioned in one of the Dharmasāstras that a guru is one who gives upadeśa in any language while an ācārya is one who teaches only the Vedas.

We usually speak of a guru being one like Dattātreya, without associating him with any strict system or tradition and who, with the power of his grace alone, brings about the spiritual uplift of his disciple. An ācārya, on the other hand, is one who, like our Śankara Bhagavadpāda, belongs to a system or siddhānta and who gives comprehensive instruction in it. So it is that we speak of "Dattaguru" and not of "Dattācārya". When one gives upadeśa systematically in a discipline of knowledge and has, like Śankara Bhagavadpāda, also the power of grace, then both appellations are used: "Śankarācārya", "Śankaraguru". However, when we look into the śāstras the definitions are different. In the widely-quoted *Manusmṛti* the qualifications mentioned above for the guru are also mentioned for the ācārya. Which means that the ācārya has to give comprehensive education to the student, from investing him with the sacred thread and imparting the Gāyātrī upadeśa up to instruction in the Vedas and śāstras, not omitting anything.

*Upanīya tu yaḥ śiṣyam Vedam adhyāpayēt dvijaḥ
Sakalpam sarahasyam ca tam ācāryam pracakṣate*

(According to another meaning of the word, the "guru" has the character of divinity. The Parabrahman has neither an attribute nor a form. How do we understand It with a mind that knows a thing only through its form and attributes? It is for this purpose — to grasp the Parabrahman with our mind — that the Parabrahman itself in its compassion comes to us in the person of a man. "Gu" denotes gunas or attributes and "ru" denotes rupa or form. So the guru is the Parabrahman that has attributes and a form.)

In the dim past the father gave Brahmopadeśa to his son and taught him the vidyā in which he was proficient. The number of vidyā-s were very limited then. In every family a particular vidyā (proficiency in a subject, art or craft) became its property and was handed down from generation to generation. At that time the father himself was the guru. In ancient works like the Rāmāyaṇa, the father is spoken of as the guru. We find the same mentioned in the later poetical works also.

Subsequently, as the number of arts and vidyā-s increased and became enlarged in scope, it was felt thus: "Why should each vidyā remain the property of one family? May we not join together and share the vidyā-s and expand the horizons of our knowledge in various arts and crafts?" So it became the practice for the son to leave his parents and join the elders of other families to learn their

vidyā-s. There emerged individuals who were proficient not in one vidyā alone but in many subjects. It came to be felt that, instead of learning from one's father, it would be better to be taught from the very beginning by a teacher proficient in many vidyā-s. So developed the system of the child receiving Brahmopadeśa from such a guru and residing in his gurukula for his entire education.

Learning at home and in the gurukula

Even when the father was a distinguished scholar himself, he sent his son to another learned man to study under him. In this way the son was not spoiled by excessive parental affection and the guru would bring him up in a disciplined manner. Thus the system of gurukulavāsa came into being with the student begging for his food, learning the virtue of humility and living a life of simplicity. It was from this time that the custom originated of the guru imparting his disciple Brahmopadeśa and becoming his teacher throughout.

If a child is to be taught at home there will be obstacles to his leading a disciplined life because of his freedom there and the bonds of parental affection. It came to be realised that gurukulavāsa was highly beneficial since it helped in the growth of vidyā as well as of the vidyārthin or student.

Here and there, however, there were instances of children becoming students in the gurukulas run by their parents who were distinguished men. In the Upaniṣads we notice that a father of this type, apart from teaching his son himself, also sends him to other gurus to complete his education. One marvels at the care and pains taken by parents in the old days to widen the horizons of their children's knowledge and to remove all taints from their Self.

Nowadays most parents are not worried about either (that is their children acquiring more knowledge and ennobling their Self). Their only objective is that the son must somehow bring home a fat purse. They don't care about which foreign country their children go to, the sort of profession they practise or the work they do, the kind of learning they acquire so long as they make money. It may be the parents do not have to send their children abroad; may be the children cut themselves off on their own from their families and go abroad. And it may also so happen that the son does not part with a single rupee from the wads of currency he earns.

What was the practice in the old days? The father was anxious that his son should earn fame. When the son was yet a child, he was "offered" to the guru in a spirit of sacrifice at the time of the Brahmopadeśa. In later times somehow we reverted to the practice of the father performing the Brahmopadeśa. Now the old system of education has become extinct. All that remains is the symbolic ceremony of the father investing his son with the sacred thread and giving him the Brahmopadeśa.

Unmindful of their own qualifications, learned fathers in the old days sent their children to some other distinguished scholar and had the Brahmopadeśa given by him. They did so because they felt that if a child left his parents and home for a gurukula to be taught by a distinguished teacher, it would greatly help in shaping

his character and conduct. That is how the Brahmopadeśa ceremony came to be called "upanayana". "Upanayana" means "leading (a student) near (a teacher)." In other words taking a child to a gurukula and entrusting him to the care of an ācārya. If the child were to be taught by his father at home there was no need to describe it as "leading him near..."

(At first the father takes his son to his ācārya. Later the ācārya leads him towards Īśvara. We may call the latter act the second upanayana. Leading a disciple to the Paratattva or the Ultimate Reality is the function of the sannyāsa-guru in the last āśrama. During this second upanayana the sacred thread worn during the first upanayana is discarded.)

The *Manusmṛti* and the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* have it that the father who does garbhādhāna (the procreation ceremony) and brings forth a life (a child) and performs its saṁskārās¹ like jātakarma, nāmakarma and cauḷa (known as *mundana* in the North) is a guru while the one who performs the son's upanayana and imparts him education is an ācārya. It means that the father who is a guru first does not become his son's ācārya and give him upadeśa and education. He remains just a father, the mere *appa*² of today. No, today's father does not even perform rites like cauḷa.

Will not a child feel sad if, after his upanayana ceremony, he leaves his home and people with his ācārya to a strange house? May be it is for this reason — for the reason that the child should not be unhappy in his new home and surroundings — that the ācārya is given the same title as is given the father, that of "guru". In this way the child will look upon his ācārya also as his father. The āśrama of his ācārya is called "gurukula"

How mother and father are great

In the *Manusmṛti* the father is accorded a high place even if he does not teach his son himself. It is said in this Śmṛti: the ācārya is superior to ten upādhyāyas (those who teach for a salary); the father is superior to a hundred ācāryas. In the same context the mother is placed above everyone else by being described as superior to a thousand fathers.

During the time of Yājñavalkya a boy's upanayana was performed either by his father or by his elder brother. It was only in the absence of the two that an outsider performed the initiation. "In the absence" should not be taken to mean "in the event of the death of the two". If the father and the brother did not have the necessary qualifications they were prohibited from performing the upanayana ceremony. What sort of qualifications? The father or the brother, apart from being completely conversant with one śākhā of a Veda, must have taught it to others. He should not be engaged in an occupation unworthy of a Brāhmin. (Judged by this standard it is doubtful whether any father today is qualified to perform the upanayana of his son.)

1 See glossary.

2 *Appa* means "father" in more than one Indian language.

In some Smritis the word "guru" is applied as a common term to all great, important people or elders. Father, brother, grandfather, brothers and sisters of father and mother, father-in-law, the king, all learned and virtuous Brāhmins, and in addition, mother, stepmother, grandmothers, the ācārya's wife, paternal and maternal aunts, mother-in-law, elder sister, all such women are also gurus.

Although so many gurus have been mentioned, according to Manu, the ācārya deserves the *gaurava* (respect) due to a guru because by conferring knowledge on the student he earns a place equal to that of the father. It is the same Manu who declares that the father must be called a "guru" because he begot the son and brought him up.

(The very word "gaurava" is from "guru" and means "that which pertains to the guru".)

The guru is not only he who teaches the Dharmaśāstras or the śāstra concerning the Self. He who imparts any vidyā is a guru, says Manu. That being the case, Manu is lost in wonder about the greatness of the ācārya who teaches the entire vidyā of the Ultimate Reality (Sadvidyā).

The guru young in years

One realises from the Dharmaśāstras that the teacher, though younger in years than the taught, must be regarded as an elder or a senior and therefore as a guru. We may learn from one who is younger in years than we are. Before us is the high ideal that, in the matter of acquiring knowledge and the advancement of the Ātman, differences between younger and older are to be disregarded.

In support of this Manu tells a story.

The son of Mahārṣi Angiras was teacher to the brothers of Angiras, that is to his paternal uncles. At the time he taught them he called them, "O children." The uncles at once became angry and lodged a complaint with the devas (celestials).

The devas dismissed the brothers of Angiras, telling them: "You have not done right by complaining. You do not know any vidyā at all and, if you are learning a vidyā from a teacher who is your son (nephew), then you are to be regarded as children and he as an aged man. A person does not become a vṛddha (an aged man) merely because he is a man of many years and his hair has gone grey. The man well versed in the Vedas is to be known as old."

Great yogins, who are but skin and bone because of their age, listen to the Ādiguru Dakṣiṇāmūrti's upadeśa imparted in silence. "Behold the wonderful phenomenon under the pīpal tree. The disciples are aged men, the guru is a youth. How does that young professor give his lecture? In the language of silence. Even so the doubts of the disciples get cleared (the disciples become enlightened)"

*Citram vaṭatarormūlē vṛddhāḥ śiṣyāḥ gururyuvā
Gurostu maunam vyākhyāṇam śiṣyāstu chinnaśayāḥ.*

We regard a man as distinguished or as a senior in the following five ways. We respect some people as great because they are wealthy. Does not an important

personage ("prabhu": a man of wealth and power) command immediate respect? Paternal uncles or maternal uncles or sisters-in-law (wives of older brothers), if they are younger than we are, are regarded as senior or as elders; the kinship makes them worthy of our respect. An aged man, whoever he be, is respected as an elder. Fourthly, if a man has performed great yajñas and lives a life of moral and religious discipline he is respected whatever be his age (even by those who are older). Fifthly, a man is accorded respect because of his great learning. In the Dharmaśāstras these are mentioned in their order of importance, that is the man deserving of the highest respect is the last-mentioned, the man of learning.

Mother, father, teacher

The ācārya, the guru who is father, and the mother are mentioned in this order in some texts, order of increasing importance. But the general view is that all three are to be venerated as aspects of Īśvara. In some Dharmaśāstras the ācārya is given a higher place than the parents. Manu himself elevates the ācārya thus: "One attains (or earns) this world through devotion to one's mother, the world of the sky through devotion to one's father and the world of Brahmā through devotion to one's ācārya." Just as devotion to the mother, father and ācārya is lauded so is one warned that any disrespect to, or any act of disloyalty against, any of the three is sinful in the extreme.

Adhyāpaka

There are three ways of correcting and moulding a disciple: by giving him instruction; through the power of the guru's grace; or through the purifying efficacy of mantras and Veda-saṁskāra (acting according to the Vedic sayings). The Smṛtis do not mention the power of the teacher's grace in this context since (being an intangible quality) it cannot be included in the śāstras. In the case of the other two there are two opinions. According to the first, the guru is one who purifies his disciple through mantras and saṁskāras and thereafter gives him complete education (paripūrṇa-vidyā). The second opinion is that the one who, without recourse to the rites of saṁskāras, gives education to the disciple partly or fully is an ācārya. There is a third opinion according to which the ācārya himself performs the saṁskāras of his pupil with mantras and gives him education ending with instruction in Vedānta. Both are called adhyāpakas. Of the two the one who teaches for a salary is inferior to the other and is called an upādhyāya.

How the upādhyāya got "promoted"

The name upādhyāya, so befitting the rich Vedic tradition, has been given to the latter-day "teachers". By "teachers" don't we mean people who work for a salary?

There were ācāryas for whom teaching was not a means of livelihood. Indeed it was their life's dharma or duty. Such ācāryas dwindled in number in course of time and the number of upādhyāyas increased. The name "upādhyāya" (*vādhyār*) itself, instead of suggesting a teacher of inferior status, came to denote a teacher of prestige. The original meaning was forgotten and anyone imparting learning came to be called an upādhyāya. Even the ācārya has come to be called upādhyāya. That is how a number of Northerners who taught the Vedas from generation to

generation tagged on the term "upādhyāya" to their names — they did not think there was any suggestion of inferiority about it.

You must have heard of "Mukherjis", "Catterjis" and "Banerjis" in Bengāl. Some of them call themselves correctly as "Mukhopādhyāyas" "Caturupādhyāyas" and "Vandyopādhyāyas" (or "Bandyopādhyāyas"). In the word "Mukha + upādhyāya", "Mukha" means the Vedas. In Sanskrit "mukha" also means the mouth. The word mouth denotes "vārta" or speech. The Vedas are themselves called "Mukha" by virtue of the fact that "vārta" is regarded as the Vedic word (speech). A "Mukherji" is one who teaches the Vedas — "Mukha-upādhyāya". "Caturupādhyāya" = "Catterji": the "Catur" denoting the four Vedas, has changed into "Catter" here. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa was born in a Caturupādhyāya family. His wife (the Holy Mother) belonged to a Mukhopādhyāya family. "Vandya-upādhyāya" means a teacher who deserves respect. "Vandya", according to the Bengālī manner of speech, changes to "Bandyā" and thereafter with the addition of the suffix "ji" becomes "Banerji".

The term "upādhyāya" came to denote respect. In later times, under the British, highly learned pandits were given the title of "Mahāmahopādhyāya". Some of these Mahāmahopādhyāyas possessed all the qualities befitting an ācārya. They had their gurukulas and did not care for any income. Indeed they spent their own money to conduct them.

Teaching: worship of Īśvara

There are so many occupations in which people are engaged for their livelihood. No one regards such work as wrong or as demeaning. However, in the old days performing pūjā to Īśvara for money and teaching for a wage were considered lowly occupations. The reason for this is the incongruity of turning a function that gives joy and fulfilment into a job for filling the belly. From this one realises that teaching was equated with worship.

According to the śāstras to earn his livelihood each man is to be engaged in an occupation in keeping with his caste. What is the occupation of Brāhmins? We find an answer to this question in ancient Tamiḷ texts. According to them, Brāhmins were called "Ārutozhilor", that is they had six "occupations". They are called "ṣat-karma-nirata" — those diligently observing six karmas or duties. What are these? One is adhyāyana — learning the Vedas. In this there is no scope for earning any money. Second, adhyāpana — teaching. Apart from teaching the Vedas, a Brāhmin must acquire proficiency in various occupations and trades and teach them to those entitled to learn them.

This does not mean that the Brāhmin must be conversant with all occupations. Such a thing is not possible. He must, without detriment to his duty as a teacher of the Vedas and to his religious observances, learn a couple of occupations and train others in them according to their castes. That is the system practised by Brāhmins according to the Purāṇas and epics. Brāhmins specialised in Āyurveda, Arthaśāstra (political economy, statecraft), Nāṭyaśāstra, Dhanurveda (archery or the art of warfare) and so on and gave instruction in these subjects to students according to tradition.

The Guru Tradition

A Brāhmin must do no more than teach the occupation proper to a caste. He must not himself be engaged in it, whatever the income he could gain thereby, and not even as a means of livelihood. He must be satisfied with the dakṣiṇā received from his students. In other words, he helps people belonging to other castes to have a sufficient income by teaching them their occupations or trades without using such knowledge himself to earn a fortune. Not only that. It has been laid down that the Brāhmin must be engaged in the occupation that is proper to his caste, that is teaching. In this he must not expect any income, the sole object of his work being the propagation of learning and worship of Īśvara.

Ignoring all this some denigrate Brāhmins, saying that they created the śāstras to promote their own selfish interests. If you look at the matter with an open mind you will realise that the Brāhmin does not enjoy any privileges. Indeed, he has created many disadvantages for himself, so as to work for the advancement of his Ātman and the welfare of the world, not minding the suffering he has to go through in the task.

“Receiving”

Of the six occupations, leaving aside adhyayana and adhyāpana (learning and teaching), there remain four: yajana, that is performing a sacrifice on one's own; yājana, performing sacrifices for others; dāna, giving away gifts; pratigraha, receiving charity. Expense is incurred in yajana and dāna and there is no income in either. But there is income in yājana and pratigraha. But here is an important point to note. Apart from the fact that receiving charity is considered demeaning, there is the deterrent factor that the donee would incur the sins of the donor.

There is a big list detailing the expiatory rites (prāyaścitta) to be performed for accepting various gifts. This is apt to create fear in the mind of the receiver. The expiation is related to the type of charity and the man who makes it. It is not that Brahmins have been kept in fear of receiving gifts by others. Indeed, in the past, they themselves laid down in the sastras the rules pertaining to receiving gifts in such a manner as to create fear in their hearts. Big śrautins would like to be yajamānas (performers of yajñas) instead of having the benefit of conducting yajñas for other people. The reward that the Brahmin receives for performing a yajña for his own sake is far greater than the dakṣiṇa he receives for performing it for others. But yājana or conducting sacrifices for others is one of his duties. The dakṣiṇā he receives for carrying out this duty he spends in some sacred or meritorious cause.

To sum up, though six “occupations” are mentioned with reference to the Brāhmin, there is no scope at all for income in three of them – adhyayana, yajana and dāna. And there are a number of constraints in the matter of earning by yājana and pratigraha (receiving gifts). The only remaining means of income then is adhyāpana or teaching. Although there is legitimate scope for income here, adhyāpana was practised as vidyā-dāna (the gift of vidyā or learning) and its divine aspect was safeguarded.

The ācārya did not teach for an income. He accepted a dakṣiṇā from his

disciple, but he never asked for it himself. It must also be noted that ācāryās, noble in character, accepted a dakṣiṇā from a disciple only after they were satisfied with their teaching, not after the disciple was satisfied.

I am reminded of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in this context (first Brāhmaṇa, fourth chapter). Janaka becomes a student of Yājñavalkya. He makes gifts to his teacher after each upadeśa or lesson. But on each such occasion Yājñavalkya returns the gifts saying: "It is my father's view that without having imparted upadeśa in full no dakṣiṇā should be accepted from a disciple."

What other countries do not have

Considering all this I must say that those who are called "teachers" in other countries are different from the "guru" or "ācārya" in ours. The difference is as big as between a goat and an elephant. People in other countries do not know the "teacher" to be Īśvara (the Almighty or Supreme God) or to be one who represents Īśvara. They have not the least idea that the student must forsake all when he goes to such a teacher. All that they can say in praise of a good teacher is: "Oh, he is a very able man and acquainted with many subjects. And he teaches so well, in such an attractive manner." The teacher too thinks similarly about himself and does no more than try his best to justify what others speak of him.

In our country the qualifications of a teacher (or the qualifications expected of a teacher) were extremely high. Apart from the fact that he did not teach for any material gain, he had to live a life of purity and have realisation of the Self. Teachers in our land were intellectually gifted and could teach a variety of subjects. But what was special about them was that they did not stop there. There was the insistence that they must be inwardly pure and, as men who taught the Vedas, disciplined in the performance of Vedic rites.

The ācārya, it is laid down, must have three qualifications. First, he must be well versed in a system of thought, in a system of philosophy (ācnoti hi śāstrārtham). Second, he has to apply in his practical life (svayaṃ ācarate) what he has learned. Third, he must not only teach his disciples the śāstra in which he is proficient, he must make them live according to its teachings (ācāre sthāpayatyapi). One who is merely proficient in a subject or a system is a "vidvān" but such a one does not have the high status of an ācārya. A man whose life is based on the śāstra in which he is learned but is not a teacher of the śāstra is an "anuṣṭhātā". If he goes a step further and has realisation of the teaching of the śāstra he has learnt, he is an "anubhavi" – but yet he is not entitled to the high title of "ācārya". He who does not set an example through his own life of what he teaches is a pracāraka. The ācārya is one who is all three — an anuṣṭhātā, anubhavi and pracāraka.

The education that a man receives must be faultless in every way and his life must be based on it. Thus the ācārya's life is to be governed by what he has learned. In this way he also sets an example to others. He is expected not only to teach the śāstras but also train his students to live according to their teachings. That there were many ācāryas of this type in our country is a matter of pride for us above everything else.

Even such a great man as Vaḷḷuvar has said that this world is not for people lacking in material possessions. But what about our teachers in the past? Our śāstras asked them to be unmindful of material possessions and urged them to teach with the sole objective that vidyā must grow, that vidyā must be nurtured. They were thus steeped in the tradition of self-sacrifice. If a man works for the welfare of the world in a spirit of self-sacrifice and without any expectation of reward (niṣkāmya) then he will naturally come to possess spiritual wealth (in other words he will attain perfection of the Self.) It is said in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* that immortality was attained by many by self-sacrifice alone.

The teacher commanded great respect in our country. How? He lived a disciplined life according to the śāstras without being attached to material possessions, and attained purity of consciousness (citta-śuddhi). And such a teacher, free from desire, spent all his time in giving the gift of vidyā to other people's children in his humble home made of leaves (paṃśālā). "Look upon the teacher as God. Go to him forsaking all else." Such an exhortation will not be heeded if the teacher is respected merely for his intellect. He must lead a chaste and blameless life, must be inspired by the spirit of self-sacrifice and must regard the children of other people as his own. It was because we had such teachers that the students looked upon them as Īśvara and took refuge at their feet. In no other country did such a noble tradition obtain.

Good "secular" teachers too

The ideal described above was pursued not only by Vedic ācāryas. Even teachers of secular or worldly subjects were men of high qualifications and character. It may be that they did not have realisation of the Ātman. But they had human qualities of a high order. Some of them were known for their anger or partiality but the students went seeking them and became devoted to them because of their other virtues. How else could Ekalavya have gone for refuge to Droṇa, an ācārya who taught the art of warfare? How else could have Karna become devoted like a slave to Paraśurāma?

Even those who taught the art of dance had the title of ācārya, "Nṛtyācārya". Our teachers not only excelled in learning, they also lived a blameless and disciplined life. A lion in music, Ustad Tansen, belonged to the court of Akbar. When we read about his ācārya, Haridās, we find that he was like a ṛṣi. He was called "Haridās Svāmin".

In the South too — in Tiruvaivāru — there was a great musician called Mahā Vaidyanātha Śivan. He lived such a noble life that he was respectfully called "Śivanvāl" ("Śivanvāl" is the plural in Tamil of "Śivan" and denotes respect). He never missed his Śiva-pūjā; not once did he fail to perform his sandhyā -vandana. When he was on tour he would fast if his pūjā-box did not reach him in time. He would give his music recital between 3 and 6 in the afternoon so that he did not miss his evening sandhyā-vandana. Or he had his recital starting at 6.30 p.m. after his sandhyā-vandana. If at all he had to start his recital at 4 or 5 p.m. he would

leave in the midst of his recital, perform his sandhyā-vandana, then at the proper time resume his music.

His brother Rāmasvāmi managed all his affairs including money transactions, legal cases, etc. A devout man of letters, he composed songs called *Periya-Purāṇa-Kīrtanas*, dedicated to the 63 Nāyanmārs (Tamil Śaiva saint-poets). Entrusting everything to Rāmasvāmi, Vaidyanātha Śivan devoted himself to music, Śiva-pūjā and the chanting of the Gāyatrī. He was not particular about having a śiṣya-paramparā. However, considering him to be godlike and inspired by his virtuous conduct, a number of disciples always stayed with him at his house. Although he did not give them formal instruction, they would learn by listening to him whenever he sang to himself. There were twenty or thirty of them and he fed them all and did not accept any dakṣiṇa from them.

Men who taught music and dance and trained young people in the use of weapons were entitled to be called ācāryas because of their qualities. What then about the ācāryas who taught the Vedas and the śāstras? Their students must have looked upon them as Īśvara. Could there be any doubt about it?

Better than institutionalised

The heights achieved by India in education must be attributed to the fact that teaching was not considered a "business" here. Education was not institutionalised but left to the care of individuals. That is how it attained its heights and did not deteriorate into a business until some centuries ago. (Why, even in recent times we had examples of such individuals here and there.)

It was during the time of the Buddhists that institutions arose for teaching – like the universities of today – at places like Nālandā and Takṣaśilā (Taxila). Before that the practice of a number of teachers teaching a number of subjects at one and the same place had not become widespread. Individual ācāryas conducted their gurukulas in their āśramas. There might have been one or two upa-adhyāpakas to assist them.

"Kulapati"

There was the rare phenomenon of the guru teaching in some gurukulas all the 64 traditional arts in all their aspects and conducting inquiries into them with the help of a number of ācāryas. In these gurukulas senior students probably taught the juniors. The guru (in charge) was called a "kulapati".

We speak of Kulapati Munshi. There is Kulapati Balakrishna Joshi in Madras. Both are Gujaratis and the names of both end in "shi". But the two are not kulapatis in the original sense of the word I just spoke about. With the passage of time it came about that some individuals who served the cause of education with distinction were called kulapatis. Munshi established a number of educational institutions, among them the Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan, intended to propagate our cultural traditions. As for Joshi he earned a good name as a distinguished teacher — he was for many years associated with the Theosophical School. We call Munshi and Joshi kulapatis out of respect.

If there is a great guru like Vasīṣṭha, naturally many will come forward to learn directly under him, even if it be a little bit so as to earn the name of being a "Vasīṣṭha-śiṣya". The great gurus of the past must have felt that they should fulfil the desire of people who wanted to join their gurukulas. So they must have appointed teachers to work under them to teach all the entrants. The senior gurus must have in the initial years taught the students only one or two subjects. They must have taught in detail only in the advanced stage.

During the 19th century there lived a great scholar called Mannārgudi Rāju Śāstri who was a "pāraṅgata" in vidyā" (he had reached "the other shore of knowledge" in his subject). In the generation following his, many emerged as his students. But all of them could not have actually completed their education directly under him. They must have learned at his feet only at the last stage. Earlier they must have been taught by the senior students of his school.

In the first sarga of *Raghuvamṣam* Vasīṣṭha is described as a kulapati. In *Śākuṅṭalam* Kaṇva Maḥarṣi is called a kulapati. Later, in the period noted for a number of poetical works and śāstras, the guru who had 10,000 students in his gurukula was called a "kulapati". The number 10,000 seems an exaggeration to some. However it be, there must have been at least hundreds of students under the kulapati concerned. The point to be noted here is that, in spite of there being so many students, the guru (the kulapati in this instance) fed and maintained all of them without caring about fees or dakṣiṇā. He thus remained a true ācārya. "Yo ana-dānādi-poṣaṇat adhyāpayati". He who feeds, nurtures and teaches students – this is the definition of a kulapati. "You are doing noble work. You are producing a great number of vidvāns for the kingdom", thus appreciating the guru's work the king made donations to the kulapati. There was no question of the latter teaching for money or for his livelihood.

On the whole, there were not many kulapatis who had large educational institutions under them. The more common practice was for an individual ācārya to conduct a small gurukula.

The rise of the ancient teaching system

How did teaching originate in the earliest of times, during what is called the Vedic period in our country? (Why only in our country? What is said here applies to the whole world.)

The first schools originated as the ṛṣis imparted to their children and the children of their close friends and relatives (whom they regarded as their own children) the mantras and vidyā (learning) revealed to them by the grace of Īśvara. By the word "vidyā" here, in the early times, we do not mean the arts and sciences denoted by the term in later centuries. In those days each and every path of upāsanā was called a vidyā.

During deep meditation, when the antaḥ-karaṇas or inner organs or faculties of a ṛṣi are in union with the Paramātman, mantras are revealed to him from the ether which is a form of the very Paramātman. By the grace of the Paramātman a path of upāsanā is also shown to the ṛṣi for the mantras to be revealed to him. Just as

Yamadharma-rāja gave upadeśa to Naciketas, or the Sanatkumaras gave upadeśa to Nārada, so a great man of divine character would impart a vidyā to a ṛṣi or a deserving student. Naciketas received from Yama the upadeśa of "Agni-vidyā" that has connection with the Svarga-loka. Yama also gave the boon that the vidyā would be named after Naciketas, his student.

In the same way there are some vidyā-s named after the students who received instruction in them. Thus we have "Upākosala-vidyā", "Satyakāma-vidyā", "Maitreyī-vidyā" — these are mentioned in the Upaniṣads. They are each one of them named after the disciple who received the upadeśa concerned, not after the guru who gave it, or of the deity invoked (upāsanā-mūrti) or the tattva pertaining to the vidyā. From this we may realise the high place accorded to the student who was eager to learn a vidyā with devotion and diligence.

Let that pass. I spoke about the school of the earliest times and about the various vidyā-s.

Brahma-vidyā is the end or goal of all vidyā-s. It means the Upaniṣads constituting the Vedānta which speaks of the Truth or the One Reality. We hear people remarking about some work accomplished, "What, is it such a big Brahma-vidyā?" In the Upaniṣads (meaning the Brahma-vidyā) are mentioned many vidyā-s — "Pañcāgni-vidyā", "Madhu-vidyā", "Vaiśvānara-vidyā", "Śamvarga-vidyā", "Dahara-vidyā", "Antaryāmi-vidyā", etc. There are some vidyā-s involving a great deal of ritual and some others involving meditation and other abhyāsas (practices).

How did the early schools originate? The ṛṣis or seers obtained vidyā-s by the grace of Īśvara. The mantras and the sūktas (which consist of a number of mantras) were revealed to them from the ether in an "apauruṣeya" form (that is without a human agency) and they taught them in their homes to their children and the children of people close to them. To this is to be traced the origin of the early school. The dwellings made of leaves in which the ṛṣis lived are usually called āśramas. The āśrama in which students were taught was called a ṛṣikula. The ṛṣikula was our — indeed mankind's — first school.

In this way, in the earliest times, vidyā and vidyāśālā were part of the family tradition (handed down from one generation to the next). Later, contacts developed between the various ṛṣikulas and education expanded. The inmates of a ṛṣikula learned not only the vidyā and mantras taught in it but also the vidyā-s and mantras and sūktas associated with other ṛṣikulas.

Language, a discipline of sound

The most important tool in teaching is language. The world's first literary work, the R̥gveda, contains the grammar that determines the form of the language. Westerners are full of admiration for this grammar. Apart from the rules of grammar of other languages, students were also taught how to enunciate the svaras of the mantra. Each syllable is to be pronounced by raising or lowering it or by uttering it in sama, that is in an even or ordinary way. The mantra is to be taught

in the same form in which the ṛṣis received them as a blessing. Ages have passed since the time of those first schools which taught the Vedas. But even today all over the country a ghanapāṭhin teaches them in the same manner as in the first schools without the slightest change in the svaras or intonation!

Teaching without writing

This teaching was not through writing. The art of writing came much later. The early school had none of the appurtenances of the present-day school — blackboard, chalk, slate, slate-pencil, notebook, pencil, pen, books, etc. When we say “*patippu*” in Tamil for learning we mean learning from books. We speak of “*akṣarābhyāsa*” in the Vidyārambha rite (initiating a child in the alphabet). The term “*akṣara*” has for many centuries been understood as writing. We learn from Valluvar and Auvvai that writing was an important part of education from before two thousand years ago. They speak of the numerals and writing as the two eyes of vidyā.

But in the ancient age I am speaking about, that is from the time of the Vedas and up till a very long period subsequent to it, the entire system of learning in all its aspects was conducted entirely orally. The student received his instruction aurally and reproduced what he learned orally. It was so ordained that the Vedic mantras should not be written down. The reason was that the divine sounds of the Vedas should ever be present in the world and generate the well-being of mankind. Now what has this to do with the idea of the Vedas not being put down in writing?

How was a section of people to be created who would be dedicated to the task of propagating the sound of mantras? It was laid down that this section should not pursue any occupation other than chanting the mantras and that that was the only way by which they could earn their livelihood or their *dakṣiṇā*. For this purpose it would not have been enough if the section of people so set apart learned the Vedas from books, reading them now and then. In writing it was not possible to make clear the “ascent” and “descent” of the svaras of the mantras. If you put in a mark here or there, it may lead to mistakes in printing or writing and the mantra itself will change and the result would be unfortunate.

There is another reason more important than all these. If the mantras were to be read only now and then they would make but a superficial impression on the mind and they would not be fully fruitful or rewarding. One’s mind must be imbued with the mantras and they must become integrated with one’s life-breath. Only then would their chanting be fully potent. If we decide to learn the Vedas in the written form, we may tend to think, “After all they are in the book. We are free to read them whenever we like.” This will lead to indifference and we may not take the trouble of memorising the mantras. Instead of the mantras becoming an inward reality or our being steeped in them they will remain something merely outward. It is to avoid such a possibility that our ancient schools conducted their teaching without any written texts and solely depended on memorising.

The student was so moulded as to make him not only intelligent but virtuous. This enabled him better to absorb the mantra. The mantra will become a shining inner reality only in that individual who leads a pure and chaste life: it is a process in

which he becomes illumined. That is the reason why the student was made to observe the vow of brahmacarya (celibacy). Vidyābhyasa or education was a vrata (vow) from the very beginning with dīkṣā (initiation).

At birth a Brāhmin too belongs to the fourth caste. At the time of his upanayana saṁskāra he becomes a "dvija" or twice-born. After his education he becomes a "vipra". With all the three he becomes a "śrotriya". Such is the śāstra:

*Janmanā jāyate Śūdraḥ
Saṁskārād dvija ucyate
Vidyayā yāti vipratvam
Trībhiḥ śrotriya ucyate*

The student becomes a "Brāhmin" when he is steeped in the Vedas – which are called the "Brahman" — and when he realises the knowledge of the Paramātmān proclaimed in the same "Brahman". This means education in our land was different from being a mere means of livelihood that it is today. Our forefathers, from the very beginning, took a lofty view of education and placed before themselves a very high ideal. This view meant imparting a student knowledge of the Self and helping him to triumph over the cycle of births.

The teacher recited each mantra five times and asked the student to repeat the same five times. The disciple was called an "ekasanta-grāhin" if he could grasp a mantra and repeat it after hearing it only once.

Kula, śākhā, chātra, caraṇa

We often hear people remark: 'We must see (so-and-so's) kula (clan) and gotra'. (Our modern reformers do not want people to subscribe to this belief.) The descendants of the same ṛṣi form a group belonging to a "gotra". "Kula" means the group including descendants and their kin. It was in such a kula, it seems, that the ancient school originated. In those times it was known as "ṛṣikula" rather than as "gurukula". The term "gurukula" suggests that there was no blood relationship between the guru and his pupils. However, the early schools consisted of gurus and students who formed a kinship. In the beginning, as I mentioned before, the father was the guru. This type of early school propagated a vidyā that had been discovered by an ancestor ṛṣi or a vidyā that had been revealed to him – so it was called a ṛṣikula.

Later the ṛṣikulas exchanged the vidyā-s and mantras discovered by the various ṛṣis. The kulas and gotras that came together thus followed the same practices. Here and there appeared groups that brought together the mantras taught by various ṛṣis and each group studied the mantras thus brought together. Thus arose śākhās, divisions of the same Veda that slightly differ from one another. Historically speaking, the vidyāśālās or schools came after the ṛṣikulas and were connected with the gurukulas, each of them concerned with the study of a particular śākhā. By now education had expanded beyond the original schools of blood relatives. It began to embrace all people belonging to one section of the Vedas and following the same practices. Later the gurukula further broadened its scope to include not only different śākhās of the same Veda but all Vedas and also other branches of learning.

From Pāṇini's grammar we find that the student (what we today call "māṇavaṇ" in Tamil or "vidyārthin" or "śiṣya" in Śanskrit, is referred to as a "chātra" "Chātra" means an umbrella. The student came to be called a chātra because, like one protected by the umbrella from rain and sun, he came under the protection of the guru and was guarded against all bad or unhealthy influences. From this we gain an idea of the noble character of the guru and of how he was imbued with love for his disciple. I say this because, unlike today, when education is confined to imparting knowledge, education then meant, in addition, moulding the student's character.

We also learn from Pāṇini that the school was called a "caraṇa".¹ "Carāṇa" literally means a foot. We call our foot also "pāda" or "pada". We use the word in the term denoting the most elevated of positions, Paramapada. The feet support our body, so too does it support our life. It is in the same sense that the gurukula is called a "caraṇa".

The adhyāpaka or Vedic teacher is called a "śrotriya" if he chants and teaches the Vedic texts up to the final standard called "ghana". The teacher who is not only well versed in the Vedic mantras but is also proficient in explaining their meanings, their significance, is called a "pravaktā". One who does "pravacana" is a "pravaktā" (one who expounds).

Subsequently, as stated earlier, two types of teachers came into being, the "ācārya" and the "upādhyāya".

Pāṇini refers to students taught in the same gurukula as "sabrahmācārins" and "satirthyas". These names were used in later times too. In English we say "class-mates". "Gurubhais" is the term used in the North.

Guru-dakṣiṇā

Manu speaks about the dakṣiṇā to be given to the guru after a student completes his studies in the gurukula: it may be according to the disciple's capacity – cows, land, gold, clothes, grain, vegetables, umbrellas, sandals, whatever. Manu also lays down that a teacher who teaches for his livelihood (fixing his fees beforehand as if he were conducting a business) is not eligible to take part in a śrāddha ceremony. So also his student. You probably remember (what has already been said) that a teacher who teaches for a salary or for his livelihood is called an "upādhyāya".

As education grew and expanded, instead of the earlier kulas which taught only blood relatives, there developed big gurukulas that were common to all those entitled to study the Vedas. Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas also joined them.

The arts and sciences of old

In course of time, vidyā, which had been understood wholly as a path of devotion, so developed as to include the arts and sciences as we understand them today. These were also taught in the gurukulas. The *Chāṇdogya Upaniṣad* contains

¹ A "Samhitā" is a collection of Vedic mantras. A "Brāhmaṇa" contains an explanation of how Vedic karma is to be conducted to the accompaniment of the mantras. According to some, a division of a Samhitā as well as the school that teaches it is a "śākhā". Similarly, a division of a Brāhmaṇa is a "caraṇa".

a long list of such arts and sciences. When we read it we are filled with amazement that centuries ago our forefathers had taken great strides in such a variety of subjects and had given instruction in them systematically.

Even after becoming proficient in many vidyā-s, Nārada is unhappy that he has not received the knowledge of the Ātman. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Nārada mentions to the Sanat Kumāras the vidyā-s he has learned. These include the four Vedas; the epics and the Purāṇas (which Nārada calls the fifth Veda); grammar (which he describes as the Veda of Vedas); pitryam or the kalpa relating to ceremonies in honour of departed ancestors; rāṣi or arithmetic (mathematics also?); Daivam or the science of signs or forecasting; ekāyanam or statecraft; nidhi, that is finance or economics; vakovākyaṃ or logic; Deva-vidyā or Niruktam (the etymology concerned with the meanings of the syllables of Veda-māntas); Brahma-vidyā (this term usually means Vedānta but here it means phonetics concerned with the sounds of māntas – it is Śikṣasāstra); bhūta-vidyā or the science pertaining to all creatures (biology); kṣātra-vidyā or the art of warfare practised by Kṣatriyas; nakṣatra-vidyā meaning both astronomy and astrology; sarpa-vidyā, the science of curing poisons; Devajana-vidyā¹ or the art of dance, drama, architecture, painting — the vidyā-s belonging to the Gandharvas. (Devajana are those who are between the devas of the summit and humans.) Nārada thus mentions many disciplines.

Nārada was a great genius. So he was able to learn so many subjects. Along with that, even though he was so vastly learned, he had the discrimination and humility to recognise that he had not experienced the bliss of the Ātman. That is why he approached the Sanat Kumāras and received the upadeśa of Atma-vidyā from them. It is clear thus that the aim of education in our land is to obtain knowledge of the Godhead.

Coming to the subject of gurukulas. As a result of the increase in the number of disciplines, the gurukula must have expanded with an addition to the strength of the teachers also. Big schools must have arisen with separate classes for students who, unlike Nārada who learned a number of subjects, studied only a few disciplines.

Tagore started his Śāntiniketan with the forest universities of our ṛṣis as his model.

The difficulty Nārada felt (the desire to know Ātmānanda) was not common to all students of those times. Although education then had to do with the Ātman, an ordinary student was not all at once pushed on to the path of jñāna. Though a student was made aware of the Brahmā-vidyā on the intellectual plane there was no compulsion that he must have inner experience of it. After his education he got married, became involved in his household work, celebration of various festivals. He begot children and attained maturity of his consciousness (citta) by living out his past karma and performing his religious duties. The Vedas and śāstras have it that it is only after living through these stages that a man can become a sannyāsin and be engaged in the quest of the Ātman. The education system was such as to help him in the gradual development towards this ultimate goal.

1 According to one opinion "Devajana-vidyā" comprises "Deva-vidyā" and "jana-vidyā". "Deva-vidyā" means the arts of the Gandharvas while "jana-vidyā" means medical science.

Dharma and the Brahman

Dharma is that which makes us lead a disciplined life so far as this world is concerned. The Brahman is related to the other world (paraloka). The ordinary man (jīva) arrives at the stage in which he is capable of inquiring into the Brahman only through the pathway of dharma which is constituted by the pathway of Karma or action. The Purvamīmāṃsa which constitutes the karma-mārga (path of karma), is inquiry into dharma and leading a life according to the Dharmaśāstra. And the purpose of the Uttaramīmāṃsa or Vedānta is inquiry into the Brahman and realising It. Although Vedānta was taught extensively in the schools of old, it did not mean, in the case of the majority of the students, anything more than taking an interest in the subject. The students were not to be immediately involved in the pursuit of the goal of Vedānta. When a student became a gṛhastha or householder he lived a worldly life, in accordance with the tenets of dharma. It was only after he became mature within that he was qualified for full involvement in Ātma-śāstra (the Ātma-śāstra that he had learned earlier merely for outward knowledge and not for actual realisation). Nārada was not an ordinary being. Because of his extraordinary nature he was inspired to know and realise the Brahman soon after completing his education. He passed from the brahmacaryāśrama itself (without becoming a householder) to the state where he was qualified for Brahma-jñāna.

Nārada apart, the old type of education was such that an ordinary man did not stray into adharma (unrighteousness). By adhering to dharma and with devotion, he became interested in Ātma-vidyā.

All subjects are Vedic

An extremely important point must be made here. Vidyā (learning) in ancient times was rooted in the Vedas. Whatever the art in question, or the science, it was connected with the study of the Vedas, with one or another of the fourteen Vedic vidyā-s. And the purpose of all this was to lead a life in conformity with the Vedas. Another interesting point is that some sections did not accept all parts of the Vedas and accepted only the Pūrvamīmāṃsa. Like the Cārvakas there was another section that did not accept the Vedas at all. Then there were groups that neither accepted the Vedas nor opposed them. Sāṅkhya and Yoga had their origin independently but even these subjects were taught along with the Vedas. Later emerged Buddhism which was non-Vedic and was opposed to the authority of the Vedas. The Buddhists established universities of their own. But in these universities too the fourteen branches of Vedic learning were taught.

Education for all castes

When many vidyā-s developed for different occupations, the Traivarnikas, that is the three castes eligible to study the Vedas (Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas), joined the gurukulas. Even members of the fourth varṇa or caste came to the ācāryas in the afternoon to learn the śāstras pertaining to their trades or

occupations. I will tell you later about the extent to which it was necessary for members of each caste to receive education from the gurukula. You will then realise that there was no partiality or discrimination in this field.

Usually students belonging to all the three varṇas residing in a gurukula did not study the same course. The period of education for them also varied. The upanayana of children belonging to the three castes was also performed at different ages and they were, therefore, sent to the gurukula not at the same age.

Compulsory education

These differences apart, I would like to mention one important feature of our ancient education. It was obligatory, according to the śāstras, for the members of all three castes mentioned above to receive Brah̥mopadeśa and education from a guru. It means that education was compulsory, not left to the sweet will of the parents. If the children were not sent to a guru their parents were severely punished. In those days the harshest and most humiliating punishment was being made to lose one's caste. According to the śāstras Br̥hmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas who did not go to learn from a guru were expelled from their castes. Their children were excommunicated as vr̥tyas. Our forefathers gave great importance to the acquiring of Vedic knowledge by those qualified to study the Vedas as well as other branches of learning.

The deserving alone....

It did not mean however that, because education was compulsory, the students could be half-hearted in their studies. The Dharmaśāstras declare that education must be imparted to the deserving alone (satpātra), that is those who are prepared to learn whole-heartedly the entire course with the observance of the rules of brahmacharya. The student should be chaste in conduct and must have a good grasp. He must have a fine retentive memory. "Grah̥ṇa-śakti" is ability to grasp what is taught. Retaining it in the mind without being forgetful is dh̥raṇā-śakti.

You may ask how education could be compulsory and at the same time restricted to the deserving. What would have a student done if he was naturally poor in grah̥ṇa and dh̥raṇā? The answer is the child was sent to the guru after the Brah̥mopadeśa, that is after imparting the Gāyatrī mantra. If a student chanted the Gāyatrī with earnestness and devotion he would be good at grah̥ṇa and dh̥raṇā.

When a student did not meditate on the Gāyatrī in the proper manner and did not therefore acquire the ability to grasp things he became an asat (not good, or false). No vidyā was imparted to such students and they were not accepted in the community. Just as even a good seed goes futile if sown in a barren land so too a sadvidyā imparted to an asat will be rendered useless.

It is said that it would be better for a learned man to die with his vidyā than teach an undeserving student. The idea that only the deserving should be taught is expressed in the form of a story in the Dharmaśāstras. The goddess of vidyā tells a

Brāhmin: "I am a great treasure you have received. You must safeguard me in the same way as you safeguard a treasure. Spend it with care and distribute it among the deserving. You must impart me (vidyā) to a student who is chaste in body and mind, has subdued his senses and studies with diligence. And you must make sure that he too will preserve and safeguard me (vidyā) as a treasure."

It is stated in the *Manusmṛiti* that that student should not be taught who is neither attentive nor devoted and who misuses his vidyā (that is employs it to purposes that militate against dharma). All Dharmasāstras give the terrible warning that one who teaches a student for money without bothering about his fitness will go to naraka (hell).

Education in later times

Our forefathers had established a system according to which it was necessary for a student to be worthy in respect of both knowledge and character. In later times, when schools as understood today came into being, the only anxiety about a student was whether he behaved as a rowdy in the class, and beyond that no questions were asked about his character. A student was failed only on the basis of his lack of knowledge (not because of lack of character.) Indeed a student was not admitted if he was not likely to pass the examination. Even such a system has changed now. A student who behaves in a rowdy manner is feared and given the marks demanded by him.

There is no need to worry either about character or about knowledge so long as the students belong to a community which forms a vote bank (for the ruling party). There is no other criterion. However, there is no frank admission of this. Instead, the claim is made that "the backward classes are being brought forward, the suppressed are being uplifted".

It is essential to uplift the backward classes. But it has to be done in a proper and balanced manner and not at the expense of the common welfare of society. It would be perilous if in the process various sections of society are denied justice.

Because the grandfathers, great-grandfathers, etc. of students belonging to some communities today were highly educated and because their counterparts in some other communities did not receive education, these former students cannot be told: "Weren't your grandfathers and great-grandfathers well educated? So today, however intelligent you are, you will be treated as belonging to the second class as far as college education is concerned." Though they are inferior in qualification, seats are reserved for those whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers did not receive any education.

This does not stand to reason — it is not rational. But those who support this sort of thing call themselves rationalists — but act in an irrational manner. *In the beginning, when society was in reality divided into castes on the basis of occupations, the education system was in support of the division (and such as to promote the different occupations). Now that system of education is described as an offence in the name of caste. Today the reservation policy is based on the*

thinking that caste is a more important criterion than learning (for admission to colleges). This is a greater offence in the name of caste and it is amazing that such a system is described as progressive, egalitarian and rationalist.

No one would object to the uplift of backward people. The objection is to the means adopted, pushing back people who are capable of going forward on their own. Let the hungry man be fed, but for that reason do not snatch the food from others.

This is only one aspect of the perverse manner in which the high ideals of equality and abheda (non-difference) are pursued today. It is ironic that those who want caste abolished have put the seal of caste indelibly on society with their pursuit of a policy of education and employment that is itself based on caste.

No caste bias

You will realise from one of the ideals we have placed before ourselves that in ancient times education had no caste bias. It is proof of the importance given in the past to acquiring knowledge. Taking a liberal view, the Dharmasāstras permit people belonging to one caste learning from another the vidyā they (the former) do not possess now, or have lost.

According to Manu, one may learn from a member of any caste a worthy vidyā or a lofty ideal, or receive a girl of noble character in marriage. However, in the Dharmasāstras of later times it is stated that the varna-dharma, or the dharma of the fourfold division, should not be violated in the matter of taking a wife from another community because of the risks involved in marrying a girl out of love. The girl in question may deliberately be passed off for one possessing good character though the fact may be otherwise. However, even a Brāhmin may learn dharma and vidyā from a non-Brāhmin.

Dharma grows out of works on knowledge. Indeed the purpose of such works is to help dharma. So the two (dharma and knowledge) should not be treated as two separate entities.

Suppose most of the learned Brāhmins of a place have been wiped out by foreign invaders or by barbarians or suppose for some reason the learning of the Brāhmins of a particular locality has become extinct. During such times of danger and crisis the Brāhmins concerned may learn even the Vedas from Ksatriyas or Vaiśyas.

It is sign of wisdom to find out the true meaning of a subject irrespective of who teaches it or who speaks about it. Thus we must not reject a vidyā outright without considering the possibility that it might contain something valuable. In the same way we should not dismiss others from whom we might gain knowledge, exclaiming: "Aha, are we to learn from these unworthy men? Am I to learn listening to such a man?" Instead, our approach should be: "It does not matter who speaks about any subject. If there is anything of value in the talk we will accept it." These worthy attitudes are supported and encouraged in the Dharmasāstras.

Of course, one may, under some false pretext, learn unworthy things trying to

satisfy oneself in this manner: "Let me see if there is something of interest in it." However, it is not easy to learn something without making an assessment of its aspects, about its "high" and "low". This point is particularly stressed in the śāstras.

Here is an interesting story from the Mahābhārata. A ṛṣi burns down a stock in his anger. Thereafter it so happens that he learns aspects of dharma from a woman and, at her bidding, the rest of the dharma from a butcher. No better proof is needed than this story to illustrate that our forefathers were ready to listen to anyone to acquire knowledge and wisdom.

Vidyā and the fourth caste

There were a number of people belonging to the fourth caste who were learned enough to teach Brāhmins. The Dharmaśāstras declare: "You may go and learn from them." One truth becomes apparent from this. Contrary to the belief prevalent today, Brāhmins did not keep members of the fourth caste in darkness. Nor were the latter segregated. It is true that they were not taught the Vedas directly. But Brāhmins taught them the śāstras pertaining to their various occupations. And, apart from this, they were also given upadeśā in dharma and jñāna. It was mainly through the Purāṇas that such upadeśā was imparted. There were many individuals belonging to the fourth caste who were well versed in dharma and Ātma-vidyā. Such Brāhmins as were not sufficiently learned were taught by them.

There is a fine example to illustrate how knowledge was acquired from members of non-Brahmin castes. Bhagavān Vyāsa propagated the Vedas through his Brāhmin disciples. And he taught the Purāṇas to a non-Brāhmin, Romaharṣa, who was a Sūta, and sent him out to propagate them. The illustrious Brāhmin ṛṣi of Naimiśāranya treated him with great respect, gave him a seat of honour, and learned the Purāṇas from him.

The supreme gift of knowledge

Our forefathers believed that of all the acts of public welfare or philanthropy there was nothing to equal the imparting of vidyā to the deserving, to the satpātra, to the right or virtuous person. It is lauded again and again as "vidyādāna". From the very use of the word dāna it is evident that the ācārya is not to look for any material gain from teaching.

Dealing with the subject, the *Manusmṛiti* observes: "The worthiest of dānas are called atidānas. Godāna, bhūdāna and vidyādāna (gift of cows, land, learning) all three are atidānas. Annadāna (gift of food) is also praised highly. But vidyādāna, which is food for the mind, is higher than the dāna for the stomach. There are many vidya-s. Making a gift of these is a noble dāna. But the highest of vidyā-s is Brahma-vidyā. No praise is sufficient for the gift of Brahma-vidyā. He who makes a gift of this vidyā not only earns the svarga of the gods (abode of the celestials) but is "severed from all connections with samsāra (worldly life) and attains oneness with the Paramātmān (that is he attains mokṣa.)"

Length of terms

It is customary to have a twelve-year course in our present-day Veda-pāthasālās. It needs eight years, in addition, to learn the *bhāṣyas* thoroughly and grasp their meaning. The period of education in the old days was determined by the mental capacity of the student as also according to the subjects he wished to learn. The shortest was nine years. Twelve years became the general practice. Some courses lasted eighteen years and some others thirty-six years. According to the *Manusmṛiti*, there were courses that had no restrictions with regard to their length – a student could study even for a lifetime. The Dharmaśāstras permit a man to dedicate himself to learning throughout his entire life as a Brahmaçārin (that is without his entering the gṛhasthāśrama or householder's stage of life). A student was discharged from the obligation of observing āśrama-dharma only after his guru had tested him and satisfied himself that he was of exceptional intelligence. Such a student was called a naiṣṭhika, a naiṣṭhika brahmaçārin.

For academic purposes the year was divided into two terms. The first was of about five months, the second of about seven months. The first term was called upākarma and the second utsarjana or utsarga. For some people the term upākarma will bring to mind *Avanīyāvittam*¹ — that is the day on which the sacred thread is changed every year. For Ṛgvedins this day of upākarma occurs in the lunar month of Śrāvaṇa under the asterism of Śrāvaṇa. For Tamils the month of Śrāvaṇa is between the new moon day of *Āṭi* and the new moon day of *Āvaṇi*. "*Āvaṇi*" is derived from Śrāvaṇi. For Yajurvedins upākarma is on the full moon day of the month of Śrāvaṇa. Ṛgvedins fix the day (as mentioned before) under the asterism of Śrāvaṇa. Yajurvedins according to the tithi of pūrnimā or the full moon day.

In the hoary past the full moon in the month of Śrāvaṇa occurred without fail under the asterism of Śrāvaṇa. That is precisely the reason why the month "Śrāvaṇa" is so called (that is the month in which the full moon transits the asterism Śrāvaṇa). During the period when, every year, the full moon and the Śrāvaṇa asterism came together both Ṛgvedins and Yajurvedins commenced their term of upākarma on the same day. Later, as a result of a shift in the movements of heavenly bodies, in the month of Śrāvaṇa when the full moon fell under the asterism of Śraviṣṭhā (*Āvittam* in Tamil) Yajurvedins began to observe the commencement of upākarma on the full moon day. The Dharmaśāstras have it that the upākarma must be observed on the full moon day of the Śrāvaṇa month. So Yajurvedis gave greater importance to the tithi (date according to the moon), that is the full moon (Pūrnimā) in this case, than to the asterism or nakṣatra.

This is what we call "*Āvaṇi Avittam*" or "*Āvinīyāvittam*" in Tamil.

Ṛgvedins, not minding the tithi (date) the full moon – continued to observe the commencement of their upākarma on the day of the Śrāvaṇa asterism. So it has been the practice until today. That is why those in the know of things call upākarma "Śrāvaṇa". So the Ṛgvedi upākarma has no connection with the

1 Among Tamil Yajurvedi Brāhmins, the upākarma ceremony is known as *Āvaṇiyāvittam*.

Śravistha (*Avittam*) asterism but, since Yajurvedins predominate in the South, even Rgvedins call their upākarma "*Aviniyavittam*."

In certain years, even in these times, the full moon day of the month of Śrāvana coincides with the Śrāvana asterism. On such occasions both Rgvedins and Yajurvedins observe upākarma on the same day.

Sāmavedins observe their upākarma one month later, that is under the asterism of Hasta in the month of Bhādrapada. It usually occurs on Gaṇeśa Caturthī or one day before or after that. According to the śāstras, if Hasta and Pancamī of the moon come together, the day is particularly good. During the time when the full moon day of the month of Śrāvana happened to fall under the asterism of Śrāvana, in the month of Bhādrapada, the asterism of Hastā was conjoined with the Pancamī of the waxing moon.

The term "upākarma" itself is not known to many people. (Indeed it may be that many people do not know the Veda to which they belong.) Even those who must have heard the term upākarma perhaps think that it is a day on which the soiled sacred thread is changed. Actually, changing the sacred thread is a minor rite of upākarma.

"Upākarma" does not in fact refer just to one day. It is the commencement of an entire term of five or six months. During this term students learn the basic Vedic lessons from their ācāryas: what is called Śruti, including the *Samhitās*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, the Upaniṣads, etc. These lessons continue until the beginning of the month of Puṣya (*Tai* in Tamil). (Puṣya is also called "Taisa". "Tai" is derived from "Taisa".) On that day, that is the beginning of Puṣya, the study of the Vedas is concluded with the ceremony of utsarjana. This must be performed either on the full moon day of Puṣya or on the day falling under the asterism Rohinī before that.

Since Sāmavedins have their upākarma in Bhādrapada (*Puraṭṭaṣi* in Tamil), they have their adhyayana term for five months or a minimum of four and a half months. They have their utsarjana on the full moon day of the month of Māgha – Magha Pūṁimā usually comes fifteen days after the new moon day of the month of Puṣya.

Utsarjana and visarjana mean the same thing — that is discontinuing or discharging something. Utsarjana thus is the ceremony for the discontinuance of adhyayana and adhyāpana (learning and teaching) of the Vedas. Seven months later, on the next upākarma, the Vedic lessons must be recommenced from where they were discontinued. "Upakramaṇa" means to start something — that is why the Vedic ceremony performed on the commencement of adhyayana-adhyāpana is called upākarma.

The second term is the seven-month period during which there are no new Vedic lessons. During these months the six Vedāṅgas are taught — *Śikṣā*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Chandas*, *Nirukta*, *Jyotiṣa* and *Kalpa*. Other subjects are also taught during this term. The teaching and learning of such subjects are discontinued on the eve of upākarma and the study of the Vedas is recommenced. After the utsarjana, Vedāṅgas, poetry and other subjects are taught from where they

were left before. In the North the utsarjana day is called Sarasvatī Pūjā or Vasanta Pañcamī.

Nowadays *vedas* and *polis*¹ have become more important than anything else in the performance of *Avanīyāvīṭṭam* (upākarma). The first sūkta of the Vedas — the Vedas which are meant to be studied for a whole term — is chanted by the priest and the others (the Brāhmins performing upākarma) repeat the same in a faulty manner. The utsarjana ceremony is also performed on the same day with the priest chanting one sūtra from each Vedāṅga and the others repeating it again in a faulty manner. (Indeed the participating Brāhmins do not even know that the priest is conducting the utsarjana ceremony.) Somehow they have not done the utsarjana of the upākarma function itself! It may be for the sake of the *vedās* and the *polis*. We have now come to the unfortunate stage of making a mockery of ourselves.

The brahmacārin learns the Vedas and the *Vedāṅgas* and other subjects in alternating terms and completes his education in twelve years. The gurukulavāsa may extend up to 18 or 36 years when the student learns not only his own *Vedā-sākhā* but also other Vedas (one who knows two Vedas is a Dvivedin; three Vedas, Trivedin; four Vedas, Caturvedin) and, apart from the Vedas, also the *Vedāṅgas*. He teaches members of other castes the vidyā they are entitled to learn and he also specialises in some branch of learning.

Why upākarma for gṛhasthas?

If upākarma and utsarjana are connected with education why are they not confined to brahmacārins? Why have the śāstras enjoined householders to perform them?

According to the śāstras, it is a Brāhmin's duty to do adhyāpana after his adhyayana (he must become a teacher after his studies). When a Brāhmin teaches a brahmacārin he has to commence and conclude each term with upākarma and utsarjana ceremony. In this way he makes himself and his student pure. Even if he does not teach anybody after becoming a householder, is it not necessary for him to retain what he has learned? For that purpose he must divide the year into two terms and again memorise what he has learned. In this manner the householder too has to perform upākarma and utsarjana.

In the Dharmasāstras upākarma and utsarjana are mentioned in the section dealing with the dharma of gṛhasthas, not of brahmacārins.

At one time education itself was a tapasya performed in the worship of Īśvara. It commenced with Brahmopadeśa and concluded after the observance of a number of vratas (vows). The rite signifying the conclusion of studies is called samāvarttana. The brahmacārin is to marry and settle down in the āśrama of the householder only after this ceremony. How upākarma is to be performed by one who has had his samāvarttana and how it is to be performed by one who has not had his samāvarttana is described in some Smṛtis. From this it is clear that even a householder has to perform these rites. Some ṛsis who are authors of Smṛtis have clearly stated that the gṛhastha too must do his adhyayana as a student so that he does not forget what he has learned. This is called dhāraṇā.

1 Savoury and sweet items.

Holidays

As already mentioned, there are two terms in the Vedic academic year. Are there no holidays? Yes, there are. Our forefathers were not lacking in loving tenderness for children. They gave them days of rest and did not tie them down to studies all through the year. The days when there is no learning or adhyayana are called "anadhyayanya" days. There are six such days every month – the full moon day, the new moon day, Āṣṭamī or the eighth day and Caturdaśī or the fourteenth day of the waxing and waning moons. In addition, every year, after the upākarma and utsarjana terms there are three days of anadhyayana. Also there are four other holidays in a year called "Cāturmāsī".

All these are regular holidays occurring every year according to the almanac. So they are called "nitya anadhyayana" days. Apart from these, there are holidays that cannot be fixed according to the almanac but are declared for some special reason ("naimittika"). For instance when it rains heavily, when there is a storm, when there is a fire in the forest, when the gurukula is attacked by dacoits. On such days there are to be no lessons, so says the Dharmasāstra of Manu with human sympathy and understanding.

Eclipses do not occur on fixed days of the year. So the days on which they fall are naimittika holidays. (During eclipses there should be no teaching but the mantras learned should be muttered. Japa done during eclipses is more efficacious than at other times.)

Is it right to beat a student?

Here one must add what the Dharmasāstras have to say about how the ācāryas are to conduct themselves towards their students.

It is generally agreed that, on the pretext of showing affection, the student should not be pampered and spoiled. It is for this reason that a child, instead of being taught at home, was sent to the gurukula. The student was bound by the śāstras to conduct himself according to the wishes and instructions of his ācārya and he was not to live according to his own whims or will. However, for this reason, nowhere is it mentioned that the ācārya should browbeat him into doing things or keep him in fear. The message of the śāstras is that, while treating the disciple with affection and consideration, the ācārya should keep him disciplined and not allow him to become self-willed. If you examine our texts ranging from the Upaniṣads to the Purāṇas you will find many examples of the bond of affection between the guru and his disciple. But this bond of affection in no way detracted from the discipline with which the student was bound.

By speaking to him sweetly and by treating him with affection the guru had to take his student on the path of progress. You will realise the sweetness of this relationship between the guru and his disciple from the fact that the guru addressed his śiṣya as "Saumya".

The student should not be beaten, according to the Smṛti of Gautama. Though, in later times, the word śikṣā itself came to mean punishment, the rule at first was

that there was to be no punishment during the time of teaching. Notwithstanding this, at times beating the student might have become unavoidable. There is a saying, "If you don't beat the cow it will not yield milk." Or: "Even a brother doesn't help as much as beating." "Spare the rod and spoil the child," is a well-known saying in English.

When a student had to be punished, he was to be beaten with a short length of rope or cane, not with a whip or a stick of the tamarind tree. He was to be beaten, if at all, on the back, and beating on any other part of the body, especially the head, is forbidden by the *Manusmṛiti*.

The śāstras pay attention to the smallest detail in education and give useful advice on each. The underlying idea is that, throughout his period of education, the student should remain disciplined and that, towards this end, he must keep his senses and urges under control.

Qualities of a student

Manu lays emphasis on the observance of brāhmacārya by the student. He calls this "indriya samyama" (control of the senses). How is this rule of brahmacārya significant? The goal of education, says Manu, is not merely the "understanding of the Vedas", that is the attainment of knowledge, but the uplift of the Ātman. That is why vidyābhyaśa or education is described as a vrata (sacred vow) and as tapasya (austerity).

Manu also clearly defines the daily duties of the student. Sandhyā-vandana, Agnihoṭra (samidadhāna in the case of the brāhmacārīn), svādhyāya or learning one's lessons properly and memorising them; begging for alms (bhikṣācārya); drawing water and gathering samit for the ācārya as also bringing clay and flowers for his pūjā. The student must, in all humility, request his teacher to lecture on a subject (pravacana) and make the subject clear to him. So goes the description of śiṣya-dharma or duties of the student. Svādhyāya and pravacana should on no account be given up, says the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*.

Promoting health

In all this it must be noted that, apart from the emphasis on improving knowledge and character, importance is also given to health. Rising early in the morning, bathing in cool water, performing prāṇāyāma and Sūrya-namaskāra – such habits will help to enhance not only keenness of intellect but bodily health and purity of heart. By performing duties like bringing samit for the guru the student learns to be humble and makes his body tough.

A human being has three constituents – the body, the intellect, the Ātman. The education system of old ensured the soundness and proper growth of all three.

I have spoken to you at length about the education system prevalent in our land in ancient times. Yet there may be some features not known to me.

Individual teachers mostly

Under the Buddhists and the Jainas in later times, schools bigger than before

and larger in number made their appearance. I do not forget the big schools of earlier times teaching a number of subjects like the ones mentioned in the *Chândogya Upaniṣad*. However, most of our schools of this ancient period were under individual ācāryas who were responsible to one group of students. The life of such teachers was interwoven with that of their students. The ācāryas were able to pay attention to each student individually and, apart from imparting knowledge, they inculcated good qualities in him.

In a federal set-up there are a number of autonomous state governments under a central authority. In our system of education individual teachers looking after groups of students were like the autonomous states. All teachers and students were under the control of the kulapati. The kulapati, through the example of his high conduct and otherwise through his qualities, was able to bring all of them under his discipline and ensure their good conduct. Education did not mean merely the acquiring of knowledge nor was it a means of earning a livelihood. And if it cut out the path of fulfilment of the Ātman it was because the kulapati, apart from the vitality of his presence, supervised the conduct of students, constantly keeping an eye on them.

At the apex was the kulapati. In big gurukulas it was the practice to have teachers each of whom was responsible for one batch. Small gurukulas under individual ācāryas were more common in ancient times. In other words, education under the care of individual gurus had greater importance than under institutions.

From times of old it was natural for students to achieve progress in their respective fields by studying in various gurukulas and under various individual teachers (not institutions). Until recently, there were students who had their gurukulavāsa under various gurus – Mīmāṃsā under one guru, Nyāya under another and Vedānta under a third and so on. Even today there must be students, though not large in number, who must be learning under several gurus. There is also the practice of studying even one śāstra under more than one guru – one section of it under one guru, another under a second guru.

The point to be noted is that all such ācāryas were not members of one gurukula. Each taught individually in his own gurukula. It was a system of education according to which a number of gurus did not teach on an institutional basis. It was a system in which individual teachers taught students on the basis of their own qualifications, excellence of conduct and character.

The individual teacher and his greatness

A teacher, who is not part of an institution, has perforce to remain pure of character and conduct so as to attract students. Will any father send his little son to a guru, however learned he be, if he is not of noble character and is not a man of compassion? After all, the boy has to spend ten or twelve years in the gurukula, years during which both his body and mind will have to be shaped for the better.

Drawbacks of institutional education

An institution consisting of many people will be mixed in character. Its shortcomings will not be obvious as they will be in the case of an individual. If you

The Guru Tradition

make a garland consisting of the same flowers (marigolds or chrysanthemums) you will be able to spot the bad or foul-smelling flower in it easily and discard it. But if a garland is made of different kinds of flowers you will not be able to recognise the bad flowers that are mixed with the good ones. To take an example from cooking. The aubergines or "brinjals" are full of seeds; the broad beans are overripe. So it is suggested: don't make any dish separately of either of the two vegetables. Use them in *aviyal*.¹ When an individual object or commodity is spoiled or goes rancid you recognise it immediately and throw it away. However, if there are broken bits of things, pieces of a mirror or glass, or bits of useless plastic and rags you make dolls out of them or other attractive objects. You read about such things in the papers.

We too can in the same way build institutions that take our breath away with people drawn from amongst us who may, however, be wanting in many respects or are good for nothing. I need not say much – you know it for a fact yourself. Today there are so many institutions or sanghas that seem to be flourishing. But, individually, how many of the members who make up these institutions will stand the test of character? When a number of people join together their individual drawbacks will remain concealed or submerged in their very togetherness.

Institutions will never be able to shape the character of students and nurture their intelligence in the same way as individual gurus. They will be able only to test the pupil's knowledge and help him to improve it, but not his character or conduct. When an individual guru resides with a student, makes him work for him and feeds him, he will be able to mould his character also.

Nowadays, when a child is admitted to school only his intelligence is tested. There is no room in the present system either to test a student's character or to improve it. Nor can a child whose character cannot be mended can be rejected. In the old system of ours that type of education which did not shape the character of the pupil was considered no education at all. The Lord declares towards the end of the *Bhagavadgītā*: "...na atapaskāya, na abhaktāya, na ca aśuśrūṣave (never should you teach this to one who is not austere, one who is devoid of devotion and one who does not serve").

According to the *sāstras*, subjects of great import should not be taught without having kept the student in the gurukula for more than one year and without being satisfied about his character and conduct. Such restrictions or ideas have no place in an institution like the present-day school. That is why our education system has led to much evil because it is exclusively devoted to the nurturing of knowledge and intelligence and the advancement of subjects that are not all of them likely to be beneficial to mankind.

(I spoke about students being given their first lessons after they were tested for a period of more than one year. But suppose a boy is found unfit after such a test. Can a teacher, finding him hard-working like a draught animal, extract work from him without teaching him instead of sending him home? According to the *sāstras*,

¹ Kerala dish popular all over the South.

if a teacher keeps a boy, not fit to be taught, for selfish reasons or for something else, the sins of the youngster will accrue to him. The sins committed by a boy after he becomes a student will be visited upon the guru for his failure to correct him and put him on the right path. A guru will incur sin by not accepting a boy as a student also. The responsibilities of the guru are indeed great. There are stories of ṛṣis who, wanting to make known the devotion of their students of good character, have kept them in their gurukulas without teaching them for many years.

Education given by an individual teacher, instead of an institution, benefits the teacher as much as the taught. When an individual (who is not part of an institution) wants to excel as a teacher it becomes imperative for him to perfect himself.

Examples in the Upaniṣads

If we scan our ancient texts we will come to know how the gurus who conducted such gurukulas as described above were men of noble character, men inspired by affection for their students. Without caring for profit, these gurus had other people's children residing with them for years and they exerted themselves to the utmost so that the Vedas would be handed down to posterity and for the well-being of the world. It is a matter of great pride for us that such gurus have appeared in our land from generation to generation.

When someone approaches a guru and tells him in all sincerity, "I have come to you to become your disciple", the guru accepts him as such and teaches him all that he knows without caring for any profit. This idea is expressed in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*(6-2) in the passage dealing with the upadeśa given to Gautama by the king Pravāhaṇa.

In another version of the story in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (5-3), it is the disciple who spurns worldly goods. He says: "I want only vidyā; nothing else. I will not accept any material goods given instead." Rājā Pravāhaṇa tells Gautama: "O Bhagavān Gautama, ask for worldly goods. Whatever the quantity I will grant you." Gautama ṛṣi replies: "I don't want any of it. I want that vidyā which I do not know and which you know." Here we have an example of a ṛṣi, who is addressed as "Bhagāvan", going to a Kṣatriya seeking vidyā, that is to a guru who belongs to a lower varṇa. It is clear that with regard to learning the Truth the Brāhmins of those times were humble and without any ego. The saying, "The pot filled to the brim will not spill over", is illustrated here.

Gautama's son Śvetaketu was somewhat conceited by nature. When a man is haughty how could he be taught any vidyā? Gautama, to test Śvetaketu, puts him questions (on Ātma-vidyā) and makes him realise his ignorance. Thus, after his ego is erased or subdued, Gautama teaches his son the Mahāvākya that is still celebrated all over the world, the Mahāvākya that proclaims the non-difference between the jīva and the Brahman.

This story actually occurs later. Before it, it is Śvetaketu who goes to the king Pravāhaṇa. He loses his temper simply because he is unable to answer the questions put by the king. He returns to his father and tells him: "Some low character, a Kṣatriya, asked me all sorts of questions." Such behaviour is

characteristic of a *kuraikuṭam*¹, a pot that is only partly filled (in other words a half-baked character). Gautama, on the contrary, is a *niraikuṭam*² (a pot full to the brim) and he thinks to himself: "Ah, these are things that I should learn." So he goes to the king and asks him for upadeśa.

On another occasion five great scholars, noted for their life of Vedic discipline, come to the same Gautama to find out all about the "Vaiśvanara-Ātman". (This is proof of how even great śrautikas were untiring in their search of vidyā.) Gautama does not pretend to know the answer. With an open mind, he admits that he has no answer to the question put by the scholars and directs them to Aśvapati, king of Kekaya. To digress, we often hear people make the remark: "A professor is indeed one who does not know his subject. He merely professes to know it."

There is a similar story in another Upaniṣad (*Praśna*). From it also we learn about certain great truths. Five great men, Sukeśa, Satyakāma, etc, are seekers of the Brahman. Steeped in the Brahman as they are, they are "Brahmaparas" and "Brahmaniṣṭhas". Distinguished, though they be, they go in all humility to the great sage Pippalāda, samit in hand, in search of real vidyā and the Truth. They offer the samit to the ṛṣi and request him to give them upadeśa. Pippalāda decides that however great they be they must be tested so that people will learn a lesson — apart from the lesson of the Vedas, lessons of real life must also be taught. He tells them: "Come back with śraddhā (faith) after a year practising brahmacarya and performing austerities. I will then give you the answer to your questions. You may ask any questions you wish to ask." ("Yathā kāmam") according to your wish, so says the Upaniṣad). I will answer them to the extent I can." These words reveal the humility of Pippalāda.

The one-year period of austerities that he asks the five to observe was to test their humility. If you go to a man believing him to be your guru you must accept that whatever he asks you to do is for your good. It is faith like this that is meant by śraddhā.

Śraddhā, paripraśna

The Lord says in the Gītā (4-34) that one must receive upadeśa from jñānins who know the Reality. Five verses later (4-39), He declares: "Śhraddhāvān labhate jñānam" (The man of faith and attentiveness obtains jñāna). Bhagavān too here says that the disciple should go on probing the teacher, questioning him again and again. He uses the word "paripraśna". "Praśna" by itself means knowledge acquired by putting questions to the teacher. By adding the prefix "pari" the term means "deep or thorough inquiry" (questioning again and again). This is not the same as the practice obtaining today of trying to find out whether the teacher knows his subject by asking him questions and trying to humiliate him! The purpose of paripraśna is to inquire thoroughly into a subject so as to gain full understanding of it. The Lord uses two words along with "paripraśna" to make his meaning clear. (These words convey a meaning which is contrary to the present-day approach to the teacher.) The word that comes before is "pranipātam":

1 & 2 "Kuraikuṭam" and "niraikuṭam" are Tamil words.

The Guru Tradition

“making obeisance to the teacher” (by prostrating oneself) in an attitude of humble reverence. The word that comes after “paripraśna” is “sevā”. It means that the student should serve the teacher. First the disciple must be humble, then he must serve his guru. The basis of all this is unshakeable faith in the teacher (śraddhā), implying that any upadeśa given by the guru is for the disciple’s good. Only such students have been exhorted to learn by questioning their guru again and again.

Gurus in whom such faith can be reposed arise only in gurukulas conducted by individual gurus, not in institutions. The student has always to live with such a guru and then only can he know the extent of his knowledge and his character. How are such things to be known in institutions? Whether it is a school or a college there are separate teachers for different subjects and they memorise some notes, go through the motions of teaching, and pretend to be learned men. In contrast, how was the Upaniṣadic ṛṣi, the Upaniṣadic teacher? When questioned on a subject, he said: “I will answer to the extent I can”. In these days will you come across such an example of humility, such sincerity of purpose and honesty, in a man who occupies the teacher’s seat. “Śiṣya” means one who has humility. Apart from the śiṣya, who must be humility personified, here we have the guru also exemplifying the same quality.

If the guru and the disciple lived a simple life of harmony, it is because they were like members of the same family in the gurukula and they were of one heart. There were no secrets in their relationship and the one had nothing to hide from the other. How could there be such a heart-to-heart relationship between the guru and his disciple in a school run on an institutional basis? Because of the familiar relationship the guru opened out his mind to his student and laid bare all his intellectual gifts. To deserving students he emptied out all that he knew. To the scholars who had come to him for enlightenment, Pippalāda said: “I will answer your questions to the extent I know”. He added at the same time: “I will tell you all that I know.” Thus he came forward to make a complete gift of all the vidyā in his possession. We hear nowadays that some teachers are afraid of their students excelling them. We also hear that some teachers claim thesis written or prepared by their students as their own. The kinship obtaining in the gurukula and the affection and concern of the guru for his pupil will not be found in institutionalised education.

Testing students

Just as a jewel is cut so as to make it more lustrous, so was the student constantly tested so as to make him shine in his studies and character. There were ṛṣis who made students work without teaching them for long and purified them thus in the crucible of service.

There was for instance Upākosala¹ who was a student of the guru Jābāla Satyakāma. According to the “syllabus” and “curriculum” of those times, Satyakāma taught his students for twelve years the Vedas, the śāstras, etc. But he did not admit Upākosala alone to the lessons. For twelve years he entrusted him

¹ This story occurs in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (4-10).

with the responsibility of looking after his (the ṛṣi's) Agnis, sacred fires.¹ The boy never grumbled. For twelve long years he lived in the gurukula without attending any class and carrying out all his guru's wishes.

The practice was that, after the adhyayana had been completed and the samskāra called samāvarttana had been performed, the disciple was sent home from the gurukula. Thereafter he married and settled down to the gṛhasthāśrama (or householder's life). Satyakāma performed the samāvarttana of all his disciples except Upākosala. He neglected this pupil or seemed to neglect him.

Even then Upākosala remained patient doing the work allotted to him by his guru.

Gurupatnī or guru's wife

Satyakāma's wife, who had all along noted how Upākosala had been treated by his guru, lost her patience. She said to her husband: "This boy Upākosala has observed strict brahmacarya and practised tapasyā. He has tended your sacred fires all these years. And I have never seen you teaching him. If you do not wish to earn the curse of these Agnis you must start teaching this poor boy from now onwards at least." Thus she fought with the ṛṣi for Upākosala.

This "fight" has many implications for us. We learn a number of interesting things from what the ṛṣi's wife told her husband. First, she was more considerate to the students than was the guru, considerate like a mother to the children who had come away from their homes.

We also find exemplified in her one of two types of dharmapatnīs. Some pativrātās (wives who are totally loyal and dedicated to their husbands) think that there must be full obedience to the husband irrespective of whether or not what he says or does is in keeping with dharma. Nalāyanī was one such. For the sake of satisfying his desire she carried her sick and seedy husband to a place of ill fame. The other type of pativrātā believes that, lest her husband suffer a lapse from dharma, it is her duty to remind him of what is morally right.

Sītā, for instance, tells Rāma when he is about to go to the forest without her: "Is it not a woman's dharma not to be separated from her husband even if she suffers much while remaining with him? Have you not spoken of strīdharmā (the code of conduct for women) and persuaded your mother to stay by the side of your father instead of accompanying you to the forest? That being so, does not the same dharma apply to me? Is it just on your part to ask me to remain here instead of accompanying you to the forest?" Arguing in this manner she succeeded in obtaining Rāma's consent to her going with him to the forest.

It was not an idle warning that the Satyakāma's wife gave her husband when she told him that he would incur the wrath of Agni. In reality the divine powers were a living presence in the homes of ṛṣis and, therefore, if the sages acted against dharma they would show their anger. Satyakāma's wife was truly worried that,

¹ There are a number of Agnis according to the *Gṛhyasūtras* and *Srautasūtras*.

because Upākosala had remained untaught for so many years, her husband would merit the curse of Agni. Another point arising from this account is that the Agnis in Satyakāma's āśrama were a powerful living force as we will notice later in this story.

Regardless of his wife's warning, Satyakāma went out, as if he wanted to test Upākosala still further. As for the student he was agitated by the thought that his guru did not listen to his wife. He was also pained that, because of him, differences had developed between the guru and his wife. Worrying about all this he could not even gulp down his food. The guru's wife, in her anxiety, asked him why he had not eaten. He replied: "It's due to illness of the mind. I have no appetite for food."

Taught by divine powers, but....

It was then that the Agnis, who had been tended with such care by Upākosala, revealed themselves. "Poor boy, he has served us so faithfully and now he suffers so much that he cannot even eat. Without any further delay we must give him upadeśa ourselves," so they decided among themselves. They gave upadeśa to Upākosala – first all the three Agnis together and then each individually taught him Agni-vidyā and Ātma-vidyā.

The Agnis thought that, if they gave Upākosala all upadeśa, it would mean that he did not need his guru. The importance of the guru, they felt, should in no way be diminished. So they stopped with giving the boy the philosophical part of the Agni-vidyā and Ātma-vidyā and said to him: "Dear child, from now your ācārya has to teach you how to have realisation of these vidyās and to tell you the procedure and technique for the purpose."

The ācārya returned home, calling, "Upākosala." The student responded with "O Bhagvān" and stood before him. The Upaniṣad subtly points out here that, though the guru had severely tested Upākosala and the boy had suffered in mind, the bond of affection between the two had not weakened a bit.

The guru looked at the boy. The boy's face shone with tejas (lustre). Satyakāma guessed what had happened and asked him: "Dear child, who gave you upadeśa?" Fear took hold of Upākosala, the fear whether it had been wrong on his part to have received upadeśa in the guru's absence. Also he was puzzled as to whether he should inform the guru about the Agnis who had so kindly given him upadeśa. He thought that he should not hide anything from his guru and that, at the same time, he should not unrestrainedly tell him all that had happened. He decided that he must inform the teacher with circumspection what had transpired in his absence. He said: "Who else, Svamī, who else would have given me upadeśa? Only these Agnis gave it. They were not like what they look now. They looked somewhat different then."

Upākosala now came out successful in his guru's final test also. Satyakāma had gone out deliberately knowing in his mind that a stage had been reached when the Agnis, unable to wait any longer, would give his student upadeśa. What was the reason for his acting in this manner? Early in Satyakāma's own life he had gone through a similar experience.

(And this is the story.¹) Satyakāma's upanayana was performed by a rsi called Haridrūma. One day Haridrūma asked Satyakāma to tend some 400 head of emaciated cattle. The disciple said to himself: "I will return to my guru only after these cattle which are skin and bone are fed well. I will wait until the cows calve and there are 1,000 head of cattle." It took many years for Satyakāma's resolve to become fulfilled.

As the brahmacārin Satyakāma returned with the cattle to the gurukula after the lapse of so many years, one of the bulls in the herd gave him upadeśa. On the following day Agni gave him upadeśa and on the two subsequent days a haṁsa and a waterbird called matku did the same. Satyakāma, by virtue of the upadeśa received from all these, became lustrous in the same way as Upākosala now. Haridrūma asked him the same question that Satyakāma was to put to Upākosala later. Satyakāma answered it with the same tact and circumspection with which Upākosala was to answer it later. He said to Haridrūma: "No human being gave me upadeśa." He declared that he wanted Haridrūma alone to be his guru.

The indispensability of the ācārya is underlined here. The message is: "Only that vidyā will bear the highest fruit which is given directly by word of mouth by the ācārya." Thinking perhaps that it would be impertinent to make such an observation himself Satyakāma merely said: "What I have gathered from great men like you is the lesson that only that vidyā will bear the highest fruit which has been learned from the guru."

The Upaniṣads throughout illustrate the ideal of guru-śiṣya relationship.

From the story of Satyakāma, the student, let us return to the story of Satyakāma, the teacher. He had known from his own experience that even if he had not given upadeśa to Upākosala certain divine powers would give it. He now wanted to find out how the pupil would behave after receiving upadeśa from the divine powers: There was no need for the disciple to tolerate the indifference of his guru any more. He could still receive all upadeśa from the divine powers. Satyakāma wanted to find out whether Upākosala would think thus and become conceited. "If he is going to have his adhyayana completed here, let me see whether he will be proud about the upadeśa he has received from Agni. Let me test him." Such were the thoughts of Satyakāma.

Upākosala passed this test with distinction, as they say, and his guru was pleased. "What upadeśa did the Agnis give you?" he asked his disciple. Upākosala told the guru all about it. Satyakāma blessed him and made up for his past neglect by giving him upadeśa himself. The upadeśa given by the Agnis had been incomplete and now the guru completed it.

Independent thinking

What was the function of the guru in ancient times? Unlike what obtains at present he was not satisfied with giving some lectures and "covering the portion"

1 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (4-4).

The Guru Tradition

before going home for the day in peace. The guru (in the old days) again and again tested the student and moulded his character, making him chaste in heart and mind. It was only after making sure about his character that he nurtured his student's intelligence and knowledge. There is nothing more dangerous for a man than to possess intelligence without character.

The gurus then knew the sort of upadeśa needed by a student according to his stage of development. Much thought went into how the boy was to be raised from one stage to the next. The guru imparted vidyā progressively. Bhṛgu received his education from his father Varuṇa¹. At first when he was not mature enough his father taught him, basing his lesson on the premise that the annamayakośa² that is the body, was the Truth or Reality. Then he made him perform austerities until the boy realised the unreality of the body. Later Varuṇa based his lesson on the premise that the prāṇamayakośa was the Truth. Thus making him perform austerities again and again – that is by developing the awareness of the Self by degrees – he revealed to his disciple the final Truth. "The prāṇa (the vital force) is not the Reality but the manas (the mind); the manas is not the Reality but vijñāna (knowledge, understanding); no, higher than all this, existing by itself, in the form of Ānanda (Bliss) is the Ātman and that is Truth, the Reality."

Is it possible to teach a student in this manner in an institution – teach him according to the stages of his development, raising him step by step?

There is another important thing to be noted. Montessori and other educationists say: "Children should be left to learn by themselves as they work. In the same way, they must be free to think for themselves and learn for themselves. Everything now is taught from books and the child merely memorises his lessons."

When the guru entrusts to his student the preliminary work relating to sacrifices, the latter has the opportunity of doing and learning things for himself. So far as the other castes are concerned they learn their craft or trade by watching their father or grandfather work. According to our śāstras there is room for such practical learning in our system of education. And just as the students were directly involved in work and encouraged to gain practical knowledge of their subject, there was scope in our old method of education for students to think for themselves and become enlightened. The story of Bhṛgu is proof of this. Varuṇa who was both Bhṛgu's father and guru encouraged his son to think for himself and realise the Truth.

There are a number of stories in which the guru gives upadeśa and asks the disciple to go and perform austerities, that is to meditate on his upadeśa. On the disciple's return the guru asks him to speak about his understanding of the upadeśa.

Here is another story. It is also from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8th chapter). There was an asura called Virocana who believed that there was no Truth beyond

1 From the "Taittiriyaopaniṣad," "Bhṛgu-valī"

2 Sheath made of food.

3 Sheath made of the vital forces or airs.

the body. But even he was helped by Prajāpati to engage himself in philosophical inquiry, although he came to the wrong conclusion that the body was the Truth. The point to note is that unlike the idlers and gossips in our midst today who do no thinking at all, the asura was at least made to think for himself and arrive at some concept, erroneous though it was. Gurus in the old days did not reject students and accepted them in the belief that it would be worthwhile to try and bring about some improvement in them however small it be. The story of Virocana is proof of it.

When someone was accepted as a disciple, even if he was good for nothing, the guru tried to make him acquire some quality or other. According to the Upaniṣad, Virocana, though an asura, obeyed the bidding of Prajāpati and observed brahmacarya for thirty-two years to help him in his philosophical quest.

Indra, king of the devas, was also, like Virocana, a student of Prajāpati and he too wanted to know the Reality. However, unlike Virocana, he did not stop at the stage of knowledge in which the body seemed to him to be the Truth. As we saw in the story of Bṛghu, unable to find fulfilment in bodily pleasures, he came again to Prajāpati. To test his fitness to know the truth beyond bodily pleasures, Prajāpati kept him in his āśrama for thirty-two years asking him to observe brahmacarya during the period. Great truths are taught only after a student is kept under the discipline of strict vows even if he be someone so distinguished as the king of the devas. Indra spent 101 years in all controlling his senses and Prajāpati taught him at last the ultimate Ātma-tattva.

The present educational system in which the deserving and undeserving students are not differentiated has led to evils like scientists discovering or inventing things that create more and more harm to the Ātman. Doctors support sinful methods of treatment. There are many reasons for this. One of them is that when education is institutionally based it is not possible to give individual attention to the students and ensure their character and conduct.

To care for students with total attention is extremely difficult. It places a great burden and responsibility on the shoulders of the guru. The disciple might even be irritated by such attention on the part of the teacher and might exclaim: "Who is he to keep examining me all the time and torment me with tests." Gurus in ancient times devoted themselves to teaching without expecting any reward. Their goal was the spread of vidyā. And spreading vidyā meant educating the deserving. (Today there is laxity everywhere and people are cut loose so to speak and everybody is taught everything, devaluing in the process education itself.) To teach the deserving alone would mean putting the student to the severest of tests. The criterion for enrolment would be not intelligence alone but character and good-naturedness also. Gurus in the old days realised that, as far as possible, the student must be made deserving of knowledge stage by stage.

Even the great lord of the devas, Indra, had no escape from this strict system. Why, the asura king Virocana was also similarly bound by it and it shows the keen interest taken in the propagation of vidyā in those days. More remarkable, as we

learn from the stories told above, the ācārya belonged to such a high plane and possessed such noble qualities that the students thought to themselves: "The guru is entitled to be strict with us. To submit to so noble a guru, a teacher who is so highly qualified, will only help in the creation of our well-being. We do not stand to lose anything."

There is one more important point to note. Who is an uttama-puruṣa (man belonging to the highest category)? Is it enough for a man so called to lead a chaste and blameless life? Is it sufficient for him to be honest and austere and be without any passion? A man possessing such qualities will earn the respect and devotion of other people. But will he attract students, students who would like to reside in his gurukula with him? If a man is austere, remarkably intelligent and uncompromisingly honest you will feel compelled to make obeisance to him from a distance. You will not wish to live in his home with him. To persuade the student to stay with the guru, the latter must have, apart from all other qualities, a loving heart and mind. He must also be a man of grace and compassion. Of all the qualities of an uttama-puruṣa his loving nature, grace and compassion count as the foremost. It is love or affection that is transformed into divine power, the compassion that has the capacity to protect. Such love or compassion is termed *aru!* in Tami! and "anugraha" in Sanskrit.

Kṛṣṇa and his ācāryas

Our śāstras and Purānas tell us that our ācāryas in olden times, endowed as they were with grace and compassion, were ideal men. That the bond of affection between the guru and the pupil should ever remain strong and constant without ever diminishing was the prayer uttered through mantras at the very beginning of the lessons. The Upaniṣadic prayer in the beginning and conclusion of the daily pāṭha (lesson) is: "May we, the guru and the śiṣya, ever remain without ill-will for one another." "The hand that beats also embraces:" the ācāryas of the past exemplified the truth of this saying. They were strict when the occasion demanded strictness, and they poured out their affection when the occasion demanded affection. We realise this when we read the *Bhāgavata - purāna*.

Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa himself reminds Kucela (Sudāma) of the days when they lived together in the gurukula. After slaying Kamsa and after their upanayana was performed, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma went for gurukulavāsa to the Brāhmin Sāndīpanī's āśrama. Kṛṣṇa is the source of all knowledge, all vidyā. However, an example was to be set to the world in devotion to the teacher. That is why, according to the *Bhāgavata*, Kṛṣṇa studied as an ordinary pupil under an ācārya. However, the Lord had his mission to accomplish, the work of his incarnation to carry out. So the usual twelve years were not spent in his education. Instead, with his divine power, he learned one śāstra a day and thus, in the course of sixty-four days, learned all the subjects. (The same was the case with Balarāma. After all, was he not also a divine incarnation?) From this Sāndīpanī realised that Kṛṣṇa was a divine being. After completing his gurukulavāsa, Kṛṣṇa asked his guru: "What dakṣiṇā should I give you?" The ācārya asked him to fetch his son who, many years earlier, had been swept away by the sea and had departed for Yama's abode.

This was the *dakṣiṇā* that the guru desired of his disciple. But this is not relevant to our present subject.

Our subject is teacher-student relationship. Although Sāṅdīpanī was aware of the divine character of Kṛṣṇa, he also knew that the Lord had come in the guise of a pupil wanting to demonstrate to the world that the student (though an *avatāra*) must be made to work in the *āśrama* and must be made pure through his humility. So the sage did not make an exception in the case of Kṛṣṇa in the matter of serving him.

Kṛṣṇa was a darling among darling children. At the same time, he was the learned among the learned. But in obedience to his guru he fetched firewood from the forest. He recalls to his class-mate Kucela their days together in the *gurukula*.

One day Kṛṣṇa and Kucela went to the forest to fetch firewood. Darkness descended and it poured and poured. There was such a deluge that they were unable to make out the ups and downs of the wooded terrain. In the fearful darkness nothing could be seen. In his sport of playing the part of a human the Lord pretended that he could not find his way back to the *āśrama*. He now asks Kucela recalling the incident: "You and I were full of fear and sorrow and, holding one another's hand, we went round and round in the darkness. Do you remember that?" This incident illustrates how the guru was a taskmaster.

Now let us listen to the Lord himself about the other side of the guru, his love and affection for his pupils. "Anxious that we had not returned to the *āśrama*, the guru searched for us and found us at daybreak. He was so moved as he saw us that he said: 'Poor boys, you have suffered so much for my sake.' How heartily did he bless us to make up for the trouble we had taken. 'All the good things that you desire will be fulfilled,' he said. 'May the Vedas you have learned always protect you in their full glory and power'."

The guru not only personified a wealth of learning, he also represented a wealth of character, a wealth of discipline or *anuṣṭhāna* (religious practices) and a wealth of inner virtues (*Ātma-sampat*). It was the *gurukula* system of old that shaped him thus. When a guru was responsible for the students residing with him in his *āśrama*, it became incumbent upon both teacher and taught to remain unblemished in character. The system itself so moulded them as to achieve this purpose.

To deserve the affection and respect of students, the guru must be a man of character living a disciplined life. He must possess the capacity to shed grace. Only with such a guru will the students like to live. On the intellectual plane too the teacher must be well advanced. He must take the trouble of acquiring more and more knowledge in his *śāstra* to enable him to answer students who, as mentioned by the Lord in the *Gītā*, keep questioning him (*paripraśna*).

Learning by questioning

There is something remarkable about this method of learning in which *paripraśna* (questioning again and again) plays an important role. There are many instances in the *Upaniṣads* to demonstrate how students learn by frequent questioning of their

teacher. In the *Gītā*, you find Arjuna often interrupting Kṛṣṇa to put questions to him. Questioning and cross-questioning are an indication that the student is attentive to the lesson taught by the teacher.

If a professor thinks that all he has to do is to prepare for a "lecture" and reproduce what he has prepared before the class, there is no need for him to study his subject any further. He could deceive his class by pretending to know everything about his subject. When the student questions him in between (this is called "paripraśna") the professor will be compelled to have a thorough grasp of his subject. During paripraśna his ignorance, or gaps in knowledge, will be disclosed and he will be obliged to study his subject further in depth and extent.

Paripraśna will encourage both teacher and student to try to go deeper into a subject. Just as the teacher puts questions to the student, the student should put questions to the teacher. In this way new and interesting insights will be gained. J. Krishnamurti holds question-and-answer sessions – and they are said to be interesting. We too conduct classes in *Bhāṣyapāṭha* and *Vākyaṛtha* and we find them interesting when intelligent questions are asked. "Aha, we didn't know this before. This didn't occur to us... We must find out the answer to it" – in this way there is greater keenness to know all aspects of the subject taught or discussed.

Śankarācārya himself has spoken about this matter. An absorbing aspect of his *Bhāṣyas* is that, in his discussions, he himself anticipates the likely questions and cross-questions of the opponents of his system. In his answers he, so to speak, hits the nail on the head. He posits the opposition point of view as "pūrvapakṣa" and establishes his own conclusion as "siddhānta". In his *Bhāṣya* on the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* – in the upakrama (somewhat similar to an introduction) to the second chapter-he provides an example of the excellence of this method. He observes: "By dealing with a subject in the form of the opponent's questions and the answers to them the mind of the listener (or student) is attracted. If, as in *Tarka śāstra* (logic), statements are made in a terse epigrammatic form it becomes difficult to understand subtle points or truths."

There are some learned people who do not have the ability to present a subject in the form of a lecture. But if you keep asking them questions they keep answering them satisfactorily. In this manner the questioner could extract all the relevant information about the subject concerned.

There was a *sthapati* (master carpenter) called *Mālaikaṇḍān Somasundara Ācāri*. He could not read or write nor make speeches. But he knew everything about the building of chariots. He had made a name for himself by building chariots for some twenty or twenty-five temples. But he could not speak about his work. He came to the *Āgama-Śilpa* conference held in 1962 at *Īlayāntankuti*. *Sā. Gaṇeśan*, who was in charge of the arrangements, very much regretted the fact that the *sthapati*, though so knowledgeable about his art, could not speak about it before the *sadas* (conference or assembly). It was then that the idea of paripraśna occurred to me. I said to *Ganeśan*: "You have a general idea of chariot-making. Based on your knowledge, keep questioning the *sthapati* on his work. He will be able to pass on all his knowledge on chariot-building". As decided, *Ganeśan* kept

putting very intelligent questions to the śhaṭapati and the Ācāri kept giving excellent answers. Indeed, during this session the subject so developed as to suggest the shape of a chariot. People who were present talked about it as an extremely interesting and significant item of the sadas. The Ācāri was presented with a gold necklace and given the title of "Emperor of Chariots" (Rāṭha-chakravartin). I mention this to illustrate the value of paripraśna.

The guru is moulded by the disciple

Two qualifications for a guru are mentioned in the *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* (1-2-12) in the passage dealing with the concept of the Paramātman (Paramātmā-tattva). Here one is exhorted to "go to the guru for refuge". One qualification for the guru is that he must be a śrotriya. A śrotriya is one who is steeped in the Vedas. Erudition in the Vedas constitutes his educational qualification.

But as a guru he must have a second qualification. That is he must be a Brahma-niṣṭhaka: apart from possessing knowledge of the Paramātman to the utmost limits, he must have realisation of It in his heart. Such personal experience or realisation is not possible without love, the spirit of sacrifice, the desire to help others and truthful conduct. It means that the Upaniṣadic ācārya, unlike the present-day professor, was not merely a man of knowledge but a teacher who possessed a wealth of qualities which enabled him to lead his student to the realisation of the Self. In English one speaks of "qualities of head and heart". Like that, the guru must be distinguished intellectually and must have a big heart. The student living with him in the gurukula helps the guru in realising this. In other words, just as the disciple is moulded by the teacher, the teacher is also (indirectly) moulded by his disciple.

The gurupīṭhas

In all this talk I had in mind not only the guru who teaches his students lessons but also those who have come in a line of succession like me with the title of guru and are seated on the gurupīṭhas. These gurupīṭhas were established for the well-being of the people and to take them on the right path across the jungle of saṃsāra (worldly life) and to lead them to Išvara. It is only when the disciples are virtuous, living in accordance with the discipline prescribed by the śāstras pertaining to them, that we too will earn their support and respect by following the far stricter injunctions of the śāstras that are meant for us and by observing the discipline and conduct of our calling (ācāra and anuṣṭhāna). Otherwise what will happen if the disciples, as in the present times, do not live according to the rules meant for them? The sannyāsi-guru who does no more than try to live according to the rules he has to observe evokes their admiration. A guru who is a yati (an ascetic who has controlled his senses) must eat the simplest of food, live in the humblest of dwellings, and wear the simplest of clothes. Even for the slightest impurity he must bathe and fast. He must remain ever austere, observe the rules of ācāra without even a little deviation from them. Only then will he be true to himself as a sannyāsin and attain siddhi. Only then will he be a true guru and become capable of leading his disciples from this worldly life on to uniting them with the Supreme Being.

Those who work in an atomic energy plant have to observe a number of precautions to protect themselves from radiation. Similarly, we too have to protect ourselves from the radiation of lapses in ācāra (conduct according to the śāstras) and remain ever alert. A man whose work is concerned with atomic reactors will hurt himself and cause damage to the reactor if he does not observe the rules of the establishment. The result is that those who are to benefit from the reactor will stand to lose. Action is taken against the man who does not strictly observe the rules governing work in an atomic plant. On the other hand, if he is strict in the observance of the rules, nobody holds a celebration to congratulate him.

Similarly, if we fail even a bit in observing our dharma as ascetics we must be questioned about it. But we don't deserve praise for our adherence to it. The anxiety is about whether we can truly practise the yatī-dharma (the duties of ascetics) fully. That being the case, if you shower praises on us exclaiming, "O what a hard life of vows and observances you are leading! How you suffer for our sake! What great sacrifices are you making!", in course of time we will become conceited because of the praises. And what will be the result? We might stop observing one by one such practices as we are now observing partly, or only fractionally. This will mean the end of the maṭha (the gurupīṭha) and with it all the good that should accrue to the world from the maṭha will come to an end.

The ācārya who lives strictly according to the discipline expected of him will not receive any praise if his disciples are also careful in the observance of the vows, fasts and other rules of ācāra and anuṣṭhāna enjoined on them. In this way he will not become conceited nor will there be any risk of his becoming lax in his observances. This is my wish: "May I have good disciples like the ones described above. If we, the gurus, are guilty of any lapse in the observance of our rules they must question us about it and correct us. They must ask us: 'Why, Śvāmiji, is it proper for you to do like this?'"

A sannyāsin who is on his own and a pīṭha-guru

My statement that the quality of the disciples determines the quality of the guru applies to the gurupīṭhas also. A sannyāsin who is on his own need to have knowledge only of the religious sampradāya (religious tradition and code of conduct) to which he belongs. He must of course go beyond and become a jñānin or a devotee in order to resign himself to the will of the Lord. It is different with the sannyāsins who head the gurupīṭhas or maṭhālayas. They have to clear the doubts raised by their disciples on the śāstras. They have to hold conferences of the learned and find answers to intricate questions on religious practices and other subjects. So they must have a mastery of the śāstras.

When the disciples seek advice and enlightenment on the sāstras, the heads of the maṭhas will be enthusiastic about learning more to answer their questions. They will also be encouraged to hold meetings of learned people to inquire into the śāstras and arrive at decisions on matters in dispute. The disciples who seek advice must themselves possess knowledge of the śāstras. Those who do not possess any such knowledge will obviously have no doubts to clear. When they

have doubts they go to their guru, the head of the matha, to clear them. Disciples are becoming less and less acquainted with the śāstras. It is so among the Hindu community in general. The extent of the learning associated with gurupīthas is commensurate with that possessed by the disciples of the gurus.

It is sad that since people are becoming less and less conversant with the śāstras the gurupīthas are also descending to their level. Is there a greater danger to our religion than the fact that the gurupīthas, whose duty it is to preserve the śāstras for the present and for the future, are themselves wanting in this respect? So you must learn the śāstras to the best of your ability not only for your own sake but also for the sake of elevating us to the true desired level. That means you must realise that it is your responsibility to make the gurus occupying the gurupīthas more determined in preserving the śāstras. In pursuit of this goal you must yourself acquire good knowledge of the śāstras.

What happens when this is not done? There is a saying: "Where there is no sugarcane factory the flowers of the *iluppa*¹ tree serve as sugar." If I talk to you a bit about this or that subject, you praise me to the skies. An engineer must know engineering, a doctor must know therapeutics. Similarly, the head of a gurupītha must know the śāstras. If he does not know them it is bad. There is no need to laud a guru if he happens to know something about the śāstras.

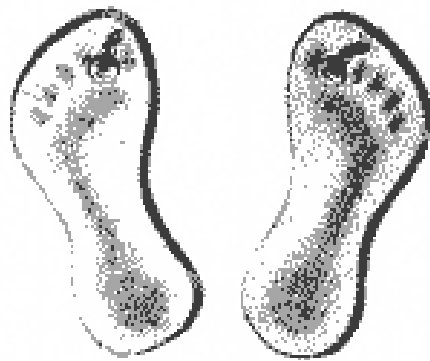
Apart from matters relating to the śāstras of old, I happen to speak about things connected with the new sciences, about history, epigraphy, linguistics, etc. People learned in all these disciplines come to me. They actually come to speak to me about their personal problems. In between I just provoke them to speak on subjects in which they are experts so that I too may learn a little from them. It is in this way that I have got to know the A B C of a number of subjects and learned to lecture on them! Listening to me, you marvel at my performance and sing my praises, describing me as "omniscient", as a "treasure-house of all arts", and as "one possessing insight into all knowledge"

I mention this to impress on you that, when the disciples are learned, the guru, so as to keep up with them, is compelled to rise to a higher level of vidyā.

There is greater likelihood of good ācāryas and good disciples emerging if you have a system in which the gurukulas are small in scale with the ācāryas and disciples residing together in harmony.

¹ See glossary.

Part Four



Part Four

Institutionalism

Śankara's work for a necessary evil

It is when a guru is on his own as an individual, without the backing of an institution, that he has greater reason to remain pure of heart and mind. I make this statement in spite of the fact that I myself head an institution and have the title of "Ācārya". Śrī Śankara Bhagavadpāda was the very first to introduce an institution in our religion, an institution with a strong foundation. It was again he who brought together the followers of our religion thus on an institutional basis, thereby enabling our religion to flourish without losing even a bit of its vitality. I, who praise Śankarācārya for his work of institutionalisation, support at the same time the system of individual ācāryas (teachers without the backing of an institution).

Praising Śrī Śankara (for what he accomplished) is justified. What would happen to the vast community of our people if there were only a few aśramas under individuals functioning on their own and a handful of disciples however virtuous they be?

All was well when the country was sparsely populated. People then followed the path prescribed by the śāstras and lived as humble citizens, looking upon as an ideal the few who led a life of inward purity. But, in course of time, the population increased, and it meant that the "quantity" grew and the "quality" declined. The result was a lowering of the standards of that section of people who were expected to be an ideal for others.

Taking advantage of this situation, other religions like Buddhism and Jainism created a rift in society. They realised that they could perform their work as an opposition and grow in strength only by organising themselves on an institutional basis. And they did precisely this and grew strong, winning the support of the rulers also.

During these times it became imperative to bring together people belonging to our religion as a united body sticking together like tamarind pounded and stored in a jar and not like a bag of āmalakas¹ that get easily scattered. To accomplish this our Ācārya had to bring our people under an institutional order. This he did on a national scale to the astonishment of the whole world. No amount of praise would be adequate for this great work of his.

However, even this (uniting our people under an order) must be described as a necessary evil: a lesser evil with which it became necessary to repulse a bigger evil. When there is organisational backing it is possible that the ācārya of a school or a mathālaya may not be always awake to the need to preserve the strength of his Self (Ātma-bala). The backing of the people, monetary strength and ownership of property are "disincentives" as far as fostering an ācārya's Ātma-bala (spiritual strength) is concerned. That is why, in the beginning, the gurukulas were under individual ācāryas.

¹ See glossary.

Educational institutions with a number of ācāryas teaching in the same establishment came into being on a wide scale only with the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism. The universities of Nālandā and Takṣaśilā came up at that time.

Big educational institutions of old

Takṣaśilā (Taxila, now in Pakistan) was famous long before the time of the Buddhists – in fact right from the Upaniṣadic period. The region in which it is situated was then called Gāndhāra. Gāndhārī was a princess of the Gāndhāra kingdom. It was in Takṣaśilā that the great-grandson of the Pāṇḍavas, Janamejaya, performed the sarpayāga (snake sacrifice). Before him, it was also there that the Mahābhārata epic was first introduced to the sages. So much for its connection with the Mahābhārata. Takṣaśilā's connection with the Rāmāyaṇa is much greater. The place owes its name to the fact that it was founded by Bharata's son Takṣa. It had its origin in Vedic times. When Fa-hsien travelled in India in the fifth century AD, and wrote about his travels, it abounded in Buddhist caityas and vihāras. Later the Huṅas raided the city and razed it to the ground. When Hsuan Tsang visited it 200 years after Fa-hsien he found the place in ruins.

We learn that Takṣaśilā was a great Buddhist centre of education. But it had no central university teaching a variety of subjects. Instead, it had a number of small schools located in the same place. Though not under a central set-up, sixteen subjects were taught including the Vedas. Great men like Cāṇakya, it is said, were taught here.

Nālandā, on the other hand, was an institution similar to the universities of present times. From the ruins of Nālandā we learn that it had large lecture halls and hostels. Nālandā is in Bihār, the Magadha of olden times. "Bihār" is derived from "vihāra", "vihār". Rājagṛha (Rajgīr) which was associated with the Buddha's life is near Pāṭalīputra (Pāṭna) and close by is Nālandā. One of the important Buddhist philosophers, Nāgārjuna, chose this place for the university (viśva-vidyālaya, sarva-kalāśālā or, as it is called in Tamil, *palakalaikazhakam*). We learn that Nālandā university was at its zenith in the fifth century AD during the reign of Narasimha Bālāditya. Apart from Buddhist śāstras, other subjects were also taught like the Vedas to some extent and, to a larger extent, arithmetic (gaṇita), astronomy, Tarka, music, medicine, etc. There were 10,000 residential students here. We feel proud about the fact that many good students came here to learn from Europe and other parts of Asia.

It seems that engineering and other technical subjects of the time which were taught in Takṣaśilā were not taught at Nālandā. Though all students were admitted, the purpose of Nālandā university was in particular the creation of Buddhist bhikṣus (monks). So, probably, "worldly" technical subjects of practical use were not included in the curriculum. But astronomy was taught and there was an excellent observatory in Nālandā with instruments to scan the skies. There was also a library housed in a building with nine floors.

Mahmud of Ghazni, Mohammad Ghorī and others invaded India and made havoc of our cultural heritage. The Slave dynasty began its rule in the 13th

The Guru Tradition

century. Nālandā university went into decline from that time and eventually to ruins. But it is a matter of pride for India that a university like it flourished for as long a period as eight centuries.

Three centuries after Nālandā university had reached its zenith (in the 5th century), the Vikramaśilā university was established on a hill on the banks of the Gangā in Bengāl by Dharmapāla of the Pāla dynasty. Dharmapāla also built a Buddhist maṭhālaya attached to it. Many bhikṣus from Tibet came to learn here. A large number of monks also went from here to spread Buddhism in Tibet. Many Buddhist texts (especially Tāntrik) became unavailable in India in later times and had to be obtained from Tibet. Even now many old books have been discovered in the Tibetan monasteries. Their presence in Tibet could be traced to the time of contacts between Tibet and India when Nālandā and Vikramaśilā universities flourished.

In ancient times there were a number of centres which taught the Hindu śāstras, arts and sciences. Kāśī in the North and Kāñcī in the South were two of the most important of these. In the land of Gandhiji's birth, Kathiawār, Valabhī was an excellent educational centre. Another great centre was Vikramāditya's Ujjayinī in central India. I have mentioned, north, south and west. Navadvīpa, associated with the Hindu religion, was a centre of learning and it was situated in the east, in Bengāl. It has come to be called Nādiā. In earlier times all Hindu darśanas (systems of philosophy) were taught here. Later, just as Nālandā and Vikramaśilā were destroyed by the Muslim onslaught, Navadvīpa too fell under evil days. But in the 15th century it reemerged from its ruins. In earlier times, it had been a seat of learning where many subjects were taught, but now it was famous particularly for Tarka-śāstra (logic).

But in all these places, where Vedic studies formed part of the curriculum, there were individual gurukulas which functioned in groups but which were not under any university.

This does not mean that there were no Hindu educational institutions at all under one central body like a university. Even before the advent of Buddhism and Jainism there were big gurukulas here and there. Generation after generation, new commentaries must have appeared, works based on new inquiries, on the fourteen different vidyā-s (branches of learning) based on the Vedas. Poetry and drama also must have continued to flourish. As a result of contacts gained with other countries from the time of Alexander's invasion, we must have become acquainted with new sciences, new subjects. All these must have taken strides over the decades and the centuries.

Apart from the Buddhist and Jaina centres of education, there must have existed institutions belonging to the Vedic tradition also that were similar to the big universities of today with many students studying at the same centre. It must have been so especially after it became difficult to conduct classes with one teacher, or with one teacher with a couple of assistants. When the subjects themselves gained in dimension, it became difficult for the student to study them in all their aspects. To some extent even in earlier times all students must have been taught only the basics of a subject and parts of it in detail as an "optional". When a thousand

students came to study under Patañjali Mahārṣi in Cidambaram, each wanting to learn a different lesson, he had a curtain erected between him and the students. Sitting behind the curtain and taking the form of Śeṣa (one of his earlier births) with his one thousand mouths, he taught the students, speaking to them with each one of his tongues. So goes the story.

The new religions and big educational institutions

The rise of Buddhism and Jainism, with the vigorous propagation of their doctrines, led to more contacts with other countries and the development of various arts and sciences. This necessitated big educational institutions. Earlier the system had consisted of gurukulas under individual gurus with a few students.

There was another important reason for big educational institutions to come into being with the advent of the new religions. Perhaps those who induced Hindus to join these new faiths genuinely wanted knowledge to spread among the people. But we know from our recent history that, when it comes to religious conversion, there can be another hidden motive. What have we seen in recent times? Religion has been "nicely" propagated and conversions made through the establishment of schools everywhere and through scholarships. We have had so much experience of all this. It occurs to me that when non-Vedic religions made their appearance in this country they must have established educational institutions on a large scale so as to lure more and more converts. It must also be mentioned that obtaining among us were certain unique or peculiar circumstances which helped to draw the common people to these new faiths in this manner.

Peculiar circumstances

What were these circumstances? Our forefathers had laid down that Brāhmins must give instruction to members of all castes in their respective occupations. Besides, Brāhmins also gave them instruction in dharma and imparted knowledge concerning the Self. However, the Vedas were not taught directly to people belonging to the fourth varṇa. According to our varṇa-dharma, different occupations were allotted to different communities. In this system, Vedic education and the practices arising from the Vedas were the lifelong occupation exclusively of the Brāhmins.

Vedic instruction was given to Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas only up to a point and it was not given to the fourth varṇa at all. Though the Vedas were not directly taught to the fourth varṇa, they and others were taught the truths contained in them, the meaning of Vedic concepts, the Purāṇas and epics and ethics.

However, this teaching for spiritual development did not, in the case of the common people, take the form of classroom instruction, involving gurus and disciples. In the gurukulas the teaching meant mainly instruction in the Vedas. After their work of teaching the Vedas, etc, the ācāryas taught people belonging to other castes. The common folk learned about spiritual and moral matters from those conversant with the Purāṇas, the epics and works on personal and social conduct rather than from the ācāryas of the gurukulas.

People belonging to the fourth varṇa, who were already doing their work

efficiently, had no need to leave their homes and go to some remote gurukula to learn their occupation. Nor did they have need to send their children to the gurukula since the home itself was their school.

The Smritis declare that the Vedas alone need to be learned from Brāhmins, that the rest of the subjects, and the various crafts and trades could be learned from others. Such an arrangement was permitted from a practical point of view. Children belonging to the labour class did not spend some years first in learning their job and then applying it in earning their livelihood. They learned as they worked, assisting their elders at home. Only when some fine aspect of work had to be learned, some doubt to be cleared or some subtle skill acquired did they go to the Brāhmins for help. Since, however, there were people conversant with the minute details or finer points of a craft or trade among members of the community concerned also there was not always the need to go to the Brāhmin to learn them. Goldsmiths, sculptors, carpenters and other artisans are called *ścāris* in Tamil ("ścāri" is from "ścārya"); this shows that among the communities following such occupations there were experts to teach their children.

We must note here that, although the three varṇas (Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas) had the right in olden times to learn the Vedas and become students in gurukulas, the upanayana of the children belonging to these castes was performed at different ages. The practice of akṣarābhyāsa (learning the alphabet) before the upanayana must have originated in later times. Akṣarābhyāsa is not included in the 40 saṁskāras (rites). In the earliest school there was no writing or any such thing as written matter. As I have said before instruction was entirely oral – it was by listening that one learned. Upanayana was then the commencement of education. During the upanayana ceremony the upadeśa (initiation) was given through the great Gāyatrī mantra and this upadeśa was the seed sown for learning the Vedas by listening. After the upanayana the child was sent to the gurukula.

The Brāhmin child was sent to his guru after his upanayana performed at the age of eight. The initiation of the Kṣatriya child was at eleven and of the Vaiśya child at twelve. They were similarly sent to the guru at these respective ages. The Brāhmin child's upanayana must be performed before he is 16 years of age. Similarly the upper limit for the Kṣatriya is 22 and for the Vaiśya 24. If the Brāhmin child happens to be very bright his upanayana may be performed at five, the corresponding ages for bright Kṣatriya and Vaiśya children being six and eight.

Why did the education of castes other than Brāhmins commence later? Any child develops a flair for work according to its natural environment. It has the instinct to imitate. The non-Brāhmin castes did a great deal of manual work. One wielded the knife or the sword, another ploughed the field, yet another wove. Thus they were engaged in various manual activities. Children of these people, for each of whom a particular trade was a svadharma (own duty), could not learn by observation any trade or craft actually being practised in a gurukula. The gurukula was not a workshop.

Nowadays, there are educationists like Montessori who declare that it is not

right to learn lessons in the abstract, in an empty manner. According to them learning must be by actual doing. When a child does not learn by "doing" he will not be moulded properly and those brought up in such a system will not also do their job properly. The Montessori system is nothing new to us. Our forefathers practised something similar to it. That is why all children, except those of Brāhmins, whose lifetime occupation was expanding the horizons of knowledge, were not put in a gurukula when they were very young. Such children, living happily with their parents and grandparents, could make use of their instinct of imitation to learn their occupations (by "doing"). Besides, the parents received their children's help and made extra profit.

There is another aspect to be noted. Brāhmin children who had to cultivate mantras that are invested with sacred power had many restrictions with regard to food and other habits unlike other children. How could children of other castes obtain food to which they were used from gurukulas run by Brāhmins? Such children joined the gurukula at an age when they could control their palate. This was the reason why their upanayana was performed when they were older than Brāhmin children.

If non-Brāhmin children were to learn their trade or occupation they could do so at home to a considerable extent. Kṣatriya and Vaiśya children were to join the gurukula only to study the Vedas. There was no need for them to attain the same proficiency in this subject as Brāhmin children. Otherwise it would tell upon their own occupation, their svadharma. It was so enough for them to gain a limited degree of Vedic knowledge and for that purpose they did not have to spend as many years in learning as Brāhmin children.

Different syllabuses

Education and such matters came, in course of time, to be centred on Brāhmin society. Kṣatriya princes and other important members of royalty also spent a considerable number of years in the gurukula.

But importance must have been given to the caturdaśa-vidyā-s (fourteen branches of learning) of Brāhmins and subjects like the science or art of warfare, Arthaśāstra (political economy and statecraft), etc, were taught only on an elementary level. Since Brāhmins had to be qualified to teach the occupations of other castes the gurukulavāsa of some Brāhmin students extended up to more than twelve years. During this period they were taught Dhanurveda, political economy, sculpture or music. But this did not apply to all Brāhmins.

Kṣatriya children had to study Arthaśāstra, Dhanurveda (art of warfare) and statecraft thoroughly. So the syllabus and curriculum for them must have been different from those of the Brāhmin children. There might possibly have existed gurukulas exclusively for Kṣatriya children. Or it might be that in gurukulas, where the fourteen branches of learning of Brāhmins were taught, the Kṣatriya children also learned them up to a point or in between other lessons. Later, it is likely, they went to exclusive gurukulas to learn statecraft, the art of warfare, etc, more thoroughly. Like the inter-collegiate classes prevalent now, students of different gurukulas might have jointly studied some subjects. Bharadvāja taught not only his

son Droṇa but the Kṣatriya Drupada. Similarly, the Kṣatriya Kṛṣṇa and the Brāhmin Kucela (Sudāma) studied together.

Two different stories

But note a difference here. Bharadvāja was unsurpassed in Dhanurveda. His son Droṇa learned the art thoroughly from him and from Paraśurāma. Later he gave training in it to the Pāṇḍava and Kaurava princes. The Brāhmin Kucela would not have studied in this manner. Between the stories of Droṇa and Kucela there is another difference but I am straying far my subject. I will tell the stories in brief since they are well known being from the Mahābhārata and the *Bhāgavata*.

Droṇa, in the latter part of his life, suffered a spell of poverty. He went to Drupada for help in the belief that, as his old classmate, he had a right to ask for such help. Intoxicated as he was with power Drupada was cold to him thinking that it was beneath his dignity to receive him. "This wretched Brahmin, aha, he wants to flaunt his friendship before me?" so he said to himself full of contempt for the visitor. Years later, wanting to take revenge on his old friend, Droṇa made Arjuna take Drupada prisoner. Reluctantly, Drupada gave away half his kingdom to Droṇa. But the humiliation rankled in Drupada's breast and he performed a sacrifice with the sole purpose of begetting a son who would slay Droṇa. From the sacrificial fire arose Dṛṣṭadyumna and Draupadī.

Later, when Arjuna won the hand of Draupadī in the svayamvara contest, Drupada gladly gifted away his daughter in marriage to the Pāṇḍava prince, not minding the fact that the young man had earlier taken him captive. During his confrontation with the Pāṇḍava he had formed a high opinion of him for his valour. So his anger was directed against Droṇa who had incited Arjuna against him. Eventually, in the Mahābhārata war, Arjuna had to face his guru Droṇa in battle. It was not an easy confrontation for the Pāṇḍava for Droṇa was an unrivalled warrior.

You know the story of how Arjuna left the responsibility for his victory in the hands of Kṛṣṇa and how the truthful Dharmaputra (Yudhiṣṭhira) was persuaded to say that Aśvatthāmā, Droṇa's only son, so dear to his father, had been killed. Also of how an elephant called Aśvatthāmā was killed and Dharmaputra was made to exclaim: "Aśvatthāmā hataḥ kuñjaraḥ" (Aśvatthāmā, the elephant, has been killed). As Yudhiṣṭhira said these words Kṛṣṇa blew his conch-shell Pāñcajanya and the last word "kuñjaraḥ" (elephant) was drowned in the sound and Droṇa did not hear it. Broken-hearted, he cast away his weapons and drew back from the combat faltering. At that opportune moment Dṛṣṭadyumna lunged forward and killed him. The Mahābhārata adds that all those who watched the scene in the Pāṇḍava army felt outraged by the ignoble deed.

The other story is contrary in spirit to this and is such as to gladden our hearts. Like Droṇa, Kucela too suffered the pangs of poverty and went to Kṛṣṇa, his classmate, for help. Bhagavān was not indifferent to him and received him with royal honours and, with all his love, gave him a seat by his side, worshipped at his feet and asked Rukmiṇī to fan him with the whisk. Kṛṣṇa's Māyā was such that

Kucela returned home without speaking a word about his poverty. But before Kucela was home Bhagavān created a rain of gold for the poor Brāhmin who could now hardly recognise his house and was lost in wonder.

The story of Kucela makes us happy while that of Droṇa with its account of ill-will and injustice creates misgivings in our mind. Here I will say what I think of the two Brāhmins. Kucela, however poor he was and however much he suffered, lived humbly and virtuously with the determination that he must not forsake the dharma of a Brāhmin. That brought him great honour. Droṇa was also a great man. But, as a Brāhmin, he did not stop with teaching Dhanurveda, but himself took up arms and engaged himself in combat. That is why his story did not take the happy turn that Kucela's did. It is true that he did not confront Drupada directly and did no more than incite Arjuna against him. Even so it was not proper for him as a Brāhmin to become affronted in the manner of a Kṣatriya and feel the urge for revenge, though it might be conceded that Drupada gave him cause for anger. From the very beginning he took an interest in the art of warfare to an extent more than proper for a Brāhmin and he received training in it from his father as well as from Paraśurāma. In this manner, little by little, damage was done to his svadharma (his own duties by birth).

That by such conduct Droṇa brought difficulties upon himself and others was shown by later events in his life. It so came to pass that he had to fight on the side of the unjust Duryodhana. How painful it must have been for him. Sharper than the arrows of Arjuna were the words hurled at him by Bhīmasena in the battlefield. Bhīma accuses him of acting against the Brāhminic dharma. Droṇa could say nothing in answer and had to swallow the insult.

A Brāhmin deserves esteem and respect only insofar as he remains a Brāhmin. If he slips in his Brāhminic dharma he incurs the disrespect of others. These truths are revealed in a striking manner in the stories of Kucela and Droṇa.

Brāhmins during the Buddha's time

It is likely that a number of Brāhmins during the Buddha's time did not live according to their dharma. (I had thought that the stories of Droṇa and Kucela were not relevant to our subject but eventually they do appear to fit in). The Buddha sought hard to find a solution to the cessation of sorrow or dukkha. He sought in vain an answer from the Brāhmin scholars of his time. Subsequently, he practised austerities and found that desire was the root cause of all sorrow. And the cause of desire was Māyā (illusion). Māyā it is that makes you believe that this world is real. Mokṣa or nirvāṇa (deliverance) is that which dispels Māyā. In nirvāṇa there is nothingness. When there is nothing there is no Māyā also, no desire, no sorrow. We learn from the story of the Buddha that he discovered these truths and proclaimed them to the world.

However, the truths that are said to have been discovered by him had been proclaimed earlier by the Vedas and the Upaniṣads and by śāstras like the Gītā. The Buddha himself could not say anything final about the nature of nirvāṇa and he left it to be understood as a state of arid śūnya or vacuity. We have covered

ground beyond in making it clear that mokṣa is not śūnya but the state of fullness, the state of supreme bliss of the true consciousness (paripūrṇa-saccidānanda). If no Brāhmins came forward at the time to demonstrate this truth to the Buddha should we not take it as a sign of their degeneration?

The Buddha and the Jina (Varddhamāna Mahāvīra) claimed that the offering of animals in sacrifice was hiṃsā and condemned it. The Buddha and Mahāvīra gave a paramount place to ahimsā. But ahimsā has an important place in the Vedic religion too. In fact ahimsā is the first among the ordinary virtues (sādharaṇa dharma) of all mankind. However, Bhagavān has so ordained it that worldly affairs are to be conducted by the joint efforts of the gods and humans. And this "plan" of Bhagavān was revealed or made known to the sages. Accordingly the sages arranged sacrifices to be performed to please the celestials. In return for this they send us their blessings in the form of rains and cause the natural forces to be beneficial to man. When propitiating the devas the bali (oblation) they like is to be offered as an āhuti (what is offered in the sacrificial fire).

It is not proper for us to ask how Bhagavān's creation is such that the devas who do good to us are fond of such bali. His creation is a marvel and beyond our comprehension. How is it that in God's creation, the lion and the kite look so majestic and handsome and yet are fond of flesh? Trees that are ablossom with fragrant flowers — don't they require foul-smelling manure? It may be that, similarly, the bali, purified by mantras, is food for the celestials.

If a king has to protect his country against thefts and other crimes he has to employ hounds. And surely the hounds have to be fed meat. In the same way when the devas do good to the world they have to be given in āhuti the vapa¹ they like. Also noteworthy is the fact that the yajña-paśu (any animal given in sacrifice and not necessarily a cow) is not to be compared to the animal fed to the hound and digested by it. The soul of the yajña-paśu attains a meritorious world.

Appayya Dikṣita lived about four hundred years ago. He was a very kind-hearted man. He is believed to have said in sorrow: "Being a Brāhmin I have to kill dumb creatures and perform sacrifices. O Supreme Being, I offer these animals in sacrifice in the faith that they have their final rest at your lotus feet. You must inspire in men faith in the Vedas which proclaim this (that the animals sacrificed will attain the lotus feet of the Lord)." So saying he performed the Vājapeya-yāga. At the time, right before all the people present, a celestial vehicle descended to earth. The animals whose vapa had been offered in the sacrificial fire appeared in a divine form. The Gandharvas and the Apsarases who came with the celestial vehicle treated the animals with honour and took them away. Similar stories are told in the Purāṇas also.

It does not matter whether or not we see with our eyes that the animals sacrificed attain a meritorious world. We do see with our eyes that a sacrifice, performed strictly conforming to the rules laid down in the Vedas, brings benefits. Performance of yajñas during droughts brings rains. During famines they cause the

¹ See glossary

crops to be plentiful. During epidemics they create a healthy atmosphere all round. Recognising this, people support yajñas since they bring blessings from the devas so propitiated.

If it is considered just to perform experiments on rabbits and rats and kill them in the laboratories to discover medicines for man, sacrificing animals in yajñas could also be justified since it is done for the prosperity of mankind.

It seems when the Buddha and the Jina condemned yajñas there were no Brāhmins capable of demonstrating that the animals sacrificed attained a realm of merit. Nor were there probably virtuous Brāhmins who could perform sacrifices in the prescribed manner and demonstrate in practice how mankind benefited thereby. That is why the Buddha and the Jina were able to defy the authority of the Vedas, found new religions and propagate them. When the Brāhmins, who are the custodians of the Vedas, declined in their spiritual power, respect for the Vedas must have so diminished among people as to have created a favourable climate for the new religions.

I had begun by saying that the story of Droṇa was not relevant to my theme. But we found in the course of the narration how Brāhmins became lax in the observance of their svadharma. Droṇa was an example in this respect. But it is not enough to cite the case of an individual like him in this context. There was a decline in general among Brāhmins since they became less mindful of their religious practices. In this state of decline non-Vedic religions like Buddhism and Jainism took root.

Kṣatriyas and Brāhmins

The Brāhmin Droṇa was opposed by the Kṣatriya Drupada. The Buddha and the Jina, who were opposed to the Vedas studied by the Brāhmins and to the yajñas and other religious duties performed by them, were also both Kṣatriyas. Centuries later, that is 500 years before our time, another man appeared who too opposed the authority of the Vedas and also the varnāśrama dharma like the Buddha and the Jina. However, without severing himself completely from Hindu dharma, he accepted the nāma-japa of Hindus, the meditation of the Śabda, the Brahman, etc , and established the Sikh religion. He too was a Kṣatriya.

Drupada and Kārtavīrya were examples of those who harboured ill-will against Brāhmins as individuals. The first, as we have already noticed, was a foe of Droṇa and the second of Jamadagni Mahārṣi. Both were Kṣatriyas but they were neither opposed to Brāhminic ideas and concepts nor did they want to establish new religions.

In the case of Drupada what began as contempt turned into hatred. And in the case of Kārtavīrya it was jealousy for Jamadagni first that developed into hatred. Kārtavīrya thought about Jamadagni thus: "This Brāhmin Jamadagni, wearing just a piece of cloth to hide his modesty, lives in a hut, but with the power of his austerities he has won that which I can't obtain with the prowess of my arm. He has obtained the sacred cow Surabhi from the gods, the cow that yields all his desires. No wonder his wife is so lavish in her hospitality to me and to my whole

entourage." Jealousy so incited turned into hatred and he killed the maharṣi in the end.

Then you must have heard of the rivalry between the Brāhmin Vasistha and the Kṣatriya Viśvāmitra, of how the latter was determined in pursuing his objective that he should be called a "Brahmarṣi" by no less a sage than his rival Vasistha. In our Purāṇas and śāstras we have a few instances of the conflict between Brāhmins, remarkable for their power of austerities, and Kṣatriyas renowned for their physical prowess.

If we further inquire into this subject of Brāhmin-Kṣatriya conflict, the false propaganda mounted nowadays against varnāśrama-dharma will be exposed. Present-day reformers argue that Turks, whites and other invaders could bring the Indian sub-continent under their heel because our society was riven and weakened by caste differences. The implication of this charge is that Brāhmins managed to keep the rājās under their control and suppressed the rest of the people. As a consequence, it is said, the embittered castes, who formed the majority, became indifferent to the fortunes of the nation ("What does it matter whether it is Rāma who rules the country or Rāvaṇa?). So much so, the argument goes, when foreigners invaded the land, these "embittered castes" did not cooperate in the country's defence or they even helped the invaders. This view, whose purpose is to tar the Brāhmins as the culprits responsible for the subjugation of the nation by foreigners, in fact implies that these other castes were themselves guilty. They betrayed the nation (according to this view) on the pretext that they had not been given an elevated status. As a matter of fact there is no historical evidence to show that they harboured any ill-will against Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas. Notwithstanding this, the histories written by Europeans make the above charge. And our own people, who are influenced by such prejudiced accounts, repeat the charge again and again: the charge that it was because of the differences created by varṇa-dharma and the lack of unity among Hindus supposedly resulting from it that we again and again came under the thrall of foreigners.

If foreign powers succeeded in establishing their rule among us it is because there was no unity among the rājās, not because of differences arising out of varṇa-dharma. If at all there was at some time or other any confrontation between the castes, it was, as mentioned above, between Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas.

How the fourth varṇa respected the Vedic tradition

Until the beginning of this century Vaiśyas and Śūdras did not nurse any ill-will against Brāhmins nor did they wish their ruin. Even in the present times it is the Kṣatriyas who have been opposed to the dominance of Brāhmins.

Brāhmins were drawn to the British educational system before other communities and consequently they also lapsed from their dharma. The authority exercised by the chiefs of states and principalities and by the zamindars passed into the hands of foreign rulers. So the true Kṣatriyas or those who came in their place suffered considerably in wealth and influence. When a kingdom changes hands, it is after all the ruling family and the nobles surrounding it that are affected. This is what

The Guru Tradition

reveal the truth. What is suggested in the history written by Europeans themselves? Contrary to what is erroneously believed at present, there was firm unity in the nation only during times when the varṇāśrama-dharma based on the Vedas was strictly practised. Great empires ruled by great imperial dynasties flourished during such periods. And the country was seldom subjected to foreign invasions then. It was when kingdoms, supporting non-Vedic religions that propagated ahimsā were ruling that the unity of the nation was undermined resulting in the fracturing of the country into a number of states. The way was paved thus for its becoming an easy prey to foreign invaders.

Such facts are subtly indicated in the histories written by foreigners. Now, after our becoming free, these are openly and emphatically being proclaimed by distinguished historians like K.M. Munshi¹ who are engaged in rewriting our history without any bias.

Munshi is not an old-fashioned Sanātānist like me. He is a reformist, and a friend of Gandhiji's. And he was a member of the Nehru cabinet. So he cannot be included among the "reactionaries" who insist on jāti dharma (or caste). But in the interest of truth he and people of his thinking have made the above observation about the nation's unity.

The Mauryan empire was prosperous during the reign of Candragupta who maintained the order of Vedic ācāra and varṇāśrama. After Aśoka, who supported Buddhism, the Mauryan empire broke up and fell a prey to the Scythians (Śākas), Pārthians (from Asia Minor which was under Greek rulers), the Kuṣānas and others. Later Puṣyamitra Śunga came to power as emperor, supported the Vedic tradition and performed the aśvamedha sacrifice. The nation became reinvigorated as if with an infusion of new blood. The empires of subsequent rulers like Śamudragupta, Candragupta Vikramāditya of the Gupta dynasty (not to be confused with Candragupta Maurya mentioned earlier) who performed the aśvamedha sacrifice flourished under the system of varṇāśrama. Munshi and other historians like him point out that it was varṇa-dharma chiefly that inspired social unity and social strength during the period of the imperial Hindu dynasties.

The various castes lived zestfully and took pride in their allotted occupations in the assurance that they were well knit and well protected. The entire working class (engaged in various trades and crafts) were linked together like a chain, well integrated with each section complementing the other and contributing together to the unity of the country. The historians mentioned above point out that, unlike the Buddhist and Jaina doctrine of nirvaṇa or kaivalya which did not appeal to the minds of people, there was something real and positive about the Hindu religion with its varṇāśrama-dharma. It had avataras descended to earth — like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa — who had all the auspicious attributes and who like all of us humans, married and begot children. They ruled over kingdoms and, instead of subscribing to ahimsā and tolerating outrages against society, waged war successfully against the forces of evil and wickedness. Thus the creative urges of the Hindu religion led to the formation of great empires.

¹K.M. Munshi (1887-1971), founder of the Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan, was obviously living when the Paramaguru made this statement.

I have seen an extract from the writings of Munshi. In it he shows that it is not altogether true that, Harṣavardhana, the Buddhist, built a great empire. This belief gained ground from the popular work. *Harṣacarita*, in which the author Bāṇa, who was patronised by Harṣa, has given an exaggerated picture of the greatness of his king and his kingdom. The Gupta empire before Harṣa was much bigger than it and unlike Harṣa's lasted long with the support of Hindu dharma. Harṣa's empire did not survive him.

Most of the Buddhist rulers also realised that without the binding force of the varṇāśrama system, society would become loosened and disintegrate like a bag of *āmlas* emptied, that if they adhered to ahimsā the country would be weakened and become an easy target for greedy foreign powers. So they supported ahimsā only nominally and, though they built caityas and vihāras, they too fought wars. They also supported people carrying on their trades according to the varṇa-dharma. Even when their kingdoms weakened, they too honoured worthy Brāhmins of their time.

The facts of history belie the accusation that, as a result of the constraints of the varṇa-dharma of Brāhmins, the nation was weakened and became an easy target for foreign invaders. After Aśoka, when the Mauryan empire had its downfall, it was a Brāhmin who got together the people and established the Śātavāhana empire in the Deccan.

My purpose in speaking about our history is to impress upon you the fact that people who have lived as one family should not be divided by sowing the seeds of poison in the minds of any one section of them,

Advaita and the state

Let me also expose another lie similar to the one about varṇa-dharma. Some critics say: "Because of regarding the world as nothing but Māyā (illusion) as taught by Śankarācārya, Hindus lost their spirit of adventure and enterprise and became a soft people. That is how India was enslaved by foreign powers." The Ācārya never expounded Advaita and Māyā as doctrines to be followed in practice by all people. He brought them to the path of karmānuṣṭhana (performance of religious duties) and worship based on devotion. He exhorted only people who had maturity of mind to take to the path of Advaita with its concept of Māyā.

To prove this it is sufficient here to cite what is historically known to be a fact. The source of inspiration for the founding of three powerful empires were Brāhmins who were uncompromising Advaitins.

Malik Kafur, in the course of his devastating expedition through the South down to Rāmeśvaram, razed many a temple to the ground and inflicted a deep wound on Hindu society. But our culture and civilisation came to the fore and attained the pinnacle of glory again. The credit for this should go to the Vijayanagara emperors. Who was it that helped to found their empire? The answer is Vidyāranya Svāmin, the celebrated Advaita exponent, scholar and statesman.

The kingdom of Tanjāvūr ruled by the Nāyaks was at first a branch of the Vijayanagara empire. The man who was responsible for its founding was Govinda Dikṣita. He was a gṛhastha (householder) but was called, "Advaitācārya". Śivaji established the Marāṭha empire and saved Hindu society from the onslaught of Aurangzeb and his religious bigotry. His source of inspiration was an Advaitin and brahmacārin called Samartha Rāmadāsa.

Some people pretend to be very knowledgeable but speak without a sense of responsibility on subjects like caste, the unity of India, Advaita, etc. Their views are calculated to create a sense of inferiority in us with regard to our great religious and cultural traditions. There was no rivalry or jealousy at all in the Hindu community arising out of caste or education. Such feelings obtained perhaps between Kṣatriyas and Brāhmins, though not to any significant degree.

Restraint even in conflict

Even with regard to conflicts between Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas – which were infrequent — there were some features which testify to the greatness of our national culture and these need to be noted. In other countries if there were differences of opinion, say, between the Pope and a king or between the ulema and a sultan, they ended in a real quarrel or fight that sometimes took a bloody turn. Here it was different. Our kings did not try to put down Brāhmins with their brute strength. If, as is erroneously claimed, the Brāhmins lorded it over all the rest, breathing down their necks, during times of conflict between them and the Kṣatriyas the common people would have instigated the Kṣatriyas to do away with the Brāhmins. But this never happened.

When there was an encounter between Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas, the community that wielded the sword acted under certain constraints and within certain bounds. It speaks for the virtuous character of the common people who, though not entitled to study the Vedas, never used any opportunity that might have arisen to incite a quarrel between communities.

Opposition based on knowledge

The matter is not to be left at that. If Brāhmins were really conceited about their intellectual attainments and superiority of caste, how would they have been placed on a high pedestal by people of virtue belonging to other castes? Does not justice demand that a community that is overbearing and arrogant should be kept under control? Indeed a community that is not remarkable for its physical strength could have easily been put down. But we know from history that no steps were taken at any time against Brāhmins on the pretext that they were overbearing. This shows that, apart from being intellectually distinguished, Brāhmins were also men of character who deserved respect.

It was because they were learned that Brāhmins were intellectually distinguished. But, apart from intellectual brilliance, it was the system of education then prevailing, especially gurukulavāsa that so moulded their character and conduct as

to earn the respect of others.

Conflict with Brāhmins, whenever it occurred on any significant scale, had nothing to do with the power gained through material possessions. It arose from opposition to the Vedic religion or differences with it. It was doctrinal, that is based on the siddhānta or system of thought of another religion in relation to the Vedic dharma. And such opposition was proof of the intellectual strength of Brāhmins in that they had to be confronted on the conceptual level. I make this remark in relation to the advent of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

Sikhism was not as much opposed to the Vedic religion as Buddhism and Jainism had been. Though it rejected varṇa-dharma and ritual, the elements that form the backbone of the Vedic religion, it did not proclaim itself as opposed to its mother religion, i.e. Hinduism. There were Sikh gurus who gave asylum to Brāhmin pandits who had suffered at the hands of foreign Muslim rulers. Indeed, they even fought these foreign rulers.

The Buddha, the Jina and Nānak, who were all Kṣatriyas, opposed Brāhmins in a sāttvika manner (not through brute strength). Their confrontation was based on religious and philosophical ideas, a field in which the Brāhmins excelled.

Those were times when Brāhmins somewhat lagged behind in Ātma-bala, in inward force. But the proponents of the new religions recognised that the true strength of Brāhmins lay in their traditional śāstras. To achieve victory over them and establish the superiority of their philosophy, they had to encounter Brāhmins on the plane of ideas and not through physical encounter. According to psychologists, like individual consciousness, there is "racial" as well as "class" consciousness. They also speak of powerful individuals arising as leaders of groups from time to time. A section of Kṣatriyas, if not all, wished to do better than Brāhmins in philosophy. The Buddha and the Jina emerged as representatives of this group. This (the fact that the rivalry between Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas was centred on religious doctrines and philosophical concepts) is a matter of pride for both communities.

Brāhmins need not be the exclusive repositories of knowledge, philosophy, etc. Kṣatriyas ruled in accordance with the advice given by Brāhmins learned in the śāstras. A section of this ruling class must have been conscious that, apart from their physical valour, they also possessed intellectual distinction. And this must have acted as a motive in the founding of new religions.

This psychological factor is revealed in another aspect also. Are not Brāhmins recognised in the śāstras as sāttvikas? In real life too they remained more virtuous and peace-loving than others. The Kṣatriyas, on the other hand, were doughty and warlike and thus rājasa. So to look at the matter psychologically — they must have wanted to show themselves to be more sāttvika than Brāhmins (in addition to wanting to excel them intellectually and to show themselves to be more deeply concerned about philosophical matters). This desire led to the founding of new religions. It was perhaps for this reason that (to show themselves to be more sāttvika than Brāhmins) that they taught ahimsā in an extreme form and opposed

the yajñas in which animals were sacrificed. This does not mean that their sincerity in advocating ahimsā is doubted. All that is meant is that their conviction about non-injury probably arose out of their feeling that they must excel Brāhmins in sāttvika qualities.

The big schools and the new religions

The Brāhminic doctrine of the authority of the Vedas, of Vedic dharma and varṇa had no place in the new religions founded by the Buddha and the Jina. There are rules as to who can study the Vedas and who cannot. But the study of the basic texts of the new religions was thrown open to all. So, naturally (unlike the old Vedic gurukulas which were small), they had to establish big schools for all their followers.

Admitting all without distinction to the new schools led to another development in education. The śāstras were taught in the gurukulas only in Sanskrit with all its grammatical refinements. The common people did not know Sanskrit; they knew only one or another of the Prākṛts. One of the basic Buddhist texts, the *Tripitaka* (it is in three parts), is in the Prākṛt called Pāli. The *Angas*, the authoritative texts of the Jainas, are composed in another Prākṛt, Arddhamāgadhī.

An important method of carrying out religious conversion among unlettered people without the use of force is by establishing schools, spreading education among them and teaching them religious texts. We know, in this context, the work of Christian missions. Five hundred years ago, when Nānak wanted to propagate his religion of Sikhism he realised that Punjabi had no script. The Guru who came after him, that is Guru Angad,¹ had to invent a script. He collected Guru Nānak's teachings and propagated them. The script is called Gurumukhī since it had its origin in the Guru (from the Guru's mouth). The point to note is that those who want to convert people to their faith in a sāttvika and clever manner without using force do so by establishing schools. Discarding the language of the learned, Sanskrit, the Buddhists and the Jainas had recourse to the language understood by the common people — one or another of the Prākṛts.

Subsequently, however, when the Buddhist and Jaina systems of thought developed the need arose for the expression of subtle and abstruse ideas. The Buddhists and the Jainas also then accepted Sanskrit as the most suitable vehicle for the purpose. Hsuan Tsang, who came to India during the reign of Harṣavardhana (7th century AD), says that the Buddhists held their discussions in Sanskrit. However it be, schools bigger than before began to appear when the need was felt to teach the common people through the medium of their own tongue.

Gurukulas for Brāhmins

I have already spoken about the system prevalent before the Buddhist and Jaina periods. Vaiśyas and Śūdras went to Brāhmin ācāryas to be taught only about highly specialised subjects. The gurukulas were otherwise meant mainly for Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas. Indeed it would be more correct to say that they were

¹Guru Angad, 1504-52.

meant mostly for Brāhmin children. In those days gurukulas, education, etc, were associated mainly with Brāhmins. Among Kṣatriyas, the princes, other important members of the royal family, children of the chief officials, etc, lived in the gurukulas. It seems other children belonging to that caste — that is children of ordinary soldiers, of aides and others — were taught at home by the father or in special schools where training was given in arms. Even such Kṣatriya children as those who lived in the gurukulas might not have received their education along with Brāhmin children.

Now to recapitulate briefly what I have said about education and the varṇa system. There was no need for Kṣatriyas to learn the Vedas in their entirety and also the fourteen vidyā-s. Similarly, Brāhmin boys might not have made a detailed study of the art of warfare (Dhanurveda) except those who were to train Kṣatriyas. Others might not have studied subjects not needed for their livelihood like statecraft and Dhanurveda. So Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas must have had different syllabuses. However, it is certain that children of the two castes must have learned, at intervals, the caturdaśa-vidyā-s together in the same gurukula.

Since Vaiśyas have the right to learn the Vedas it is likely that their children also studied in Brāhmin gurukulas. However, in course of time, as the population grew, new goods had to be manufactured and sold, and more contacts made with the outside world. Vaiśyas had, for the last-mentioned reason, to go to, and settle in, foreign countries. That being the case, they must have in due course put aside the study of the Vedas and specialised in the subjects of direct concern to them from childhood onwards like commerce and cow protection. They could not learn from books the day-to-day changes in market trends nor the art of dealing with people. In any case, there were no books available then to teach such matters. So the Vaiśya boys did not receive education to any high degree. They acquired an elementary knowledge of the Vedas, and learned religious practices and the śāstras only to the extent needed for their trade or occupation. But from childhood onwards they were trained in their work directly by their father or grandfather and thus got to know first-hand the secrets of their trade and the skills required for it.

Education in early times was generally confined to Brāhmins. That is why, even centuries later, the word pāṭha, which means the study of the Vedas, occurs in the term used for the school, pāṭhaśālā. The word "ācārya", which means a 'teacher' who gives complete education to a pupil beginning with the upadeśa of Gāyatrī, is now used as *āśiriyar* in Tamil for the man who teaches atheism, communism, etc, also. The upādhyāya, meaning the one who taught the Vedas for a living without having given the Gāyatrī upadeśa, is still used in Tamil as *vāṭṭiyār*.

“Mānava”, “Mānākan”

“Śiṣya” and “vidyārthin” in Sanskrit are known as “*mānavan*” or “*mānākan*” in Tamil. In *ceyyul* (poetry) the word is *māni*. It occurs in the passage dealing with the Vāmana incarnation in the *Divyaprabandham*. “Mānava” means a “man”. The human race began from Manu. That is how we have “manuja”, “manuṣya”, and “mānava” in Sanskrit — the Tamil “*manitan*”, “*mānutan*”, etc. “Man” in English is also

related to Manu. He who has 'manas', the capacity to think, is a man. Westerners say that man is a thinking animal. "Mānava" means a man "Mānavan" means a child, boy. Since education is imparted from childhood the student is called "mānavan" or "mānakkan". The Tamil "māni" is also from this, but like "mānavan" it does not denote a student of any caste. "Māni" means a brahmacārin who has had his upanayana. Such usage could be traced to the fact that in the old days students were mostly Brāhmin brāhmacārins – and the usage persisted in later times also.

The fact that Brāhmin children had special education in the old days did not give rise to any misgivings among others. These latter did not need gurukulavāsa for their way of life or occupation. They had the good sense to realise that when necessary they could consult the Brāhmin on difficult technical points. They also did not feel that there was anything wrong about the fact that "he (the Brāhmin) alone studied certain subjects; he alone lived according to a certain discipline". They found satisfaction in the belief that everyone carried out his duty according to his caste or family and that, as a result, there would be all-round happiness and fulfilment. "The Vedas that the Brāhmin chants and the sacrifice that he performs are intended for our well-being also. The life of severe discipline enjoined on him points a goal to us also. Let him therefore keep doing his work according to his way of life. Let us not go and interfere with it. Let us not compete with him or have any feeling of rivalry with him." Such was the attitude of people for ages. And as long as this attitude was prevalent life in the community was orderly and harmonious.

System of labour not affected

The Buddha and the Jina misunderstood this system of education and life. It is possible that their view was influenced by how the Brāhmins of their time conducted themselves. The Brāhmins then must have been proud of being high-born without however living a life of religious discipline and without acquiring Vedāntic knowledge. But, instead of trying to correct them and restore them to the true path of Hindu dharma, the Buddha and the Jina said: "The purpose of the Vedas itself is wrong. There must be no caste division. The division of caste in the Vedic dharma is discriminatory." Human nature is such that when the common people heard such talk they began to lose their faith in the old order slightly. "We will do what they (supporters of Vedic dharma) do not do for you." In this manner the Buddhists and Jainas organised their religions without any caste. They taught their basic texts (the śāstras and arts) in the speech of the common people in order to make them easier to teach students in big educational institutions. Was not such an arrangement a big boost to conversion?

Notwithstanding all this there was an important feature of society at the time to be noted. Even as conversions to Buddhism and Jainism were going on, the system of hereditary occupations was not disturbed. It means that even when faith in Vedic observances and Vedānta was in a somewhat weakened state, and the position of Brāhmins as leaders among the common people was somewhat shaken, people continued to carry on their hereditary occupations. Varna-dharma did not die away so far as non-Brāhmins were concerned. The non-Brāhmin did

not perform any sacrifices and he was little involved in philosophical inquiry. He paid heed to the proponents of the new religions about not accepting the leadership of Brāhmīns, but he hardly tried to examine or understand the concepts or doctrines of the new religions.

Generally speaking, any new movement gains support from its opposition to certain things. It does not, to the same extent, gain acceptance for its rules of conduct or creed. When Gandhiji said, "Drive out the white man", people united under him to oppose the foreigner. But how many who claim to be his followers live according to his teachings of ahimsā, truth, discipline and devotion to Īśvara? Not many, you will sadly note. We carried on a big struggle not so much against the adharma of foreign rule as for the freedom to live as we like. When Gandhiji himself wanted to bind us to a certain dharma we did not like to submit to it. We love to point a finger at the faults of others and oppose them instead of realising our own faults and trying to correct ourselves. If I were to speak one word asking you to hold a conference or a convention to oppose atheism or conversion, you would do so at once, make hard-hitting speeches and pass resolutions. But if I were to tell you to live according to the śāstras, would you pay any heed to it? No. Similarly, the common people did not follow the dharma or ideas of Buddhism and Jainism. In this context, mention must be made of one feature of the new religions which was not possible to practise. They held up ahimsā and renunciation as ideals to be followed by all people, unlike our religion which makes compromises. Jainism, particularly, has the severest regimen to torment one's body. Buddhism and Jainism are not like Hinduism which teaches happy and easy step-by-step ways of progress towards the highest ideal. So, though the Buddhist and Jaina religions had a wide following, their adherents did not practise their teachings with any sense of conviction.

The system of hereditary occupations, it is important to note, was not given up. People continued to practise the hereditary system because of the realisation that to give it up would mean confusion about who would do what. Besides, it would result in the rise of rivalry and jealousy among various sections of society and the breakdown of life in the community in general. The edicts of Aśoka and other kings belonging to the Buddhist-Jaina traditions proclaim that even during their reigns varṇa-dharma was prevalent and that they too respected it.

This may be confirmed without any room for doubt if we consider the following. (Here the Paramaguru examines the history of India relating to the period under discussion.) Subsequent to the time of the Buddha and the Jina there appeared exponents of Tarka-śāstra like Udayanācārya, Mīmāṃsīkas like Kumārilabhaṭṭa who gave the utmost importance to the performance of Vedic rites and a life lived according to the Vedas and, finally, our own Ācārya (Śankara), the Vedāntin. They held debates with the exponents of Buddhism and Jainism and triumphed over them. As a result the eternal Veda dharma with its varṇāśrama system was restored to its old glory. This is a fact supported by history.

But, according to the history written by Europeans with the deliberate purpose of maligning Hindus — and their texts are accepted as sacrosanct by

many of our own people today — Buddhism and Jainism were a powerful force in the period intervening the advent of those religions and the birth of Śankarācārya. If this were true how would it have been possible to restore the Vedic varṇa system? There is no proof to sustain the belief that, after all people had become one caste, they were again divided according to the varṇa-dharma throughout the country, during the time of Śankara Bhagavadpāda, on orders issued thus: "You be a Brāhmin, you a Kṣatriya, you a Vaiśya and you a member of the fourth varṇa." Fortunately, like so many other stories concocted in the name of history, there is no account to substantiate the restoration of the varṇa system in this manner. Such an account will not be accepted by any intelligent person.

The system of hereditary occupations had existed for centuries, naturally as it were, and it would have been equally natural for people born in a particular caste or community to carry on, without questioning, the occupation handed down from generation to generation. However, once this system of caste-based occupations was discontinued it would not be possible for anyone to revive it. "Let you be of this caste -- let you be of this other caste," no one would agree to this sort of thing. Instead, complaints would be heard: "Why can't he be in that caste? I will be in another caste." If Buddhism and Jainism had spread all over this vast country and a new society without any differences of caste had been established, it would have been impossible to impose varṇa-dharma again on a nationwide basis.

It is universally agreed that during the time of Śankarācārya all non-Hindu religions had already begun to decline. But, if all the people in the country had given up their hereditary occupations, it would have been impossible for a single individual even of Śankara's stature to bring them all again into the varṇa-dharma fold. That he accomplished such a task with the help of a ruler is also not known. There is no historical evidence at all, nor any proof in literature, that varṇāśrama was re-established by royal edict. When a king like Niraśir Neḍumāran embraced Jainism his common subjects were probably afraid to go to temples, or to practise the rites of our religion openly, but it would be preposterous to suggest that all of them embraced either of the two new faiths.

Even during the period, when Buddhism and Jainism had a considerable following, people did not give up their hereditary occupations. It means that a change in religious thinking was not accompanied by a change in the pattern of worldly life and that the caste system still flourished. That is why when the saint Sambandha turned back a king to Hinduism from another religion, the common people abandoned their fear, started going to temples again and practised the Vedic dharma. Many of those who had embraced other faiths returned to the Hindu fold. However it be, the system of occupations based on caste remained unaffected throughout (irrespective of conversion or reconversion).

Buddhism and Jainism never took root on a nationwide basis

Buddhism and Jainism did not take root on a nationwide scale. On the whole, the structure of Hindu society was not affected by the new religions to any significant extent. If you look at the question from a religious, and not from a social

point of view, you will see that Brāhmins and others, with their special involvement in religion, did not embrace the new faith in large numbers. Koon Pāndyan embraced Jainism but his wife and his chief minister Kulcirāyar did not follow his example.

Above all, to consider what is particularly relevant to our subject, not many non-Brāhmins received their education from the Buddhist or Jaina schools. As stated earlier, they continued to carry on their hereditary occupations. Since they could receive practical training from their elders at home they had no need to go to any school. However, a very small number of non-Brāhmins must have joined the Buddhist or Jaina schools since they thought these institutions taught all subjects without observing any caste distinction. However, in proportion to the total population they were small in number. Even so, schools bigger in size and larger in number came to be established for their sake.

It must also be mentioned that the number of people who joined the Buddhist bhikṣu sangha formed a very small percentage of the community. Though it is true that the bhikṣu-dharma so expanded as to become a target of ridicule, it does not mean that a large percentage of people renounced the world and became monks. In the earlier period the majority of people who renounced the world and became sannyāsins were Brāhmins but they did so after living through the first three āśramas. A few Brāhmins received sannyāsa directly while they were yet in the brahmacaryāśrama (bachelorhood). If you take the number of sannyāsins then to be 1/2% or 1% of the population, after the advent of Buddhism and Jainism, when bhikṣus were accepted from all castes, the corresponding percentage could not be more than 4 or 5. The remaining, who formed more than 90%, must have continued to live their life as before. However, when you find three doctors in a place instead of the usual one, you feel that there are too many. Similarly, when the monks who had formed 1/2% or 1% of the population increased to 4% or 5% it must have been felt that there were too many of them. Also, unlike Hindu sannyāsins, who lived individually (that is each by himself), the Buddhist monks lived in groups, as a sangha, and since they stayed in one place and conducted schools there it looked as if they constituted a large community.

It would be difficult for a society to tolerate or suffer the strain of 4% or 5% of its strength becoming sannyāsins sworn to observe very strict rules of life. As a reaction to this, the discipline in such a society would be loosened. This is precisely what happened.

So far as the social structure of the country was concerned, during the Buddhist and Jaina periods the system of labour according to the varṇa-dharma was not particularly affected. And in the religious sphere, though there was some laxity in the matter of Vedic observances and though Vedic education also suffered slightly, they did not altogether lose their force. Nor did the non-Vedic religions flourish to any great extent on a countrywide basis.

There were, however, rare occasions when non-Vedic religions flourished with the support of the state. On the intellectual level also they had some support. But during these times a Śankara or a Sambandha arose to restore the Vedic religion to a state even brighter than before.

The Guru Tradition

All European historians are not partisan in their accounts. There are individuals everywhere who respect the truth. And, apart from them, institutions also who respect the truth. Take the case of Oxford University. It has earned a name for itself for its impartiality and for the authenticity of its inquiries and views on any subject. If this university publishes a book on a topic once, it does not regard it as the last word on the subject. It keeps carrying out further research in it. As a result of fresh investigations, if new material is discovered and if such material is authentic, it is accepted courageously and brought out in a revised edition of the book, or in an altogether new work. The university has published a history of India in this manner.¹

It is stated in this book very clearly: "In every period in the history of India Buddhism and Jainism have gained great influence in one or two of its many kingdoms. A large proportion of the population of these kingdoms have also embraced these religions. But, if anybody claims that either of these two faiths had at any time spread all over the country, it must be seriously questioned. From the beginning, the Hindu religion of Brāhmins has been a living force in every age. It is a matter to be understood without any doubt that there were a great many people following it in every age. A 'Buddhist period' and a 'Jaina period' in the history of India are spoken of in a number of books. This is wrong, an erroneous view presented deliberately. There has never been a Buddhist period nor a Jaina period. Neither Buddhism nor Jainism has ever pushed out Hinduism totally nor has either taken its place, though they have flourished in one or two regions or kingdoms."

I started with the subject of education and, if I have talked about other things, they are not unrelated. What is the purpose of education? Is it not the quest for truth, for the truth being revealed? At present our children are taught views that are contrary to the truth. They are taught that the Buddha and the Jina, who appeared not long after the beginnings of civilisation in our country, created a stir in the life of the people which had been based on the Vedic tradition. They are also told that the new religious leaders established their faiths on a firm footing throughout the land. Should I not bring to the notice of all concerned that such a preposterous view is taught as history?

The excellence of the gurukula system is underlined by the fact that it was based on nurturing certain qualities in the student like purity of heart and life. The system also shows that true education is fostered not through establishment of a big

¹ A professor of history states that the Paramaguru must be referring to Vincent Smith's *The Oxford History of India*. He also points out that the observations of the Paramaguru must be based on the following passage in the book:

"It must be clearly understood that Brāhmanical Hinduism continued to exist and to claim innumerable adherents throughout the ages. It may well be doubted if Buddhism can be correctly described as having been the prevailing religion of India as a whole at any time. The phrase 'Buddhist period' to be found in many books is false and misleading. Neither a Buddhist nor a Jain period ever existed. From time to time Buddhism and Jainism obtained exceptional success and an unusually large percentage of adherents in the population of one kingdom or another, but neither heresy ever superseded Brāhmanical Hinduism."

university and the creation of textbook committees and similar institutions.

What do we mean when we say that Śankarācārya or Jñānasambandha restored the Hindu dharma to its old glory? They transformed the state of religious affairs during the time the Hindu dharma had declined in various parts of the country and other religions had become dominant. More significantly, they established the supremacy of the Hindu siddhānta among the learned and thinking sections of the people. There is no reason to believe that the hereditary system of labour based on caste – which is an important social aspect of Hindu dharma – had gone into decay and that a religious leader who came later re-established it. (There is absolutely no possibility of a religious leader bringing about a social change of such proportions without the help of an imperial ruler.)

One particularly remarkable feature of Śankarācārya's greatness is that, though he accomplished what no one else could have accomplished, he did not possess the slightest self-pride. That is why in all his works, commentaries, prakaraṇa texts and hymns, there is not a single mention about himself. This has led to differences of opinion about his age and other matters concerning his life. From a passage in one of his works – and it is the only reference relevant to our subject – we learn without any room for doubt that during his time there was no ruler in India whose writ ran throughout the country, no ruler who could be called a "sārvabhauma" (imperial ruler or "universal monarch").

There is a mention of devas in the *Brahmasūtra* (first chapter, third pāda, 33rd sūtra). Commenting on it Śankara says that the devas indeed exist – and that they have contacts with humans. "Because no one from among us has the capacity to make contacts with the devas, it is not right for us to ask how men could have made contacts with them in earlier times. One who asks so can also argue perversely that, since at present [that is during Śankarācārya's time] there is no sārvabhauma in our country, there was no sārvabhauma at all at any time and that, since the varṇāśrama system has deteriorated, there was no varṇāśrama system at all at any time."

What do we understand from this statement? Even an imperial ruler cannot enforce the varṇāśrama system all over the country through a fiat. Let us consider such a possibility as a hypothesis. But the fact is that there was no such ruler during the time of Śankarācārya. Similarly, if varṇa-dharma flourished after him, with its earlier vitality, it means that even during his lifetime it could not have altogether ceased to exist.

(Śankara's statement that there was no sārvabhauma during his time confirms the point I made earlier. During the time of Buddhism and Jainism, when our rulers subscribed to either of the two religions with their emphasis on ahiṃsā, prosperous and powerful empires could not have emerged and sustained themselves. The nation was also at the time subject to invasion by less civilised hordes from abroad. Śankarācārya was born during such a period when there was no sārvabhauma. Let this pass. Even if there was no great empire at the time varṇa-dharma had not totally ceased to exist.)

You may ask: "Did you not say, did you not quote what the Ācārya had himself mentioned in connection with his statement about the absence of an imperial ruler during his time, that the varṇāśrama system had deteriorated? Now you speak differently and say that it had not totally become extinct."

My answer is this. The fact is neither had the varṇāśrama dharma totally become extinct nor did it flourish in all its strength and perfection. Śankara himself observes that in his time the caste division was "avyavasthitaprāya". It means not that it had ceased to exist altogether, but that it had become loosened. It must have become "irregular", that is without the required discipline. Probably my earlier description that it had remained "intact" is not quite right. At the same time it is not true to say that the system had ceased to exist.

This is how I picture to myself the state of affairs then. The influence of the Brāhmin must have declined because of his conduct having been such as to invite criticism. Also the common people must have been turned against him by making them believe that he had created a "discriminatory" social system. The sacrifices he conducted and his exposition of dharma must have reached a low level. Though these factors which give spiritual strength to the community had declined, the common people must have carried on their work according to the hereditary system of occupations since it helped the smooth functioning of worldly life. So far as they were concerned they were ignorant about the concepts of Vedānta and Buddhism and Jainism. They had, to the best of their ability, followed the ideals of life of Brāhmins of virtue, had worshipped Rāma and Kṛṣṇa and had thereby become mature within. The majority of them now, since they did not have the leadership of Brāhmins, did not become spiritually elevated but somehow practised the worship of the duties of their choice.

When Vedic leadership was not available any longer, people fell victim to fierce, disgusting or tearful practices of worship like those of the Kāpālikas. Those who were not in their fold paid obeisance to the Buddha or the Tīrthānkara, instead of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, Kapāli or Kālī. But it would not be true to claim that they had any knowledge of the doctrines of these religions or faiths.

Leadership and the common people

You may ask: "Like the Brāhmins who provided leadership, did not the Buddhist and Jaina monks provide leadership to the common people?" I must say 'No'. I say so not because I am obliged to give such an answer as a Hindu guru. I do so in all impartiality. There were so many great men among Buddhists and Jainas, so many great monks, so many men of erudition, so many philanthropists and so many men known for their self-sacrifice. I myself have some admiration for the philosophy of Nāgārjuna.¹ It is also true that these bhikṣus, more than the Brāhmins, lived in close association with the common people and mixed with them. Even so they did not provide leadership to them.

Why?

¹ Nāgārjuna, founder of the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism. He propounded the doctrine of Void.

What is leadership? Leadership consists in making others follow one's path. They may be said to possess the quality of leadership who, others think, may be followed as an ideal. In other words, he who is followed as an ideal or example, has the quality of leadership. The common people would like to follow the example of those who are householders with wives and children, not those like bhikṣus who have turned away completely from life and perform the severest of austerities. They may have devotion and respect for such people who have renounced the world. But since they do not set an example of how life is to be lived they cannot be regarded as leaders.

In the Vedic dharma the Brāhmins were looked upon as an ideal. And since they spent the greater part of their lives as householders, other communities could follow their example in practice. And indeed they did so.

When the Buddha and the Jina founded their new religions without any caste distinctions, there appeared a good number of monks. The result was a decline in the quality of sannyāsāśrama. It so happened later that many of these monks had to seek escape from their monastic life. So much so bhikṣus came to be scoffed at by the common people.

To explain the matter further. To start with, the monks practised rigorous austerities compared to the householder and were elevated to a high position. But the common people could not benefit from their leadership (because they were beyond their reach). Later, when a number of bhikṣus themselves were seen to be guilty of lapses, they became the target of ridicule because they had abased themselves and taken a direction opposite to what would have made them leaders. In this context it is sufficient to read Mahendra Pallava's prahasana¹ (farical comedy) *Mattavilāsam*.

To repeat, even after the advent of Buddhism and Jainism people on the whole did not give up their hereditary occupations whatever be the religion that they claimed to follow.

The great work of Ādi Śankara

Interest in religious doctrines was confined to a few learned people, that is to the world of scholars. At first Udayana, later Kumāriḷa and others and, finally, Śankarācārya —all three conducted disputations with panditas and refuted the tenets of Buddhism and Jainism.

In this context, Śankarācārya's performance was astounding. It was not that he merely completed the task of the Tārkikas and Mīmāṃsikas who had half driven out Buddhism and Jainism from the country. Tarka and Mīmāṃsā were confined to the scholars and could hardly be the religion of the common people. The Advaita of the Ācāryā also was understood only by the learned. More than

1 Mahendra Pallava (7th century AD), the great Pallava ruler.

understanding it, realising (or having anubhava) was possible only for one in a lakh or a crore. The Ācāryā, who established such an abstruse doctrine, also did immense good to the people on another level. After refuting other religions he formulated a system of worship that was shorn of any vulgarity or gruesome practices. It was a system not only for the learned but for the entire society. Śankara restored Vedic karmānuṣṭhāna (system of religious observances) to its earlier glory, ensured the advancement of virtuous Brāhmins and made the rest of the community go forward under their leadership.

“Leadership” here does not mean that the Brāhmins led a procession holding up flags, spoke from the platform or were garlanded or otherwise honoured with *ponnadai*¹. Theirs was silent leadership. The Brāhmins lived unobtrusively in a spirit of self-sacrifice and discipline, practising the ideals of ahimsā, devotion, love and non-possessiveness, and creating a sense of fearlessness in others. “Leadership” was what the common people derived on their own from the “leader” as an example for their lives.

It was Śankarācārya who made possible through this leadership the advancement of the Ātman which gave a meaning to the life of the entire community and uplifted them. What is India? India means dharma, devotion and the richness of the Atman. Śankara infused this spirit of India, this oxygen in the people and made India live again. As I stated earlier, the appellation “Acāryā” supremely fitted Śankara. He functioned according to the qualities essential to an ācārya: he contributed not only to the intellectual progress of people but also nourished their heart and Self and provided the inspiration for their disciplined conduct. And he taught this lesson not only to India but to the entire world.

He travelled through the whole country, triumphed over exponents of other doctrines. (Indeed these other doctrines fled the country, so to speak, after suffering defeat at his hands.) But this alone did not constitute the victory of Hinduism, because victory accomplished through argument is merely intellectual. How is the refutation of other religions sufficient to create a sense of discipline among the people, how is it enough to make them devout or to give at least the wiser and more mature among them the realisation of the Ātman? If you ask me what constitutes the achievement of Śankara that is without a parallel, this is my answer: Apart from establishing dharma, bhakti and Ādvaita-jñāna and apart from refuting the tenets of other religions, he made his victory complete by making it the victory of the Vedic religion.

It is generally said that our Ācārya established the supremacy of jñāna among the three paths to salvation (karma, bhakti and jñāna). This is of course true, but it was again he who re-established the path of karma and bhakti by giving them new life. Karma and dharma are interconnected (the one is integral to the other); the two go hand in hand. According to the Vedic śāstras, a man's dharma, that is the way of life, is based on his kulakarma or occupation according to caste. The kuladharmā and svadharmā are used in the Gītā and other śāstras in the sense of kulakarma and, what arises from birth, svakarma.

¹ See glossary

What is the path cut out for us by our Ācārya? Attaining purity of the citta or consciousness by performing the work laid down by the śāstras is the first step. Meditating on Īśvara with the consciousness so made pure, that is through devotion, takes us a step further. Through that very meditation the consciousness itself is erased and, finally, Ādvaita-jñāna is obtained. This jñāna means becoming one with Īśvara (in other words it is Īśvara uniting with Īśvara).

That which deals with the karma of each one of us is the Dharmaśāstra or Smṛti. That which fosters bhakti is embodied by the Purāṇas. And that which provides the means of Advaita-jñāna (awareness of non-duality) is Vedānta, i.e. the Upaniṣads, the crest of the Śruti or the Vedas. The Ācārya is the abode of all three – of the Sruti for jñāna, of the Smṛti for karma and of the Purāṇas for bhakti. He is indeed a temple of all three, declares a verse.

*“Śruti-Smṛti-Purāṇānām ālayam karuṇālayam
Namāmi Bhagavadpāda-Śankaram Loka-Śankaram”*

Śankara Bhagavadpāda, the Ācārya of jñāna, did good not only to a few people who had attained maturity within. He was the abode of compassion since he did good to all mankind by showing them the paths of karma and bhakti. (“Śam” means “good” or “well-being”; “kara” means “to do”. Śankara Bhagavadpāda was “Loka-Śankara”. He did good to all the world, all mankind.)

The Ācārya, through his intellectual work, brought Brāhmins back to their mother religion. Just as in the old system of education knowledge was woven together with anuṣṭhana or religious observances, he bound them to karmānuṣṭhana. In this way he was instrumental not only in their attaining purity of consciousness (citta-śuddhi) but in their becoming an ideal to be followed by all members of society, an example to them of how life is to be lived.

When Śankara visited a place he held disputations with the learned people there. He also restored the temples of the place to their old glory, established yantras in them and rendered deities of a fierce aspect benign.

It will not be doing adequate justice to Śankara by glorifying him again and again only as the teacher of Ādvaita. In this way we do not portray him or his work fully. The goal he taught mankind is Advaita and he established it as an unshakeable doctrine or system. But those who can inwardly realise the truth of Advaita are few. Śankara was a benefactor of all people – not only of a few – because he taught them the supreme means of attaining purity of citta, through karma based on the śāstras. Besides, he fostered bhakti among all by reviving temple worship on a large scale. He created the system of worship called “Śanmata” which provides for the worship of one or more from among six deities according to one’s choice or wish (worship of “iṣṭadevata”). Each deity is regarded as an aspect or form of the Paramātman and, as such, its devotee does not look down upon the worship of other deities. Śankarācārya also initiated the “Pañcāyatana pūjā”¹ of one’s iṣṭadevatas. In this manner he broke down the differences and quarrels among Hindus and reunited them.

¹The worship of five deities – Śiva, Ambā, Viṣṇu, Vināyaka and Sūrya – is called “Pañcāyatana pūjā”

Starting with "ācārya" and "upādhyāya" and the differences between them I have digressed far to speak about the greatness of Śankarācārya. But I will tell you how this topic is related to the subject of educational institutions. Other religions (Buddhism and Jainism) established big schools and colleges and kept inviting to them students belonging to all castes. But the common people were interested only in carrying on their hereditary occupations. So, as stated before, the home itself was the school for their children and they did not join in any considerable numbers the schools started by the Buddhists or Jainas. Even those who joined them must have dropped out after the first two years or so. Only those who were hereditarily involved in learning and philosophy – first Brāhmins and then Kṣatriyas – must have joined the new schools in large numbers and completed the entire course. We come across, here and there, in the story of the Buddha's life, accounts of his having debates with Brāhmins and of Brāhmins embracing his religion. The Buddha opposed Brāhmanya but it was from Brāhmins that he received much support not only for his religion but for his schools. After all, Brāhmins it were who were mainly interested in debates on religion and philosophy.

To sum up, it was during the time that Buddhism and Jainism flourished that a system of education common to all, with a variety of teachers working in the same school, came up. But even during this period the caste system was prevalent.

Comparing past and present

We need not rack our brains by going into ancient history to study the subject of caste. Caste consciousness has been in our blood from time immemorial. Europeans, particularly Christian missionaries, have attacked varṇa-dharma with greater harshness and sarcasm than most others. They too, like the Buddhists and Jainas much before them, have established schools and colleges. But with one difference. The Buddhists and Jainas, realising the need to impart sound knowledge to the students, included the Vedic cāturdaśa-vidyā-s (fourteen branches of learning) in the curriculum along with their own doctrines. If caste ceased to have any force as a result of the propagation of their doctrines and people no longer carried on their hereditary occupations, what would have been the result? There would have been a vacuum in society and the Buddhists and Jainas would not have found a substitute for the system of hereditary occupations. It must have been for this reason, for society to continue to function properly, that they let the system go on.

But what happened during the regime of the British? They threw to the winds the śāstras based on Vedic learning. As a substitute for the work traditionally performed by all people, they brought, one after another, machinery, coal, steam, electricity, etc. The system of occupations according to caste almost came to an end. Apart from this, they cleverly did another kind of damage by creating the lure of material prosperity. They also propagated ill-will amongst communities by promoting, on the pretext of carrying out research in history, "Āryan-Dravidian" racist feelings.

Whatever the fate of the other occupations, the lifelong occupation of Vedic studies for which there is not – and there cannot be – any substitute was brought to near extinction. Our own people, especially those who are entitled to the Vedic “occupation” (the custodians of the Vedas), have contributed their “service” towards this end and earned punya or merit as a result! The consequence of all this is that, but for a handful of old-fashioned adherents of the Vedas like me, all others think that caste is a great indignity and that it belongs to an uncivilised system. However, although the division of labour on the basis of heredity has all but ceased to exist and although all people believe that this will be beneficial to our progress, not more than ten out of a hundred come forward boldly for intercaste marriages. This means that, even in this state of decay of caste and of traditional values, consciousness of caste is ingrained in all of us. Are not elections still contested mostly on the basis of caste? It is no wonder then that during the Buddhist-Jaina periods, when there were no factories and when the economy was based on each village having its own handicrafts, the various castes continued to function according to their occupations.

On another matter too we could make a guess about conditions in the past on the basis of the situation prevailing today. Who are the people to have taken to Western education for long and to have become proficient in it? The answer is Brāhmins. Until the protest movement was engendered by the feeling that Brāhmins had come to occupy most of the posts, tradesmen, artisans, etc, did not take to Western education. Originally they had stuck to their traditional work telling themselves, “We have a family occupation and that is enough to fill our bellies.” It was the Brāhmin, with his concern for knowledge, who took to Western education when new courses like “arts”, “science”, etc, came up during the British regime.

Let us consider the situation. The rājās had ceased to rule then and the Brāhmin therefore no longer enjoyed royal patronage. He not only lost faith in the grace of Īśvara, he ceased to possess qualities like courage and the spirit of self-sacrifice needed to pursue the dharma he was expected to pursue even at the cost of his life. That was the time when the white man cleverly tempted him with the opportunity of jobs and for this he had to take to the system of education instituted by the foreigner. The Brāhmin succumbed to the temptation and became the first slave to Western education.

First was created the purely imaginary fear of “Brāhmin supremacy” and, on the pretext of putting an end to it, the Englishman established schools and colleges with the purpose of weakening Hinduism itself. And those who joined them were mostly Brāhmins. This led to “Brāhmin supremacy” in another sense and, to oppose it, the Justice Party, the Kazhakam, etc, were formed, consequently weakening Hindu unity and undermining Hindu society. All this had been according to the Englishman’s own plan. From this you may guess how in earlier times followers of other religions (Buddhists and Jainas) established educational institutions meant for all without any distinction of caste.

Today, even though people do not pursue their hereditary occupations, there are machines and factories to do all work and there is no damage done to society even if people do not carry on their hereditary occupations. But in the old days it was not like now. So the majority of the labouring classes would have carried on their hereditary occupations without joining any of the schools. The subjects in which the Brāhmin was particularly interested like the śāstras, philosophy, poetry, astronomy (also astrology) must have then extended their frontiers day by day. But the subjects in which the Kṣatriyas were interested did not register any similar progress. No new methods of warfare were developed nor did the science of warfare advance spectacularly as in modern times. The same could be said about the subjects in which the third varṇa, constituted by the Vaiśyas, was interested: there was no day-by-day advancement of the śāstras connected with trade and commerce, no new courses like B.Com., business management and C.A..

There were no factories then and the question of establishing schools or polytechnics for members of the fourth varṇa did not arise. So their system of learning continued as before – that is learning while working with their elders. The new schools created on a big scale did not attract communities other than Brāhmins in large numbers. The majority of people belonging to the non-Brāhmin communities believed that their livelihood would be affected by going to school and by learning subjects that were of no practical use to them. Who then, among the non-Brāhmin castes, went to these schools? The affluent, those who had so much property that they did not have to worry about earning their daily bread. There were also a few who were perhaps not well-to-do but were indifferent to worldly life and possessed the hunger to know the eternal truth. Among such men was Appar Svāmin.¹ He belonged to the fourth varṇa and acquired learning by studying in a Jaina school. But the percentage of non-Brāhmins who went to the new Buddhist or Jaina schools was very small. Next to Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas joined these institutions in considerable numbers, then Vaiśyas and people belonging to the fourth varṇa – in that order.

When Macaulay's system of education was introduced so "nicely"² in the last century as to uproot our religious and cultural traditions without our becoming even aware of it, who joined the new schools? Mostly Brāhmin children. Similar must have been the case with the Buddhist and Jaina schools started centuries earlier. The majority of those who joined them must have been Brāhmins. The Brāhminic svadharma must have very much gone into decline then, though not to the same extent as today. The new religions could not have taken root otherwise. In the name of ahimsā the Brāhmin's most important duty (occupation) of performing sacrifices came under attack. In works like the *Sankara-vijayam*, we see that the devas (celestials) complain before Īvara about the decline in the duty of the performance of sacrifices (yajñānuṣṭhāna). Since their traditional occupation and means of livelihood were affected, Brāhmins must have embraced the new

¹ A great Tamil saint-poet.

² The Paramaguru uses the word "nicely" with all its South Indian nuances of meaning, suggesting things done so smoothly and skilfully as to conceal their real intent.

religions and become Buddhist and Jaina monks in greater numbers than people of other communities. They must have also formed a large part of entrants to the new schools. However, it would not be true to say that all Brāhmins embraced either of the new religions in order to fill their bellies. Many of them must have become converts out of a genuine interest in philosophy and education.

Through the observance of svadharmā and the meditation of the Gāyatrī, Brāhmins acquire citta-śuddhi and their intelligence is illumined. In this respect Brāhmins must have suffered a slight setback during the period we are speaking about. But there is something called tradition or pāramparya: certain qualities and skills are in the blood. (So it must have been with the Brāhmins who joined the new schools.) It is only after the lapse of many generations that the traditionally acquired qualities are totally eroded. My great anxiety is that we should not face such an eventuality in the generation after our own. Once it has been pedalled a bicycle keeps going on its own momentum. Similarly, without any pedalling in the form of new anuṣṭhāna (religious observances) on their part, Brāhmins can go forward to some extent because of the push given them by their forefathers. This hereditary "pedal force" of intellectual brilliance stood the Brāhmins in good stead even during the period when the other religions prospered. History repeats itself. We have seen the same thing happening before our eyes with the English system of education coming into force. Brāhmins, more than others, had the appetite to learn about the doctrines of the new religions.

From the time of Aśoka, when Buddhism was propagated in foreign countries, we developed contacts with the intellectuals of old civilisations like Greece and China. This was a fresh incentive for Brāhmins in their intellectual pursuits. The need arose for us to learn from foreign countries such aspects as we did not know of subjects like astronomy. We had to teach them subjects they did not know like geometry, surgery (the śāstra associated with Śuśruta), etc. This provided a fresh encouragement to Brāhmins to join the new schools. In these institutions students belonging to all castes from India studied together. There were foreign students who studied under our upādhyayas. Similarly, teachers from abroad taught classes which included our students. However, among the students from our own country Brāhmins predominated, followed by Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyās and Śūdras in that order.

Buddhist-Jaina education

Let us forget what the Buddhists and Jainas did on the pretext of propagating religious doctrines or holding philosophical discussions. Let us forget how these great advocates of ahimsā pushed down followers of other religions from the terraces or rooftops of buildings. Let us also forget how they set fire to buildings belonging to the institutions of other religions, their mathālayas. But we cannot find fault with their education system for such was the excellence achieved by it. Nor can we find fault with them with regard to their propagation of knowledge or of philosophy. Their contribution to literature has also not been inconsiderable. Among the two – the Buddhists and Jainas – the Buddhists had greater influence in the North, while the Jainas had a greater impact in the South.

In Tamil the school is called *palli* from the fact that in the old days education was given to people belonging to all castes in the Jaina monasteries called *pallis*. The suffix "palli" in many place names denotes that the place in question had Jaina schools. There is a belief that (Tiru)cirāpalli (Tirucirapalli) is so called because it had a school belonging to the Jaina monk Cira.

(The word "palli" has a number of interesting associations. It means in Tamil "reclining" or "going to sleep" – *palli-arai* is bedroom. The Jaina monks who lived in the caves of the mountains used finely polished stones or slabs for beds. Such stones are still to be seen in the Pāṇḍyan region and places like Tirucirāpalli.

(Jaina monks pulled out each hair of the head by its root so as to have a smooth pate. They got the name Śramaṇa (*Camana* in Tamil) from the fact that they suffered bodily pain. But, when there was an indiscriminate increase in the number of monks, they fell to the temptation of a life of ease and one result of this was they made stone as smooth or soft as cotton (to make beds).¹ In saying this I am not attacking or ridiculing the followers of any religion. I merely wish to point out that an ideal suffers when it is attempted to be practised on a wide and popular basis.

(After the advent of Islam and its spread in the South the mosque also came to be called "*palli (vāsāl)*" in the same way as the Jaina and Buddhist *palli*. This led to confusion among ignorant people about religions other than their own: even today some people in Kerala call Muslims Bauddhas.)²

I was speaking to you about the contribution made by Buddhists and Jains to literature. The five great Tamil poetical works belong to them. What is regarded as a work of the utmost importance in Tamil, *Cilappatikāram*, was composed by the Jaina monk Ilango. *Maṇimekalai* is by the Buddhist Cittalai Cāttanār. *Kuṇḍalakesi* is also a Buddhist poetical work. *Civakacintāmaṇi* is by the Jaina (*Camana*) Tiruttakkadevar. The author of *Kalingattuparaṇi* is also a Jaina. The grammatical work *Nannūi*, *Yāpparunkalakkārikai* (a work on poetics), *Aranerisāram* (it is a work on renunciation), *Naladiyār* (a work on ethics) – all these are by Jaina monks. The grammatical work *Virachozhiyam* is by a Buddhist.

In the North there were Buddhist universities so big that their fame spread far to other countries. They had many faculties and were run efficiently and in a disciplined manner. A number of Chinese pilgrims came to India mainly to learn Buddhist doctrines and philosophy in one or another of these institutions. Recently I read in a book that Hsuan Tsang (Yuan Chwang) was one such Chinese who, after studying at Nālandā university, taught there and held the position equivalent to the present-day dean.

¹The implication is that people were admitted to Jaina monasteries without paying any regard to their fitness.

²Not only mosques, churches are also called *pallis* in Kerala. When a Hindu embraces Christianity or Islam he is said to "join the Marga", which contains a clear reference to conversion in earlier times to the Marga or Buddhism.

Writing

There was another reason for the remarkable growth of Buddhist universities.

Brāhmins gave importance to memory power. They prayed specially for such power ("mayi medhām"), for keenness of intelligence, and they constantly nurtured both. In this way, listening to some lesson or passage once or twice, they absorbed it in their memory. Chaste and simple living ensured that there was no waste of intellectual and physical energy in the pursuit of worldly pleasures or comforts. Through rigorous observance of religious practices, the hungers of the body were wrung out and brightness of intelligence acquired. Besides, by meditating on the Gāyātrī mantra, studying the Vedas, practising pranāyāma and observing brahmacharya, the mind shone with knowledge.

Brāhmins thus developed their memory power. Teaching was one of their six duties. People belonging to various fields, carrying on various trades or occupations, would come to learn from the Brāhmin. In the assemblies of the learned, he would be questioned on the śāstras. On such occasions how could he keep thumbing through the pages of a book for his answer? So he had to cultivate his intellectual powers to such an extent that his mind itself would be like a library of books. He had to keep his memory power honed so that it always remained bright. For this he had to make certain sacrifices. All this became part of the creed of the true Brāhmins. Such being the tradition, the great corpus of texts, the Vedas, got the name of Śruti, that which is heard by the ear – and not read by the eye. The Vedas are called in Tamil 'Ezhutātakilavi'; it means 'unwritten old text'.

If a subject is not retained in the mind and instead written down in books or on palm-leaves, we will increasingly tend to neglect it, telling ourselves, "After all it is all in the book. We can refer to it when the need arises." The habit of memorising a text or reading it intently and grasping its meaning is on the decline. We see this happening before our eyes. Our forefathers went to the extent of stating: "You have written it, haven't you? Well, that means it will serve no purpose." There is a saying: "Speak a thousand, write not even one" (Sahasram vada, ekam mā likha').

A book I read recently has it that, as opposed to the practice described above (that is of Brāhmins depending on their memory to learn and teach), the Buddhists introduced the method of teaching based on written texts (palm-leaves). According to the author of the book and also researchers of our own time, the "Sūtras" appeared a little before the time of Alexander's invasion of India, that is in the 6th century BC. The Sūtras contain our śāstras in a terse or aphoristic form, as for example in the *Brahmasūtra*, the *Yogasūtra*, the *Vyākaraṇasūtra*. The word "lipikāra" (one who writes) occurs in Pāṇini's *Vyākaraṇasūtra*, also the word "grantha", meaning a book. That we knew the art of writing (that we had a script) from the time of the Sūtras is proved by this. However, Indians of the time kept their writing to the minimum.

According to the book I mentioned above, writing was used only for purposes like publishing royal fiat. The śāstras and literary works were not written down but memorised and taught orally. It is not only the Vedic Samhitā (collection of

mantras) that was not written down; even the Brāhmaṇas which explain the Vedic rites were not put down in writing. According to the author of the book, in these texts there is no mention of any bark or any kind of leather that could have served the purpose of paper then. Nor is there in it any reference to ink or any writing instrument. The author says that the earliest Brāhmī script discovered belongs to the edicts of Aśoka, 3rd century BC – these are connected with Buddhism. In the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata there are references to Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas receiving their vidyābhyāsa, but there is no mention that they learned to write. According to the same author, in the life of the Buddha entitled *Laṅkāvatāra*, there is a mention of the child Buddha (Siddhārtha) having learned to write. What is heard by the ear and learnt is “Śruti”; what is memorised and practised and taught is “Smṛti”. Even if these could be written down, the ideal was not to make a subject “cheap” in that manner with the likelihood of its being forgotten, so says the author of the book.

A student who learns the Vedas by reading, a “likhitapāṭhaka”, was looked down upon and called “pāṭhākādhama”. The book referred to above says that the practice of writing down the śāstras commenced with the Buddhists. And that was not without reason.

Waging wars, internal policing and working as state officials – all these formed part of Kṣatriya dharma. The Vaiśya had to protect cattle and carry on trade. Members of the fourth varṇa earned their livelihood by manual labour. If all these people were asked to spend many years in the gurukula in the same way as Brāhmin children, insisting that they should sharpen their minds, cultivate their power of memory and learn without reading and writing, what use would be knowledge so gained in their occupation in later life? Not only would it not be useful, it might even prove to be a hindrance. The reason: according to their varṇa they had, in their childhood and youth, to learn by observation and practice the occupation they were to pursue in later life. Kṣatriyas had to learn the use of weapons, Vaiśya children had to learn trade and commerce by closely watching transactions and business practices. Others had to learn their work by apprenticing themselves to their father or grandfather.

The need for constant memorising would be an obstacle to such practical training. *In respect of learning by memorising* these castes would not have the advantage of the impetus given by their forefathers, the momentum of the “pedalling” done by them. I do not wish to speak in demeaning terms about these castes. That is why I have emphasised the words “in respect of learning by memorising”. Everyone excels in the skill needed for his hereditary occupation. A young Brāhmin will take a lifetime to wield the sword in the manner a Kṣatriya lad does. Even grown-ups in other communities will not be able to deal in a commodity and make a profit by selling it in the same way as a Vaiśyā boy does. It is the same with the hard work put in by the fourth varṇa: by the time a Brāhmin woman washes one pancapātra (vessel used in ritual), a young maidservant will have washed all the dishes in the household.

As stated in the book referred to above, it was the Buddhists who changed the

The Guru Tradition

system of education from that of learning by listening to learning by reading, from the use of the ear to the use of the eye. When education was given chiefly to Brāhmins, teaching orally and learning by listening were found sufficient. When the Buddhists started schools for other communities along with Brāhmins it became necessary to give instruction through reading instead of writing and not through memorising.

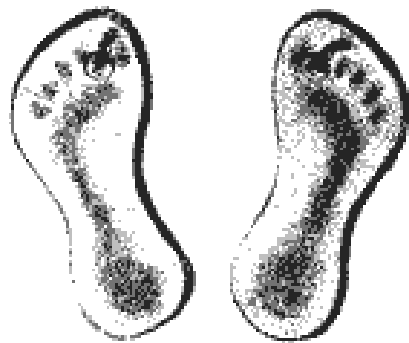
Even so, communities other than Brāhmins, and next to them Kṣatriyas, did not join these Buddhist institutions in any large numbers. Not only that, until recently, they learned the skills of their respective hereditary occupations through practical training. Or in their oral tradition they memorised the verses pertaining to their respective crafts and trades as had been the practice from early times. You go to an Ayurvedic physician: you will hear him reeling off the verses relating to his prescription. The *sthapati* or master carpenter also recites verses pertaining to his job.

It has now become customary for people to put the question: "Do you know to read and write?" Until some generations ago, village folk knew neither. But so far as their work or occupation was concerned they were better than a B.E. or a B.Tech. of today. Some of these villagers must have learned to read and memorise a few verses and others must have memorised the same by listening to them. Only a few must have learned to write at all. Even if they did not have any remarkable memory power, they must have been sufficiently intelligent to memorise the lessons pertaining at least to their subject. They would not have bothered about subjects and stories of little relevance to them.

It is not that there were no dullards among Brāhmins. Also we know from the history of our past that other castes also produced men of outstanding intelligence. Such men are still to be met with in these castes.

After the appearance of big Buddhist educational institutions, it became the practice to give instruction through writing. Another reason for this practice was the continuous development in the *śāstras*, the emergence of new *śāstras*, arts, and sciences (*vijñāna*). How was it possible to preserve knowledge in all these subjects by memorising the lessons however keen one's intelligence was, even if it was sharp like the *kuśa* grass? So it became necessary to put everything down in writing for the purpose of teaching.

Part Five



Part Five

Big Vedic universities

When the Buddhists and the Jainas became a force with the establishment of big educational institutions, could the other religion, that is the Vedic religion, lag behind if it were to hold its head high?

Thus Hindus too started big schools to teach the Veda-vidyā-s along with other subjects. There is always a new awakening in any field when there is opposition to it. There is then also a new spurt of energy among those engaged in it. In our own times we notice how the propagation of atheism (nāstikya) has created a new awakening among believers. People who had no devotion or neglected their religious observances, people who were no better than idlers, have come forward as āstikas (believers). And this has led to a number of kumbhābhisekas and the holding of religious discourses. Also people have begun to perform worship at home and observe some religious vow or other.

During the time of the Buddha, Brāhmins were to some extent ignorant of their traditions. The Buddha criticised their religion and big schools were established in support of Buddhism. As a reaction to this there was a gradual awakening among a section of the Vedic community. They too wanted to start big schools like the Buddhists and acquire learning in several subjects. Brāhmins joined these institutions in large numbers. Thus there emerged big educational institutions belonging to the Vedic religion and to Buddhism and Jainism as well. All this led to a growth in Vedic and non-Vedic philosophies, in literature, in the sciences and in the arts.

The Vedic religion and culture had grown without any organisation behind them and purely on the strength of the personal anuṣṭhāna (religious observances) of individuals. When Buddhism and Jainism developed on an organisational basis, with the cry "Sangham śaraṇam gaṇchāmi",¹ the need for some kind of organisation was felt among followers of our religion too. I have spoken about this before. Whatever the extent to which Śankarācārya had revived the old order it was found that our gurukulas under individual ācāryas were not adequate to meet the challenge of the universities belonging to the new religions. It was increasingly found necessary to create our own educational institutions on an organised basis, each under a number of teachers, to give instruction not only in the Vedas, but in the arts and the sciences of the time. It was during this period that the pāṭhaśālā began to appear along with the gurukula.

In the North such big Vedic pāṭhaśālās were called *ṭol*. An institution similar to the elementary school is called a pāṭhaśālā there. The *ṭol* teaches grammar in detail apart from astronomy, poetry, etc.

Thus there were many Hindu teaching establishments in the old days.

In earlier times, the ācārya was not paid any salary and he was satisfied with the dakṣiṇā, whatever it was, that the student gave him after completing his education.

¹ "I go to the order for refuge". "Sangham" is usually translated as "order", the order of monks here. It implies a "joining together", an "organisation"

The Guru Tradition

This class of ācāryas faded away and a new class of upādhyāyas took their place and they were supported by kings, nobles and local people or by endowments.

(It was not only the Brāhmin who received royal support for carrying on his hereditary occupation but others too like the potter, the washerman, the pūjāri who conducted the pūjā of the village deity, the drummer, etc.)

The custom followed by the student to obtain his food in the old days: he begged for alms and what he received in this manner he gave to his guru's wife. She did her own cooking because the rites called "Vaiśvadeva-bali" and the worship of the gods in the gurukula could not be performed with the bhikṣā brought by the pupil. A householder, according to the śāstras, is not allowed to take cooked food from others. So there is separate cooking in the guru's household.

Although in the old days the rulers did not make royal endowments as their counterparts in later times were to do for the maintenance of educational institutions, they did give donations to the ācāryas of their time. This they did not only to nurture virtuous and distinguished scholars and earn their blessings but also to help them in the performance of sacrifices so essential to the prosperity of the kingdom. It was out of such donations received from the kings as well as out of the gifts of land and gold that the ācāryas of ancient times maintained their gurukulas and households and performed yāgas in addition. The guru's wife would feed the student not only with the alms he brought. She would supplement it with what she cooked for the household. She would ask the student with much affection to eat well. On festive days the guru would make him gifts of clothes, etc. and give him his blessings. In this way, just as the student had taken refuge under the guru, surrendering himself in body and spirit and giving up all his material possessions, the guru blessed him with all his resources of body, material and spirit.

With the disappearance of this noble system of education and with the starting of big schools came the system of upādhyāyas. Maintained as they were through salaries paid from royal endowments they were concerned only with imparting knowledge to their students. As mentioned before, it was because of unavoidable circumstances that such a system of salaried teachers came into force.

When the frontiers of knowledge extended — when new subjects developed — it became necessary for many upādhyāyas to work together in the same educational institution. Also different teachers had to hold classes for different students. In between, when the Brāhminic dharma declined with the spread of other religions and the gurukula system weakened, similar schools (big in scale and with a number of teachers) had to be created to restore Veda-vidyā to its earlier glory.

The gurukula elements in big schools

Though these new institutions were not of the same high standard as the earlier gurukulas, it does not mean that they were as bad as present-day colleges and universities are. In a sense they too were gurukulas. Their students did not live at home and go to the vidyāsālā every day. They resided in the vidyāsālā and studied there. From this you should not think that there was anything like the

The Guru Tradition

present-day hostel then. In the hostel nowadays there is a single warden for a large number of students and the teachers do not live with them. In the vidyāśālās mentioned by me it was different. The students were not separated from the teachers – the two stayed together. Instead of one warden looking after a large number of students, a number of teachers looked after them, residing with them to ensure their discipline. The teacher who taught a number of students who constituted a class was also their warden. Today, as a result of unsatisfactory discipline, the students are abandoned to their ways. But even in the large vidyāśālās of the time I am speaking about, when the number of gurukulas under individual teachers had decreased, the students lived under the strict discipline of their masters.

In Takṣaśilā, which was Buddhist, the system was that each upādhyāya had under him a certain number of children who were exclusively his students. Here a number of gurukulas were conducted at the same place. But it was not like a centralised university. Nālandā, however, resembled in structure the university of later times. But what we described as the gurukulas of Takṣaśilā did not exactly qualify to be so called because they had one big drawback, namely, the teachers were paid salaries from the fees collected from the students. If the students were unable to pay their fees they had to compensate for it by doing physical work. How can you compare these institutions to the gurukulas of old? It was in one such ancient gurukula that Kṛṣṇa, though he was the Lord himself, had to do physical work (kainkarya). Not a word was spoken about dakṣiṇā in these old gurukulas until the entire education of the pupil had been completed.

In the Buddhist educational institutions of later times the teachers were monks and they lived in vihāras where all their needs were met. Even so they charged their students a fee. However, their system deserves to be appreciated for the reason that under it the students were divided into groups, each being placed under a teacher. Attention was paid to each student individually.

In the Vedic school, where hundreds of students studied, it is likely bhikṣācārya was not practised. Probably only those who directly went to study the Vedas and the Upaniṣads observed bhikṣācārya. But even in the case of the other students there was no slackness as we witness today. Now the students eat what they like, see what they like and speak what they like. The teachers then maintained control over all aspects of the student's life. Above all, what is discarded today as of no basic value to education was given the highest importance in these gurukulas: I mean the Vedic schools of later times too gave importance to religious observances without the slightest lapse on the part of the students. Indeed, this has been the living force of our great civilisation, its very life-breath.

If you examine the literature, history and royal edicts of that time it will be seen that the quality of both students and teachers in the vidyāśālās was of a high order. Although not equal to the gurukulas of the ancient ṛṣis, we learn that in these later schools the teacher-student relationship was based on high ideals. Learned teachers of good character and conduct taught here students who were truly interested in learning, students who were humble and devoted to their teachers.

If there were a number of men who had mastery over a śāstra or an art in some

corner of the country, students from a thousand or two thousand miles away sought them at a time when there were no railway trains, aeroplanes or postal communication. They left their homes, friends and relatives and travelled far to learn at the vidyāśālā there. I will give one or two instances.

Kāñcī as a centre of education

Of the vidyāśālās all over the country connected with the Vedic dharma I will speak in particular about those in the Kāñcī maṇḍala. Kāñcīpuram has always been a centre of study of various śāstras and of the philosophical inquiry connected with a number of religious traditions. The great saint Appar Svāmin said about Kāñcī: "*Kalviyaikaraiyillala, Kacci-mānagar* (the great city of Kāñcī with limitless education – a vast lake of education without bounds). That Appar spoke like this about the city is of special significance. There are some great men, jñānins, who have realised Śvara and who have the strength to bless others, but they may not be educated to any level in the formal sense. They may even believe that a high level of education or erudition is not necessary. In recent times, Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Paramahansa was one such. There are other great men who must have, so to speak, "reached the other shore of education" (that is they are vastly learned). Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa's first disciple Vivekānanda was one such. Appar Svāmin was also like this in the matter of being highly educated. When he was a Jaina, with the name of Dharmasena, he studied at the Jaina school of Tiruppātiripuliyūr and became fully conversant with the Jaina system of thought. He was the humblest of the humble and in his *Tevāram* verses (Tamil Śaiva hymns) we see his profound knowledge of all śāstras including the Upanisads. It is particularly significant for such a man to say that Kāñcī was specially important for education.

Kāñcīpuram is associated with the sarvajña-pīṭha ("seat of omniscience"). Only that seat is called "sarvajña-pīṭha" which is ascended by men who answer questions put by scholars in all the śāstras. We read in books that the pīṭha would have four doors and many steps leading up to the seat, that on every step there would be an image that would put a question (to the man going up the steps) and declare: "Only if you answer this question may you ascend the next step." Whatever it be, it is certain that only those who answered questions asked by great scholars well versed in many śāstras could occupy the pīṭha. Our Ācārya (Śankarācārya) ascended the sarvajña-pīṭha in this way.

We know as a fact of history that, apart from men learned in Hinduism, there were erudite Buddhists and Jainas in Kāñcīpuram. Learned Buddhists like Dingnāga and Dharmapāla belonged to Kāñcī. Maṇimekalai was initiated into Buddhism here by Aravaṇavadigaḷ. A section of Kāñcī called Tirupparuttikunṣam was a big Jaina centre. Fierce ways of worship, not based on any religious work or philosophical concept, nor related to the Vedas, like Kāpālika and Kāḷāmukha tried to take root in the Kāñcī maṇḍala. Śankarācārya made the eight Kāḷis here gentle and benign and installed the Śrīcakra before Ambā Karmākṣī. However, all this is not relevant to our present subject of education. My point is that Kāñcī was a place where discussions were held not only by learned men belonging to the various Hindu siddhāntas but also by Buddhists and Jainas. Much could be said on this subject, but not now. I have now to tell you the story of my new discovery.

“My research” regarding ghaṭikās

It was while wanting to speak to you about my research work that I talked about “guru”, “vādhyar” (“upādhyāya”), etc, as an introduction, and I drifted afar. I am not going to delay the story of my research any further.

You must have heard the term “ghaṭikāsthāna”. Or it may seem to you that you have heard it — or you may not have heard it at all. Though I may seem to be joking about it, I must say with regret that knowledge about our ancient śāstras, about our ancient system of education and about the establishments created for them is precious little. When I inquired about ghaṭikāsthāna of people who I thought should know about it, I received no information from them. Some, though, claimed that they had heard the name. While many ghaṭikāsthānas had existed in Tamil Nāḍu, these people said: “Vidyāśālās called ghaṭikāsthānas have existed only in the Godāvārī valley. We don't know anything beyond them.” I was happy that they knew at least that the term ghaṭikāsthāna meant a vidyāśālā.

The name “ghaṭikāsthāna” denotes an educational institution in which the Vedas and śāstras were taught along with the arts and sciences of the time. I wonder whether in later times the name applied also to schools which had nothing to do with Vedic learning. Originally the name meant a school where the Vedas formed the chief subject. In Tamil they say “ghaṭikā” for short.

I spoke to you about the existence of many educational institutions which were not exactly gurukulas but which had many teachers giving instruction to a large number of students not only in the Vedas but also in secular subjects. I also observed that such institutions, which had been few before the Buddha, increased in number after him. With a little research I was able to find out that these institutions were called ghaṭikāsthānas. The educational institutions in Kāñcī I referred to were such ghaṭikāsthānas. There is no need to go to the Godāvārī or Gangotrī for them.¹

The next step in my research was to find out through a study of history, literature and epigraphy where these ghaṭikās had existed. I did a great deal of investigation. I will speak about it a bit later. Haven't I started it all to blow my own trumpet?

Why the name “ghaṭika”?

What aroused my curiosity particularly was the name “ghaṭikā” and my efforts to find an explanation for it made me plunge into my investigations.

One meaning of “ghaṭikā” is “a small pot”. “Ghaṭa” means a “big pot” “Ghaṭikā” means a pot smaller than a ghaṭa. Another meaning of the word is a unit of time (*nāzhikai*² in Tamil). I became eager to know in what sense “ghaṭikā” was used for a vidyāśālā. None of the people I questioned about it knew the answer. Eventually, with all my investigation or probing (*tonḍipārkaḷ*), I passed in my

¹ The Paramaguru, speaking to a Tamil audience, wants to stress the point that ghaṭikāsthānas had existed right in their own region.

² One *nāzhikai* is 24 minutes.

research work. I am now weaving a yarn to boast about it!

The Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, has printed many works from palm-leaf manuscripts. Recently I was reading its publication, *Ābhoga*. In speaking about this work I must tell you about the book that is its "father", the book that is its "grandfather" or "great-grandfather", etc. Since all these are Advaitic śāstras it is good for you to know a little bit about them. Let me tell you.

Vyāsa composed the *Brahmasūtra* and Śankarācārya wrote a commentary on it. Vācaspatī Miśra wrote an explanatory commentary on this commentary – he called it *Bhāmatī* after his wife. As a commentary on the commentary called *Bhāmatī*, Amalānanda wrote the *Kalpataru*. Now *Ābhoga* is a commentary by Lakṣmīnṛsimha on the *Kalpataru*. That means if Śankarācārya's commentary is the child of the *Brahmasūtra*, *Ābhoga* is the grandchild's grandchild.

After reading *Ābhoga*, I had to refer to the book that is its "father", *Kalpataru*. In one passage in it there was a mention of "ghaṭikāsthāna".

The reference was in the explanation to the 24th sūtra, fourth pāda, third chapter of *Brahmasūtra*. It is the passage in which the sūtrakāra or author, Vyāsa, expresses the opinion that there is such a thing as sannyāsaśrama. Jaimini in his *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* contends that a man attains mokṣa directly by performing Vedic karma as a gṛhastha or householder and that there should be no sannyāsa in which Vedic karma is eschewed. Vyāsa rebuts this view and establishes that there is a tūrīya or fourth āśrama (that is sannyāsa).

The qualifications of a sannyāsin are given by Amalānanda in his *Kalpataru*. The sannyāsin must remove his śikhā (tuft of hair) and must have a shaven head. He must also cut off his sacred thread – such is the general belief. However, according to some, a sannyāsin can keep his śikhā and sacred thread. Such is the custom among followers of the Rāmānuja siddhānta (Viśiṣṭādvaita). The author of the *Kalpataru* gives his opinion as to which is the right view:

"Ye tu śikhā-yajñopavīta-tyāga-rūpa-pāramahansa-vṛttim na manyante te na paśyanti pratyakṣa ghaṭikāsthāneṣu pathyamāna Atharvaṇīm Śrutim – saśikham vapanam kṛtvā bahis-sūtram tyajet budhaḥ".

(They say that the man who goes to the highest level among sannyāsins, the Paramahansa state, need not shave his head and cut off his sacred thread. Those who speak thus do not seem to have heard the words of the Atharvaveda spoken by those who study the Vedas in the ghaṭikāsthāna: "The wise man who takes to sannyāsa must remove his śikhā and discard his sacred thread.")

Another important matter we learn from this is that in the period under reference the study of the Atharvaveda had not been totally discontinued – that the fourth Veda was also taught. Let that be. In this passage the term "ghaṭikāsthāna" is mentioned. The reference to students studying the Vedas in the ghaṭikāsthāna is contained in an ancient Advaitic text – so it means that the ghaṭikāsthānas were highly respected by learned people.

1 This discourse was given in 1965.

We learn from what Amalānanda says in the concluding part of his *Kalpataru* that he was a contemporary of Kṛṣṇa and Mahādeva of the Yādava dynasty of Devagiri, c mid-13th century. (It means 100 or 150 years after Rāmānuja.) I looked for authoritative references to ghaṭikāsthānas before and after this date. My research led me to 1,000 years before the time of Amalānanda.

The antiquity of ghaṭikās

In the beginning of the 4th century AD, a certain king studied under a guru in a ghaṭikāsthāna. He belonged to the Śimoga (Shimoga) region of Karnāṭaka. And the ghaṭikāsthāna where he studied was in Kāñcīpuram! The fame of Kāñcī as a centre of learning was so great that a king living several hundreds miles away wanted to go and study there. Since his guru also went with him to study there, it means that the śāstras were taught in depth in this ghaṭikāsthāna.

Our people have travelled 1,000 or 1,500 miles seeking knowledge and enlightenment during times when there was no transport either by rail or by road. They have travelled from Kāñcī to Kāśī and Pāṭaliputra and so on. I spoke to you about Patañjali having taught at Cidambaram (Chidambaram). A disciple had come from Gaudadeśa or Bengāl to learn from him. He was called Gauda. Śankarācārya's guru was his "grand pupil" (disciple's disciple). When Śankara was teaching Vedānta in Kāśī a student called Sanandana came from the Coja country to learn from him: Sanandana came to be called Padmapāda¹ later.

The king who went to Kāñcī from Śimoga was Mayūravarmaṇ. His guru was Viraśarmaṇ.

("Śarmaṇ" denotes a Brāhmin, "Varmaṇ" a Kṣatriya, "Gupta" a Vaiśya, and "Dāsa" a Śūdra.)

The two, Mayūravarmaṇ and Viraśarmaṇ, went to Kāñcī to learn all śāstras ("pravacanam nikhilam"), so says the epigraph or śāsana of Kākusthavarmaṇ who ruled two regnal periods subsequent to Mayūravarmaṇ. This inscription is on the pillar of the Śrī Praṇaveśvarasvāmin temple in Talagunṭa in Śimoga district. The text of the inscription is printed in the *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. VIII.

"yaḥ prayāya Pallavendrapurim"

Referring to Kāñcī as Pallavendrapurī the inscription says that the king joined the ghaṭikā ("ghaṭikām viveśa").

The king or the prince, after having completed his education under his guru, came with his teacher to Kāñcīpuram to learn the śāstras in their entirety. From the fact that people came to study at the ghaṭikā in Kāñcī we learn that the Tamil-speaking region too had great centres of learning like the universities of Nālandā and Takṣaśilā.

During the time of Mayūravarmaṇ, that is in the 4th century AD, the Pallava king Skandaśiśya was ruling from Kāñcīpuram. We learn from another epigraph – that of Vijayanandivarmaṇ III – at Velūrpālayam that Skandaśiśya won a ghaṭikā after

¹ There is a reference to him in an earlier chapter on "guru-bhakti"

defeating another king called Satyasena. Velūrpālayam is seven miles north-west of Arakonam (in North Arcot district). This epigraph is printed in *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. II, Part V.

*“Skandaśiṣyastato abhavad-dvijānām ghaṭikām
rājāṅṅ Satyasenāt jahāra yaḥ”*

“Dvijānām ghaṭikām” means the “ghaṭikā of Brahmins”. It is clear from this that the ghaṭika was concerned with Vedic learning. And from the *Kalpataru* we gather that the Atharvaveda, which is not learned now, was studied in the ghaṭikā. Since the acquisition of the ghaṭikā from a rival king is specially mentioned, it means it must have been a large establishment, similar to a university.

It is likely that, apart from Veda-vidyā, other subjects studied by the castes that have the right to learn the Vedās – Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas – were taught in the ghaṭikās. It must be surmised that Skandaśiṣya acquired the ghaṭikā from Satyasena because the ghaṭikā, where the art of warfare was taught, turned out warriors for future generations. Or it may be that the rājā in question won the ghaṭikā from another ruler for the simple reason that it was a citadel of knowledge.

The word “dvija” means “twice-born”. All the first three varṇas, by virtue of the upanayana saṁskāra or rite, are regarded as born a second time and are dvijas. So in the ghaṭikās, said to belong to dvijas, Kṣatriyas must have also studied. Mayūravarman was a Kṣatriya.

Satyasena was the king from whom Skandaśiṣya won the ghaṭikā. His name suggests that he must have been one of the Satyaputta (“putta” is from “putra”) kings mentioned in the Aśokan edicts. I have done some research to arrive at the conclusion that these Satyaputas were rulers of of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam.

From another Velūrpālayam inscription we learn that Narasimhavarman, apart from building the Kailāsanātha temple in Kāñcīpuram, rebuilt a ghaṭikāsthāna for Brāhmins (here the word “dvijānam” occurs). “Punar vyathāt” (built again): such being the reference it means that long before the time of Narasimhavarman there was a ghaṭikā and that it had gone into disrepair. Realising its importance Narasimhavarman must have rebuilt it. The inscription is in beautiful verse form:

*Tatputrasūnaḥ Narasimhavarmā
Punarvyathāt yo ghaṭikām dvijānām
Śilāmayam veśma Śaśāṅkamauleḥ
Kailāsakaḷpam ca Mahendrakalpam*

Stone temples

“Śilāmayam veśma” suggests a house made of granite. Since a temple means today a structure of stone kept upon stone, why should this be specially mentioned? There is a reason for doing so. In the beginning of the 7th century, before the time of Mahendrarvarman, temples were built of bricks, wood, etc. It was Mahendrarvarman who built the first stone temple. Instead of “built” we must say he was the one who “took it”. Even in his time the practice of cutting stone from the mountains and making slabs for the construction of temples had not

started. Then how were stone temples built? Temples were carved out from huge rocks. This was the first development from the early temples of bricks and wood. The second development took place 100 years after Mahendravarman, during the time of Narasimhavarman II (Rājasimha Pallava). It was he who had big rocks broken into pieces to build temples by placing stone upon stone. The first such temple was the Kailāsanātha temple of Kāñcīpuram. The reference in "śilāmayam veśma" is to this temple.

When an entire temple is carved out of a rock (this is what is meant in Tamil as *kutaivarai kovil*) it suggests that we go in search of the Lord. Now the rock was made to come in search of us and it was broken down and its pieces built together like a structure of bricks. In this way the Kailāsanātha temple was the first sanctuary to be built of stones in which the Lord himself came in search of us.

This temple, built as Kailāsa on earth, is mentioned as "Kailāsa-kalpa". It is referred to briefly as "Mahaendrakalpa" to denote that it was built by Mahendravarman, using his own method of construction.

Mahendravarman, who was brought back to the Vedic religion from Jainism by Appar Svāmin, built cave temples in Māmaṇḍūr, Pallāvaram (Pallavarapuram), and below the Malaikoṭṭai (Rock Fort) temple in Tirucirapalli. He lived in the early 7th century AD. His son was also a Narasimhavarman. He was the "Māmalla" who went as a conqueror up to Vātāpi. But it was not he who built the Kailāsanātha temple. That sanctuary was built by Narasimhavarman I. The ruler who was called "Māmalla" was his great-grandson, Narasimhavarman II. In order not to confuse him with his great-grandfather, Narasimhavarman I, he is referred to by his regnal name of Rājasimha. Since he came in the famous line of Mahendravarman and built temples, he referred to his construction as "Mahendrakalpa".

"Śaśānkamauli" is Parameśvara who is also known as "Candraśekhara" "Śilāmayam veśma Śaśānkamauleh!" — the "śa-kāra alliteration is pleasing to the ear.

The temple and the ghatikā

The ghatikā was for the study of the Vedas – and the temple was for the worship of Deva ("Devārādhana"). That Narasimhavarman built both is extremely appropriate. The Daivasānnidhya¹ in a temple is achieved by the prāna-pratiṣṭha carried out with Vedic mantras, kumbhābhīṣeka and pūjā. The temple is the fruit that hangs from the tree of Sanātana dharma which is sustained by the roots constituted by the Vedas. The "fruit", that is the "temple", is to be enjoyed" by all. The "cause" of this fruit is hidden as roots in the form of the Vedas.²

It was in the line of kings like Narasimhavarman that, after the rājās went into decline, the Cettiars and Pillais (also Nagarattārs) appeared to foster our religion.

¹The living presence of the divine; nearness to the divine.

²Here the Paramaguru plays upon the word "Mārai" which literally means "hidden". It is also the Tamil word for the Vedas.

They kept up the tradition of renovating temples and creating pāṭhaśālās. (When a temple was renovated, they also established a pāṭhaśālā together with it.)

The fruit of studying in a pāṭhasāla is indeed this, viz., that the feet of the all-knowing (omniscient) Īśvara will be available for meditation and worship. It was only for the realisation of this fruit that temples were built by our forefathers.

In the passage on education in *Tirukural*, Tiruvaḷḷuvar gives the name of "Vālarivan" for Īśvara. It is indeed a word pregnant with meaning. "Vālarivan" is one who knows everything (omniscient). However much one may be learned or educated, one should not be conceited about it. One should feel humble because one's knowledge is nothing but a drop compared to the (ocean of) omniscience of the Lord.

In the eighth century

Another stone inscription relating to a ghaṭikāsthāna belongs to the 8th century. It shows that the ghaṭikā was a prosperous institution (*South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. IV). This inscription is to be found in the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple, Kāñcīpuram.

Once the main branch of the Pallava dynasty did not have an heir and the result was anarchy in Kāñcīpuram. There was then in another branch of the dynasty a ruler of minor importance called Hiraṇyavarman. The leading citizens of Kāñcīpuram went in a delegation to him and appealed to him to send his son Parameśvaravarman to be crowned king in Kāñcīpuram. Hiraṇyavarman agreed. Soon after, Vedic savants conducted the coronation ceremony of Parameśvaravarman and gave him the title of Nandivarmapallava. While mentioning this, the inscription referred to above adds that there were teachers from the ghaṭikā not only in the "delegation" of the Kāñcīpuram citizens to Hiraṇyavarman but also among the Brāhmins who conducted the coronation ceremony. Here is proof of the high place accorded to the ghaṭikāsthāna and the esteem in which its teachers were held.

The Cālukyas who ruled from Vātāpi (Bādāmi) had the titles of "Vikramāditya" and "Satyāśraya". They and the Pallavas were frequently at war – victory and defeat more or less alternated. On one of the pillars of the Kailāsanātha temple of Kāñcī (this is west of the mahāmaṇḍapa), there is an inscription mentioning the charities of one of these Cālukya rulers, Vikramāditya Satyāśraya. It respectfully describes the inmates of the ghaṭikā in Kāñcī as "mahājana" and warns in Sanskrit that "whoever does harm to this dharma would incur the sin of killing the mahājana of the ghaṭikā."

Format of a śāsana

A royal edict has generally three parts. In the first part is the "praśasti" or words of praise. In this praśasti the rājā who made a particular donation, with the assurance of its being made permanent, is extolled. So also his ancestors. It is the second part of the inscription that gives the details of the charity – to whom it was made, the date on which it was made, and the nature of the charity, etc. The

concluding part has "Vyāsagītā" verses. For the proper execution of the endowment made, the "dharmakartās" (those in charge of religious and charitable work in temples and other places) are exhorted to execute it honestly. Thereby they would earn merit (as described in the inscription). By not executing the endowment properly and honestly they would incur sins as listed. Usually, mention is made of "the sin of killing a black cow on the banks of the Ganga". This is the worst of sins. Mentioned instead of this in the above inscription is: "incurring the sin of killing the ghatikā-mahājana". Hence it follows that killing the mahājana in the ghatikā was considered as great a sin as killing a black cow on the banks of the Gangā.

7,000 students

From another stone inscription we have information of a big ghatikā which was almost like an entire village. It indeed arouses our wonder. Seven thousand students studied in this ghatikā. The inscription pertaining to this is on a rock in the river Nivā flowing past the village Tiruvaḷḷam near Guḍiattam in North Arcot district. It has been discovered as belonging to the first half of the 8th century. The inscription is published in *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. I, Part I. Most stone inscriptions relate to charities, endowments, etc. and this too, after speaking about a charitable act, warns: "Whoever does damage to this 'dharma' will earn the sin of killing all of 7,000 inmates in the ghatikā."

The "Kāśākudī" copper-plate inscriptions of Nandivarma Pallava are famous. In Part II, Vol. II, of the book of inscriptions I referred to earlier, we learn how the kings of the time built ghatikās with great respect for, and affirmation of faith in, Brāhmins (they are called Bhūdevas – gods of earth). The kings were called Kṣātracūdāmanis – Kṣatriyas who were like crest-jewels of their caste. Even though the ācāryas of the ghatikāsthāna did not conduct any gurukula they merited being called "deva-dvijas" since they were conversant with all the four Vedas and excelled in the performance of rites according to dharma.

Similar to the ghatikā of 7,000 students, we also come to know about ghatikās with 3,000 and 1,000 inmates. There is a village called Brahmadeyam in the taluq of Ceyyāru of North Arcot. The very word "Brahmadeyam" means that which has been offered to Brāhmins. There is a temple of Candramaulīśvara in this village. In a niche in one of the walls of the *sanctum sanctorum* is an inscription mentioning "*trairājyaghatikāmadhyastamuvāyiram*". The mention of "*muvaḷḷiram*" (three thousand in Tamil) shows that 3,000 students studied in the ghatikā in a continuous stream and this drew the attention and respect of all people. In another Tamil inscription is mentioned "*ghatikai ezhāyiram*" ("ghatikā of seven thousand"). In a certain place, a ghatikā in which a thousand students studied is referred to as "ghatikā-sahasram".

Some people opine that the figures 7,000, 3,000, etc. are an exaggeration. Even if we concede that they are and make an allowance for the exaggeration, is it not reasonable to think that there should have been at least half the number of

students in each of the ghatikās mentioned? Is it not remarkable also that more than 1,000 students studied Veda-śāstras at the same place?

In Āndhra and Karnāṭaka

Although it was in Kāñcīpuram that ghatikās were supported most – and it was there that they attained the heights of excellence – we know that even during the sixth century kings of the Telugu country had established ghatikās in the Godavari valley. When excavating a pond there in the Śikkulla agrahāra, Tuni tāluq, a copper-plate was discovered. It belonged to Vikramendravarman II of the Viṣṇukundin dynasty. The inscription states that he established a ghatikā “in a proper manner and earned a heap of merit” (Yathāvidhi vinirmāpita ghatikāvāpta’ punyaśaṅcayasya).

In Karnāṭaka we find inscriptions of the 12th century which refer to ghatikās. This will be seen from the *Epigraphica Karnāṭaka*.

In the Hemavati Tottappa temple of Kāmakonṭanahalli in Tumkūr district there is an inscription of Tribhuvana Mallideva Cola Mahārājā who ruled in the latter half of the 12th century. It speaks about a ghatikāsthāna in Hencārapattanam and the gifting away of a village before the Nonampeśvarasvāmin there. The inscription says: “Śrīmadu Hencārapattanata Mahā-ghatikāsthāna Śrī Nonampeśvaradevara sannidhānadalli...”

Māndayam is in Mysore¹. There, in Hajegere, an edict has been discovered of Śivamāra, a ruler of the Prthvi Konkaṇi dynasty. It mentions a gift of land and gives the name of the donee as Mādhaveśarman, belonging to the Haridasagotra. He is lauded as “one of a thousand belonging to a ghatikā” (Ghatikā-sahasrāya Haridasagotrāya Mādhaveśarmane”) *Epigraphica Karnāṭaka*, Māndya taluq, Vol. III, page 108.

There is a stone inscription of Cennarāyapattana belonging to 1442. In our history of ghatikās we have come to the middle of the 15th century, that is 1,100 years from early 4th century AD, when Mayūrarvarman came from Karnāṭaka to study at the ghatikā of Kāñcīpuram. Now many ghatikās had appeared in Karnāṭaka itself. Among them one belonging to the period of this inscription and established in the month of Bhādrapada in the Dundubhi year. It refers to the institution with respect and devotion as “ghatikāśrama” instead of “ghatikāsthāna”. We infer from this that, just as an individual guru had conducted a gurukula, here (in this ghatikā) a number of ācāryas gave instruction to hundreds of students and the place remained as sacred as an āśrama.

In the Coṣa land

The Coṣa kingdom was well known in the matter of Veda-śāstras and education, but the pāthashālās there were not known to have been called ghatikās. Even so we know that in Veppattūr (Vempattūr) in Tanjāvūr district there was a school in which great scholars taught and it was called a ghatikā. We discover this from the inscription of Rājendra Coṣa II in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Vedapurīśvara

¹ The reference is to the old princely state of Mysore which is now part of Karnataka.

temple in Tirukkazhittittai. This is the southern boundary of the region where ghaṭikās were to be found.

In Mahārāṣṭra

When I started speaking about ghaṭikās I mentioned Amalānanda. He lived in Devagiri now called Daulatābād. It is in Mahārāṣṭra (Maharashtra). Since he mentions ghaṭikās it is reasonable to presume that there were universities called ghaṭikās also in the region where he lived. Or during his period, mid-13th century, the fame of the ghaṭikās of Kāñcī must have been such as to have reached his ears. Students from all over the country and belonging to various traditions must have come to study at this ghaṭikā and, considering its reputation, he asks in surprise: "Does not so and so know about the students of the Atharvaveda chanting the mantra that speaks about sannyāsa?"

"Ghaṭikā" and "ghaṭikāra"

We know how ghaṭikās were famous. But how is the name ghaṭikā derived? I keep boasting about having seen so many inscriptions without trying to answer this question. Now should I not also "brag" about how I found out all about the name?

Everyone perhaps knows that "ghaṭa" means a "pot". A ghaṭikā is a small pot. We have, for instance, pairs, "latā-latikā", "patra-patrikā", and "ghata-ghatikā" in the same manner. The second word in each of these pairs is the diminutive form of the first. But what is the connection between "pot" and "school?"

I said "ghaṭikā" also means "nāzhikai" (a Tamil word, meaning a unit of time). It is in this sense that the term "amṛta-ghatikai" is used. Since time was measured by the water trickling from a pot, the unit of time called "nāzhikai" was named "ghaṭikā" after ghaṭa. You find the idea in "ghaṭikāra" ("time-piece, "watch", "clock").

"All right, but why should an educational institution which resembled a college be called a 'ghaṭikā'? Were the students always watching the ghaṭikā expecting the class to finish? And is the name derived from that?" These are some amusing thoughts. However, in academic matters of such seriousness – that is a subject concerned with Vedic learning — could a name suggesting ridicule be proper?

Ghaṭikācalam

There is a place called Śolingar which was called Colasimhapuram in the old days. (It is also known as Colalingapuram.) Another name for it is Ghaṭikācalam, meaning "Ghaṭikā Mountain". I inquired of people there about the significance of the word "ghaṭika". They said that by staying on this mountain for just one ghaṭikā – that is one *nāzhikai* – all evil, including trouble caused by malignant spirits, would vanish with the power and grace of the deity here, that is Narasimhamūrti. Hence the name "Ghaṭikācalam". This was of no help to my research.

I sought an explanation for the word "ghaṭikā" occurring in the name of the Tamil book, *Nānmanikkatikai*. I came to understand that "ghaṭikā" meant a "small piece" and that in this work four pieces of upadeśa, four gems, were strung

together in each verse – hence the name *Nānmanikkatikal*. From this also I could not make out how the term “ghaṭikā” was applied to an educational institution.

Rewarded at last

I made further inquiries about the word “ghaṭikā”. I long brooded over the word. I questioned learned people about it – but all in vain. However, my eagerness to know the meaning of the word as applied to an educational institution became only keener. And, at last, my inquiries yielded fruit.

Just as I found a reference to “ghaṭikā” in the *Kalpataru* which is considered an Uttaramīmāṃsā-śāstra, I found an explanation for the word in a Pūrvamīmāṃsā work. Happily, information relating to our education was obtained from Mīmāṃsā which is one of the caturdaśa vidyā-s (fourteen branches of learning).

In Prayāga, in the 5th century BC

A leading exponent of Pūrvamīmāṃsā, Kumārilabhaṭṭa, has written a commentary called *Tantravārttika*. In its “Kalpasūtrādhikaraṇa” is a verse (the subject of the verse is not relevant here) containing the phrase “ghaṭikā-mārgavṛttiṣu” and this is what is important to us.

I spoke about the existence of ghaṭikās from the 4th century AD up to 1,000 years thereafter and I pointed out, with pride, evidence for it in the form of royal inscriptions. Now we see that there were ghaṭikās in the 5th century BC, about a thousand years prior to the 4th century AD.¹ Evidence for this is something better than royal inscriptions, the word of a contemporary of our Acārya, the śāstraic pronouncement of Kumārilabhaṭṭa.

That is to say the educational institutions called “ghaṭikās” flourished for more than 2,000 years. If Śankarācārya introduced institutionalism in the Hindu religion, the education connected with that religion was also institutionalised during his time in the form of ghaṭikās. When the Buddhists began to wield some influence among the intellectuals, the Tārikikas and the Mīmāṃsakās opposed them. It appears that the ghaṭikās must have been established by bringing together scholars steeped in the Veda-vidyā. What was started then expanded over the centuries.

Apart from confirming the very early existence of the ghaṭikās we learn from Kumārilabhaṭṭa’s reference to them how these institutions were found in regions extending from the Gangā in the North to the land of the Coḷas in the South. Kumārila then lived at Prayāga which centuries later came to be called Allahabad. Since he mentions what educationists were familiar with (“ghaṭikā-mārga-vṛttiṣu”) it means that the educational institution called ghaṭikasthāna was known from Allahabad in the North to Veppattūr (Coḷa territory) in the South.

Let us leave aside questions like the origins of the ghaṭikās, their dates, the extent of the region where they existed. Was not our problem with the very name “ghaṭikā”?

¹This is based on the view that Śankara lived between 508 – 476 BC.

Light on name

We discover the reason behind the name "ghaṭikā" from the commentary of Bhaṭṭa Someśvara on Kumārilabhaṭṭa's *Tantravārttika*. Bhaṭṭa Someśvara explains "ghaṭikāsthāna" thus:

*Ādakausāla-jijñāsārtham tattad-Veda-bhāga-cinḥa-lekh-
yāni ghaṭikāyām kumbhākhyāyām nikṣipya, tattad-Veda-bhāga
parīkṣa-kāle tānyākṛisya, ākrsta lekhyā-cinhitam
Vedam paṭha ityadhyetarāḥ anuyujyante iti ghaṭikā-mārga-
vartino anuyogaḥ."*

The words, "anuyogeṣu ghaṭikā-mārga-vṛttiṣu", appears in a verse in *Tantravārttika*. The commenator (Bhaṭṭa Someśvara) describes what it means (or mentions what it refers to) and concludes by saying that this is "ghaṭikā-mārga-vartino anuyogaḥ"

"Ghaṭikā-mārga-vṛtti" means the "way of teaching as imparted in the ghaṭikā" Those who follow it are "ghaṭikā-mārga-vartīs" "Anuyoga" refers to the conducting of inquiries, or examinations.

From Someśvara's account of how examinations were conducted at the ghaṭikāsthāna we understand the reason behind the name "ghaṭikā" "Ghaṭikāyām kumbhākhyāyām" "kumbha" means a pot; the name "ghaṭika" is connected with the pot. Someśvara explains that the name "ghaṭikā" is derived from the fact that examinations were conducted by using pots in the schools called "ghaṭikās"

What is this method of examination or test? How do you account for the pot in it? A candidate answering a question paper in an examination nowadays after mugging up the subject is called "*ghaṭam-aṭṭān*" in Tamil. Is the name "ghaṭikā" derived from such an idea? I told you earlier that a name suggestive of ridicule could not have been applied to an educational institution that was much respected.

To find out whether a student's adhyayana is thorough he must be able to chant any mantra he is asked to chant. The purpose of an examination is to test this.

I will explain to you through a concrete example, and not in an abstract manner, how this test was conducted.

Suppose we want to find out whether the student being examined knows a particular mantra in the R̥gveda. He must chant it without a clue being given to its first word. Since adhyayana implies memorising, if the first word is given also, the student, in all likelihood, will be able to chant the entire mantra.

So he was given a mere indication, a number, for instance, and asked to chant the mantra the examiner had in mind.

How was this number given?

There are more than 10,000 mantras in the R̥gveda. To number them from 1 to 10,000 would be difficult. Fortunately, the Veda has been arranged into a number of divisions, each division having a number of sections, and each section having a

The Guru Tradition

number of sūktas further divided into a certain number of ṛks. A ṛk is a mantra and is like a śloka or verse.

In the division mentioned above there are two types. There are ten maṇḍalas and each maṇḍala is divided into "anuvākas" and each anuvāka is divided into "sūktās". This is one type. In the second type, there are eight "aṣṭakās" and each aṣṭakā has sub-divisions called "adhyāyas", each adhyāya being further divided into sūktas.

Now it is easy to test a student by giving him a clue in the form of a number (or numbers). Suppose an examiner gave the number 2-4-3-5. If the ghaṭikā in question followed the maṇḍala division, the student had to chant the fifth ṛk in the third sūkta of the fourth anuvāka in the second maṇḍala. If the aṣṭakā division was followed, the student had to chant the fifth ṛk in the third sūkta in the fourth adhyāya of the second aṣṭakā.

What is the connection between this and the ghaṭa or pot?

Instead of the examiner giving the number orally it would be clearer to the student if he wrote them down. So clues in the form of numbers were inscribed on bits of palm-leaf and kept in a pot. These bits of palm-leaf could be used again and again unlike the numbers orally given. They would, in addition, constitute documentary evidence in case any dispute arose with regard to the test.

During the examination the student had to take out a chit from the pot and chant the ṛk mentioned in it. Apart from single ṛks, the student was tested in the same manner with regard to sūktas and Pañcāti (the latter in the case of the Yajurveda).

The practice was followed in the election to the local administration in Tamil Nāḍu. It was called "*kudavolai*" election. An innocent child was asked to take out a chit from a number of chits in a pot. In the ghaṭikā examination the student himself must have taken out the chit or perhaps the teacher, or some intermediary. Instead of appointing the teacher himself the examiner, a third man was probably asked to take out the chit as the examiner.

The test was conducted in such a way that no doubts could arise about its propriety. Whether the examiner was the teacher himself or an outsider there was no room for the sort of malpractices we witness today like, for instance, the examinees being told the questions beforehand. The questions were in the form of numbers written or inscribed on chits kept in the pot and the student had to answer according to the numbers which he got as a matter of chance. There was thus no likelihood of any doubt arising with regard to the proper conduct of the examination.

From the explanation given by Bhaṭṭa Someśvara we learn that it was from the ghaṭā used in examining students that the vidyāśālā concerned was called ghaṭikā. In discovering the meaning of the name "ghaṭikā" there is the joy of finding a treasure!

A little bit of Sanskrit

Since I have spoken at length about the subject of teaching I will teach you a

little bit of Sanskrit by way of explaining the meaning of the passage quoted earlier from Bhaṭṭa Someśvara.

“Vedakauśala-jijñāsārtham” – to find out how much proficiency (a candidate) possesses in the Vedas; “tattad-Vedabhāga” – in those parts of the Vedas (that the students have studied); “cinhalekhyāni” – chits containing clues or indications; “ghaṭikāyām kumbhakhyāyām” – in pots that are called ghaṭikās, “nikṣipya” – after being kept (or put in them); “tattad Vedabhāga-parīkṣakāle” – when the examination in that part of the Veda is being conducted; “tāni ākrṣya” – after removing or taking them (that is the slips); “ākṛstalekhyā-cinhitam” – according to the clue contained (in the slip); “Vedaṃ paṭha iti” – chant the Veda; “adhyetārah” – adhyāpakās; “anuyujyate” – conduct (the examination).

Appropriateness of the pot

How fitting was the idea of involving the kumbha or pot in Vedic education. As stated earlier, the Veda dharma is a great tree. Its study, Vedādhyayana, constitutes its roots, What is the ultimate “phala” of this tree. “Phala” means “fruit.” I suppose you know that. The temple is the fruit of fulfilment of the Veda dharma. The gopurams, the vimānas, the images are imbued with the Vedic mantras and made to radiate for the well-being of the world. It is the kumbha that transmits the power of the mantras. The temple is made a temple by anointment of the gopuram, vimāna, kalaśas (they too are kumbhas!) and the divine idols with the sacred water (water imbued with the properties of the mantras) contained in the kumbha. Such is the nature of the kumbhābhiṣeka ceremony. The kumbha that is part of the fruit of the Vedas (the temple) becomes the ghaṭā at the time of the examination conducted in the vidyāśālā.

There was satisfaction and immense happiness in learning that the name “ghaṭikāsthāna” was derived in this way. There was also satisfaction in having passed in the research.

Vedic schools in Tamizhakam

Through this research we were able to find out that, like the big educational institutions called ghaṭikās in Tonḍaimaṇḍalam, there were large Veda pāṭhaśālās in other parts of the Tamil country also. But these latter were not known by the name of ghaṭikās.

There is a view prevalent now that learning did not flourish to the same extent in the South Arcot North Arcot and Chengalpaṭṭu areas as it did in the Cola, Paṇḍya and Tonḍai kingdoms. This view will be proved wrong if we study the inscriptions found in these areas. There were big vidyāśālās in these parts but they were not called ghaṭikāsthānas. In Bāhūr, which is between Cuddalore and Poṇḍicherry, five copper-plate inscriptions have been discovered. According to them there was a large vidyāśālā in Bāhūr which taught the caturdaśa-vidyā-s, each vidyā having a separate department. The inscription also mentions that, in the latter half of the ninth century, a minister of king Vijayanṛpatunga had donated three villages for its maintenance.

There is a Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple in Tribhuvanam (also called Tribhuvani) near Bāhūr (not to be confused with the Tribhuvanam of Tānjavūr district). On the eastern, western and northern walls of this temple there are inscriptions, dated 1048, belonging to the time of Rājādhirāja. We learn from these inscriptions that there was a fairly big vidyāśālā in Tribhuvanam which had 190 students and 12 teachers. Sixty students learned the Ṛgveda, 60 the Yajurveda, 20 the Sāmaveda and the remaining 50 the śāstras. Of them 70 specialised in Vedānta and the rare text of grammar called *Rūpāvatāra*. Apart from these subjects the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata and the Dharmaśāstra of Manu are also taught.

There is a Vaiṣṇava-āgama called Vaikhānasa. Among the four important temples of Śrīvaiṣṇavas – Śrīrangam, Tirupati, Kāñcīpuram and Melakote – in Tirupati alone are the rites conducted according to the Vaikhānasa-āgama. The remaining three follow the Pāncarātra-āgama. In the Tribhuvanam school Vaikhānasa was also one of the subjects taught.

According to the inscription, a noteworthy feature of this pāṭhaśālā (of Tribhuvanam) was that both teachers and taught were bound by rule not to be engaged in activities other than teaching and learning respectively.

Enṇāyiram is a village between Vizhupuram and Tiṇḍivanam. It is also known by another name, Rājarāja-Caturvedimangalam: the name denotes that the village had been donated by Rājarāja to Brāhmins well versed in the four Vedas. From an inscription of Rājendra Coḷa I, we learn that there was a big educational institution in Enṇāyiram with 340 students and 14 teachers. The students were divided into two batches – 270 in the lower class and 70 in the higher. Of the 270 in the lower class, 75 studied the Ṛgveda, 75 the Yajurveda, 20 the *Chāndogya śākhā* of the Sāmaveda, 20 the *Talavākāra śākhā* of the Sāmaveda, 20 the Śukla-Yajurveda or *Vājasaneyya*, 10 the Atharvaveda, 20 the *Bodhāyana Gṛhya-kalpa* which is one of the Vedāngas, and 40 *Rūpāvatāra*. (We have mentioned that 75 studied the Yajurveda and that 20 studied the Śukla-Yajurveda. “Kṛṣṇa” and “Śukla” are two divisions of the Yajurveda. The first-mentioned 75 must have studied the Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda. The majority of Yajurvedins in Tamiḷ Nāḍu belong to the “Kṛṣṇa” division.)

Atharvaveda

Since some centuries ago there has been hardly any following for the Atharvaveda nor has it been studied during the same period. However, during the 11th century, 10 students studied this Veda in the pāṭhaśālā at Enṇāyiram in Tamiḷ Nāḍu. When I first spoke to you about the story of ghaṭikās: I told you that students of the Atharvaveda were mentioned in the *Kaipataru*. The Atharvaveda must have been learned at Bāhūr also. The basis of our religion is constituted by the fourteen vidyā-s and there was a department each for these vidyā-s in our schools. So the Atharvaveda must also have been taught in them. In later times, for some reason, followers of the Atharvaveda dwindled in numbers and almost came to nil and it ceased to be studied.

Respect for many śāstras

In the higher class of 70 at Eṇṇāyiram, 25 learned grammar, 35 studied the Prabhākara siddhānta of Pūrvamīmāṃsā which is slightly different from the siddhānta of Kumārilabhaṭṭa, and 10 studied Vedānta or Uttaramīmāṃsā. (I am reminded of the inscription of Āditya Karikāla in the Nageśvarasvāmin temple of Kumbhakoṇam which mentions an endowment for the study of Prabhākara's Mīmāṃsā.)

According to another inscription in Eṇṇāyiram there was an endowment to feed Brāhmins (scholars and others) and Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Every day 506 Brāhmins were fed.

Pazhaya Śīvaram is about 12 miles from Kāñcīpuram. Near it, on the banks of Pālār, is Tirumukkūtal where there is a Vaiṣṇava temple. According to an inscription of Vīrarājendra Deva in this temple (date 1067), a vidyāśālā and a hospital were run from the income of the temple. In this school 10 students studied the Ṛgveda, 10 the Yajurveda, 20 grammar, 10 the Pāncarātra-āgama. You may remember that I told you of the Pāncarātra having a wider following than Vaikhānasa of the two Āgamas. It is mentioned that five Vaikhānasa Brāhmins conducted pūjā in a Śīva temple. They were called Śīvayogins. There were also three Śaiva Brāhmins in the vidyāśālā.

The Vedas and Āgamas

A point to be noted in the foregoing is that in these inscriptions the Brāhmins who studied the Vedas and śāstras and those who studied subjects connected with temple ritual – Pāncarātrins and Vaikhānasas – are mentioned separately. However, the differentiation is not total. In the same vidyāśālā the Vedas and Āgamas were both taught. The two were promoted as branches of the same Sanātana dharmā

In a stone inscription in Paṇayavaram, near Eṇṇāyiram, Brāhmins and Śīvayogins are mentioned separately as Vaidīkas and students of Āgamas. Fifty from the former group and 10 from the latter were fed every day. (In Keraḷa, during temple festivals, Brāhmins are fed even today¹ in the name of "agram". In those days Brāhmins in Tāmiḷ Nādu must also have been fed – this is just my conjecture.)

Harmony

We realise from the various inscriptions that unity in diversity is the main feature of our religion. As pointed out before, it was under the same roof that the Vedas and Āgamas were studied. Besides, as far as the two Vaiṣṇava-āgamas are concerned – Pañcarātra and Vaikhānasa – in some Pāncarātra temples Vaikhānasa was taught. What should make us happier is the fact that in some Vaiṣṇava temples the Śaiva-āgama was also taught.

¹ The Paramaguru made this statement many years ago. The custom of feeding Brāhmins, in the *śrīpurāṣ* (feeding houses of temples), has been discontinued in Keraḷa, except perhaps on rare occasions.

Temples and Vidyā

I spoke to you about the education given in temples. I must explain it a bit further.

About 1,000 years ago, the rulers known as the later Colas were a more dominant power than the Pāṇdyas and the Pallavas. It was only after Vijayālaya brought about a new awakening that Parāntaka, Rājarāja, Rājendra and others extended the frontiers of the Coḷa empire. A matter for pride is not so much how this empire expanded as how art and culture flourished during this period. During the time of the Pallavas the temples were built on a small or medium scale and now, during the period of the Colas, they were built on a large scale. At the same time, education, literature, music, dance, all these took great strides. A beautiful aspect of this advancement was that it was not merely a case of the building of temples going on the one side and culture growing on the other. It was with the Lord as the base, with the temple as the (sthūla) "gross" centre, that both education and culture developed.

Now took shape the idea of establishing schools right inside the temple. The "vyākaraṇa-dāna-maṇḍapa" found in many Saiva temples belongs to this period. Since the temples that were built now were big there were facilities in them to conduct colleges of higher education. If you see the temples of Cidambaram, Tanjāvūr and so on you will notice double-storeyed buildings inside the premises almost touching the outer walls. These were built by the Coḷa kings during the 10th-12th centuries as "Tiruchuttu-mālikai", meaning buildings around the sacred walls. Classes were conducted inside these buildings. They also housed the equivalent of today's libraries, "Sarasvatī bhāṇḍāras". Manuscripts were collected and copied and kept carefully in them and they were made available to teachers and students. A "bhāṇḍāra" is like a store room: there were in the kingdoms of the time offices like "dhana-bhāṇḍāra" (treasury) and "dhānya-bhāṇḍāra" (godown for grain). The man in charge of the treasury was "dhana-bhāṇḍāra" Similarly dhanya-bhāṇḍāra who was in charge of the godown for grain. (The supply in those days was not as erratic as it is today and did not give rise to frequent complaints.) If there was a bhāṇḍāra for education, of which the presiding deity is Sarasvatī, what else could it be but a library? That is how we have the beautiful name "Sarasvatī-bhāṇḍāra"

Since these colleges were conducted inside the temples it did not mean that instruction was given in them only in religious subjects. I said that there was a maṇḍapa exclusively for grammar. However, even secular education was not meant to be taught keeping aside Īśvara and religious observances. It was to create this consciousness, that learning should not be divorced from the divine, that the colleges of general education were constructed inside the temples. There is evidence to show that subjects like Āyurveda were also taught, the implication being that there must have been a medical college also.

Pride and shame

All this shows the great achievements of our forefathers in education. In this story I have been able to do research in many matters and connecting them with

The Guru Tradition

one another to come to certain conclusions. By reading various books, scanning inscriptions and through other means I got to know much information. So much so that I exclaimed in wonder: "Have I come to know so much?"¹

It is well known that big hills have been excavated in Ellorā to create temples with their breath-takingly beautiful sculptures. Those who see them exclaim in wonder: "How could such temples have been built!" It is not that visitors and devotees alone are lost in wonder. The chief architect himself, after completing his work of excavating the caves, building the temples and creating the sculptures, was filled with amazement. He gave expression to his wonder in a verse which is inscribed on a stone in the Kāilāsanātha temple. The verse says: "I cannot believe – and I am aghast – that all this sacred work was accomplished by me. No longer will I be able to build like this. I must truly have been possessed..." I am reminded of this statement now.²

In my very boast (about my rediscovery of our traditions of Vedic education) there is something about which I must feel small. From the 5th century BC to the 15th century AD – that is for 2,000 years – institutions for Vedic learning flourished throughout the country, but as a guru of this religion (of Hindus) I did not know about them until recently. Not only that, my inquiry into the subject did not elicit any information from our learned people. It shows that we are not only ignorant about our ancient cultural traditions but also indifferent to them. Education in our national śāstras has declined to such an extent. It is a matter for shame that the ghatikāsthānas that flourished until the 15th century and the other Vedic schools that prospered to an equal extent (though they were not called ghatikās) became extinct afterwards. Indeed they had so irretrievably gone into oblivion that we did not even know the meaning of the term "ghatikā".

At a time when there was no easy means of transport and communication, students from various parts of the country travelled 1,000 or 2,000 miles to learn at vidyāsthānas which had a strength of 1,000 or 2,000. Just think of it. These institutions flourished for as long as 2,000 years! But today when there are so many facilities and students go on foreign trips to be trained in subjects that are not essential, there is not a single vidyāsthāna similar to those of the past. We should hang our heads in shame. Let 90 or 95 students out of 100 learn the modern sciences or business courses. But let at least five students out of 100 learn subjects that are truly ours like religion, grammar, logic, medicine, etc. And could not such students, in addition, learn subjects like physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy and engineering and conduct research?

¹Obviously the Paramaguru is speaking in mock pride.

²It is not in any stone inscription of the temple itself but in the "Baroda copper-plate inscription" that there is a reference to how the architect Kailāsanātha temple (it was built in the 8th century during the reign of the Rāstrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa I) was lost in wonder at his own work. After having failed to create another sanctuary like that of Kailāsanātha he exclaimed: "How did I build the Ellora temple!"

A plan for national vidyā

The government spends thousands of crores of rupees on economic planning. Instead of merely talking about culture, if only it spends one-hundredth of this amount, universities could be established for our ancient śāstras. Scholarships and stipends could be given to students for the purpose and, after their graduation, grants could be given to them for research – or aid could be given otherwise. In this way our great traditions could be nurtured.

But, since such vidyā must be taught in accordance with the śāstras so as to derive the true benefits from it, it seems it would be better, after all, if the government did not undertake the responsibility to teach it. All political parties are committed to reformist views. Such being the case, one wonders whether it is possible to do anything according to the śāstras, according to the do's and don'ts laid down by them. So, instead of expecting help from the government or criticising it, members of the public who respect the śāstras must come forward to perform the task (that is establishing universities to promote our ancient śāstras and traditions).

The right method

The life-giving factor for establishing new schools for our ancient arts and śāstras is insistence upon the introduction of our old method of teaching. It means that such schools must be different from their counterparts belonging to other cultures. If the subject is an old śāstra, the method of teaching it must also be old. When a European or American woman comes to any of our temples or maṭhas does she not wear a sārī? Similarly, the educational institutions meant for traditional Hindu learning will be infused with life only if they are conducted in the manner suited to them. Even in a Hindu temple built in America the naivedya (the offering made to the deity) is not biscuits but *puliyodarai* (rice cooked in tamarind soup, with spices added). When there is a performance of Bharatanāṭyam does not the dancer wear the costume depicted in sculptures that are 1,000 years old? In the same manner, if there are schools for Hindu arts and śāstras, they must not be like the universities of today which are housed in big buildings and in which people wear European-style clothes. Our schools, as far as possible, must be run according to the traditional methods.

In ancient times, the ṛsis had their gurukulas in dwellings made of leaves and creepers. Today, it is not practicable to conduct colleges in forests. In medieval times or earlier, ghatikās came up even in the towns. But the colleges or universities I am talking about should not be conducted right in urban centres. The ghatikāsthānas which functioned in the cities during the middle ages were not affected by the sort of evil urban ways and worldly activities that we witness today.

The gurukulas of old were in the forests. There was no scope for diversion in them nor were the students exposed to the sort of temptations that would militate against the strict observance of brahmācarya. The sole aim as well as interest of the students was study. (It must also be mentioned that during that period there were fewer towns and a much vaster area was under forest than now.)

The Guru Tradition

The students were not confined to their rooms but were in tune with nature, living in the midst of streams and greenery, playing with deer, grazing cows and meditating on the Gāyātrī mantra, sitting in the open with the sky for a roof. Unlike today, when students live an artificial or "mechanical" life, their counterparts then lived every moment of their life truly and happily. Rabindranath Tagore has extolled this kind of life led in our ancient gurukulas. He founded a forest university himself, the Viśva-Bhāratī. Even during times when there were no vidyāsālās big enough to be called universities, the ṛṣis built their paṇḍasālās in the forests, each paṇḍasālā being a gurukula. Large areas blessed with natural beauty remained places of education (vidyā-bhūmi).

We must now establish at least a few vidyāsālās to promote our national śāstras and arts. As far as possible they must be situated far away from urban centres with their degenerate values of life. Nothing should be done that would detract from the beauty of their natural surroundings. As for the students, they should not fall victim to modern fashions, in the matter of dress, etc. Also there should be no big buildings either to house the schools, or to accommodate the students and the staff.

Village statistics

When I go visiting places I see boards displayed by the local panchayats. Written on the board are facts and figures relating to the village concerned: population, area, crops, the number of literate inhabitants, etc. In addition, the percentages of literate people in countries like England, America and Japan are also given to impress upon us how low the corresponding percentages in India are. The authorities display these figures to provide the motive for our nation too to advance like foreign countries in literacy and education. They believe perhaps that by such propagandā people will be persuaded to send their children to schools and that education will, as a result, become more widespread.

The essential statistics

It occurs to me that we must find out how many people of character and learning there are in a village and display the figures on the board. Suppose figures are given for each village of its literates and its people of character and the percentages for the two categories. Will you learn from the board that where there are more literate people there are also more individuals of good character?

"How do you find out the man of character in any locality?" it will be asked. "Is your suggestion practicable?" These are reasonable questions.

An alternative occurs to me. Even if you cannot make a list of people of character and others, you could make another list easily. The police and the civil courts maintain a list of pickpockets, tax evaders, people arrested for crimes like thefts, fraud, impersonation, prostitution, murder, dacoity, etc. Even if you do not have the figures for such criminals the number of "cases" may be available. So if mention is made on the panchayat board of the number of criminals – or the number of criminal cases – instead of the number of literate people, we will obtain certain useful facts.

Literacy and crime

Wherever education is more "advanced" and widespread the incidence of crime is also higher – this speaks for the type of education given all over the world. It is in countries where there is a rapid growth of schools, colleges and post-graduate courses that crime also is on the increase.

Among unlettered people living in the forests and mountains the police have very little work to do. These people have no need for lawyers.

As modern education takes strides, more and more novel forms of crime develop and also new skills in cheating and fraud. If crimes like the fraud perpetrated by industrialists and politicians, and the corruption practised in a shroud of secrecy do not reach the lawcourts it is because they have behind them the new skills acquired by criminals. Three-fourths of the crimes committed in any locality do not come to the knowledge of the police or the courts. It is not only the incidence of civil offences that has gone up as a result of the new skills obtained through education. Big bank robberies, spraying an entire council of ministers with bullets, staging coups, toppling governments with muscle and money power – all such crimes and offences are executed in a clever and well-planned manner and are made possible because of modern education. Apart from these, crimes like brawls, people being threatened with pistols or the shooting of innocent citizens are increasing day by day in countries where education is widespread. Things have so deteriorated that university lecturers throw stones at others during senate meetings or hit one another with chairs.

Among the uneducated Ādivāsis there may occasionally be a family quarrel or a tribal dispute in which a head is lopped off. That is a crime committed in anger, an act done on a momentary impulse. The Ādivāsis are otherwise innocent of the sort of crimes mentioned earlier. The unlettered aboriginals are incapable of crimes like forgery and cheating or well-planned and organised robberies and thefts.

Is education unnecessary?

Does the foregoing suggest that there is no need for education? Have not great men spoken about the imperative need for education? "Writing and arithmetic are like the two eyes," they say. Auvvai, the great Tamil saint-poetess, goes further:

*Kavaiyāki-kkompāki-kāttakatte nirkum
Avaiyalla nalla marangaḷ – chavinaḍuve
Nittolai vāṣiyā ninrān; kurippariya
Māṭṭa tavannan maram*

Briefly, it means that one who does not know writing is like wood. And Bhartṛhari, the Sanskrit poet, has it that a man without vidyā is an animal: "vidyāvihīnaḥ paśuḥ".

Our own experience of how educated people behave or conduct themselves is one thing and what great men have said in praise of education is another. How do we reconcile the two? If we examine the matter a little deeply we will see that there

The Guru Tradition

is nothing irreconcilable between the two. The education that great men speak about or have in mind is different from the system prevalent today. There will be no incidence of crime if we implement the type of education that they have in mind. The great men who spoke about the need for education did not have in mind a system calculated to develop only the intelligence. Education, according to them, must nurture devotion. Such a view is in agreement with what Tiruvaḷḷuvar, the celebrated Tamil poet, says:

*Karṭatanāl āyapayan enkol? Vālarivan
Naṟṟal tōzhā'r ēnin*

It is because education is not connected with the divine, because it does not inculcate fear in God and concerns itself only with knowledge, that it has become perverse and led to undesirable consequences.

White men and Muslims – and education

It may be remarked: "There is religious education in many countries. But there too you encounter the sort of crimes and misconduct you spoke about". I concede that what obtains in the West – prayer, teaching of the Bible, etc – is not enough. A student is bound by the discipline of religious observances so that the waywardness of his mind is corrected. It is because the mind is let free, without any control, that crimes are committed. In the West students are not brought under the discipline of religious practices. That apart, the intellectuals there believe that religion comes only next to science (even older people there believe so). They are neither here nor there.

Consider, on the other hand, the Muslim countries. The crimes I spoke about are not much in evidence there. On a state level they may covet or capture other lands, stage coups, but as individual citizens of their own lands they cannot be faulted so much. When people of the countries surrounding them are engaged in wrongful action and conflict, they too are drawn into their ways – but not to the same extent as others. The reason for this is that religious discipline is very pronounced among Muslims. In addition, similar to our Dharmasāstras, they have a system called the Sharia' on which their law of punishment is based. Muslim states in general have not evolved any new jurisprudence and still follow the Sharia'. Unlike people in the West, Muslims are generally deeply proud of their religion. For that reason the incidence of crime in their countries is not as high as in other lands, the reason being that they do not dare go against the tenets of their religion to the same extent as people in other countries go against theirs. Don't we see that, unlike people in the West who are fickle in their fashion and live a life of unfettered freedom, most Muslims still follow, as far as possible, their old modes of dress, behaviour, etc. I may be said on the whole that, if a people are brought under a system of discipline, they will not be involved in crime over-much. Although Muslims have done much harm to the Hindu religion, we cannot but speak in appreciation of their pride in, and commitment to, their religion.

In the communist countries

We see the same (that is less incidence of crime) in the communist countries where there is a curb on the religious spirit. In China and the Soviet Union where people are

not allowed to have anything to do with religion¹, the incidence of crime is very low. Believers like us (āstikas) cannot of course accept the communist doctrine. But for that reason we cannot but concede that, as a result of the stern discipline imposed in the communist countries, the incidence of crime is low and people there do not abandon themselves or freely commit offences. The communist regime was established by freeing people from the bonds of religion, with the promise that all people would be made equal and would become comrades of one another. But, realising that without the bonds of religion it would not be possible to maintain order among the people, they bound them to something else – they substituted religion with the sterner discipline of the state!

However, it is not a matter of pride for a society to maintain order through fear – fear of man-made laws and fear of the men enforcing them. The right thing for it is to maintain order and discipline through fear of the Lord and His laws. But nobler still, and a matter of greater pride, is to love the Lord and not stray in the least from the dharma that He embodies.

But everybody will not measure up to such a level or ideal. So the gurus conducted vidyāsālās according to the śāstras and the laws laid down by the Lord and brought the younger generation under control as policemen enforcing the divine law (policemen who combined strictness with grace and compassion). Children were led on the right path. The gurus demonstrated that in this manner education, far from encouraging young people to commit wrongs, promoted the growth of virtue and noble qualities.

Life in this country is imbued with the religious spirit. But it is our great misfortune that, like the communists who are opposed to religion, our republican sarkar has resolved that only secular education will be imparted to children in India. Unlike in communist countries where the state enforces order in the life of its citizens, people in India are allowed to live with all the bonds of discipline loosened.

Vidyā with humility

Humble devotion to the guru is part of the devotion to Īśvara, and it is this which gives education its true character. Without the “pathya” (diet restrictions) of humble devotion the medicine called vidyā will not be efficacious. That is why from the time of Kṛṣṇa Paramātmān education and humility have been braided together and students made “vidyā-vinaya-sampanna” (those possessing a wealth of learning and humility). Such humility can be inculcated only in a gurukula in which the teacher, without caring for his salary, keeps the student in his home, feeds him and cares for him. It is to make this humility total and meaningful that the pupil begs for his food. As a beggar his pride drops like a feather and he becomes humble.

Devotion to Īśvara and humility before the guru help in subduing the learner’s ego (ahaṅkāra). That learning which does not erase the “I-consciousness” will lead only to peril. Religious observance, devotion to Īśvara, serving the guru and right education – these will obliterate the student’s ahaṅkāra and render him pure. Without these education will make him swollen-headed. He will be inclined to boast: “See, how

¹The attitude to religion has now changed, especially in the Soviet Union.

The Guru Tradition

much I've learned." They speak about "vidyā-garva": pride in learning or in education.

Mere outward adherence to anuṣṭhāna (religious observances) will not do, nor is it enough to serve one's guru and become devoted to Śvara for appearance's sake. We often hear people remarking of some scholar or other: "He's devout and strict in his religious observances. But how conceited is he about his learning!" Many scholars, who seem to be āstikas, are vain about their knowledge. Seeing himself as one such Tayumānavasvāmin said: "*Kallāta perkalē nallavarkaḥ, nallavarkaḥ*" ("They are good. They are good", the Tamil saint-poet thus praises the unlettered twice. And he laments: *Karṇam arivillāta en karmattai en shoḷken?*" ("What do I say of my karma? Educated though I am I have no true knowledge."))

The student will learn to be humble if he is truly devoted inwardly, is strict in his religious observances and has faith in his guru. If the uneducated are good to some extent, how much more virtuous, how much nobler in nature, must be the truly educated? If the educated become accustomed to wrong-doing more than even the forest-dwellers, it is because their ahaṁkāra has grown as a result of their education or, more correctly, the method according to which they have been taught.

Gurukulavāsa to curb "aham"

Gurukulavāsa is of the greatest help in destroying the ego. If a student is asked to be devoted to what seems a remote Śvara and if he is asked to study the śāstras belonging to the remote past, it will not be easy for him to learn the qualities of discipline and humility. If at all he acquires any good qualities it will be on a superficial level. That is why the pupil was taken in his childhood itself to a great man and entrusted to his care. The sincere and untainted devotion of the guru and his anuṣṭhāna, based on dhama and karma, served as an example to the disciple and he too learned these qualities. [To explain the Paramaguru's statement: Education given in the abstract will have little value. In a gurukula, the teacher is a living example to be followed, – a living illustration of what is to be learned through the śāstras.]

Why not possible?

Such a noble system as gurukulavāsa should not be given up on the plea that it is impracticable today. Why is it impracticable? In the previous generation, why, until the beginning of this generation, some śāstras and arts were promoted through gurukulavāsa. The subjects concerned were not taught as extensively as they should have been, but to the extent they were taught it was in keeping with the gurukula system.

The ancient tradition of our music dealt with in the "Bharata-śāstra" and *Cilappatikāram* mingled with the style that the Muslims brought with them to become Hindustani music in the North. And our own old paddhati developed further as Carnatic (Karnāṭaka) music. During the past 400 or 500 years these two paddhatis have grown and earned the respect of all the world: indeed they constitute a great cultural treasure of our nation. In both systems, great vidvāns, great *ustāds* and *pandits* have appeared generation after generation. Has not all this progress been achieved without the establishment of any big school or college and mostly through the gurukula system? Colleges for music were established only some 40 to 50 years ago.

Tanjāvūr paintings, woodcraft, Pattamada mats – we send them from India as presents at royal weddings in England, at coronation ceremonies, etc. and we take pride in doing so. In which schools or colleges were these arts and crafts taught and how have they come to survive until today? These crafts have been kept alive by individual artists and craftsmen who give training at home to their own children and others.

Responsibility of the public

The gurukula system of education must be revived as far as possible. It must be implemented for Vedic learning more than for other subjects. Few Vedic gurus are to be found today who have the qualifications required for an ācārya and who will take full responsibility for their pupils and maintain them as well as their own families without expecting any material rewards. Such gurus were in abundance in the past when there was royal patronage. We, who claim to be rulers in the present-day democracy, must take the place of the kings of old and join together to create the funds necessary to save this system from extinction.

For the progress of Veda-vidyā

The little work done by a few people to promote Vedic learning here and there is in danger of becoming disorganised. It has become necessary to centralise it. For this purpose the Maṭha (the Kāñcī Kāmakoti Piṭha) has drawn up a number of plans and created a trust¹ with the objective of preserving the Vedas. The people in charge of this trust may be approached for details of the scheme. It is your duty to give it monetary and material help so that the Veda-śāstra-vidyā will flourish and grow particularly according to the ancient tradition. You are all born in this country. Whether you like it or not, don't you suffer its climate, sometimes shivering in the cold season or perspiring in the heat of summer? Now bear this burden of the duty of maintaining the Veda-vidyā as another discomfort. Since I am your guru you must, after all, submit to my browbeating! [The Paramaguru laughs heartily as he says this.]

· A common objective of these schemes is to pay the teachers well. "Paying well" does not mean that the teachers will live in bungalows and drive about in cars. The aim is that they should not suffer any hardship. In these days, when inflation has become a permanent feature of life, even a "peon" (I wonder whether people will be angry when I use the very word) gets Rs 400 or Rs 500 a month as salary. The Vedic scholars must be paid adequately so that they may live with a sense of self-respect, even if they do not live ostentatiously. Don't you ask a musician to sing for two hours, honour him and pay him Rs. 500 or Rs. 1,000²

Do teachers exist without students? We are in a woeful state today because people are averse to subjects like the Vedas, śāstras and culture. The stipend paid to students of Vedic pāthāśālās must be attractive enough to draw them to these schools right from their childhood. After finishing his studies, a student must be

¹ Veda Rakshana Nidhi Trust, "Sreyas", 2 Sixth Main Road, Nanganallur, Madras-600 061.

² Musicians are paid much more today, especially in the North.

enabled to subsist at least on gruel (*kanji*) for the rest of his life. For this purpose some money must be placed in his name in fixed deposit. There should be no risk of the principal being squandered by him and he must receive only the interest. We do all this now on a small scale. After the death of the student the deposit will devolve to his family instead of to the trust. Only by such means – making provision for such a legacy – will future generations be motivated to study the Vedas. Their conscience, a little aroused, they will follow in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers. They must be inspired to think thus: "We too must, like our father and grandfather, dedicate ourselves to Vedic learning." Education in Veda-śāstra will then continue to be imparted in the proper traditional manner in the future.

Learning and money

"Vidyā for the sake of vidyā" is the highest of ideals for teachers as well as for taught. Vidyā for vitta – learning for money – is a middling principle or goal. Learning only for money is the lowest objective of education. Nowadays the outlook of people all over the world is so debased that they want money without learning. That being the case, adhering to a very high ideal may not serve any practical purpose. That is why we must promote our vidyā by providing a fair measure of monetary help to teachers as well as to students.

At the same time, I have been constantly pleading for the creation of such conditions as would help the emergence of at least a few gurukulas of the ideal type.

Bhikṣācārya

The highest form of gurukula education is that which does not have money for its motive. There is nothing to equal the gurukula conducted by gurus who, in a spirit of utter self-sacrifice and without caring for hardships like hunger, spread learning with single-minded devotion. Students would shine in learning only when their gurus combine erudition with high-mindedness. It is all right for such gurus not to worry about their own hunger, but what about their disciples? A young student should not wilt in hunger. In the old days a Brāhmin who did *adhyayana* had family property; it is not so today. When the Vedic scholar has to struggle for his livelihood how can he look after his pupil? It is here that the pupil's *bhikṣācārya* comes in good stead. The student must sustain himself by begging for his food. Not only that. If he goes begging to four or five houses for his own food, he must go to another four or five for his master's food. As stated before, since the teacher should not eat cooked food brought from others, the student must beg for rice (uncooked), pulses, vegetables, etc., for his master and his family.

Preserving the ideal

It may be asked: "Where do you find such teachers and students these days? Why do you speak about things that serve no purpose in practice?" But I do speak because as one having the title of guru I must not fail in my duty of at least reminding people orally of our high ideals. You should not allow a system to die away without at least being conscious of its ideals. After all, Jesus Christ did not worry about who would follow him when he said: "... whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,

cooperation of all in this.

The Veda-bhāṣya is directly connected with the Vedas. The Vedāṅgas must also be propagated, particularly vyākaraṇa (grammar), jyotiṣa which developed later into astronomy and mathematics.

Among the four "upāṅgas" of the Vedas, the second part of Mimāṃsā is Vedānta. The doctrines of Śankara, Rāmānuja and Mādhva come under Vedānta. As far as this Matha (Kāñcī Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha) is concerned our chief responsibility is promoting Advaita-Vedānta and we hold gatherings of scholars (śaḍas) for the purpose.

The Matha has been holding the Advaita Sabha from before the turn of the century. We also support the publication of books in this sampradāya or tradition. In the same manner, the Rāmānuja and Mādhva mathas support the Viśiṣṭadvaitā and Dvaita sam- pradāyas respectively. (If I were to speak the truth, I should say that the Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas have better commitment to their systems and religious observances than Śmārtas have to Advaita and the observances pertaining to it.)

Customarily, Vedānta and śiddhānta are spoken of separately. But Śaiva Siddhānta is a Vedic doctrine based on Vedānta. It is promoted by the Āḍhinakartas¹. Similarly there are mathālayas which preserve the sampradāyas of Caitanya, Nimbārka, Vallabha and so on.

"Philosophy" taught in universities is mostly the Vedantic system. Since, all over the world, philosophical inquiry is given more importance than religious observances, Vedānta is gaining importance day by day. The purely philosophical part of Vedānta has become world-famous without its theistic aspects. Indeed, Vedānta itself has come to be regarded as Advaita and this has caused resentment and anger among followers of other sampradāyas. That apart, thanks to the work of universities, Vedānta, more than any other ancient śāstra, is a living force today.

There is no place in this Vedānta (studied as a university course) for ācāra and anuṣṭhāna (religious conduct and observances). Besides, in the name of research, expression is given to views contrary to those held by our ancestors. (Although they say that they are scientific and open-minded, some of these researchers are biased in their views and theories.) So much so we are not fully satisfied with the sort of Vedānta propagated by the universities.

Let people of other countries laud the pure metaphysics of Advaita and endeavour as best they can to study it. May be some rare individuals among them, by virtue of the merit earned in their previous birth, will gain mastery in it. Must there not be something remarkable in their previous birth that they have been drawn to Vedānta? However, as far as we are concerned, Vedic ācāra and karmānuṣṭhāna are vital. Never mind the research work done on Advaita or the number of books written on it. Knowledge of Advaita or monism gained in this manner will be confined to one's intellectual perceptions and will be far from being realised

¹ "Āḍhinakartas" are heads of Śaiva mathas in Tamil Nadu.

without ācāra and anuṣṭhāna. Śankarācārya, who established Advaita, firmly laid down that a man should undertake philosophical inquiry only after becoming inwardly pure through karmānuṣṭhāna and devotion to Īśvara. (Unlike followers of other sampradāyas, who are exclusively devoted to one deity, the Advaitin is devoted to one or another manifestation of the Paramātman who is the source of all. Where is the place for devotion to a deity in university education? How does one become inwardly pure in it?)

We need facilities to support traditional scholars in Vedānta-śāstra and facilities also for students to learn under them in the same traditional manner.

Comparative philosophy

Universities conduct research in comparative religion and philosophy. They inquire into various systems to find out how they agree with one another and how they differ from one another. This kind of research is admirable. Even in the traditional system of learning it is essential for the student of one sampradāya to know the standpoint of other sampradāyas. Take the śāstra of any tradition or system. It seeks to establish its doctrine by citing the views of other systems and by trying to refute them. The method adopted by the protagonists of our śāstra was to open the discussion by citing the views of the opposing side, developing them and then rebutting them to establish their own system, i.e. Advaita. Such was the method adopted, more importantly among others, by Śankara Bhagavadpāda. However, people who learn any śāstra, according to the present method, do not study other śāstras on their own. They do not go beyond what others have quoted from these other systems. The śāstras of the rival systems must be studied thoroughly. It will help in understanding the truth without being prejudiced by one's own views and predilections.

In any debate each individual arrives at conclusions according to his degree of maturity or wisdom. But, whatever the conclusion arrived at intellectually, it may have no relation to his inner feelings on the subject. A man adheres to beliefs that have made a deep impression on his mind. In the final analysis, Ātmasatya (the truth of Self-realisation) is beyond debate. There is no denying this. However, when we take up a śāstra, to attain proficiency in it we must not only have a thorough grasp of it but we must have a fair measure of knowledge of other śāstras too. It is only then that we will be able to appreciate the greatness of others even though their systems of thought may not finally be acceptable to us. "Only our philosophy, our system, is great. All else is empty" – such a narrow outlook has no place in the world of knowledge.

In this country there are many who are proficient in English. They must study the philosophical systems of other nations in addition to our own and write books on them. These books or their substance could be made known to students of colleges run according to the ancient method.

Similarities and dissimilarities

Our intellectuals must be encouraged to examine our country's sciences and "semi-sciences" (of the latter I will speak to you shortly) and compare them with

modern Western sciences. The results of their inquiry must be made available to students of colleges run according to the old system.

We must not stop with finding out what our ancient texts have to say about a subject. We must try to reconcile their findings, wherever it is possible, with the theories of modern science. For example, the Āyurvedic physician must accept what he may find beneficial for health in the Western or some other system but which of course is not contrary to the tenets of Āyurveda. Similarly, allopaths also must accept Āyurvedic methods of treatment that may be found useful.

The Purāṇas

Among the Vedāṅgas, the Purāṇas seem to be popular today, considering the number of upanyāsas, pravācanas and Harikathā recitals held everywhere. You must realise that of the 18 Purāṇas many have not gained any popularity at all. As for the Upa-purāṇas and Sthala-purāṇas, they are being forgotten. We must honour the few existing scholars in these Purāṇas, Upa-purāṇas and Sthala-purāṇas, and look for students who will learn under them and will eventually become scholars themselves.

The same arrangements must be made for the Pūrvamīmāṃsā, Tarka (Nyaya-śāstra), the Dharmaśāstra and other upāṅgas. Among these, the Dharmaśāstra will help us in observing ācāra and anuṣṭhāna and make our lives conform to the true traditions of Indian culture. On an intellectual plane, it is important to propagate Mīmāṃsā-śāstra and Tarka-śāstra.

Āgama-śāstra

Apart from all these, there is the mantra-śāstra which is like a vast ocean. (There is a work called *Mantramahodadhī* — “Mahodadhī” means a great ocean.)

Āgama-śāstra comes as a companion to mantra-śāstra. It deals with the building of temples, investing them with the divine presence (Daivasānnidhya) through mantras, etc. There are a number of Āgamas which deal at length with the building of temples, the installation of deities and the method of pūjā or worship followed for different deities, etc. It is the temple that brings the common people in touch with the Paramātman. That is why I am particularly anxious that light should be shed on this śāstra. Recognising the importance of the Āgamas, assemblies have been held, at intervals during the past, of such people well versed in the Āgamas as are still in our midst — Śivācāryas, Bhaṭṭas and others. The government has also given encouragement by establishing schools to teach the Āgamas. However, I am not sure how far these institutions are conducted according to the rules of the śāstras. Our politicians are interested not so much in adhering to the śāstras as in bringing into every question irrelevant things like the place of the mother tongue and the equality of castes. The true spirit of the Āgama-śāstras will be kept alive if they are taught according to the gurukula system, by a Bhaṭṭa or a Śivācārya, to four or five students.

Vāstu-śāstra

We saw how the construction of temples is described in the Āgamas. But where is a temple to be built in a village or town, how is the village itself to be planned,

how are the houses to be built and where should they be located? Answers to such questions are to be sought in the ancient vāstu-śāstra. In building a house or planning a village, it is not enough to bother about ventilation, sunlight, drinking water, sewage, etc. People pay attention, or seem to pay attention, only to these. Vāstu-śāstra deals with all these but something more important also. It tells you how a house should be built and how a village should be laid out in such a manner as to ensure that they receive the radiation of divine powers. Vāstu-śāstra helps us to construct a house in such a way as to make it suitable for our religious observances.

Śilpa-śāstra

When we talk of the construction of temples we at once think of śilpa-śāstra or architecture and sculpture. There is such a profusion of sculptures in India that the whole world has not ceased to marvel at them. Associated as they are with divinity, they are not meant to rouse the consciousness but to purify it. It is not enough to admire them as part of our cultural heritage. The sculptors and sthapatis must be honoured and we must encourage students to study under them. Sculptors and sthapatis are invited to the Āgama sadas (conducted by the Kāñcī Maṭha) and given a place of honour. After we started holding the sadas, the Lord has opened his eyes (our starting the sadas itself, after all, was possible only because of His grace) and many temples are being renovated and new temples are being built. There is a somewhat bright period today for śilpīns and for the śilpa-śāstra and its teaching.

The government has established a school and a workshop for śilpa-śāstra. Fortunately, this subject was originally taught by Brāhmins and became the hereditary occupation of a separate caste. So, nowadays, there is not much scope for diluting it with elements that militate against the spirit of the śāstra and ācāra. To make a carving on a pillar or to make an image, the artist or artisan has to toil for hours together every day. If a Brāhmin were to do this job, he would not be able to perform his sacrifices and other religious duties for the well-being of all the world. Grammar, logic, Mīmāṃsā and other subjects are taught orally, learned aurally and retained mentally. Śilpa-śāstra demands day-long physical effort. That is why it was entrusted to a separate caste.

In the same way, Brāhmins taught only the theory in respect of sciences like medicine. The practice was entrusted to other castes. Such sciences or arts became a means of livelihood for them and being their sole profession or occupation they gained thorough proficiency in them. With increasingly better experience and the skill thus acquired, they were able to give practical training in arts like sculpture to their children even without possessing any theoretical knowledge in them.

The sthapatis, however, knew enough theory not to violate the śāstra in making images. They could even quote the rules pertaining to the making of a maṇḍapa or a vimāna of a temple. Present-day sthapatis too do not lag behind in this respect. These artisans who constitute the Viśvakarma community became expert teachers of their art. If they happened to be ignorant about some aspect or if they had a doubt about some point, they consulted their Brāhmin guru.

The Guru Tradition

Until recently, they lived in conformance with to *ācāra*, wearing a tuft (called *kudumi* in the South, *śiṅḍi* in the North) and *pañcakacham* (dhoti that is tucked back). Even in these degenerate times it is a matter for congratulation that they maintain this style. The *sthapatis* wear the sacred thread and are vegetarians. They work according to the *śilpa-śāstra* and bear no ill-will towards Brāhmins, nor are they opposed to Sanskrit. Some of them are well read in their *śāstra* and can explain passages in them. Nowadays there is much talk of equality and egalitarianism. If you ask me whether this tradition will stand to lose if the government, in its anxiety to put into practice the ideology of egalitarianism, starts colleges to teach the art of *śilpa*, my answer will regretfully be "yes". If you remind me of my having said, "you said there won't be much *anācāra*," my answer will be "I said there would not be much *anācāra*, not no *anācāra* at all." The reason is that the rules and discipline for learning the art of the *Viśvakarmas* are not as strict as those for the students of the *Veda-śāstra*. The stricter the rules the more the chances of a breach in their observances. Also, even if those who study the *śilpa-śāstra*, and build temples and make sculptures are somewhat lax in observing their *ācāra*, the rites of *kumbhābhiṣeka* and installation of deities conducted to the accompaniment of mantras will wipe away the undesirable consequences thereof.

Village arts – folk-lore

Generation after generation, the *pūjārī* has been seen rattling his drum and telling stories from the *Mahābhārata*. He too practises an art and that art also is based on a *śāstra*. It should not die away with him and I ask you to make sure that it is taught to his sons or other children. Make arrangements on a permanent basis with the creation of a fund and the provision of material help. Similarly, steps must be taken to promote *karakam*, puppetry and the arts connected with temples, deities and Puranic lore and to ensure that they do not become extinct with our generation. In our country all arts, whether they belong to the village or the town, have a divine connection.

Moulding teachers for ancient arts and sciences

There are yet so many other *śāstras*. The fundamentals of *śāstras* have existed in our own country for subjects otherwise thought to be modern like physics, chemistry, zoology, geology and engineering. We may learn about them from *Varāhamihira's Brhatsamhitā* and *Bhojarājā's Samarāṅgaṇasūtra*. But, as a result of the popularity gained by Western sciences, there are few people conversant with the sciences of our own country. So it is almost impossible to find people who can teach them. But scholars and research workers should study old books and palm-leaf manuscripts to find out more about our ancient sciences. They should then try to give instruction in them to others.

It is sad that today for certain types of learning there are not only no students, there are no teachers also. Intellectuals and people skilled in research must study old books and palm-leaf manuscripts. Or we must encourage them to look for such books and manuscripts themselves and create facilities for their study. In this way we must mould teachers for our ancient arts and sciences and look for students who will study under them.

Vidyā that transcends the laws of nature

There were śāstras in our country based on the natural forces and others which could not be explained through the natural laws known to us. These latter are neglected today or rejected as "humbug". Without taking such an attitude, we must study such śāstras, verify whether or not they are really "humbug" and try to apply them in practice. My own view is that there may be "humbugs" among those practising such arts but the śāstras on which they are based may not themselves be "humbug". Among these are nāḍī śāstra, praśna, chāyā-puruṣa śāstra (reading a man's life or fortune from the shadow cast by him).

Our old sciences have not entirely been swept away by the new sciences. We still have in our midst people who practise nāḍī śāstra. This and similar śāstras are scorned as "unscientific" but they may be regarded as "super-sciences". People practising them must be supported and we must try to preserve their vidyā by finding students who will learn under them. Rasavāda-śāstra and astrology, which are semi-sciences, must also be developed. There are a number of astrologers who are wealthy and influential. But my concern is about preserving the vidyā called jyotiṣa or astrology.

Medical science

All over India there are a number of Āyurvedic physicians and Siddha vaidyas who are prosperous and influential men. But we should not think that the śāstra is their concern alone. We must do everything possible to preserve the ancient Indian sciences of healing and develop them and encourage young people to study them.

Yoga-śāstra

I left out yoga-śāstra. "Yoga-śāstra" is generally understood to mean Patañjali's work, *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. There are schools of yoga which are its branches or which have developed from it or which are not even part of it. Kuṇḍalinī-yoga, Hathayoga, Kriyā-yoga – there are so many types.

As a vidyā, yoga must be practised with the utmost care and caution. People who take to it must also possess considerable maturity of mind. The śāstras enjoin us to perform prāṇāyāma for a few moments so as to clear the mind, help us meditate on the Lord. This is also a part of yoga. But great caution is called for in taking to yoga seriously. If one practises prāṇāyāma incorrectly or beyond one's capacity, it might affect one's brain, even upset one's mental balance. Yoga which is meant to keep body and mind sound and healthy will do harm to both if not practised properly. What happens when the yoga-śāstra is pursued by people who do not have sufficient maturity of mind? They go in search of siddhis (performing feats, miracles) and try to acquire extraordinary powers with a view to becoming famous. They try to lure someone or other and, if they fail, torment him or her with their dubious yogic power. When yoga is not learned by mature and deserving people it will mean encouraging a new line of perverse practitioners and the consequences will be dangerous.

The Guru Tradition

There are many yogāsanas exclusively meant for bodily health. A bit of caution is necessary here too, but the possibilities they present for yoga sādhanā (yogic feats) and the consequent danger to the practitioner and others are not much. For some time there has been talk that yogāsanas must be taught in schools. For this we need teachers capable of giving instruction to children in the intricate manipulation of the body, arms, legs, etc. Moreover there is a particular time in the day to practise yogāsana. The rule is that the stomach must be empty. Not to observe such rules is to invite illness. Yoga should be taught on a mass scale only after making sure about the observance of such rules and conditions. If our children are to remain in good health they must be taught yogāsanas in a proper manner.

In other yoga practices far more caution is called for. They must be taught to deserving students by yogins of excellent character. It is doubtful whether you or I will succeed in persuading such yogins to come and teach in our gurukulas. It is also not easy to obtain students for them. The yogins themselves will decide who is fit to receive instruction from them and they will do so through their Ātma-śakti. There are quite a number of yogāśramas today. Indeed, the trouble is there are too many of them. We hear the word "yoga" more than ever from the lips of so many people. It occurs to me that we could have a gurukula not for the practice of yoga but to teach its theory. That will help in the emergence of teachers with a true understanding of the yoga-śāstra. Their presence will be a warning to people who stoop to anything in the name of yoga and try to lure people for their own selfish ends. It will ensure that only āśramas teaching authentic yoga will come into existence.

Only theory – no practice

There must be the same approach to the rasavāda-śāstra. Otherwise, on the pretext of converting brass into gold, people will commit all kinds of *pittalāṭṭam*¹ (fraud). (The very word "pittalāṭṭam" is to be traced to the fraud committed in the name of rasavāda – "pittala" or "pīṭala" meaning brass, and "hāṭaka" meaning gold, together make "pittalāṭṭam".) The study of rasavāda must be confined to an intellectual understanding of the subject. There should be no practical demonstration except to a limited extent on the part of the teacher to show that the science is based on fact. The whole idea is to reveal Īśvara's gifts to man and his (man's) capacity to understand things. The study must merely arouse the student's sense of wonder. Altogether, rasavāda is a subject to be handled with the utmost caution. But for that reason it should not be allowed to die out.

Vedānta

One aspect of what I spoke to you about yoga-śāstra is applicable also to Vedānta. Just as it is not possible to appoint a yogin as a guru and get students to learn under him, so it is with a jñānin (one who is enlightened) who has constantly endeavoured to study Vedānta and obtained mastery in it. If we have in mind a

¹Often used in ordinary Tamil speech.

Vedānta system with bhakti or devotion associated with it, it may not be possible for us to obtain for our gurukula a teacher who is devout and has also mastery of the system. We may establish our gurukula to teach Vedānta merely on the intellectual plane, not for the student to translate knowledge of the system taught into inward experience or realisation. I told you that even in the old system of education, Vedānta was taught like this. A disciple who studied in a school sought a great jñāna-guru or a great devotee or a great yogin and did sadhāna under him.

Even when the śāstras are taught purely to impart knowledge (i.e. without going beyond for realisation) there must be, unlike today, emphasis on character and right conduct based on the performance of religious duties. A student will be moulded properly only if he is brought under discipline, and faith and other virtues are inculcated in him. I would like to stress again and again the fact that education so imparted will not be misused in the life of the student later, and will be employed only for the good of mankind.

All of us must endeavour to provide facilities for the study and promotion of our national arts and śāstras in the traditional manner and, as far as possible, on the lines of the gurukula system. Only then will good conduct and religious observances develop along with learning. There is a saying that, without ācāra and virtue, Veda is not Veda. Tiruvaḷḷuvar declares that for a Brāhmin right conduct is above even learning.

What is to be done

What is the first step to be taken in this great task of promoting our national learning and shaping students of good conduct and character? All surviving śāstrajñās (men learned in various śāstras) must be brought together in a gurukula or college and encouraged to teach the subjects in which they are adepts. Here, as far as possible, all books and palm-leaf and other manuscripts must be collected and preserved. Scholars must be given the incentive to conduct research in them. Aid must be provided to get at least important texts printed.

Learn and teach

We must make sure that any individual well versed in a subject teaches at least a couple of students. Our ancients laid down the rule that a vidvān proficient in any subject must teach and propagate the subject. It is futile to keep one's learning to oneself. One must become a teacher and transmit one's learning to future generations.

Just as there are four stages in a man's life – brahmacarya, gārhasthya, vānaprastha, śannyāsa – there are four stages in teaching also. These are called "adhīti", "bodha", "ācaraṇa", "pracāraṇa". "Ādhīti" means to learn. A man must first learn a subject thoroughly. Next he must try for bodha, that is he must try to gain insight into, and proficiency in, what he has learned. The third is ācaraṇa. The first two are practised today by students with regard to a number of subjects. But it is in ācaraṇa that there is trouble. "Ācaraṇa" means weaving into our life the knowledge we have gained in a subject. In other words translating our knowledge in our practical life – living in accordance with what we have learned.

The qualifications of a vidvān are not complete with the three. The fourth and final qualification is "pracāraṇa". It means taking care to see that what we have learned is not wasted but imparted at least to a few students. Propagating learning is "pracāraṇa".

Śrīharṣa has spoken about this with poetic elegance. He is the author of *Naiṣadham*, the story of Naḷa. Naḷa was the king of Niṣādha, hence the name of the work *Naiṣadham*. It is a poetical work much appreciated by the learned. There is a saying: "Naiṣadham vidvadauśadham". ("Naiṣadham is medicine for learned people.") In the passage describing how Naḷa learns the caturdaśa-vidyā-s, the four stages are mentioned. The poet makes a pun on the word "caturdaśa".

The word "caturdaśa" yields two meanings. One meaning is "fourteen". "Dasa" is ten; "caturdaśa" = four plus ten, that is fourteen. The four Vedas, their six Angas, the four Upāṅgas, together fourteen vidyā-s. Another meaning of "caturdaśa" = four daśas or four stages. The poet has played on the idea that after learning the caturdaśa-vidyā-s Naḷa translated them into the four stages of adhīta, bodha, ācaraṇa and pracāraṇa.

Propaganda

Pracāraṇa is not what it has come to mean today, the drumming up of things, propaganda. Nowadays, statistics is employed as a means of high-pressure propaganda. "We have installed so many pump-sets, so many villages have been electrified, so many crores have been spent on the plan" – so goes the official propaganda. Whether or not anything has been accomplished for the good of the people, the statistics is calculated to impress them and earn the government their appreciation.

Those who carry out religious conversions are highly skilled in propaganda. By giving money or through some other clever means they induce ignorant people to embrace their faith and annex village after village to their religion. Then they take a census of such people converted (who knows, they may add to the figures on their own) and announce: "See, so many people have found Hinduism useless and come to our religion." They carry on propaganda for their religion making use of such statistics.

Later, if we somehow manage to get hold of the converts and ask them, "What is it that you like in their religion that induced you to embrace it?", they will just blink for an answer. If pressed for an answer they will say: "It is not that there is anything that we didn't like in the Hindu religion. Even if there is anything that we didn't like there is nothing in the new religion that we like more. To speak the truth we know nothing about the new religion. We have no regard for it, nor are we interested in any way in religious matters. They gave us such and such things. They have promised to give more. They have also promised to give us certain 'rights'. It is for these reasons that

we joined their religion not because we understand it or are particularly fond of their beliefs." They will thus speak to you the truth.

I say this because you should not mistake "pracāraṇa" for propaganda or a fraudulent kind of publicity campaign.

Creating an impression on others or confounding them with flattering figures concerning our achievements has never been a part of our cultural tradition. Our śāstras do not hold that vidyā should be spread for the sake of propaganda based on statistics. I said in the beginning itself that the propagation of vidyā is based on the belief that learning is meant only for those who can truly grasp what is taught. Such is the rule laid down in the śāstras.

Our tradition was established in the belief that each student becomes a vidvān first, then he becomes a guru to teach students on his own and make them vidvāns (scholars) themselves. The student becoming a guru and the guru in turn creating more vidvāns -- thus has the line continued and evolved into our tradition.

Our forefathers believed that the sin incurred by a man who dies without passing on his vidyā to at least a couple of students was greater than that incurred by another who dies with his wealth concealed, making it useless for others.

Financial aid and social prestige

We must find out the scholars from amongst us, obtain students for them and create facilities for them to learn. Just as there is a "chair" for some subject or other in universities and it is "funded", so these scholars should be given donations in the same way as university professors are paid. Giving a donation or a "sammāna" does not mean flaunting a salver containing cash before the donee. Enhancing the prestige of a vidvān in the eyes of the entire community or society is also a "sammāna". Our tradition proclaims that the scholar is superior to the king, that he is honoured everywhere. This tradition, this aspect of our culture, should not be allowed to fade away.

It is my deeply-felt wish to bring together under the roof of our Maṭha all those learned in our ancient śāstras and to maintain them on a permanent basis. With their help we must create a śiṣya-paramparā in various subjects. Who knows the will of Ambā?

If there happens to be a student who is truly keen to study an ancient śāstra, are we going to tell him: "There is no one to teach you your subject. Go and look for some book or manuscript. Who cares? Bang your head against a brick-wall." No, we must not leave him to his fate. We must be able to provide facilities for his study. We must tell the young man: "Come, my boy, we have been waiting for you. We had been looking for a teacher for you and now we have got one. He too has all the while been looking forward to teach a student like you."

Scholars who do not know how to teach or who do not like to teach must be requested or prevailed upon to become teachers so that the śāstras in which they are proficient do not die away with them. Even if we do not succeed in involving

such scholars in our scheme or if there are no students forthcoming we must arrange for their upkeep. People who made salt from the sea years ago and went to jail for ten days or so are still honoured and given a pension for life — or their families are given a pension. What then about scholars who have dedicated themselves to learning various śāstras, men who have studied their chosen śāstra or art in all its aspects? Should we not honour them and help them to live in fair comfort? Even if they do not have students to teach, they must be respected and given encouragement. If not now, at some time later, their knowledge and worth will be revealed. They must be persuaded to speak before assemblies of learned men and notes of their speeches taken down. We could, through paripraśna, try to gain light on the subjects they have mastered. They could be made to write theses or other scholars could write such theses with their help. Thus we must do everything possible to preserve and propagate our traditional sciences and arts and other śāstras.

Be vidvāns, all of you

It is not enough that you create facilities for others to learn the śāstras, though that is one of your essential duties. Every one of you must become proficient yourself in one of our traditional subjects, vidyā-s or arts. Your duties do not end with going to your office, earning a salary and maintaining your family. There are hundreds of branches of learning that are part of the country's heritage. You must try to learn one of them at least. Apart from creating a group of teachers and students, every one of you must become a student yourself and, after gaining expert knowledge in a subject, become an ācārya yourself with students learning under you.

If you are interested in linguistics, you may learn grammar, Nirukta, etc. If your interest is in debate you may learn Tarka. Are you fond of music? Learn to play the vīṇa, the mṛdanga or the jalataranga. Or be trained in vocal music. Or else get hold of a chisel and learn to sculpt. Many have handled the chisel and the hammer and the result is there for all to see: the gopurams rising to the skies and proclaiming to the world that the civilisation of India is as lofty as the sky.

To curb “aham”

The chisel is connected with the Lord. How did the sculptor dedicate his artistic skill or genius to the Lord? Whatever the art or science we take up we must practise it in the spirit that we are making an offering of it to Īśvara. Otherwise, it will lead to ahamkāra. We will tend to boast about our proficiency in this or that. The religious pīthas are meant to help erase the ego of people who seek refuge under them. I am seated on one such pītha. Our great culture and traditions should not go in vain. It is due to this concern of mine that I am urging you to study some branch or other of our learning or ask you to become an artist. But in doing so I should not make you go in a direction that is contrary to the main purpose of the Pītha, that is to diminish the ahamkāra or ego-consciousness of people.

Everyone must become proficient in some art and, at the same time, have devotion. Bear this in mind as you learn: 'We learn everything only through Īśvara's grace. All arts are manifestations of his grace.' You must also use your knowledge of a śāstra or proficiency in an art in such a manner as will ultimately remind you of the Lord.

If you take up linguistics you must try to seek the Śabda-Brahman. If it is music you must try to find fulfilment in the Nāda-Brahman. If you become involved in Tarka or research you must discover the reality of the Paramātman to the extent it is possible. While learning gaṇita or mathematics, you must be able to remind yourself about the immeasurable Ātma-tattva (Reality of the Ātman). The invocatory stanzas in the works of Bhaskararāya and Āryabhaṭa show how they saw their subject as related to Īśvara. When we study botany, biology or whatever, we are reminded of the Creator's marvellous work. If we study geography we will realise how he exhibits his lila or playfulness through the cosmos itself or in manifestations like the mountains, plateaux, rivers, deserts, different climates, etc. Astronomy will make us wonder about how he keeps sway over numberless worlds in the skies. In physics we will learn the laws of nature and through knowledge so gained we will be able to conform to the dharma of man. Whatever the subject we learn we must have an awareness of some aspect or other of the Paramātma-tattva. We must also help others in obtaining such awareness. This is very important. Otherwise, it would mean that I have shown you the way for "vidyā-garva" (being conceited about one's learning) which is worse than any other kind of vanity.

Be a learner not an idler

"We face so many problems in life." You will perhaps tell me as an excuse for not learning any of our traditional śāstras. "We are kept on our toes working in the office or at home. You don't seem to realise all this and, sitting somewhere in a maṭha, you advise us to learn this and that. How is it possible for us?" If you have the will you will find the way to do anything. You say that you have to face so many problems in life. But don't you spend your time in gossip, in reading the papers, in seeing films and in playing cards? Half the time so wasted may be spent in public welfare work and the other half in learning. In this way some social work or other will also be done. Finally, while our vidyā-s will be kept shining we too will receive the light of knowledge.

It may be asked: "Shouldn't people who are exhausted by office work and are racked by family worries have some diversion?" If you try to learn a subject with a true interest and sincere involvement in it you will soon realise that there can be no better diversion. The vidyā you have taken up will be a tonic for your fatigued mind. I am not asking you to give up your diversions. You do have them in any case. But think for yourself and try to give up such diversions as you yourself may feel are a waste of time. Learn a svadeśi vidyā and become proficient in it. Such was the path followed by our forefathers.

Since we are born as humans we must acquire all that is possible through human knowledge and through that again try to go beyond the human plane. If we die without having tried to transcend the human level, our birth will be no more than that of a cow or a goat. A goat remains a goat all its life and dies a goat and a cow remains a cow all its life and dies a cow. Neither the goat nor the cow has anything to lose. They have to live in nature according to the dharma prescribed by Īśvara. But it will be most unfortunate if those born as humans do not try to have their lives filled with light through the study of a vidyā according to the dharma of higher

knowledge received as a gift through the grace of the Lord. The Lord is above all knowledge and for His sake and for the sake of the Ātmān one may forsake all knowledge and all śāstras and vidyā-s on the plea, "What is the need for all these?" But in our present (unenlightened) state, we cannot do so. If we do so it will be the puerile Vedānta mouthed by the idler.

When most people were vidvāns

There are inscriptions in villages dating from ancient times. In one of them the words "aśeṣa-vidvad-jana" or "aśeṣa-vidvad-mahājana" are seen. These words are also found in the "Śrīmukhas" of our Maṭha. You probably know that "śeṣa" means "the rest" or the "remaining". "Aśeṣa" means "without anything remaining". So the inscription means that without any exception all inhabitants in the village concerned were learned. We should not think that there is any exaggeration in this claim. The reason is that, even if people other than Brāhmins did not go to any school, they were adepts in their respective occupations, trades or crafts. With regard to the first varṇa we understand that there were Brāhmins in every village who knew two Vedas or two śāstras. There were great paṇḍitas ("scholar lions") occupying the guru-pīṭhas like our Śankarācārya. In these days if you asked a man reputed to be a paṇḍita to explain the meaning of a word from a Veda, he would reply: "Let me consult the bhāṣya (the commentary) and I will tell you." I am seated on a guru-pīṭha in keeping with our times.

You may take it that I am speaking in self-interest. I want all people to become vidvāns so that the guru-pīṭhas will flourish through the knowledge acquired by people in all śāstras. As I said earlier, the guru is moulded according to the quality of his disciples. If the disciples are learned, the guru will correspondingly be compelled to improve his own stature (in learning). He should not grope for an answer when one of his disciples questions him on a subject. So if the occupants of guru-pīṭhas are to be sufficiently well-versed in the śāstras, the responsibility is that of the disciples.

Age no bar to learning

People who are asked to learn an art or a śāstra might ask: "We have all these years been used to a certain way of life. How is it possible, all of a sudden now, to learn a śāstra or an art? Isn't there a proper age for everything? Isn't there a saying that that which cannot be done at five cannot be done at fifty?"¹ It is true that just as there is a proper age for various matters, there is an age for learning also. But if you have any regret on the score that, though born in this country, you do not know even a single native śāstra you will really be able to learn at any age. The keenness of desire to know will itself give you the youthful enthusiasm and the capacity necessary to grasp any subject.

If our life has been spent in a certain way, that "certain way" may not have been the proper way. If we resolve that at least hereafter we will lead our life in the

¹This is a paraphrase of the actual Tamil saying: "What does not bend at five cannot bend at fifty."

manner in which we should have rightly led it all these years, we will obtain the enthusiasm and determination to change for the better.

The question "whether it is possible to do something at fifty" must be taken up as a challenge. You must be able to prove that it is possible. You should take it that the very purpose of the old saying is to provide a challenge that you can do what is considered not possible. Many have successfully shown this.

As an example, I will mention the case of Professor Sundararama Ayyar. He learned the śāstras when he was more than 50 years old. He could explain to big assemblies of learned men (like those who participated in sessions of the Advaita Sabha associated with the Śrī Maṭha in Kumbhakoṇam) the meaning of abstract philosophical passages that even old paṇḍitas steeped in such knowledge could grasp only with difficulty.

Apart from creating a new generation of students, old people must also study some śāstra themselves so that they may earn the good fortune of advancing to the stage of Brahma-vidyā.

Not through the state.....

In the old days our kings were extremely erudite men. Their courts were filled with learned people. The ruler helped the growth of vidyā by giving donations or grants to the scholars. I do not have to say much about conditions now. Today there is an education ministry as well as a cultural affairs ministry. We must appreciate the little bit that is done for cultural advancement. In a country inhabited by crores the government honours some ten paṇḍitas or so on Republic Day and it gives grants to a few Oriental schools. A couple of chairs are also instituted in our universities for our śāstras and festivals of rural arts are held for four or five days every year. Now add up the amounts spent on all these. The sum will not be one-hundredth of the amount spent on economic planning, defence, irrigation, etc. Not a single political party is as much interested in education as it is in other matters. There is a lot of talk to project our cultural image in foreign countries but what is done in this respect is of no value since it is far removed from the divine basis of our culture and also not in keeping with the śāstras. There is perhaps nothing more that can be done in the matter considering the ways of today's government. Nor is it any use blaming it.

There must be an awakening in the matter of vidyā among the public and among the disciples of the guru-pīthas. It is their responsibility to work for the progress of the śāstras. In one sense, what is not done on a governmental level is all for the good because otherwise there would be greater indifference on this score among the people. When the government does nothing it is more likely that people will involve themselves whole-heartedly in preserving and propagating our traditional national vidyā. They will give expression to their feelings thus: "It is our great heritage, our national wealth. We must do everything to preserve it."

Support for half-knowledge

If you consider the real state of education today you will feel sad. The standards are declining day by day. One by one the śāstras are dying out. So many arts have

The Guru Tradition

already passed into oblivion. The glow of fireflies appears very bright in pitch-darkness. Similarly, if the occupant of a guru-pīṭha knows a little bit about the śāstras and vidyā-s he is praised by his disciples as a "sarvajña" (omniscient). And for his part he thinks that there is no need for him to learn any more.

Mention of fireflies reminds me of a story. It is a true story and is concerned with Nilakanṭha Dīkṣita and Pazhamāmeri Mahādeva Śāstri. Nilakanṭha Dīkṣita was minister to Tirumala Nāyaka who built the famous Nāyak Mahal and the new maṇḍapa in Madurai. He was a great devotee and also a distinguished scholar. Mahādeva Śāstri, on the other hand, was not famous like him, but even Dīkṣita apparently suffered intellectual defeat at his hands, so goes the story. Mahādeva Śāstri composed a verse in which he had a dig at Dīkṣita. The śloka states that in a world devoid of all knowledge, people with very little knowledge shine like fireflies. Dīkṣita thereafter learned to have great respect for Śāstri.

Today's intellectual darkness is such that people with the gift of the gab glitter like fireflies. The glow of fireflies is made dim by the light shed by the galaxies, and the light shed by galaxies is bathed in the brighter light of the moon. And when the sun rises the moonlight is dispelled in his brilliance. Our progress in acquiring knowledge must be similar. Even today we have in our midst a few conversant with the śāstras and in the ancient arts. We have experts in Āyurveda, śilpa-śāstra, chariot-making, Bharata-śāstra, etc. But it is men of superficial knowledge, people who can create an impression on others with their glib talk, that earn respect. Showmen are honoured and what counts is political partisanship and caste even in matters like vidyā and knowledge. So much so it has become difficult for the true scholar to earn support and recognition. The showmen, men with the gift of the gab, people who can make a lot of noise with their half-knowledge, are able to write even on Vedānta and win world fame. But nobody comes forward to publish the works of people who are truly learned, people who have made a profound study of their subject and conducted inquiries into it. In today's state of affairs all that is needed is showmanship and flamboyance. It seems there is no need for true merit. The reason for this is that knowledge about śāstras has declined to a deplorably low level. Though there are a number of people who are proficient in Western learning, the common man has no acquaintance with the traditional vidyā of the land. The result is that people are unable to assess the worth of true knowledge, nor can they distinguish between true knowledge and half-knowledge. It is half-knowledge that glitters and it is persons with half-knowledge who win honour.

When few respect true knowledge, good scholars will feel downhearted and, in their disappointment, fail to pass on their knowledge to their children or other pupils. The result will be the eventual extinction of our vidyā-s. This is already happening now and the process must be stopped. That is the purpose of all my talk.

A request to vidvāns

It is my duty to make a request to men of learning. "You must make sacrifices in the cause of education. Without paying regard to whether or not you are respected, you must get together a group of students and pass on to them your knowledge, your vidyā. You must do it without minding the hardships you might encounter."

Ideal scholars

In one or two places, I have come across families that have dedicated themselves to vidyā, without caring for fame or money or honour. I have visited many places and seen many things but these families made me happy beyond measure.

In 1927-28 I was travelling in Keraḷa¹. There is a place called Tiruvancikuḷam there. Strictly speaking it is "Tiru-ancikkaḷam"). It was the capital of Keraḷa in ancient times. Kulaśekhara Perumāḷ among the Āzhvārs and Ceramān Perumāḷ among the 63 Nāyanmārs – the word "Perumāḷ" occurs in the names of both royal devotees – reigned from Tiruvancikuḷam. Of the places mentioned in the *Tevaranāḷ* (Tamil Saiva hymns) – "places that have been celebrated in song" – there is just one in the Malayalam-speaking area and it is Tiruvancikuḷam. However, in this land there are thirteen of the 108 divine places of which the Āzhvārs have sung. There is a famous Bhagavatī temple near Tiruvancikuḷam, in Koḍungallur (anglicised as "Cranganore"). It was here that I saw a number of scholars learned in a variety of śāstras — they cared not for the recognition of the outside world.

There seem to be so many rājās in Koḍungallur and its neighbourhood. Keraḷa itself has many rājās. All property here is passed down to the next generation according to the *Marumakkatāyam* law. (Even succession to the *gaddi* is determined in this manner.) If elsewhere property or wealth is passed from father to son, here it is matrilineal. But how could a mother, a woman, look after property or wealth? So it goes to her elder or younger brother. When he dies he cannot will it away to his sons – it passes to his sister's daughter. As stated before, this property will now be looked after by her brother. He must be the nephew of the man who in our account first took care of the property. From maternal uncle to nephew – so the property passes from one generation to the next and hence the system is called *Marumakkatāyam*². Strictly speaking, "tāyam" should be understood as "dāyam" "Dāyam" is a Sanskrit word and means "division of property". The word "dāyādi" means those who share the father's or forefathers' property.

Many of the rājās in the Koḍungallur area are rājās according to the *Marumakkatāyam* system. They are rājās only in name. Indeed their income is less than that of what we call "middle-class" people. In Tamil Nāḍu only the poorest of the poor have *kanji* (gruel), but in Keraḷa it constitutes the main item of food of the people³. In Tamil Nāḍu *kanji* is taken from an earthen pot or a gourd. The rājās of Koḍungallur do not keep such pots or gourds. Jack trees are abundant in Keraḷa and they make use of their leaves for "vessels" or ladles. Though their economic condition is such, in the matter of learning they – and even those associated with them – are amazingly advanced. Not only the men, even the women, I discovered, were proficient in some śāstra or other. They do not take the trouble of making themselves known outside, but the most distinguished among them are well known

¹ The name "Kerala" is used to denote the Malayalam-speaking area. The state called "Kerala" had not been formed yet in 1927-28.

² This system is no longer prevalent now.

³ The eating habits of Keralites have changed now.

outside their land. One such rājā has earned the title of "Mahāmahopādhyāya" from the British government. These men who, subsisting on *kañji*, have fostered our ancient sastras must be looked upon as models by our community of the learned.

It was before 1930 that I saw this place in Keraja. About 40 years later (November 1968) I came across people similarly learned, this time, in the Telugu region. And it was not an entire place but just one big family of learned members. I was delighted to see them and I said to myself almost in wonder: "Could there be a family in which every member is learned in one śāstra or another?"

This family of five brothers, in Ippūr near Tenāli, are called "Hari-sodarulu". I saw them at their house in Bezvāḍa (now Vijayavāḍa). The oldest brother was called Hari Venkaṭasubbayya. The brothers had learned the śāstras according to the ancient system and each had specialised in one subject like the Vedas, Vedabhāṣya, the Smṛtis, Purāṇas, etc. They had got together their knowledge of these subjects into books.

This is not what made them really great. Anxious that the wealth of vidyā they had acquired should not go waste, they had taught the śāstras to their children. This is what I regard as significant. When the children of the family were five years old they started learning Sanskrit. Instead of tying them down to books, they were taught to speak in simple Sanskrit. It was a matter of joy for me to listen to these boys of seven or eight speak in Sanskrit enunciating the words clearly.

In the old days there were places known for all their inhabitants, including women, being learned ("aśeṣa-vidvad-jana"). Stories are told of women who wiped the courtyards of their houses with cowdung and at the same time reeled off passages from Sanskrit. The paṇḍitas who came here to hold debates with their local counterparts fled when they learned about such women. There are also stories of parakeets which debated among themselves on Tarka-śāstra (logic). There is perhaps just a trickle of this tradition remaining in our country in one or two places, a mere "sample" as it were of old times.

Vidyā, promoted by scholars as worship of Īśvara and without any consideration of reward, will somehow become imbued with life and grow. Īśvara will help them by showing them the way to sustain themselves. There were many such scholars in the past. It was not only that supreme devotee, Tyāgarāja, who spurned royal favours and who did not care for any fame. So many other great vidvāns there were who did not hanker after wealth, recognition and honour.

It is more difficult for a scholar to spurn honour than money. "Oh, I am so intelligent and so learned and I have not only conducted research but written a great deal" – a vidvān who is vain like this will hunger after fame and recognition. Some paṇḍitas, in their arrogance, have gone to the extent of doubting the capacity of the world to understand them and its fitness to honour them.

One must exert oneself not only to become a scholar but also learn to become humble.

For the future

My statement that men of learning should not be engaged in the scramble for money or honour does not mean that they should be confined to a corner without recognition or that they should be starved. Just as a scholar must try to promote learning by making sacrifices, others must place before themselves the ideal of sacrificing at least a bit of their time and money to preserve our heritage of vidyā. In other words they must look for the vidvāns, those who are learned in our ancient arts and śāstras, and help in their financial and social uplift. They must also bring some students together who will study under them so that their learning will be passed on to future generations.

Make it part of life

Even now research is being carried out in our old śāstras. But it is done on a purely academic level without any connection with life as lived in our society. Reading papers; writing theses; conducting seminars and symposiums; arranging discussions by a few people who have been chosen as "scholars"; publishing books costing Rs 100 or Rs 200 (these books later gather dust in the shelves); holding functions to release books in which ministers and high court judges lecture on our culture; writing lengthy reviews in newspapers – so goes the list of activities nowadays. What purpose do they serve? The speeches and writings are forgotten not long after they are made or printed, as the case may be. Those who take pains on behalf of our old vidyā-s in the present set-up and conduct research and seminars and bring out publications must be congratulated. But one cannot help pointing out that their work does not have any enduring value. It does not take root in the community and is soon forgotten. It should be made an integral part of the very life of our society. Only through the establishment of the guru-śiṣya paramparā in which one's inner being and way of life are interwoven can such a goal be achieved.

If our śāstras are to be truly preserved, publishing books on them and stocking them in libraries would serve no purpose. Even if such books were to be read and research conducted in the same manner as now with the further publication of books, no lasting purpose would be served. Mere book knowledge may lead to mistakes being committed in life and may have undesirable consequences. The subjects which have evolved according to the ācāra of our country must be taught according to the system developed in conformity with this ācāra. The purpose of such teaching should be to help students control their senses, inculcate discipline and other noble qualities and develop devotion to Śvara. Only then will it bring benefits to the taught and ultimately result in the well-being of the entire nation.

Gurukulavāsa in all fields

There is nothing better than the gurukula system to accomplish the task described above. If we adhere to it in its true form and if we succeed in obtaining from the guru both knowledge and grace, we will be able to rid ourselves of all our shortcomings. Even secular education could be conducted in this way with the help of retired teachers or professors. The students must reside with them and serve them

and appear for examinations privately. Just pretend that your children failed just once (in their regular school) and send them for gurukulavāsa for one year or so and give the guru the necessary help for it. Or try the gurukula method at least during the summer vacation of two months. I have been speaking in this vein for years, blowing my conch-shell – let dawn break in its own time.¹

The next best thing is to bring together a number of students under a group of gurus in residential schools and giving instruction to them according to the śāstras.

I have spoken at such length about gurukulas and ghaṭikāsthānas in the hope that you will choose either of the two systems of education and serve the cause of our national vidyā.

May Ambā bless us all

Ambā must bless you so that at least a little bit of what I have told you is retained in your mind. Śankarācārya observes in his commentary on the *Kenopaniṣad* that Ambā, who is united with the omniscient Īśvara, shines as the very personification of vidyā, the most luminous of all lights. She must pervade our minds and inspire us all to preserve our ancient vidyā-s. Her grace alone can turn our mind away from the goal of vitta (money, wealth) towards vidyā. The light of vidyā that illumined this country all these ages is now dim and we are enveloped in darkness. Śankarācārya, who says vidyā is the greatest of all lights, concludes his commentary thus: "It is not that Umā-Parameśvarī alone who, shining with vidyā, has acquired the name of Haimavatī. Whoever earns vidyā and becomes a vidvān will obtain tejas, lustre, through that very vidyā."

We could give two meanings to the word "Haimavatī" used in this context in the Upaniṣad (*Kena*) for Ambā. "Hima" means snow and since Umā was born the daughter of the snow-mountain Himavān the goddess is Haimavatī. That which connotes "hima" is "haimā"; that which denotes Śiva is "Śaiva". Here the "i-kāra" becomes "ai-kāra". Similarly, in Sanskrit, words which start with an "e-kāra" have derivatives with "ai". From "eka" you get "aikya"; the daughter of "Kekaya" is "Kaikeyī". According to this rule also "Hema" becomes "Haimavatī". "Hema" means gold. She who shines like gold is Haimavatī. Since the Upaniṣad says that Umā has "bahu-śobha" it would be proper to construe that she shines with the lustre of gold. According to Śankarācārya it is because she is the form of vidyā that she is effulgent. While concluding his *Vākyabhāṣya*, the Ācārya observes: "A vidvān, even if he be bad-looking, shines with great lustre. ("Virūpobhi vidyāvān bahu-śobhate.) We say looking at learned people of virtuous conduct and character: "Look at the lustre on his face, What a fine look of learning he has." Similarly, we are able to make out an idler too from his face.

To go back to the imagery of pedalling the bicycle: Owing to the light of vidyā acquired by our forefathers, the faces of a few people today are still bright. It is the compassion of Ambā which keeps the bicycle from stopping. May she make everyone's face bright and spread the light of knowledge throughout the land.

¹ This is a literal translation of a Tamil expression. It means here: "I have spoken what I should. It is up to you to pay heed to it."

Part Six



Part Six

Īśvara and guru

The enduring legacy

The house that your father has left you is not enduring in character, and will crumble with the passage of time. You will have to repair it now and then, whitewash it frequently and paint it. The landed property bequeathed by your father is no different. You have got to make investments in it and work hard year after year to grow crops in it. Then there are lands which become fallow over the years whatever the amount of manure you add to the soil. There are so many other problems you have to face such as spells of drought, floods and trouble from pests. Or, it may be, water is not released from the dam whenever it is required. Above all, there is the law of ceilings on land holdings. Even if your inheritance is in the form of money, there are problems like devaluation (or decrease in the purchasing power of money). You are faced with a variety of taxes and you live in fear of new imposts. Besides, you will all the time live in fear of theft.

In this way, whatever the wealth or property that you inherit, there is the likelihood of its dwindling or perishing with the passage of time. That apart, there is the possibility of the heir to the wealth or property becoming spoiled. To preserve his inheritance somehow, he may be led to commit wrongs or have recourse to unlawful procedures. He may, in order to make gains for himself, put others in difficulties or to loss. He may stop at nothing. He may bribe people in authority, resort to deception, maintain false accounts or, to circumvent the law on land ceilings, divide the property through *benāmi* transactions. Which means that, if the wealth or property is so much (the Paramaguru cups his hands to suggest a small measure), the sin earned by him will be this much (the Paramaguru suggests a huge amount with his hands).

But suppose the property of the heir grows, without his having done anything unlawful but due to the merit earned in his previous birth or through sheer luck. Even then, one day he will have to go, leaving everything behind. A man may own a palatial house; he may have acres and acres of land yielding three crops a year and Rs 20 crores in cash. But he will have to depart one day leaving everything behind, without gaining, in the true sense, an iota from it all.

The property bequeathed to a son by his father is impermanent. It is the same with the wealth acquired by one's own effort. The riches that are everlasting and are never lost are neither bequeathed by the father nor are they acquired by us on our own. So is the case with the property that does not have to be repaired or renovated at any time, the wealth that is not taxed or stolen or the riches that need not be preserved by having recourse to wrongful means.

The guru alone can give us the wealth, the treasure, that is everlasting. It is not the wealth that does not accompany us on our departure. The fact is it is the wealth that prevents us from returning (which means it is the wealth that liberates us from the cycle of births). It is the wealth that unites us inseparably,

indissolubly, with that which is eternal, the Paramātman.

This wealth called jñāna is received as a blessing from the guru. It is given to us in the form of the guru's upadeśa and it neither diminishes with the passage of time nor has it to be added to by our own effort. (It is unlike the property bequeathed by our father; in trying to make it grow we only earn a "bundle" of sin.) The wealth received as a blessing from the guru grows and makes us too grow with it.

Whatever the other wealth, the happiness derived from it is ephemeral. The jñāna received as a blessing from the guru: that alone is "nityānanda" or eternal bliss.

Devotion to Īśvara and to the guru

No amount of devotion on our part will be commensurate with the great good that is bestowed on us by our guru. That is why it is said that we must be as devoted to the guru as we must be to Īśvara.

Yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ yathā deve tathā gurau

One must have the same high devotion for the guru as one has for Īśvara, so says the verse¹. It goes on to maintain that the inner meaning of the upadeśa of the guru is revealed in full only to such a high-souled disciple (the disciple who is a mahātman). Since the disciple who is as devoted to the guru as he is to Īśvara is described as a "mahātman", it means that through this devotion itself he gains the knowledge of the Self (Ātmajñāna). The śloka declares that the upadeśa of the guru remains burning as a light in such a high-souled student.

"Tasyaitē kathitā hyarthāḥ prakāśantē mahātmanah"

Jñāna realised

With reference to the word "prakāśante" in the verse: we should not understand it to mean merely that "the brain will be able to grasp the meaning of the upadeśa". The esoteric meanings grasped by the brain or the intellect are taught by the guru himself in any case. The intellect need not necessarily function with devotion. What then is the true meaning of the verse? It is this: the experience or anubhava which is the essence of the upadeśa will become illumined in the heart of the student. [The Paramaguru remains silent for a while and continues...]

To think more deeply about the matter, what could be the truth behind the statement that the "hidden or esoteric meanings will become illumined"? Are we to take it that matters which remain concealed or are expressed all too tersely or intricately in meaning or style will be revealed in all their clarity? You may understand it so. With the grace of Īśvara and the guru we will receive worldly and other-worldly blessings and our intellect will be sharpened. And, as stated before, we will be able to understand meanings that are hidden or are all too complex.

¹ The verse is from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (though it also occurs in the *Gurugītā*).

*"Yasya deve parābhaktiḥ yathā devē tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hyarthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanḥ"*

The Guru Tradition

But, to go beyond such an interpretation, you will realise that it would be futile to regard what is comprehended by the intellect as final or the ultimate. What is the true purpose of instruction in knowledge of the Self (ādhyātmic upadeśa)? Is it to give mere intellectual satisfaction? No! Such satisfaction belongs to the ego, to the ahaṁkāra. But is not the destruction of the ego the very object of adhyātmic upadeśa? So even if the meaning is made clear through the intellect being illumined, it must mean that what is intellectually grasped leads you to the Ātman. In other words, the goal of upadeśa is realisation of the Self and, therefore, instruction should not stop with the intellect but go beyond to be directly experienced by the student. "Svānubhūti" means such direct experience, realisation. There is a jīva-caitanya, a life principle, that is the basis for the intellect also. The experience that we mentioned must belong to this life, such is svānubhūti. Later the difference between jīva-caitanya and Brahma-caitanya will be obliterated. So too the consciousness of the individual experiencing it. And that is the state of Eternal Truth, the mokṣa spoken of by Advaitins.

Svānubhūti is also called "aparokṣānubhūti". Our Ācārya has written a work by that name.

Let us consider "parokṣa" and "aparokṣa". "Parokṣa" is that which is hidden from us, that which is secret. "Aparokṣa" is its opposite. Knowledge gained by listening is "parokṣa"; knowledge that is experienced or realised is "aparokṣa". That knowledge is hidden which is not inwardly experienced and does not give us the bliss that is its very purpose.

We read pages and pages about the Courtāllam waterfall. Those who have visited the place may describe it to us for hours. However, from listening to their account, do we experience the joy of bathing in the waterfall? It is only when we ourselves stand in the waterfall for four or five minutes – not necessarily for hours – that we realise the true joy of knowing it.

Reading tonnes and tonnes of books concerning the Ātman or memorising the texts does not lead us anywhere. Even if you receive upadeśa from the guru on the subject it will not serve any purpose if such upadeśa is no more than an act of hearing and does not transcend the intellectual plane of awareness. To that extent it is parokṣa. The upadeśa must be voiced in the Ātman as experience, as realisation. Only then does it become aparokṣa.

There is something interesting about all this. When the teacher's upadeśa is understood on the intellectual plane it does not seem to have a secret character. But since it is not realised in one's innermost being it has to be taken as parokṣa. It is only when it becomes an intimate inward experience that it is called aparokṣānubhūti. It is here that an apparent contradiction arises.

We give the label of "parokṣa" – secret, esoteric – when the guru's upadeśa is intellectually grasped. When it is realised in the inner recesses of our being, transcending mere intellectual awareness, and becomes one with our deeper existence, it is called aparokṣa, something that is manifested outwardly.

We will explain the truth of the statement through an illustration. We all know that milk is a delicious fluid. Similarly we know that sugar is a sweet substance. When the sugar is dissolved in the milk and the mixture is heated a viscous

substance is formed. We know that this substance must be delectable. But how do we know by actual experience that it is delicious? What should we do to experience the joy to be derived from the sweet? We must eat it. It is only when the sweet, an external object, is taken "in", that we truly "experience" it or realise what it is. Now an external object, when we ate it, disappeared by going into our alimentary canal and became hidden. But it is in this hidden or secret state that we could "experience" it or realise its usefulness. By being taken in, the form of an object became hidden but its purpose became revealed or was perceived in the open.

We see that there are two kinds of "in" and "out" or two kinds of "within" and "outside". Even when the form of an object is revealed, its substance remains unilluminated, that is it remains hidden or secret. In the language of Vedānta it is "parokṣa". When it goes in and its form is dissolved, its fruitful essence shines in us and becomes aparokṣa.

An object is as good as non-existing when its gross form is revealed without its essential substance that is material to our purpose is beyond our reach. But it has a meaning for us, it matters for us, if its purpose is well revealed, even though its gross form is not recognised by us. If you accept that the inner substance of an object is more important than its outer guise – hardly anyone will dispute this – the state in which the substance is not revealed is "parokṣa" and the state in which it is revealed and serves its purpose is "aparokṣa".

When the upadeśa is grasped on the intellectual plane alone, without our realising the bliss that is its substance, it is parokṣa. When is the upadeśa aparokṣa? When we transcend it, when the upadeśa is beyond the intellect, when its essence is revealed within as part of the inward life itself in the state of samādhi (absorption, union) in which we forget ourselves, then the upadeśa is aparokṣa. Here we are not practising any jugglery with the words "parokṣa" and "aparokṣa" but merely stating the truth.

The intellect and the heart

What the intellect is aware of is one thing; what life, the inner being that is the basis of the intellect, knows is another. The owl sees only at night. By day the bird sees nothing. Man sees by day, not at night. The intellect does not *experience* anything; it only knows, and it knows by inquiry based on logic. The heart which experiences objects is not aware of the debate or arguments based on knowledge. The essential truth of life is the heart, the innermost being.

The heart does not open out easily. Somehow, importance is given to a man's intellect. So everything has to be absorbed by the brain, by the intellect. Matters relating to the Ātman, which are to be experienced by the heart, are first assessed by the intellect in order to determine whether they are right or wrong. Even if the intellect decides that something is right we tell ourselves: "It is not enough if we make a decision intellectually. That way we do not derive the true benefit from the pursuit of a subject. For instance, though we have understood from so many books on Vedānta and from our guru's upadeśa that the Ātman is saccidānanda [see

glossary), we know neither "sat" (being), "cit" (consciousness) nor "ānanda" (bliss). Foolishly, we keep sorrowing about this and that. So we must bring into the heart knowledge beyond the intellect."

When the intellect is fatigued by the work it has to do and fails to attain the goal of knowledge there is the urge to open out the heart. Such behaviour is a perverse consequence of man being endowed with an intellect. The difficulty of opening out the heart is felt more by people who are highly intelligent than by those of humbler intellect. The latter, without racking their brains, accept things in faith. It is we, the "intelligent", who find ourselves in difficulties. But we too sometimes feel that we cannot come to a conclusion about matters by weighing them in the scales of our intellect. We then wonder whether all subjects are fit to be brought under the jurisdiction of the intellect.

The Vedas, reasoning and experience

Our Ācārya founded a system that still arouses the wonder of the world for the brilliance of the intellectual edifice on which it is built. Even so he has said: "Do not probe with your brain such subjects as are mentioned in the Śruti (the Vedas). The Paramātman, who is beyond the reach of the intellect, revealed the Vedas to the ṛṣis and they have passed them on to us for the world's well-being. Accept the words of the Vedas without questioning."

However, the Ācārya himself (as mentioned earlier) has written works in which he has applied his intellect to the utmost to establish his system firmly. In these he has made a deep analysis of the questions concerned, anticipated the objections of the opponents to his system and rebutted them effectively.

All ācāryas who belong to the Vedic tradition – Rāmānuja, Madhva (and, of course, Śankara) – have unquestioningly accepted the Vedas as "śabda pramāṇa" (evidence in the form of revealed sound or voice). But they have also, at the same time, expounded their concepts at length through reasoning. All of them have accepted the view that any siddhanta or system must conform to the Vedas and to reason and that it must be in keeping with inner experience. The Vedas and their pronouncements must be accepted in full. "Yukti", reason or rational argument, means that which is part of intellectual inquiry. It leads you to make decisions that are not contrary to the Vedas. It also provides explanations to matters that are merely hinted at in the Vedas or even inquires into and explains such matters as are not mentioned in them. Śruti and yukti serve their purpose only if they take you in the end towards anubhava or experience (that is realisation of the truths propounded). Such realisation occurs in the heart which resides deep in a man's being.

Some ācāryas, who have established religious or philosophical systems, may have had inner experiences that cannot be explained through the Vedas or through reasoning. They could point to them as support for the great truths they have propounded. Even people like us have certain inner experiences but we are unable to explain them intellectually or rationally. A mother's overflowing love, the enchantment created by the beautiful playing of the vīṇa are of this kind. On

the contrary, there are experiences that are neither desirable nor salutary. Is it possible to explain all of them rationally? Similarly, an ācārya too may point to such anubhava and observe: "Have you not had similar direct experiences? In the same way, accept our anubhava pertaining to our siddhānta also. The ācārya who tries to establish his system with such comparisons, citing parallels, has recourse to the last of the triad – Śruti, yukti, anubhava.

In the end it is the siddhi or fulfilment obtained by the student that makes for his great transcendental experience (mahānubhava). It is known as "svānubhūti" or "aparokṣānubhūti".

When we say that the Truth (tattva, "Thatness", the Reality) will shine for the man who is equally devoted to Īśvara and the guru, it means the prakāśa or light of anubhūti or realisation. The word "prakāśa", according to Westerners, is enlightenment or illumination. Such illumination is that of experience or realisation, not of mere intellectual awareness.

It is realisation that is of the utmost importance, of radical importance. If the upadeśa is to transcend the intellect and mature fully into anubhava one must have devotion to Īśvara and, no less, to the guru. It is that which will dig the land called the heart and cause the spring called anubhava to rise. To put it differently, the door called the heart will fling open in order to admit the light of jñāna.

Even if the inner meaning of the upadeśa is illumined through reasoning, such illumination must open the way for the light of anubhava, the light of the Ātman. For the intellect to give way without exulting in its own importance, there must be devotion. The verse, "Yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ", etc, speaks about the necessity for devotion to Īśvara and devotion to the guru that is commensurate with it.

Two bhakti-s?

To give some more thought to the matter. What are the two "bhakti-s"? Is devotion to Īśvara one and devotion to the guru another? And would you weigh the two in the balance to find out whether they are equal in weight? No, such a thing is not necessary. After all, has not Īśvara himself come to us in the guise of the guru to reveal himself to us? Have not all the śāstras proclaimed this? Have not all those great men so declared? Have they not said that their chosen deities had come to them as gurus and blessed them, leading them on to the right path?

Auvvai (the great Tamil saint-poetess) has said in her *Vināyakar Akaval* that Vighneśvara himself came to her as her guru. Arunagirinātha in his *Kandar Anubhūti* prays to Muruga (Subrahmanya) to appear before him as his guru. He prays to Kanda movingly on our behalf for we have no direct experience of the god. He had actually already obtained anubhuti after receiving the blessings of Muruga. He has mentioned this in his work. Subrahmanya had spoken to him: "Forsaking everything be immersed in the Ātman in silence. Do nothing." Arunagirinātha says that at once everything vanished and he became united with the One and Only Object. That Muruga gave Arunagirinātha such an upadeśa and that that upadeśa was transformed into realisation of the One and Only Object shows that the god had come to him in the form of his guru. Māṇikkavācaka

(another great Tamil saint-poet) also often speaks with great feeling about Paraśeṣvara having come to him, out of his great compassion, under the *kurunta* tree at Tirupperunturai (also known as Āvuḍayārkoṣil). He also speaks of how the Exalted One, the One and Only Puruṣa, has descended to earth in the form of a guru enabling us to see the Lord with our own eyes and to be in touch with him.

In his *Navaratnamāḷā* Kāḷidāsa speaks of Ambā appearing as a guru and making manifest all forms of śreyas (liberation, fame, goodness, auspiciousness) of a high order.

"Deśikarūpeṇa darśitābhyudāyam"

So, if you take it that it is Īśvara who has come in the form of your guru... No, if we say "take it" it suggests something that is quite imaginary. Let me, therefore, express my idea slightly differently. Is it not the truth that Īśvara himself has come as the guru? If you realise this, there is no need to speak separately of devotion to Īśvara and devotion to the guru. There is, in fact, no need to speak of two "bhakti-s". When the guru himself is Īśvara it means that we must be utterly devoted to him and to him alone.

If you are devoted to Īśvara who has come to you in the form of your guru or to the guru who is Īśvara in human form, if you evince transcendent devotion for him, the true meaning of his upadeśa will be transformed into your inward experience or anubhūti. You will then attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Īśvara, giver of the "fruit"

When we say that bhakti or devotion will lead to mukti or salvation, it does not mean that devotion will straightway result in salvation. Our action by itself does not produce any result. It is Īśvara who grants us the result, the phala or fruit of our action. It is he who assesses the sins we have committed and the merit we have earned and the fruit of our actions. In this way, in response to our devotion, he grants us jñāna out of his boundless compassion. We experience the bliss of salvation as a fruit of the jñāna. It is not our devotion that is directly instrumental in our receiving any reward but the compassion of Īśvara we deserve as a consequence.

If his devotion were true and sincere the devotee would not expect any reward at all. Works like the *Bhāgavata* proclaim that if we expect any return for our devotion it is like an act of trading, a business transaction. But even if the devotee does not expect any return for his devotion, Bhagavān will respond to his bhakti out of his kindness. He will bless the devotee with jñāna and grant him release from saṁsāra (worldly life, cycle of birth and death).

Two types of compassion?

If the guru is Īśvara and Īśvara is the guru, it means that Īśvara bestows on you the great reward or phala in the form of guru-kṛpā (the teacher's compassion). At first, as guru, he gives you upadeśa. If this upadeśa is to transcend the intellectual plane and become rooted within, you must have absolute devotion to the guru. The latter, in that case, blesses you by vouchsafing direct experience of the Ātman, realisation. And this he does out of his supreme compassion.

It is difficult to answer the question whether there are two kinds of kṛpā or compassion in the same way as there are two kinds of bhakti. We will have to find out the percentages of the compassions of the guru and Īśvara respectively in creating the light of jñāna in the disciple! The grace of jñāna is not something that is to be apportioned between the kindnesses of the two. If you give some thought to the matter, you will realise that it is the compassion of Īśvara alone that is manifested as the compassion of the guru.

The one recipient of all obeisance

The śāstrās proclaim that the obeisance paid by a devotee to the different forms of Divinity attain the one and the same Īśvara.

“Sarvadēvanamaskārah Keśavam pratigacchati”

It is the One and Only Paramātman that is manifested as different forms of the Godhead. It is That which has become various āsāmis. So the namaskāra or obeisance made to any form of Divinity – one must add, the obeisance made to any āsāmi – attains the One and Only Paramātman.

The word “Keśavam” in the above line should not be taken to mean the avātara called Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu alone. “Keśava” is made up of the four words: “ka”, “a”, “īśa” and “va” “Ka” means Brahmā and “a” is Viṣṇu. In the Vedaś and the Purāṇas, Brahmā and Viṣṇu are referred to thus in many places. Everyone knows that “īśa” means Śiva. “Ka”, “a” and “īśa” together make “Keśa”. That means Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra, the Trimūrti. “Va” denotes that which one has in one’s possession, what is under one’s sway. He who has the Trimūrti under his sway, in other words he who holds the Trimūrti in himself is “Keśava”. The Ācārya gives this meaning for the word in his commentary on the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*. He who contains in himself the lords of creation, preservation and dissolution must be the Paramātman. The obeisance made to any god or āsāmi is received by this Paramātman, this Keśava, who is in that deity or āsāmi. “Sarvadēvanamaskārah Keśavam pratigacchati.”

What is meant by “namaskāra”? Does it mean merely prostrating oneself before a deity or an individual? No. Such an act itself has only a secondary significance; what is important is the feeling that goes with it. The feeling of devotion is demonstrated in many ways. Namaskāra is an act that signifies that we are nothing before the Lord. It denotes bhakti. When it is proclaimed that the namaskāra offered to anyone will attain the Supreme Lord Keśava, it means that our devotion to anyone is an offering to the One and Only Parāmatman.

One bhakti and one kṛpā

The subject about which we spoke earlier has been made clear here. Did we not wonder about whether there were two “bhakti-s” and two “kṛpā-s”? We have found the answer here. When our bhakti for anyone or everyone is an offering to the One and Only Paramatman, there is no need to speak separately of bhakti for the guru and bhakti for Īśvara. When our devotion for our guru is received by Īśvara, where is the need to divide bhakti into two – the one for the guru and the other for Īśvara?

The Guru Tradition

Let us now turn to the subject of *kṛpā*, compassion, whether the *kṛpā* of the guru and the *kṛpā* of *Īśvara* are different. We have discovered an answer to this question also. If a god, a great man or a guru has compassion for us, what is the reason? It is only in consideration of our devotion. If we have devotion for them, they are compassionate towards us in return. We have devotion – and they have compassion. We offer them our *namaskāra* to signify our devotion and they respond by giving us their blessings signifying their compassion.

If *namaskāra* is for the One and Only *Paramātman*, does it not mean that the *Paramātman* alone is the source of the blessings of all those to whom we have paid obeisance? When they – the deity or the *āsāmi* – is not the real recipient of the *namaskāra* do they have the right to bless us? If they are wise about such matters, how will they respond to the obeisance made to them? Even if they, as a matter of courtesy, orally give their blessings, they will place the obeisance or *namaskāra* so made to them at the feet of *Īśvara* and pray: "O Lord, bless this child in whatever manner you like to bless him." Pleading thus, they will themselves pay obeisance to the Lord. If it is done in utter sincerity, for their sake *Īśvara* will pour out his compassion on the child in greater measure.

It can never be that *Īśvara* wants for himself all the *namaskāras* made to you and that he expects you to give your blessings in return. Indeed *Īśvara* and no other is the source of all *āśīrvāda*, of all blessings.

We hear people lamenting: "They are said to be great men and they gave us their blessings. But it was all in vain." If the blessings of great men are of no avail, it could mean either of two things. One possibility is that the great men receiving the obeisance must have thought to themselves: "The nemesis of karma is bound to overtake them. Let them cry when it does so. But I will comfort them so that they do not cry now." The second possibility is that some *Mahāmāyā* concealed playfully the will of the Lord. Or, it may be, the great men gave their blessings forgetting that they were only an instrument of the Lord. *Āśīrvāda* to be real must have its source in *Īśvara*. The Lord's blessings must manifest themselves through the individual who apparently gives them.

It is *Īśvara* who inspires humility in the mind of the student or devotee and makes him offer *namaskāra*. Afterwards, it is *Īśvara* who is the recipient of this very *namaskāra* made by the student or devotee to anyone. It is not the individual to whom obeisance is paid who blesses but *Īśvara* who pervades him. *Īśvara* alone is the recipient of all *namaskāra* and he alone gives blessings. Here we are speaking of various kinds of *bhakti*: what we, in our ignorance, speak of *guru-bhakti*, *Īśvara-bhakti* and *bhakti* for various individuals as separate entities. The compassion shown us by the guru and others is nothing other than the compassion of *Īśvara*.

How does the guru have the power of compassion? All powers belong to the One and Only *Īśvara*. It is because the guru is one with the Lord that he too acquires his power. It is through the compassion of *Īśvara* that he is raised to the position of the guru. Even after becoming a guru he is dependent on the *kṛpā* of *Īśvara*. Thus the guru has no capacity for compassion independent of *Īśvara*.

Tiruvaruḷ (grace of the Lord) and *guruvaruḷ* (grace of the guru) are spoken of separately. However, *guruvaruḷ* is in reality only *Tiruvaruḷ* since it stems from the Lord.

“Yasya devē parā bhaktih”¹: meaning of the verse

As we go on with our inquiry, it will become necessary to alter the verse slightly (*Yasya deve parā bhaktih*¹, etc.). What did we note in the verse? Whoever is devoted to Īśvara and the guru in equal measure, in him will shine the hidden meanings of the upadeśa. This means he will receive a whole range of blessings from jñāna to liberation or mokṣa. We now realise, after our inquiry, that we will be the recipients of the same range of blessings (jñāna and mokṣa) if we become exclusively devoted to the guru, looking upon him as Īśvara, or to Īśvara, looking upon him as our guru.

In between we noted one more point. Nothing gives phala or reward on its own, it is Īśvara alone who is the giver of phala. Devotion and knowledge by themselves do not yield any fruit. We have seen that it is in appreciation of our devotion that Īśvara grants us the phala. Also, there are no different devotions pertaining to different people or entities. There is only one kind of bhakti and that bhakti is for Īśvara. In addition, we saw that the source of the compassion received in response to the devotion shown to different people or entities is Īśvara and none else. It is the kṛpā of Īśvara alone that is manifested through others who are mere instruments of that kṛpā.

It is when Īśvara showers his compassion in his form of guru — out of his various manifestations — that we receive the imperishable wealth of jñāna, the blessing that unites us with the bliss that is everlasting.

Īśvara or guru?

We have seen that it is enough to be exclusively devoted to either of the two forms, Īśvara or guru. Is not Īśvara our guru? So should we be exclusively devoted to him? But then is not our guru Īśvara present before our eyes or seen before us? Do not we say “guruḥ sāksāt Param Brahma”? So should we be exclusively devoted to the guru?

Since our topic is “guru”, I am going to ask you to go to the guru for refuge and become exclusively devoted to him as Īśvara.

Human nature and the desire for change

I am not unaware of human nature. Human nature is such that not only ordinary folk but even individuals who are in an advanced state of wisdom are unable to devote their mind to one thing all the time. However good an object may be, your involvement with it cannot be of a lasting nature. Today’s menu is *sāmbār*, *rasam* and curry.¹ The dishes are good and you have no cause for complaint. But would you like to have the same *sāmbār* and *rasam* every day? You feel you must have a change of the vegetables, of the menu. Later, you may still want a further change

1 Common South Indian dishes.

The Guru Tradition

and would like to eat *citrāṇna*¹ A musician may sing a rāga very well, but you will tire of it if he sings the same in all his *cutcheries*² Whatever the field of interest or activity, you would like to have a change now and then. At a particular moment you may be totally engrossed in something, have an intense liking for it. You may later feel the need for a change. Today you find *dāhi-vada*³ delicious and gulp down five or six *vadas*, but you will frown on it if you have the same again tomorrow, the day after tomorrow and the subsequent day as well. Our appetite for a thing diminishes with the passage of time. It is in realisation of human nature, our desire for change, that our religion has so many forms of gods and goddesses, so many different forms of each deity, so many different ways of decorating them, so many different vehicles for them and so many different ways of worship.

We go to a temple and stand, say, before the shrine of Gaṇeśa. For a moment or two our mind is filled with thoughts of the deity. But soon we become fidgety and we scratch our hands or legs. The mind breaks free and wanders. But can we really let our mind give such free rein that it should dwell on any rubbish-can? Should we not draw it towards divine objects or entities? How is that to be done? The wretched mind could not remain fixed on the image of Viṣṇeśvara, however attractive the god be with his pot-belly. It is here that the leaders of our religion try to comfort us. "Such is the nature of the mind, child," they tell us. "You have got to correct it little by little, make it steady, and bring it under control. The mind desires change in everything. But the change must be related to things divine, and our religion provides you with variety. If your interest in Viṣṇeśvara declines, do not worry. Here, for a change, is Subrahmanya. Or you have so many other deities: Amman (Ambā), Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Durgā, Natarāja, the 63 Nāyanmārs. The temple has all of them. Fix your mind on each deity for a moment or two. As a result your mind will be immersed in the divine for a reasonably long time."

Our religion has so many remarkable features. Of them one strikes me as specially great. Hinduism is the only religion that proclaims the identity of the jīvātman and the Paramātman. This has come for high praise from many, including intellectuals in India and abroad. But some of them speak with regret: "This religion has the jewel called Advaita which no other religion can claim to have. However, there are practices and systems of worship that suggest duality and these are not shared by other religions. And there is such an army of gods, not to speak of the contradictions in Hinduism."

Advaita is indeed a great feature of our religion. But it occurs to me that there is a distinctive characteristic of Hinduism greater than it: the religion that proclaims the great concept of Advaita has the varṇāśrama system and such a profusion of deities. Advaita and the concept of the Paramātman constitute the ideal, while the army of deities, the many types of ācāra or observances make up our religion on the practical plane. If we aim to attain the ideal straightway our

1. Rice preparations in lemon, tamarind, sesame, jaggery, etc

2. This is how the word, used in the South for music recitals is spelled. It is from the Hindi, *kachari*, lawcourt.

3. Cake made of pulses and soaked in curd.

efforts will end in failure or, worse, in hypocrisy or false pretences. The crowning glory of our religion is that, while it insists on Advaita, it gives room for so much of dualism and this in its anxiety – indeed out of its compassion – to be helpful to the common people. It is for this reason that our Ācārya, the teacher of Advaita, brought the varṇāśrama system under stricter discipline, instituted the order of worship called "Pancāyātana". Besides, he exhorted people to worship also Subrahmanya and composed the hymn called *Subrahmanyabhujanga*. While creating the system of the worship of the six deities, "Śanmata", he included "Kaumaram" (worship of Subrahmanya) in it. We have then deities like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Nārasimhamūrti, Ambā, also Trpurasundarī, Bhavāni, Bhramarāmbā, Śāradāmbā, etc. There are sacred rivers like the Gangā to be worshipped. There is an entire "army" of deities and there are hymns composed in praise of each one of them.

Exclusive devotion: the ideal

While on the subject of exclusive devotion to one mūrti (deva-mūrti, guru mūrti or whatever), I arrive at the conclusion that it is enough if you are devoted to your guru. But it does not mean that I ask you to become exclusively devoted to the guru right away. What will happen [the Paramaguru says smiling] if you pay obeisance to me and ignore my Candramaulīśvara? Without him where is my bhikṣā? How will I live? Without him what will happen to the Maṭha? The Ācārya (Śankara Bhagavadpāda) himself founded so many maṭhas. There are so many ācāryas bearing his name and there are so many deities to be worshipped in these institutions in accordance with the rules laid down by him. I am speaking about my means of livelihood!

After all, the various deities are meant for you. You are not satisfied with one divine form or manifestation. Your interest is aroused when a number of deities are brought together in the same way as in a rāgamālikā — a number of rāgas strung together like a garland. (The word the Paramaguru uses for "interest" is "rasa".) When I speak to you about ananya-bhakti or exclusive devotion to one mūrti, I am reminding you of the ideal. It is not because I expect you at once to translate this ideal into practice. Earlier, I spoke to you about yukti (reasoning) and anubhava (the experience of realisation). I now speak to you about ananya-bhakti as a matter of yukti. It does not mean that you must try to bring such devotion into your anubhava at once.

Exclusive devotion: the difficulties

When you ascend to the highest level, you will realise that ananya-bhakti means that there is nothing other than the Ātman. It means the realisation of the bliss of jñāna to which you are, so to speak, nailed. In the stage below it, your mind is not fully erased but it has become completely integrated in what is required as its sole support. Now you may have exclusive devotion for one mūrti, ananya-bhakti. Otherwise, it will be all right if you are devoted to different deities with the awareness that they are manifestations of the One and Only Paramātman and that there is no high or low among them.

When we speak of one mūrti alone and that mūrti is the guru-mūrti, another

question arises. An individual may have more than one guru. He may learn different subjects from different gurus and he may receive initiation into different mantras (mantra-dīkṣā) from different gurus. Why "may"? Such must be the case with many of you. Who gave you Brahmopadeśa? Was it not your father? It was he who initiated you into the Gāyatrī mantra. This fact does not seem to occur to many. They seem to think that mantra-dīkṣā means initiation only in "Pañcākṣarī", "Aṣṭākṣarī", etc, and forget that it was their father who gave them dīkṣā in the mantra that is the "king" of all mantras, the Gāyatrī. Many of you must have also received upadeśa in Pañcākṣarī, Aṣṭākṣarī also. And you must have received it from a guru other than your father. That means you have more than one dīkṣā-guru. Even very great men have had more than one guru: a vidyā-guru first who gave instruction in the śāstras and another guru who gave sannyāsa-dīkṣā. Some of them have composed hymns in praise of their gurus:

One more point. There are mathālayas, guru-piṭhas, which have two gurus at the same time: the head of the maṭha and the one who will be succeeding him. That is in the same maṭha there is a senior svāmin as well as a junior svāmin. Both have the position of guru.

Furthermore, it is laid down in the śāstras that when you sit down for japa or dhyāna you have to meditate on the lineage of gurus. So it must be difficult in practice to be devoted exclusively to one guru looking upon him as Īśvara. Only a few people can look upon one guru as all and have firm faith that in him is present the entire lineage of gurus, the entirety of deities. Contrary to the nature of ordinary human beings, their minds will not wander and hunger after change; they are inseparably bound to the feet of their guru.

The stage immediately below the one in which the disciple receives the jñāna that obliterates the mind itself is the one in which the mind, without wandering, is fixed on one rūpa or form as its support. The question arises whether in this lofty stage the supporting form should be that of Īśvara or of the guru. It must be answered. Here I will place devotion to the guru on a level higher than devotion to Īśvara.

Īśvara as guru and guru as Īśvara

Do you understand the difference between the two? What does it mean to accept Īśvara as our guru? It means that we need not seek a guru in the guise of a human and we need to be devoted only to Īśvara. Let him be the guru who will lead us on to the right path. Now let us turn to the question of accepting our guru as Īśvara. Here we do not have to be devoted to someone unseen, some unseen power. We will be devoted to a guru who is present right before us and he will mean everything to us. He means to us everything. He is our Īśvara. It is about such acceptance of the guru that I am going to speak to you at length.

How to accept the guru as Īśvara

You will ask: "How can that be? Instead of worshipping Īśvara who has created all this universe and holds sway over it, how can we have exclusive devotion to a guru who is human like us?"

Let Īśvara be the creator of the entire universe, let him rule over it or let him destroy it. Why should you be bothered about all this? What is it that you expect of that Great Power or Śakti? An iota of compassion to release you from the saṁsāra you are trapped in. What you need is liberation. The problem of the universe is Īśvara's worry. Whether it is Māyā or līlā (divine sport), whatever is creation actually, it is his job. You do not profit by interfering with it nor does he have to gain anything. What you are concerned with is the impurity sticking to you and your suffering as a result of being trapped in saṁsāra. You want to be free from the dirt and worldly existence. You need that which dispels the dirt. The guru is sufficient for your purpose, the guru who imparts you the jñāna that protects and liberates you. All that you need is the one who takes you across. It is not necessary for you to have Īśvara who has created the cosmos and rules over it.

You may again say: "All right. This guru gives me jñāna. But where does this jñāna originate? If the guru has the compassion to impart me jñāna how did he come by it? Is not Īśvara the source or root cause of everything?"

So let it be. As I told you before, let Īśvara be all-powerful. Let him be the ocean containing everything. Let him be the ocean of jñāna and the ocean of compassion. Do you need all that great ocean to wash away your impurity? Will it not be enough if the Gangā rises in the well, or is available on tap? It is not necessary that you should drink the water from the very stream. In the same way, the guru has come to you as a spring, as tap-water from the ocean of jñāna, the ocean of compassion. He is sufficient to bring about your final release, the liberation that is the ultimate, and appease all your thirst and heat.

A rich man is to feed a hundred thousand Brāhmins. Mountains of food have been brought and piled up. But what is your requirement? Not more than what is served and eaten from a banana leaf. You do not know the rich man yourself, but you happen to know somebody who is close to him. If you approach him he will bring you your food in a "tiffin-carrier" wherever you be. Why should you go and stand before the rich man himself? The food belongs to him all right, but you need not, for that matter, bother him. Nor does he expect you to do it. He has authorised the man whom you happen to know – his agent – to feed people who come to him. This agent does not claim that he is distributing his own food. Similarly, it is Īśvara who has given the guru the power to impart jñāna to others. The guru does not arrogate to himself any right to impart jñāna and it is Īśvara who has, of his own will, invested the guru with the power to give jñāna to others. That being the case, if the guru fulfils the purpose of the supreme goal of leading his disciples across the ocean of saṁsāra it must be according to the wish of Īśvara that the disciples become exclusively devoted to the proceptor as their everything.

Noteworthy aspects of guru worship

There are reasons to support the worship of guru as Īśvara instead of the worship of Īśvara himself. First and foremost, Īśvara is not seen by us. All that we can do is to imagine what he is like from the descriptions of him by great men. As for the guru, he is present before our eyes. We can be in contact with him and speak to him directly.

The Guru Tradition

What we require of Īśvara – the destruction of karma and the attainment of jñāna – we obtain from the guru himself.

The blessings we receive by praying to the guru will be more than what we obtain by praying directly to Īśvara. You will ask how. How far are we capable of praying directly to Īśvara? Not very much. We do not know how to pray from the depths of our mind or heart. And we pray only for ourselves, for our personal well-being. It is not that Īśvara will not listen to our prayer. However, considering what we ask for ourselves with our little capacity for prayer, how large a measure will be his response? If we leave everything to our guru, he will pray to the Lord telling himself, "We must pray to Īśvara for the sake of this child." The guru is not like us, not like those who do not have direct perception of Īśvara. He resides by the side of Īśvara who is beyond our own reach. When he prays on our behalf, Īśvara will surely listen to him because he prays with all his inner strength. The guru has nothing to lose if we go to rack and ruin. Even so, out of his compassion he gives us upadeśa and takes the trouble of removing the stain from our minds. Will not his prayer to the Lord on our behalf be of high value since it is without any trace of selfishness? When the guru prays for us we receive the Lord's blessings in full but when we pray ourselves we receive only a fraction of such grace.

We have a parallel to this in worldly life. If we want something to be done by a governor or a minister, do we approach either directly? Do you think we will be granted an audience or an interview? It will be enough if we approach a man known to us who can speak on our behalf to the governor or the minister concerned. When he puts in a word, the governor or the minister issues an order in our favour without his ever having seen us.

In the same way, there is no need for us to approach Īśvara on our own. Instead, the guru will do our work a hundred times better by speaking to the Lord on our behalf, by pleading on our behalf.

It is not easy for us to lighten the burden of our karma. By means of the special strength granted him by Īśvara, the guru will help us in reducing this burden greatly. For our sake he will use the power he has acquired through his austerities (tapasya). Being a man of self-sacrifice and being anxious to help others, he may even take upon himself a part of our karma so as to make our burden lighter. It is not necessary that he should bear hardships so as to make Īśvara lift us up. If he is close to Īśvara he will freely ask him: "Won't you bless this student of mine? You have got to do it." (The Paramaguru raises his voice to suggest that the guru speaks with authority, as if browbeating the Lord.) "What, will you do it or not?" Īśvara will respond, saying: "Yes, I will do it."

"Yathoktakāri"

There is a temple dedicated to Mahāviṣṇu in Kāñcīpuram in which the deity is called "the Perumāḷ who did what he had been told to do". In Sanskrit the name is "Yathoktakāri". "Yathokta" = "Yathā ukta", meaning "as told".

Told by whom? A guru issues an "order" to Bhagavān to go in pursuit of his disciple as the latter is leaving his place. And, as the student is coming back, the guru

asks the Lord to return with him. The Lord carries out the order and thereby gets the name of "Yathoktakāri".

Who was the guru and who was the disciple?

Let us listen to the story. Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār was (as the name itself suggests) one of the Āzhvārs. He was named after the place of his birth, Tirumazhiśai, near Pūndamallī. In those days it was considered improper to call great men by their real names. They were either known after their birth-place, by the work they had accomplished or by names indicative of their greatness. For instance, Periyāzhvār – *Periya* or Great Āzhvār; Nammāzhvār – *Namma* or Our Āzhvār. Names derived thus often displaced those originally given by the parents. Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār is also known by the Sanskrit name of "Bhaktisāra". It may be a "kāraṇa" name, a name given for a particular reason. In the place name "Tirumazhiśai", "Mazhiśai" means "Mahisāram", which is also known as "Mahisāra-kṣetra". "Mahisāram" means "the substance of the earth". Bhaktisāra was born and brought up in Mahisāra. Later he came to Kāñcīpuram and lived in the temple of Viṣṇu, singing his *pāsurams* (Tamil Vaiṣṇava hymns), giving upadeśa to his students or going into yoga samādhi.

The first three Āzhvārs – Poykaiyāzhvār, Peyāzhvār and Bhutattāzhvār – were great devotees of Viṣṇu but they spoke highly of Śiva also. It showed the importance they gave to amity between the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects. There is reason to believe that Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār was the first to speak as a Vīravaiṣṇava. One should not speak depreciatively of the great. But Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār has said things with a view to belittling non-Vaiṣṇava deities. But in his works like *Tiruccanda Viruttam*, *Nānmukhaṅ Tiruvantādi* we see his great devotion for Viṣṇu and his insights into the higher yoga. I spoke to you about ananya-bhakti or exclusive devotion to a deity. We may satisfy ourselves by believing that this Āzhvār spoke disparagingly of non-Vaiṣṇava deities so as to foster exclusive devotion to Viṣṇu among bhaktas. Let that be.

Singing *pāsurams*, giving upadeśa to the devotees of Bhagavān (Viṣṇu and his incarnations) and remaining in quietude, he lived in the temple all the time. It would not be correct to think that the temple referred to here is that of Varadarāja Perumāḷ.

The "divine deśās" of Kāñcī

When we mention any "Perumāḷ temple" of Kāñcīpuram we think chiefly of the Varadarāja sanctuary. Actually, within the boundaries of the city there are fourteen temples (fourteen "divya deśas")¹ which are celebrated in hymns sung by the Āzhvārs. In the southern districts of Tamil Nadu there are fourteen Śaiva temples² that are also celebrated in hymns. But in the Vaiṣṇava tradition there are fourteen

¹The divine deśas: Tirukkocci or Attiyūr (the Varadarāja temple), Attabuyakaram, Tiruttankā (Tūppuḷ), Veḷukkai, Pāṭakam, Tirunirakam, Niḷṣiṅgal Tuṅdam, Ūrakam, Tiruvekka, Tirukkarakam, Tirukkār Vānam, Tirukkalvanūr, Tiruppavala Vāṇam, Paramēccura Vinnagarām, etc.

²The Śaiva shrines celebrated in hymns in the southern districts (*Pāṇḍippattinanku*): Madurai, Tiruppuvanvāyil, Kuṭṭrāḷam, Tiru Āppanūr, Tiruvedakam, Tirunelveli, Ramaivaram, Tiruvādānai, Tirupparankunram, Tiruccuzhiyal, Tirupputtūr, Tirukkānapper (Kāḷaiyār Koyil), Tirukkoṭṭunkunram (Pirāṅmalai), Tiruppuvanam, etc.

Vaiṣṇava temples in the capital of Tondaimaṇḍalam itself, that is in Kāñci. The Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple has of late become famous among intellectuals for its history and sculptures. Let me speak a bit about it.

Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism under the Pallavas The Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple

To Śaivas मोक्ष or salvation is "Kailāsa" while it is "Vaikuṅṭha" for Vaiṣṇavas. Kāñcīpuram has a temple to Kailāsanātha and another to Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ. The Pallavas, whose capital was Kāñcīpuram, were adherents of the Vedic tradition. In the true Vedic tradition equal importance is given to the worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu. The Pallava kings called themselves "Paramamāheśvaras" (great devotees of Śiva) as well as "Paramabhāgavatas" (great devotees of Viṣṇu). Besides, not forgetful of the third of the Trimurti, they also described themselves as "Paramabrāhmanyas". In the beginning, when they built temples they gave a place in them to Brahmā also. But the worship of Brahmā did not become integrated with our religious tradition and faded out. There is a view that the term "Brāhmanyas" denotes devotees of Subrahmanya. We know that the Pallavas worshipped Muruga (Subrahmanya, Kārttikeya) from the fact that, in their portrayals of Śiva, Somāskanda is shown behind the linga (Somāskanda means Śiva with Umā or Pārvatī and the child Subrahmanya). One of the early Pallava kings was called Skandaśiṣya. The Pallavas bore Vaiṣṇava names like "Simhaviṣṇu" and "Narasimha" and Śaiva names like "Parameśvaravarman" and "Nandivarman". They were Vaidikas who regarded Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism as equal. In between Mahendravarman became a Jaina but later, under the influence of Appar Svāmin, he returned to the Vedic fold. Though they saw no difference between Śiva and Viṣṇu some Pallava rulers had Śiva for their iṣṭamūrti (chosen deity) and some Viṣṇu.

Among the 63 Nāyanmārs (Śaiva saint-poets) there were Coḷa kings (Koccenkat Coḷa, Pukazh Cola); one Pāṇḍya king by name Nedumāran and a Cera king called Ceramān Perumāḷ). Nedumāran's wife, Mangayarkkaraṣi (the Pāṇḍya queen), was also a Nāyanār. There was another king called Ayyaḍigaḷ Kātavarkon who was one of the 63 Nāyanmārs. It was he who sang the eleventh of the twelve Śaiva *Tirumurais* called *Tiruveṅbā*. Śekkizhār says in his *Periyapurāṇam* that this Śaiva king, who went from temple to temple singing *veṅbās*, belonged to the Pallava dynasty. From this it is clear that just as there were Nāyanmārs among the Cera, Cola and Pāṇḍya kings there was also one Nāyanār among the Pallava rulers.

Rājasimha (Narasimha II), a great devotee of Śiva, was proficient in the Śaiva Āgamas. If Rājarāja Coḷa had the title of "Śivapādaśekhara", three hundred years before him, Rājasimha Pallava bore the title of "Śivacūdāmaṇi". It was he who first built temples in which stone was placed upon stone. Before him temples were excavated from mountains, hills or huge rocks:¹ it was thus that the first Pallava had built temples. The Kailāsanātha temple was built by Rājasimha. It has a profusion of

¹ Already stated in an earlier chapter.

sculptures and each sculpture is an exquisite piece of work. Lovers of art have given the first place to Kailāsanātha temple among the sanctuaries of Kāñcīpuram, nay, among the temples of all Tamil Nadu. All its sculptures and paintings portray episodes from the Purāṇas and, though most of them depict the Śiva theme, some are devoted to Viṣṇu also.

Noteworthy next, so far as sculptural excellence is concerned, is the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple. Its old name, Parameccura Viṅṅagaram", occurs in an Āzhvār *pāsuram* or hymn. "Viṅṅagaram" means "Viṣṇugṛham" (House of Viṣṇu). From the fact that Śimhaviṣṇu's name is inscribed in Māmallapuram as "Simha-viṅṅa-Potrādhirājan", it may be inferred that "Viṣṇugṛham" must have become "Viṅṅagaram".

Origin of Pallavas

What does "potrādhirājan" mean? The word "pallava" means a "tender shoot" "*Potam*" or "*potram*" also means the same. There is a story that a child was born to a celestial lady by Aśvatthāman and that she departed to the celestial world after placing it on a bed of tender shoots. This child, who was called "Pallava", grew up to be a king. The story is told in detail in the Sanskrit stone inscription of Simhavarma Pallava in Amarāvati in Andhra Pradesh. It is also mentioned in the copper-plate inscription of (Vijaya) Nandivarman II at Velūrpālayam, seven or eight miles from Arakonam. Aśvatthāman was a Brāhmin belonging to the Bhāradvāja gotra. His father Droṇācārya was also called Bhāradvāja. In their edicts, the Pallava rulers have described themselves as belonging to the Bhāradvāja gotra.

Although all this has been mentioned in the inscriptions of the Pallava kings themselves, people who take pride in the Tamil heritage and those who have carried out research in ancient Tamil literature tell another story about the origin of the Pallavas. In Nāgapattinam, a son was born to a Nāga woman by a Coḷa king. She bound the child with the *tonḍi* creeper and floated it down the sea. It was washed ashore and eventually became the Pallava king Tonḍaimān. The Kāñcī "maṅḍala" itself is called "Tonḍaimaṅḍalam". The *tonḍa* creeper is called *tuṅḍiram* in Sanskrit. We see references in Sanskrit to "Tuṅḍiramaṅḍalam", "Tuṅḍiracakravartin," etc.

Whether it is the bed of tender shoots on which the celestial lady put the child to sleep or the creeper with which the Nāga girl bound the child, the reference in both is to tender shoots or "pallavas". So the name "Pallava" is apposite whichever you accept of the two stories. Another name for a tender shoot is *potam* or *potram*. In Tamil also a tender shoot is called *pottu*. The term "Pallava mahārājā" became "Potrādhirājan" or "Potra adhirājan". So it is that Simhaviṣṇu Pallava Cakravartin became "Simma-viṅṅa-potrādhirājan"

"Potrarājan" is "Pottarāyan" in Tamil. An idler growing fat doing nothing earns the nickname of "Pottarāśā" which also is derived from "Potrarājan"

From Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple I have wandered far to speak to you about

The Guru Tradition

names like "Viṣṇugṛham", "Sinhaviṣṇu", "Pottarāśā". I have gone round and round before going into Viṣṇugṛha.

If Rājasimha built the Kailāsanātha temple, Nandivarman, who was his successor's successor, built the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple. The old name of this Viṣṇu sanctuary was "Parameśvara Viṣṇugṛham". The House of Viṣṇu is in the name of Parameśvara. From this we can make out the theme of the oneness of Śiva-Viṣṇu about which I have spoken to you all along. "Parameśvara" here is another name of Nandivarman. The temple built by Rājarāja is "Rājarajeccuram", while the one built by Gangaikoṇḍa Coḷa is "Gangaikondacolliccuram". Similarly, the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple constructed by Parameśvara Pallava (Naḍivarman) is "Parameccura Viṅṇagaram".

The sculptures of the Kailāsanātha temple are famous for their Purāṇic theme. Those of the Vaikuṅṭhanātha temple have a special historical importance.

There was confusion in the kingdom after the death of Rājasimha who had earned much fame during his reign. Kāñcīpuram was invaded by Vikramāditya, a Calukyan king. Rājasimha's son was also Parameśvaravarman. But he reigned only for a short period and died without leaving a son and heir. The dynasty which had continued under the system of primogeniture from Sinhaviṣṇu to Rājasimha's son came to an end. Later, leading citizens of the kingdom went to Hiraṇyavarman, who belonged to a branch of the clan and was a kin (dāyādi). With his consent his son Parameśvaravarman was crowned king of Kāñcīpuram. He ruled for more than 60 years under the name of Nandivarma Pallava. These facts are mentioned in an inscription in the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple which was known after the king's other name as "Parameccura Viṅṇagaram".

A feature of this temple more important than even this inscription is its pavilion in which the story of the Pallava dynasty from Mahāviṣṇu down to the king who built the sanctuary is told in sculptures. Apart from its historical importance the temple is significant religiously also. Here the sanctums are in three tiers. It is rarely that temples are constructed in this fashion. This method is known to have been followed only in the following: the Perumāḷ temple in Tirukottiyūr in the Pāṇḍya region; the Kūṭalazhakar temple in Madurai, in the same region; the Sundaravadana Perumāḷ temple in Uttaramerūr, near Kāñcīpuram. The last-mentioned was built by Dantivarman, son of Nandivarman who had constructed the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple in Kāñcī. But in these temples, according to the Aṣṭāṅgavimāna Āgama, the Perumāḷ is in the standing posture in the storey down below, in the sitting posture in the middle storey, and in the recumbent posture in the top storey. It is only in the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple that the order is changed. In the tier below, Perumāḷ is in the sitting posture, in the middle tier he is in the recumbent posture, and in the standing posture in the top tier.

Nandivarma Pallavamalla lived during the time of Tirumangayāzhvar. From this Āzhvār let us go to the Āzhvār of whom I spoke to you in connection with our subject of guru and śiṣya (teacher and student), that is the Āzhvār who bade the Lord himself to "do like this" or "do like that". You remember his name? It is Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār.

I told you that he lived in a temple in Kāñcīpuram and I wanted to say in which. Of the fourteen "divyadeśas" ("divine places") he lived in Teruve'kā.

The Perumāḷ of Tiruve'kā: his greatness

Like Tiruve'ka there is another place called Tiruttankā among the fourteen divine places. The forests in which the ṛṣis conducted their worship later became "kṣetras". They take the Tamil suffix of "kā" or "kātu," meaning "forest". For instance, "Tiruvānaikkā", "Tirukotikā", "Tiruverkātu", "Tirumaraikkātu" (Vedāraṇyam). Tankā is also called "Tūppul". *Tūppul* is a place where good grass or darbha grows. The ācārya of the Vaḍagalai sect of Śrīvaiṣṇavas, Vedāntadeśika, was born here. If Tankā is famous like this, the first Āzhvār, Poykaiyāzhvār, was born in the sacred pond in Vēkā which has connections with Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār. It is here that Bhagavān resides as Yathoktakarī. Before the Lord was known by this name he was called Bhujangaśayana Perumāḷ (the Lord reclining on the serpent Śeṣa). His presence is to be traced to a period before that of Varadarāja. Varadarāja appeared to grant a boon from the sacrifice performed by Brahmā. At the time of the sacrifice Brahmā and Sarasvatī had a misunderstanding. Keeping Sarasvatī aside, Brahmā had Sāvitrī and Gāyatrī as his yajña-patnīs (he had them as partners for the conduct of the sacrifice). Thereupon, in her anger, Sarasvatī took the form of a turbulent river called Vegavatī and flowed towards the place of the sacrifice. It was then that Bhujangaśayana Perumāḷ obstructed the river in its course and protected the sacrificial altar from being swept away. The sacrifice completed, Varadarāja appeared from it to grant boons not only to Brahmā at this particular time but to all devotees at all times. Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār must have lived either in the temple of Bhujangaśayana Perumāḷ or very close to it at Kāñcīpuram. It was then that, through him, Perumāḷ became "Yathoktakarī".

Most of the idols of the Perumāḷs in Kāñcīpuram are in the standing posture. There are possibly one or two in the sitting posture. The Perumāḷ of Tiruve'kā is in the recumbent posture like Ranganātha, Padmanābhasvāmin and Śārngapāṇī. There is a feature of this Perumāḷ that has attracted special attention. The recumbent figure of Viṣṇu in most temples — even if lying on the back — does not have the head turned skywards. The face is turned, even if slightly, towards the sannidhi so that his graceful glances fall upon the devotees. Śrīraṅganātha (at Śrīraṅgam) faces south with his head turned to the west and his legs stretched towards the east. When we stand before his sannidhi his head is to our left and his feet to the right.

In Tiruvanantapuram Padmanābhasvāmin has his face looking towards the east and his head is in the south with his feet in the east. When we stand before him his head is to our left and his feet to our right. The posture of Śārngapāṇī (Aravamuda) in Kumbhakoṇam is also similar. In Tiruve'kā alone — though Perumāḷ has his head in the south and feet in the north — does his sannidhi face the west. That is his sacred face is turned to the west. This means that when we stand before him for darshan his face is towards our right and his feet to our left. All the other recumbent idols mentioned above have the right side adjacent to us and the left side away

from us. When we stand before their sannidhi, the right hand near us is not held up sufficiently high in the abhaya ("don't have any fear") mudrā. The hand is like a pillow on which Bhagavān rests his head. Though it is in the abhaya-mudrā it is not raised sufficiently high to give us blessings. It is close to the pīṭha or pedestal. If it were to be raised the body itself would be slightly concealed. And when camphor is burned the shadow of the hand will fall on the body. There are problems in keeping the front hand raised in sculpting an idol horizontally (in the recumbent posture).

In Tiruveṅkā the recumbent idol is different. The head is in the south and the feet in the north. The face is turned towards the west. So everything is different. When we stand before Perumāḷ for worship his left side is near us and his right side beyond. That means his left hand is near us and his right hand – which is in the abhaya-mudrā – is on the other side of the body. If the Lord were to use his right hand as a pillow he would not be facing the sannidhi but the wall. So the face is turned towards the sannidhi. The remarkable feature about this posture is that even if the right hand, which is on the other side, is raised our view of the body will not be obstructed. Making the sculpture in this manner is not difficult. For all these reasons the figure of Viṣṇu as Yathoktakārī is different from other recumbent figures of his. The deity here also blesses all of us with his right hand fully raised in the abhaya-mudrā.

Story of Kaṇikaṇṇan

Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār had been worshipping this Perumāḷ even before the deity got the name of Yathoktakārī. (After all, it was because of him that Bhagavān got that name here.) He had a student called Kaṇikaṇṇan who was one very special to him. Kaṇikaṇṇan's parents had no children for a long time and used to bring the Āzhvār milk. The latter, who was most of the time in yogic meditation, opened his eyes rarely and ate almost nothing. He would take a little of the milk and return the remaining to the couple. They would take it as prasāda. It was by taking the milk blessed by the Āzhvār that a son was eventually born to them, that is Kaṇikaṇṇan.

Kaṇikaṇṇan became the Āzhvār's pupil even when he was a child. One day as he was going to the temple he saw a very aged woman, a hunchback who was skin and bone, sweeping the surroundings of the temple, wiping the place with cowdung and decorating it with *kolam*. The boy realised that, as a devotee, she had the determination to serve the Lord until her last breath. Seeing her selfless devotion, Kaṇikaṇṇan's heart was deeply moved and he resolved to help the old lady. But how?

If a person feels compassion in such an intense manner, the power of his guru's blessings will manifest itself in him. The power received by the guru from Īvara will be transmitted to the student. So it was that the moment Kaṇikaṇṇan's heart went out to the old lady, he was impelled by his guru's blessings. Forgetting himself, he lovingly stroked the back of the lady and at once the hunch vanished and she stood straight up. Also, she was transformed from an old woman into a healthy young lady.

In Mathura, Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa had similarly blessed Kubjā (by removing her

The Guru Tradition

hunch). Mathura is one of the seven moksapuris or cities of salvation. Kāñci alone, of the moksapuris, is in the South. What Bhagavān did in the North his dāsa's dāsa (minion's minion) did in the South. [The term the Paramaguru uses for Kaṇikaṇṇan is *aḍiyārkkāḍiyān*. Āzhvār is the aḍiyār of Bhagavān and Kaṇikaṇṇan is the Āzhvār's aḍiyān. The meaning of the word "aḍiyar" has been explained earlier. "Aḍiyar" is singular, while "aḍiyar" is its plural form denoting respect.] One is also reminded of the story of Tirujñanasambandhar, the illustrious Tamil Śaiva saint-poet, who made the hunchback Pāṇḍyan king upright. (The king, who had been called "*Koon Pandyan*" because of his hunch, became *Ninra sīr Nedumāran*.)

The aged woman, transformed by Kaṇikaṇṇan into a young lady, had been a dāsī in the court of the king of Kāñci. In her later years she became a true devadāsī serving the Lord. After her transformation now she said to herself: "Aha, with the blessings of this great Bhāgavata (devotee of Bhagavān), I have become strong again. I must now do nothing but serve Perumāḷ." And she lived true to her resolve.

Will not the whole world be filled with wonder when an aged woman becomes young again? The event will be the talk of the town. The news (of the miracle wrought by Kaṇikaṇṇan) reached the palace and the ears of the Pallava king then ruling from Kāñcīpuram. The rājā now thought to himself: "The woman who was once so dear to me has become young again." The old king now became the victim of an improper urge. He summoned Kaṇikaṇṇan and bade him make him also young.

Kaṇikaṇṇan laughed derisively. For him the guru alone mattered. The guru was everything for him and his sole refuge. No one else meant anything to him, not even the king. He had the courage to live and act according to dharma without having any fear for anyone. He said to the king: "Do you think the old lady was restored to youthfulness by me? Where do I have such capacity? It was my guru's power that possessed me and urged me to do it."

"If that be so," said the king, "fetch that guru of yours."

Kaṇikaṇṇan replied: "You don't seem to know anything about him, O king. You are the ruler here all right. But has my guru ever come to you? From this you should have known enough about him. He has no need for anyone other than Bhagavān. He has nothing to gain by approaching any other. He is filled with compassion, by his very nature, for all those who suffer but serve the Lord and meditate on him. He blesses them and removes their difficulties. It is not necessary that they should tell him about their hardships nor is it necessary that he should go to them for blessing them. He does it through some instrument. It was in this manner that the old woman was blessed. She did not want to become young again for the sake of carnal enjoyment. Her only concern was serving Bhagavān. Compassion for her came welling up in my guru's heart and he made her young again without minding the fact that he was acting against the laws of nature.

"As for you, you want to become young again to enjoy the pleasures of the body. Don't think my guru will give my blessings for such enjoyment. Old age and

death cannot be avoided and one has to submit to the laws of nature. When you depart someone else will take your place on the throne and rule the land; and he himself will pass away one day. Many have reigned before you and grown in years and departed. My guru will never agree to make you young again unless there is some special reason." Kanikaṅṅan spoke thus to the king frankly and courageously.

The king, because of his rājasa (passionate, violent) nature, was inflamed by anger. He cried: "I banish you from my kingdom." Kanikaṅṅan retorted: "I have myself decided not to live in a land ruled by such a king." He walked off and went straight to the temple and to the Āzhvār. He told his guru what had transpired at the palace. And soon he started on his journey that was to take him beyond the kingdom.

Bhagavān did as bidden*

The Āzhvār was a devotee of the Lord and a yogin. In his unalloyed love he seemed to have only two attachments: to his pupil Kanikaṅṅan and to Bhujangaśayana Perumā]. He did not want to be separated from the former and, at the same time, it was his supreme desire to be all the time by the side of the deity, the deity who was in *arccāvatāra*¹

The guru now followed Kanikaṅṅan. The boy, for his part, had not asked his master to accompany him. He wanted to go to some forest or some distant mountainside. "I should not drag my guru there along with me and make him suffer," such was his thought. "Let him be here before the sannidhi of Perumā]. Whatever he be and wherever I am his grace will protect me. Wherever I am physically, he will always reside in my heart."

The guru, however, found himself acting differently. There are examples of great men who so conducted themselves as to suggest they were attached to others. The reason is they wanted to demonstrate to the world the beauty of vātsalya (affection for a child or a young one) that had no trace of selfishness. We see instances of such affection described in the Purāṇas. The Āzhvār who followed Kanikaṅṅan believed that the Lord, sharing the same attachment that he had for the boy, would accompany them. He looked at his favourite deity in the temple. But the Lord in his playfulness (līlāvinoda) continued to recline on the bed of Śeṣa (without responding to the Āzhvār). It was now that the Āzhvār took the liberty of "ordering" the Lord himself. He did not give the command believing himself to be a great Bhāgavata or because of a sense of pride in his devotion. He merely said: "Kanikaṅṅan is going..." He spoke about his disciple leaving the city, the kingdom. "The child is leaving the place in disgust. Should you not be always by his side to protect him?"

Kanikaṅṅan firmly believed that the Āzhvār protected him and would continue to protect him, but the Āzhvār himself did not believe he was doing so. Though

* No attempt has been made to translate the Tamil verses quoted by the Paramaguru in narrating the inspiring story of Kanikaṅṅan.

1 "Arccā" means an idol. It denotes a deity who, instead of going from place to place, is installed as an idol on a seat to bestow his blessings on all.

outwardly he seemed to make so much fuss about "ordering" the Lord to give protection to the boy, he knew inwardly that all protection had its source in Bhagavān. His was an attitude of humility born of the realisation that he himself was but nothing. That is why he told the Lord, as Kanikannan was leaving: "Instead of accompanying the child you take it easy on your snake-bed. Don't lie stretched in your bed. It does not look proper. Do not keep lying in your bed..." There is a suggestion here that the Āzhvār warned Perumāḷ that he would proclaim to the world that the Lord was "irresponsible" lying in his bed. "The child is going," he said. "Unable to bear the separation from him I too am going with him. What does it mean if you remain happily resting in your bed? (He raised his voice.) Rise. Roll up your bed of Śeṣa and start."

When Bhagavān is resting, Ādiśeṣa is his bed; but when he is on the move the divine serpent, with his one thousand hoods, becomes his umbrella. Soon after the birth of Kṛṣṇa, when Vasudeva took the child to Gokula, it was Ādiśeṣa who protected the infant from the torrential rain.

Even when he seemed to be issuing an order to the Lord the Āzhvār's concern for Perumāḷ did not diminish a bit. As he asked Bhagavān to rise from the bed he made sure that the Lord took Śeṣa with him to serve him as an umbrella in sun and rain. The Lord did not want to pretend to "play" further nor cause distress to the Āzhvār. So, as bidden by his devotee, he quickly rose and accompanied the Āzhvār and Kanikannan on their journey.

"Doing as bidden" did not mean only this.

Darkness set in by the time the three (Perumāḷ, the Āzhvār and Kanikannan) had walked four or five miles. Since he wanted to enact his līlā as a human, Perumāḷ said: "It's night. Let us not travel further. We'll stay for the night here and set out again in the morning." Was it Bhagavān who really said this or the Āzhvār? After all, the Lord did only as bidden by the Āzhvār.

The three spent the night peacefully in the cool breeze on the banks of the river Pālār.

Meanwhile – that is the moment Perumāḷ had left the temple – Alakṣmī (inauspiciousness) took hold of Kāñcīpuram. When Bhagavān leaves a place, the Lakṣmī who resides in his bosom also goes with him (that is she deserts the place). So the city, famed all over the world for its prosperity (there is a saying "Nagareṣu "Kāñcī" – of cities Kāñcī), was enveloped in Alakṣmī. Nowhere was any lamp lighted. In the temples worship came to a stop since there were no lamps. Darkness took hold of everyone and there was sorrow as well as anxiety everywhere.

The citizens went to their king to complain about their plight. He too was full of anxiety and bewilderment. He realised that it was because Perumāḷ had left the city that calamity had befallen it. He said: "I will go at once, fall at Bhagavān's feet and return with him." Then he departed. It was morning when the king reached the outskirts of the city. He went up to the banks of the river where Perumāḷ was with the Āzhvār and Kanikannan.

Even now the king did not repent of the offence he had caused Kanikannan and

the injustice he had done by exiling him. It did not occur to him that he should ask the forgiveness of the Āzhvār's disciple. He went straight up to Perumāḷ – never mind whether the Lord was in the form of an idol or whether he was a living presence – prostrated himself before him and said: "Without Perumāḷ the temple is a void and the whole city is a void. The minds of the citizens too have become a void. Whatever the offence committed by us, Bhagavān must forgive us, return to our city and bless us."

The Lord replied: "I did not come of my own volition. The Āzhvār asked me to accompany him. Since I do his bidding I came with him. Unless he asks me I won't return." If Perumāḷ remained in the form of an idol, take it that he spoke as a disembodied voice. Helpless, the king fell at the feet of the Āzhvār. The latter said: "I cannot live without Perumāḷ. So I cannot ask him to return to the city and remain here myself."

"You too return," said the king. "I am indeed waiting for you to do it."

The Āzhvār's reply to this was similar to the reply Perumāḷ had earlier given to the king's prayer. "If I had come on my own," he said, "I would have returned. You asked Kaṅkaṅṅan to leave the city and he himself did not want to live there because of your conduct. And when he came away I too accompanied him since I did not like to be separated from him. So, instead of falling at my feet, go and fall at his. Pray to him and, begging for his forgiveness, ask him to return. If he agrees I too will return with him and I will ask Perumāḷ also to return."

For the sake of the Āzhvār's disciple, Bhagavān, the emperor of the three worlds, was made to leave the temple all of a sudden. Now the Āzhvār made the Pallava emperor fall at the feet of his pupil and ask his forgiveness. Listening to the king's plea, the kind-hearted Kaṅkaṅṅan turned back for Kāñcīpuram. Behind him walked the Āzhvār and, behind the latter, Perumāḷ. And all arrived together at the capital.

Perumāḷ, the Āzhvār and Kaṅkaṅṅan had spent a whole night on the banks of the Pālār. The place came to be called "Oriravirukkai". By usage it is now known as "Orikkai"

When the three returned to Kāñcīpuram Alakṣmī, was dispelled and the city was restored to its original glory. The citizens also became happy with their minds freed from fear and anxiety.

After his return, Perumāḷ did not "unroll" the Śeṣa serpent but remained standing. When he had been asked to roll up his bed and start on the journey, he obeyed. Now he had to be told: "Lie down." Bhagavān is bound by the word of his devotees. That is why he is called "Bhaktaparādhīna" (subject to his devotees).

The Āzhvār's heart melted when he saw that the One who was the Lord of the Most Exalted Realm (Paramapadanātha) was waiting for a word from him. What he said to the Lord now was a repetition of what he had said earlier but for a slight change. He did not say: "I, who cannot be separated from you, have returned. What is it that you are thinking about now? Unroll your Śeṣa bed and lie down."

Instead he said: "Kaṇikaṇṇan has returned." He gave more importance to his disciple than to himself. What he had said meant that, wherever Kaṇikaṇṇan was, Bhagavān must be with him, protecting him always. The Āzhvār asked the Lord to unroll his bed and recline on it. It was only after being bidden by his devotee that Bhagavān rested on his bed of Ādiśeṣa.

Why I have told you the story of Kaṇikaṇṇan is this: the student does not have to approach Bhagavān on his own for anything. If he has utter devotion for his guru, the latter will bring Bhagavān before him. The Lord will follow him wherever he goes, protecting him. If the guru bids Bhagavān to stand for the sake of his pupil, the Lord will do so, and if he asks him to run he will run. And he will lie down only if he is asked to do so.

It is because of the realisation of this truth (that their guru will speak to the Lord on their behalf) that some believe that all they require is the guru and that they don't require even Īśvara.

The guru who fetches Īśvara

If it is Īśvara that you seek it is not necessary that you should worship him directly. Our capacity for worship is not adequate enough. So all we have to do is to "get hold" of a guru. For our sake he will bring Īśvara before us somehow, by prayer or even by fighting with him.

In this manner many a great man has had darshan of the Lord and obtained such darshan for others too. We see this fact illustrated in the story of Somāśimāra Nāyanār. The Nāyanār was unable to invoke Īśvara himself. So he approached Sundaramūrti for help. The story goes that Sundaramūrti "produced" Īśvara before him. The relationship between Sundaramūrti and Somāśimāra Nāyanār was not that of guru and disciple. Even so we learn from the story that a guru who is close to Īśvara can bring the Lord close to the one who has gone to him for refuge.

Now let us listen to the account. We have heard the story of the Āzhvār (Tirumazhiśaiyāzhvār). Should we not now learn also the story relating to one of the Nāyanmārs. This story is connected actually with two Nāyanmārs (or Nāyanārs).

Somāśimāra Nāyanār

When I say "Somāśi"¹, don't laugh! One who has performed the Somayāga is a "Somayājīn" and the word "Somāśi" is derived from it.

The Nāyanmārs include members belonging to various castes and following different occupations. For instance, Nandanār, the untouchable, was an agricultural or land labourer; Kaṇṇappa was a hunter; Atipatta Nāyanār was a fisherman; Tirukurippu Tonḍa Nāyanār was a washerman; and Tirunīlakanthar was a potter. Then there were members from the ruling families like the Ceras, Cojas, and Pāṇḍyas. And there were also twelve Vaidika Brāhmins among the Nāyanmārs of whom Jñānasambandhar and Somāśimāra were two.

¹ In some parts of the South the Northern *samosa* is known as *somāśi*.

Near Peraḷam in Tamil Nadu are the twin places of Ambar and Ambar Mākālam. Somāśimāra belonged to Ambar. Sundaramūrti has referred to him in his *Tiruttonḍartokai* as "Ambarān Somāśimāranukku". There is a maṇḍapa between Ambar and Ambar Mākālam and it is still referred to as the place where Somāśimāra, who was a Śukla-Yajurvedin, performed the Somayāga. In the month of Vaikāṣi (May-June), under the asterism of Āśleṣa, an utsava or festival is celebrated in memory of the sacrifice. There are interesting aspects to it and it is in connection with it that I wanted to tell you the story of the Nāyanār. The story illustrates that if we are unable to invoke Īśvara ourselves we may request our guru to do so for us or someone else who is in his place.

In the Tamil work *Periyapurāṇam* it is mentioned, in a brief account, that Somāśimāra believed that he could propitiate Parameśvara by performing sacrifices and that he went to Tiruvārūr where, with the help of Sundaramūrti, he attained union with Śiva (Śivasāyūjya). From a sthalapurāṇa¹ we come to know the interesting story of the Somayāga performed by him. Unlike many other sthalapurāṇas not a few must be familiar with this. Since a festival is celebrated in honour of the yāga the purāṇa must be authentic. This, of course, does not mean that sthalapurāṇas which are not well known are not authentic.

Somāśimāra was desirous of propitiating Parameśvara by performing the Somayāga. That the offering made in Agni, the sacred fire, reached the Lord was no empty belief with him. He was eager that Parameśvara should appear before his very eyes to receive the āhuti or sacrificial offering. He was, however, diffident about his devotion and his own ability to invoke the god. But his longing to see the Lord was overwhelming. So he thought about the matter of how he could have his great wish fulfilled. It occurred to him that what he could not accomplish by himself could be achieved by some great man who was close to Īśvara.

Sundaramūrti

During his search he came to know about Sundaramūrti Svāmin who was in Tiruvārūr. His amazement knew no bounds when he heard about Sundaramūrti's closeness to the Lord. This svāmin (Sundaramūrti) was different from other svāmins. While the majority of svāmins wore just a kaupina (piece of cloth worn as an undergarment) and spumed gold and women, this svāmin seemed different. He was fond of finery and wore kumkum and scent. Besides, to tell you something about him that might shock you, he used to visit the sort of house which, it is considered, improper to visit. In spite of all this Īśvara was very close to him. If he asked the Lord for gold or women, it seemed he would receive both instantly. If the woman belonging to the house which (normally) would have been improper for him to visit, became angry with him, the Lord himself would go and pacify her and help him to visit her again. Īśvara was so much under his sway that this svāmin would even speak in such a manner as to suggest that he did not care a bit for the Lord. If he lost his eyes for being untruthful under oath he would scold Īśvara exclaiming, "Why did you pluck out my eyes? And how do you expect to

1 "Sthalapurāṇas" are accounts relating to places especially famous for their temples.

flourish?...” Listening to his words of anger, Íśvara would restore to him his sight. Sundaramūrti would browbeat the Lord into doing things for him. He was a strange kind of servant of the Lord, the sort of servant who would get things done by lording over the master. As for Íśvara he too was a strange kind of master since he carried out the orders of his servant, Sundaramūrti: he was indeed another “yathoktakāri”

The ways of the great

The ways of Íśvara and the ways of great men cannot be comprehended by small minds. With our limited intelligence and understanding we should not jump to conclusions about the behaviour of great men or be guilty of disrespect to them. In the Purāṇas and in other accounts, there are passages in which great men have explained such behaviour, giving reasons that seem we can appreciate. We must accept them in good faith.

Sundaramūrti was in love with Paravai and Śāngili. For this reason we should not at once unthinkingly view him with disdain. The two women belonged to castes other than his own and one of them belonged to the sort of street not visited by virtuous people. Even so we should not regard them as not worthy of our respect. From the fact that they are called Paravai Nācciyār¹ and Śāngili Nācciyār it is evident that they were held in great esteem and that they were women of high character and devotion.

Who were they and who was Sundaramūrti? When Sundaramūrti wanted to marry, in accordance with the śāstras, Íśvara came in the guise of an old Brāhmin and stopped the wedding, claiming him to be his slave. Why did the Lord, who had prevented Sundaramūrti from becoming a gr̥hastha or householder, later help to bring about his union with the two women, Paravai and Śāngili? To accomplish this job, Íśvara even went on an errand to a place not resorted to by virtuous and respectable people. Why? There are answers to these questions in the first section of the *Periyapurāṇam*.

Before he was born on earth, Sundaramūrti had been an attendant of Íśvara in Kailāsa. Paravai Nācciyār and Śāngili Nācciyār were companions of Pārvaī then. One day Sundaramūrti – he was at the time called Alālasundara – saw them in a garden and fell in love with them. The Nācciyārs too felt love in their hearts for him. Since falling in love was improper in Kailāsa Íśvara cursed the three to be born on earth. But out of his compassion the Lord gave them the blessing that their love would be requited during their life on earth as mortals.

There are so many things that seem strange or improper in the stories of great men. We all too hastily find fault with them without realising that what is *apparently* improper conduct is justified in the Purāṇas with proper reasoning.

Those who think of Sundaramūrti with disrespect on account of his relationship with Paravai and Śāngili should also see it in the context of some other matters. When Sundaramūrti wanted to take the hand of a girl as wife Íśvara appeared to

1 “Nācciyār” means “nāyikā” or “queen”

draw him to himself. Sundaramūrti himself spurned the life of a householder as worthless, became a slave or *dāsa* of Īśvara and went from temple to temple. During his pilgrimage he met Koṭpuli Nāyanār. The great man asked him to accept his virtuous and beautiful daughters as his wives. The girls, Śinkāṭi and Vanappakai, prostrated themselves before him. Thereupon Sundaramūrti, with a pure heart, told the Nāyanār that he would accept the girls as his daughters, not as his wives. There is internal evidence for this in the hymns he has sung about the place. He refers to himself in these passages as "Sinkāṭiyappan".

Let me speak from another angle. We see the incidents or happenings that pertain to the outward life of great men. We also try to form an idea as to how these affect their minds or do not affect their minds. However, do we realise how their inner heart, their inner being, is affected? It is only if we know this that we can appreciate the measure of their true greatness. The outward life is an indication of inner character only to a small extent. The innermost being of great men, the living nobility of their conduct, the grace that wells up in their Self or Atman will be known only from their writings, from their songs composed in the quickness of their grace, their *aruf*.

Let the outward life of Sundaramūrti be whatever. To know his inner mind, his inner being, we must listen to his songs. The devotion infusing his *Tevāram* is such as to melt our hearts. For centuries the hearts of people have been moved by these songs. It would be foolish on our part not to realise that he was a supreme bhakta. His songs move even hearts of stone. We should on no account think of him with irreverence.

If Sundaramūrti could give "orders" to Īśvara it shows how easily the Lord was accessible to him. Of the many ways of worship, Īśvara made Sundaramūrti follow the "sakhāmārga" ("path of the companion"). It implies the liberty of quarrelling with the sakhā, meaning here the Lord. "*Tampirān tozhar*" ("companion of the Lord") is one of the many names of Sundaramūrti. The man who was a companion of the Lord has composed the *Tiruttonḍartokai* to pay obeisance to the 63 Nāyanmārs. In this work he calls himself "*Adiyen*"¹ in all humility.

The riverside amaranthus

To go back to the story of Somāśimāra. When Somāśimāra was wondering whom to approach for help in bringing forth Parameśvara to the sacrifice that he was going to perform, he came to know about Sundaramūrti and his greatness. He resolved that he would seek his help to have his intense longing fulfilled.

He had, however, no easy access to Sundaramūrti who was always surrounded by the devotees of Śiva and others. Indeed Sundaramūrti conducted a royal durbar, the durbar of Śiva-bhakti. Though he was born in the community of *arcakas* called Ādiśaivas or Śivabrāhmins, he was adopted and brought up by a junior king of Tirumunaippādi. Later, the rulers of all the three major kingdoms of the South, Cera, Coḷa and Pāṇḍya, became his devotees. The Cera ruler

1 Explained earlier.

The Guru Tradition

was particularly close to him. Sundaramūrti went from place to place in the Pāndya kingdom with the three kings forming his retinue. He was indeed like a king himself with all royal paraphernalia and pageantry.

Somāśimāra thought to himself: "How can a poor Brāhmin like me approach Sundaramūrti? What should I do to come to his notice? What big gift or donation can I make him to draw him to me?" All of a sudden an idea occurred to him.

Somāśimāra ate after midday having performed his Brāhminic rites like Agnihotra. What was his meal like? Nothing sumptuous or varied. It was such as to give the lie to the unfair criticism made of Brāhmins that they eat by extorting from others. Somāśimāra was indeed an example of the simple life that a Brāhmin is enjoined to live by the śāstras. Without troubling anyone, without accepting charity or any gift from anyone, he would go to the riverbank, muttering to himself the Pancākṣara, and gather the leafy vegetable growing wild there and bring it home to be cooked by his wife. He never extracted anything from anyone. All that he extracted was the leafy vegetable that grew on earth as nobody's property.

Somāśimāra said to himself: "What have I got to offer? The leafy vegetable (*tūtuviḷankīrai*)¹ grows in abundance on the riverbanks. They say it increases jñāna as much as it helps to improve one's health. Every day I will gather this vegetable, go to Sundaramūrti's house and make sure that it is used in his food. Eventually, one day, he may perhaps ask: "Who's it that brings this vegetable every day?" He thought of this plan to send a *dūtu* (envoy) with the *tūtuviḷankīrai* so that he would come to the notice of the great svāmin.

It was a course of action not merely intelligently thought out. It was also inspired by Somāśimāra's devotion. "It matters little even if he (Sundaramūrti) does not notice the *kīrai*," Somāśimāra said to himself. "It would be enough if the offering made with such devotion by me is taken in by the holy man. Let me make the offering quietly, without caring about what will happen afterwards." True to his resolve he went every day to the house of Sundaramūrti in Tiruvārūr and left the *kīrai* there to be offered to the great man.

During this time Sundaramūrti was staying at the house of Paravai Nācciyār. The place was always like a mela with people coming and going. Somāśimāra could not go anywhere near Sundaramūrti. Quietly he would go to the kitchen, hand the *kīrai* to the attendants and leave. Paravai Nācciyār saw that a certain Brāhmin, with such concern, was bringing the *kīrai* every day. She had the vegetable added in Sundaramūrti's food. But she did not get the opportunity to speak to her husband about the Brāhmin who brought it.

Sundaramūrti had his meal every day in the company of a great number of devotees of Śiva. He would eat either silently, meditating on Śiva, or speaking with the bhaktas on the glory of Śiva. After the meal, he sang the names of the Lord or spent the time in meditation, in visiting temples or in singing new compositions of the *Tevāram*. He was so occupied in his devotions that no opportunity presented itself for him to inquire about the *kīrai* or the man who brought it.

Days passed thus. Somāśimāra brought the *kīrai* every day with his devotion undiminished. But one day it so happened that the river he crossed every day to

¹ The translator has referred to *tūtuviḷankīrai* as amaranthus. But he may be wrong. The Latin name of this leafy vegetable is *Solanum trilobatum*. *Kīrai* is a common name in Tamil for leafy vegetables.

The Guru Tradition

go to the house of Sundaramūrti was swollen. He was sad that an obstacle had come in his way of doing the little service he had been doing the great saint-poet. The river continued to be in flood for some days and all the time he remained at home.

It was by creating such an apparent obstacle for his devotee that Īśvara showed the way to Somāśimāra to solve his problem. It is one of the Lord's ways to be playful in this manner.

When the leafy vegetable was not included in his food for four or five days together, Sundaramūrti noticed its absence. Things do not come to our notice when we take them for granted so to speak. We notice them only in their absence. For instance, when we are so absorbed in conversation sitting in a room we do not notice that the place is airy or breezy. But if a door or a window shuts we tell ourselves: "O what happened? It was so airy all this time."

In the same way Sundaramūrti did not notice the *kīrai* in his food when he was absorbed in Śiva, thinking of the Lord and talking of him. But now that his food did not contain the *kīrai* he found it different and noticed its absence. When he asked Paravai Nācciyār about it, she told him that a certain Brāhmin had been bringing it but he had not come for some days.

Sundaramūrti said: "How sad! Someone was taking the trouble of serving me without presenting himself before me. It is unfortunate that I did not acquaint myself with such a noble soul. If he comes again send him to me. I must see him and I must also, if I can, be of help to him."

Both Sundaramūrtisvāmin and Somāśimāra were filled with the longing to see one another. Such is the *līlā* of Īśvara.

The flood abated. Somāśimāra decided to resume his service to Sundaramūrti. He now came to the house of the saint-poet with a greater quantity of the leafy vegetable. When he came to know that Sundaramūrti was desirous of seeing him his happiness knew no bounds. "Such a great man, he has had direct contact with Īśvara and he has even conversed with him," so he said to himself.

Somāśimāra's heart went pit-a-pat as he went and fell at the feet of Sundaramūrti. The latter was happy to see the man who had all these days shown his devotion by bringing the vegetable. "Who are you, svamī?" Sundaramūrti asked. "Without minding the trouble, you have been bringing the lettuce every day. What do you expect of me?"

Somāśimāra had been waiting precisely for this moment. Shy of making known his wish in the presence of others, he said: "Yes, you must help me. But I can speak to you about it only in private."

On hearing these words, Sundaramūrti realised that the man was preparing the ground for something big. He thought to himself: "Though Īśvara fulfils my wish whatever it be, it does not mean that I should go to him on behalf of others." He said to the Brāhmin: "O Brāhmin, don't think I can do everything. I will do whatever is within my power."

Somāśimāra replied: "There is nothing that is impossible for you." Then, when

the two were left to themselves, he unfolded his wish to the svāmin.

Sundaramūrti told Śomāśimāra that it was no easy or ordinary matter for Parameśvara to appear in person before Somāśimāra to accept the havis or sacrificial offering. "I am not sure whether I can perform such a task for you," he said. "However, since my body has so much of the vegetable brought by you I will try my best and speak to Īśvara on your behalf. It depends on the will of Īśvara whether or not it will be done. Do not take it ill if the Lord does not appear before you."

The test of Īśvara

Sundaramūrti then went to the temple of Tyāgarāja (in Tiruvārūr) and spoke to the deity. Speaking to the Lord was such a routine matter for him. Tyāgarāja responded thus: "O Sundara, if you ask me to do a thing I cannot but do it. If someone has served you with devotion, my obligation to do something in return is greater than yours. For your sake I will go to him (Somāśimāra) to accept the sacrificial offering. But there is one point you must remember. What the Brāhmin longs for is too big. It will not be just if I fulfil it entirely. I may not necessarily appear to receive the offering in this form of mine. If he offers the havis to me, whatever the form in which I appear, then I will accept it gladly."

Sundaramūrti thereafter told Somāśimāra that the Lord had agreed to appear at the sacrifice to accept the havis. Somāśimāra's joy knew no bounds. He returned to Ambar Makālam and, with the help of a number of people, performed the yāga. It was in the month called Māsi in Tamil, under the asterism of Āśleṣa. When it was time to offer the havis, Somāśimāra was filled with expectation, anxiety.

All of a sudden cries of disgust were heard: "What's all this? What shouldn't have happened has happened." A big mob of Pulayas (the lowest order of untouchables in the South) came in a bustle, beating their drums loudly. In their midst was their chief with his wife by his side and leading four dogs. She carried a big pot of toddy that reeked for miles around.

How would the Brāhmins conducting the sacrifice have felt about it all? "It's all ruined," they exclaimed. "If we do not perform a prāyaścitta (expiate for the offence of being tainted by the intrusion of the Pulayas) we will lose our Brāhminhood. We have suffered this fate because we agreed to perform the yāga for this stupid man." In disgust they hurried out of the place.

But Somāśimāra remained undisturbed and was full of joy. His longing had at last been fulfilled. The help rendered by Sundaramūrtisvāmin, his faith in the great man and Sundaramūrti's wish to bless him – all this had opened his eyes at the appropriate moment. He had passed in Parameśvara's test.

Somāśimāra understood that the Pulaya chief was none other than Parameśvara himself. The woman standing by his side with the pot of toddy was Ambā. The dogs the Pulaya held in leash were the four Vedas. The entire army of Pulayas were the Bhūtaganas or "hosts" of Śiva.

Once, in Kāśī, Parameśvara appeared before our Ācārya in the guise of an untouchable. It seemed that the Ācārya did not recognise him at first. You must

have heard the story that, after the untouchable had asked him questions on Vedānta, the Ācārya recognised him. Somāśimāra, however, recognised the Lord in the guise of the untouchable the moment he made his appearance.

In the hymn called "Rudra" all things are held to be the various forms of Śiva. Śiva is thief, untouchable, and so on. Bhagavān says in the Gītā: "He is a scholar who realises the truth that all creatures are equal: Brāhmins of the highest order who are called gods on earth, the cow and the elephant that are worshipped and, at the other extreme, the basest of all creatures, the dog, and the untouchable who eats the flesh of the dog."

Somāśimāra had waited long for the moment of Īśvara's descent and had gone through much bodily suffering to perform the yajña. When the army of outcastes came on the scene of the sacrifice he did not give way to lamentation or anger but remained peaceful and full of feelings of affection. He recognised that the chief of the outcastes was none other than Īśvara himself and placed the sacrificial offering in his hand.

He exhorted the other Brāhmins to return saying: "Do not run away. It is the Lord himself who has come in disguise with his entourage. Believe me." But they did not pay heed to him and left in a huff scolding him.

The story goes that the Lord cursed these Brāhmins to become outcastes and that, on Somāśimāra interceding on their behalf, he relented and modified his curse to mean that they would be outcastes only during a particular hour of the day, that is the time the havis or sacrificial offering was given by Somāśimāra.

The Brāhmins were not wrong in adhering to the śāstras which prescribe who has a right or who does not have a right to take part in a yajña. But Somāśimāra understood the śāstras better than they and they should have paid heed to him. They should have waited patiently for they knew Somāśimāra had gone through so much trouble in the performance of the sacrifice. Had they done so they too would have had darshan of Īśvara. But, instead, they incurred the curse of the Lord for having abused Somāśimāra.

This is not of much importance to us. When Somāśimāra brought the havis, the chief of outcastes revealed himself as Śiva riding the sacred bull. Ambā and the hosts also appeared in their true form. For Somāśimāra it was the moment of realisation. The purpose of his birth was fulfilled and he attained the world of Śiva.

When Somāśimāra realised that he could not have darshan of Īśvara by virtue of his own strength or devotion, he achieved his wish through the help of a great man who was near unto the Lord. I told you the story to illustrate this truth (that you can be face to face with the Lord if you are the recipient of the grace of a great man).

Like one drawing a cow to oneself with a sheaf of grass, Somāśimāra brought *kīrai* from some distant place to be given to Sundaramūrti who was a companion of Īśvara. The latter, feeling indebted to him, "produced" Īśvara before him.

(To "get hold" of Īśvara Somāśimāra had to "get hold" of Sundaramūrti. It was the *tātuvilankīrai* offered by him that had acted as his messenger or envoy and brought the two — Somāśimāra and Sundaramūrti — together. Is the name

tūtuviṅkīrai or *dutuvīṅkīrai* derived from this fact? There is a similar story in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Before Rāmānujācārya, there was the ācārya called Ājavandār who spent his early years in royal comfort and ease. Then, it is said, Maṅakkāl Nambi drew him to him by sending him the same *tūtuviṅkīrai*. But there is a difference. In this story it is the guru who sends the *kīrai* to the disciple. However it be, the point to note is that in both cases it is the leafy vegetable that is the messenger or envoy that fulfils the purpose of bringing the guru and the disciple together.)

If you rely on your guru, you do not need Īśvara. Or, if you do need Īśvara, you will obtain him through your guru. The story I have told you illustrates this truth. For the supreme help done by the guru all that we have to do is to become devoted to him. Faith is the source of everything. We must have the firm faith that he will take us across to the other shore (release us from saṁsāra). This is what is called bhakti and śraddhā or devotion and faith.

Even if the guru be imperfect...

An objection could be raised to the statement that there is no need to be devoted to Īśvara and that devotion to guru is all that is required. When do we become utterly devoted to someone? When do we have such faith in a man as to believe that he will grant us blessings that go as far as to be the cause of our final liberation? Such a one must be absolutely free from any blemish. It is only then that we will be totally devoted to him. He must possess auspicious attributes to an infinite degree. Only then will he be able to grant us grace that goes a long way and becomes the cause of our mokṣa or salvation. Īśvara is in this way totally devoid of any shortcoming and is the abode of infinite auspiciousness. At the same time he is the Almighty. There is no doubt that he will bless us in this world and the hereafter. No one doubts this. Will we be able to obtain a guru in the same manner, a guru who is devoid of even the slightest fault and who can help us in every way? Don't we see that, however great a man is, he has some drawback or other? He is not entirely free from desire or ill-will. And could you speak of a guru who is almighty? We see for ourselves that the gurus are not successful in carrying out even their own plans. And don't they themselves depend on Īśvara and pray to him for their needs?

Let it be so. Let it be that they too rely on the power of Īśvara, that they too have shortcomings. But Īśvara who pervades everything, is he not present in them also? But if we look upon them as being truly without blame, if we think of them as pure and full of auspicious attributes, if we become devoted to them, Īśvara who has all these qualities will accept our devotion and bless us. If we regard a dog as God and the man who eats the flesh of the dog also as God and if we believe that Īśvara will bless us through them, will he not bless us when we depend on the guru who is many times purer than we are and who is, besides, virtuous, disciplined, learned, compassionate and anxious to protect us?

Advantages of guru-bhakti

You may ask: "When there is Īśvara who is in reality free from all shortcomings and is all-powerful, why should we be devoted to a man who, however much

The Guru Tradition

superior to us, is not perfect like Īśvara? And why should we be devoted to him imagining him to be perfect? Is it not better to be directly devoted to Īśvara and none else?’

I will tell you how devotion to the guru has greater advantages than devotion to Īśvara. I have already spoken to you about it, but I will explain the matter further. We don't see Īśvara. As for the guru he is right before us. We can have direct contact with him and mix with him. Īśvara does not talk to us about what is good or what is bad for us. The guru, on the other hand, takes great care in telling us what is good for us. We may also ask him: "May we do like this? May we do like that?" Our devotion is not sufficient to receive advice directly from Īśvara.

Also, Īśvara, we believe, is somewhere in a remote, inaccessible realm. He is beyond the range of our vision, our speech, our mind. But he is witness to all our actions. However, we do not believe that he will punish us for our guilt or bless us for being virtuous. It is because we are not conscious that Īśvara is all the time watching us that we act wilfully without the fear of being punished by him. And if we do good we have to make some sacrifice or other, either with our body or with our material possessions. But we are not inclined to make such sacrifices. There is a saying: "The king kills today. God takes long to kill." It is not only in the matter of punishment that there is a difference. If the king is pleased with you and wants to favour you, he does not hesitate to reward you, to give you gold or other precious objects or titles (Rao Bahadur, Dewan Bahadur, knighthood,¹ etc). But the blessings of Īśvara do not seem immediate. The Lord's durbar is such that the consequences of our good and bad actions (punya and pāpa karma) are experienced or suffered by us over many births. Since there is an indefinite interval between our action and its consequence (happiness or suffering) we become less fearful about committing wrongs. At the same time we are also less enthusiastic about being virtuous.

In the case of the guru, if we commit any wrong he tells us about it and punishes us at once. He gives us such a lashing with his tongue that his advice sticks firmly in our minds. With the result that the next time we are up to doing some wrong we think of him and are deterred from doing it. We tell ourselves: "What will happen if the guru comes to know about it?" If he is a guru with much strength of the Self (Ātmaśakti) he will come to know about it by himself. Even if he does not have such power – or if he has such power but does not make it apparent (there are gurus who are known for their playfulness, similar to Bhagavān's līlā, and they pretend not to know things they in fact know) – we will have the fear that he will come to know about it through someone else. That will save us from committing a wrong or a sin again.

If we do a good act the guru will come to know about it himself or through someone else. Or, it may be, we will ourselves somehow see to it that it reaches his ears. He will praise us for what we have done, bless us and encourage us to do better things in the future. Too much praise will, however, make us

¹The Paramguru is obviously referring to titles given to Indians during the Raj.

The Guru Tradition

swollen-headed. So the guru may feel that a student should not be openly praised for his good actions as he is openly scolded for his bad deeds. Even so he will in a subtle or discreet manner make his happiness known to his student and bless him.

For us to go to the other shore, to attain mokṣa, we must reduce the burden of our sinful karma and add to our meritorious karma. The guru gives us incentive to do puṇya karma (like a bonus it encourages us to do good) and disincentive for pāpa karma. In the dispensation of Īśvara such incentives and disincentives are not so easily apparent.

More than all this, the guru cleanses our sinful citta or consciousness better than we can do so ourselves. Indeed he may take upon himself some of our pāpa and expiate for it. He will pray for us more intensely than we ourselves can. He pleads on our behalf with Īśvara, even issues "orders" to him or fights with him for our sake. It is for these reasons that, however imperfect or incomplete he is, the guru is elevated in the North in the concept of "Guru-vad"

For those who have affection for, and an unshakeable faith in, the guru, remembrance of him gives more peace than remembrance of Īśvara. How is it so? When we do not know for sure whether Bhagavān listens to our prayer, whether he takes notice of our virtuous actions, how can we live in peace in the assurance that we need not have fear or that the Lord is there to see about everything? In our doubt, in our sorrow and fear, our faith is eroded or swept away.

Those who have dedicated themselves to their guru will have no fear, no doubts and sorrow and will remain unperturbed in the belief: "He will take care of us. He will take care of everything."

We speak of Bhagavat-smaraṇa, remembrance of Bhagavān, meditating on the Lord. But Bhagavān is for all creatures of the universe. The number of creatures are countless. That being so we tend to wonder whether Bhagavān will single us out to pay attention. It seems to us that the Lord remains without any attachment somewhere in an impersonal manner. As for the guru, he seems to exist specially for us. He is determined to take us to the other shore. He does not have the big "office" of caring for the entire world and he has under him only so many as would be corrected by him or brought to the right path. That is why he will take a personal interest in us. We relate to him, thinking, "He is very personal to us. He is involved in all our difficulties. We regard him as one specially meant for us and we have no doubt as to whether or not he will care for us."

In our ignorant view of things, we think that Īśvara functions in the same way as nature. We do not realise that he is the true Creator. Until we obtain jñāna, we suspect that even his blessing is something that is accidental. It is only in the guru's action that we see the personal touch in a glowing manner. For that reason we are filled with enthusiasm and are at rest.

There is before us such a big heap of eatables, such a variety of dishes. But there is no one around to distribute them. How would we like to take a handful of the food and feed ourselves? Even if it be some wretched gruel if the mother fed us

saying, "Child, do eat," how different would it be? The joy you get from this personal touch you will not find in eating the most sumptuous food. Someone has prepared this sumptuous food and it is meant to be eaten by us. But we will not relish it if we do not know who it is who has made it and if we are not fed by someone personally. You see the same difference between the blessing of Īśvara and the blessing of the guru.

Whatever the grace you receive from Īśvara, however great it be, you will have doubts about it and some questions will arise in your mind about it. Not so if this grace manifests itself through the agency of great men like Sundaramūrti.

There is one more point to be considered. They say that all good as well as all evil springs from Īśvara. They further say that it is his līlā to set Māyā upon us and create difficulties for us. They terrify us by stating that Parāśakti drags even the supreme jñānin by force and plunges him in moha or delusion. The will of God is inscrutable, they say. The Lord himself says in the Gītā: "Īśvara mounts all creatures on the merry-go-round and twirls them with his Māyā." So we are likely to entertain the fear whether he would indulge in his līlā and whether he would take us across (the ocean of saṁsāra) or whether he would trample us underfoot further.

The guru is not like this, not like Īśvara who is both jñāna and Māyā. He is jñāna alone. His "office" is to dispel Māyā and bestow jñāna. You cannot say that the guru is the abode of evil, that out of his "playfulness" he despatches Māyā to cause you trouble. There is no fear or doubt about our teacher who removes all our difficulties. There is no room for fear or suspicion about him who sees to it that we do not come to any harm, dispels all our troubles and rescues us from Māyā.

That is why remembrance of the guru makes us more peaceful in mind than remembrance of the Lord.

What is smaraṇa or what is dhyāna? It means meditating on the form of the Lord, on his functions, on his attributes. It means to be so involved in meditation as to dissolve our mind in him. I spoke to you about the Lord's function. But we do not know for certain what exactly it is. There is no direct contact between Bhagavān and us. We can only think of the blessings he has given to other devotees. It is all right if the grace he has showered on others fills our minds. Protecting the honour of Draupadī, blessing Kucela (Sudāma), releasing Gajendra (freeing the elephant king from the crocodile): these are among the many acts of compassion of the Lord. The Purāṇas speak of how the Lord has gone to the rescue of his devotees, of the varied blessings he has given, of the many ways in which he has manifested his līlā. Rāsālīlā, Śiva's ānanda-naṭana ("dance of bliss"), the imparting of jñāna to devotees exemplified by Kṛṣṇa's upadeśa to Arjuna and Dakṣiṇāmūrti's upadeśa to Sanaka and other sages: There are so many things to speak about.

But in our half-baked stage how far can we be involved in them? How far will our mind find fulfilment contemplating the acts of kindness of the Lord? "Where is the Lord and where are we?" – all we can do is to give way to lamentation thinking of our smallness. But if we meditate on the guru we will realise how much

he has personally been helpful to us. If he has not fulfilled many of our desires it may be because we don't deserve them. But if we know ourselves for what we are and if we have a sense of gratitude, we will recognise that the guru has done more than what we deserve. Hasn't he taken so much trouble to correct us when we went wrong, to reform us? On our level as humans, notwithstanding all talk of *vairāgya* or passionlessness and detachment, we need support in the form of affection. Doesn't our guru also meet this requirement well? He makes inquiries about our well-being. Even if we forget to be in touch with him he asks others about our welfare and sends us *prasāda*. How kind and considerate was he in telling us, "Don't remain hungry... Don't go out in the sun..." Thinking of all his kindnesses we will be filled with joy.

When we think of *Īvara* we try to conceive him in the form already made familiar through various descriptions (in our religious texts, *Purānas*, hymns, etc). It is well and good if our mind is really fixed on such a form. But as a matter of fact are we capable of this? In the *Purānas* and in the *mantra-śāstras* various deities are described from head to foot and from foot to head (*pādādikeśam* and *keśādīpādam*) — indeed each and every part of a deity's physical form.

Accounts of male deities are given from foot to head. Starting from the feet, each part of the body is described ending with the head (ankles, legs, the hip, the bosom, the neck). Female deities are described from head to foot. Whatever the deity there are so many hands to take into account (four, eight, eighteen) and each hand carries a weapon or some other object. One deity, for instance, is adorned by the *Gangā*, the crescent-moon, the snake, the tiger-skin — or he wears the yellow cloth, the *Kaustubha* jewel and the *vanamālā* (garland of forest flowers of each season so worn as to reach down to the knees). Then there are the mounts or vehicles of the deities: the bull, the lion, *Garuda*, the mouse, the peacock, etc. It is difficult to keep our mind steady meditating even on a single deity thinking of his various attributes that make up an entire list. For all that we will be worried about our having left out some attribute or other.

Kṛṣṇa Paramātmān himself says to *Uddhava* that, after each limb of the Lord is "savoured" a little, one must concentrate on his smiling face. But once we decide to meditate on the divine form we find that we have no time for our mind to linger over each limb. It is even more doubtful whether we can fix our mind on the *mandahāsa* or *kaṭākṣa* (the gentle or incipient smile and the sidelong glance). Our mind wanders thinking of some aspect of the deity left out, some weapon or other that the god carries or, may be, his vehicle.

Meditating on *Śiva*, if we think of the goddess *Gangā*, we are worried about our having left out the crescent-moon. If we think of the eye on the forehead we are worried that we have left out the blue throat. If we think of the deer we are worried that we have omitted the axe. And, when meditating on *Viṣṇu*, if we think of the conch-shell we are worried that we have forgotten the discus and, if we think of the *Kaustubha* jewel, what about the *Śrīvatsa*? And, when we think of the lotus eyes, the smiling face vanishes. In this way it may not be possible for us to meditate on the form of a deity with one-pointedness. We may even wonder whether it would

The Guru Tradition

be better if we did not know all the descriptions of the deity concerned mentioned in the śāstras.

But if it is a question of meditating on the form of the guru it is easy for our mind to be fixed on it since we are already familiar with it. When we are reminded of our father, mother, friend or boss do we think of him or her in terms of the eye, nose, etc? Do we try to imagine their weapons? The mother means the ladle, the boss means the fountain-pen: is this how we think of them? No, we think of each according to the total impression he or she has made on our mind.

When we think of someone directly known to us, the picture we have in our mind is made up of the total effect produced by his appearance, his work, his nature, his outlook, his attitude towards us, our attitude towards him. We think of the guru also in this manner. It is not similar to thinking of a deity. Now the mind does not wander having to worry about his physical form. There is no division into form, work, character, etc. We have a total feeling for the guru which is very personal and very intimate. We find joy in meditating on such a guru whose compassion will take us across the ocean of worldly existence. When we think of a divinity we have to think of his eyes that are so wide as to reach his ears and hands so long as to touch the knees. It is different in the case of the guru. Even if he has a rough exterior we are happy thinking of him. Why do we love our mother? Is it because she is beautiful and is an M.A.? It is the same with the guru. However ungainly the son is the mother loves him. The guru's kindness for his disciple is similar. If the mother gives milk to nourish her son's body, the guru gives the milk of jñāna to nurture his śiṣya's mind. We find it easy to meditate on the guru and discover joy in his remembrance, in meditating on him.

Bhagavān and the ācārya are one and the same. If we go to a very much higher level we will realise that even the disciple is not different from the two. But to speak so in our present stage (of development or enlightenment) is nothing but empty, meaningless talk. Even people extremely mature in their wisdom, while being exhorted to view everything on the basis of non-dualism (that is to regard all things as not different from themselves), are told that an exception is to be made in how they look upon their guru. They are urged to look upon him as lofty and to consider themselves, at the same time, as much lower than he. "Never take the view that you and the guru are one," they are admonished. If such is the advice given to people of mature wisdom there is no need to tell those less wise how they should regard their guru. We can think of the guru only as being different from us. There is nothing wrong in taking such an attitude. All the same, it is important to believe that the guru is not different from Īśvara.

Īśvara and the guru are not separate. Īśvara, in fact, reveals himself as the guru. If you choose an individual as your guru, inspired by such a feeling, the result cannot but be salutary.

Three attitudes

If you have devotion for Īśvara and also devotion to an equal extent for your guru, you will have realisation of the inner meaning of any upadeśa you have.

received. That is the meaning of the verse quoted earlier..

The apportioning of bhakti between Īśvara and one's guru will depend upon one's mental proclivities as a disciple. There are those for whom devotion to Īśvara is the highest objective. For them the guru is one who shows the path for it. Here the mind is eager to be attached to Īśvara who is an unknown entity. If such be our attitude, we go to the guru seeking his help in knowing the Lord. The guru in this case represents the side-line that takes us to the main line that is Īśvara. We are grateful to the guru and devoted to him since he leads us to Īśvara. The guru too will accept us as his pupils responding to this attitude of ours. When a tender creeper is helplessly swaying in the wind, we hold it and wind it round a sturdy branch. Similarly, the guru makes the disciple hold the sturdy branch that is Īśvara. He will teach his students subjects they do not know and Īśvara will accept these pupils in this way.

Can we apportion our bhakti between our guru and Īśvara and if so will we receive their blessings in the same proportion as our devotion to them? Such a question may suggest that I am speaking in a mocking tone but in fact the question stems from "yukti". To speak of the actual experience of the disciple who has equal devotion to Īśvara and his guru: sometimes his mind will be totally attached to Īśvara and will be full of devotion for him, at other times he will be fully devoted to the guru, looking upon him as Īśvara in human form. However it be, Īśvara will give his blessings in his form of Īśvara as well as in his form of the guru.

In the third attitude there is no worry about Īśvara at all. Let Īśvara be whatever. What we need is a guru. Īśvara will show us the right path through him. Or else there is no need for us to believe the story that he comes in the guise of the guru. For us the guru is everything. He it is that is our Īśvara. So we have to be devoted to him to the exclusion of all others. He will take us across the ocean of worldly existence. All our devotion is placed at the feet of the guru alone.

The attitude that is even superior to the above is not to worry about whether at all the guru will take us across (that is show the way for liberation from the cycle of birth and death). In such an attitude there is joy in the very act of being devoted to him, in serving him, irrespective of whether or not he will take us across the ocean of saṁsāra. Finding fulfilment in service with devotion (dāśya with bhakti) is superior to the other three attitudes.

Īśvara's grace as reward for guru-bhakti

Whatever the approach of the student, whether he thinks his guru will lead him across or whether he worries at all about the matter, he is bound to receive the supreme knowledge and final liberation. He may not remember Īśvara. But Īśvara resides in the guru to whom he is utterly devoted. The Lord will therefore accept the devotion offered to the guru and give him (the disciple) the supreme blessing. We must remember that all namaskaras have the goal of Keśava. If you serve anyone with devotion – whoever it be – without the least trace of selfishness, Īśvara will show his kindness to you accepting such service as worship offered to himself.

Īśvara will give his blessings that include mokṣa if one is devoted to him with total

love, that is love untainted by selfishness. There is no need to regard him as the Lord of the three worlds nor is there any need to perform pūjā to him in submission. We may even think of him as one belonging to us, one among us. We see such devotion in the story of the gopikas (the milkmaids of Gokula). Nārada and others paid them obeisance considering them as those occupying the highest pedestal as devotees. Kṛṣṇa Paramātmā himself has celebrated their bhakti in the same manner. Indeed they (the gopikās) do not even know that Kṛṣṇa is the Paramātmā. Perhaps they have not even heard of such an entity as the "Paramātmā". They know Kṛṣṇa only as "jāra-cora", as a "thief", as one who torments the hearts of women in love. Even so they abandon everything in their love for him. In fact, they are not aware of terms like "sarvasaṅga-parityāga" (forsaking all associations, all attachments, all desires). The fact is that they forsake all for the sake of Kṛṣṇa. Bhagavān recognises their devotion and raises them to an exalted place by making them his queens in Gokula which is the realm of everlasting vihāra (playground) of joy.

If a man is devoted to his guru and looks upon him as his everything, Īśvara will bless him with jñāna and mokṣa even if he himself does not ask for these boons. The guru's help will be a great support to him when Īśvara "delays" his blessings, taking into account his karma and placing ordeals before him to cleanse his inner being. It is all part of Īśvara's līlā that the guru's mind seems different, to a smaller or greater extent, from that of Īśvara. And it is for this reason that even great Advaitins have shown themselves to have something of their own individual mind purely because of their compassion. Gurus who have not attained to a higher plane of experiencing Advaita have this dvaita-bhava or dualistic attitude to a greater degree. They pray to Īśvara on behalf of their disciples. They may even take upon themselves the burden of their disciple's karma. If they have direct contact with Īśvara and are capable of speaking to him they will persuade him or even fight with him to help their disciples. I have told you stories to illustrate this truth.

Guru and śiṣya – symbols of two great dharmas

Take the case of a student who is not exclusively devoted to his guru and worships both — his guru and Īśvara. Even so, in recognition of his service, the guru will do things on his behalf. But the student will receive the teacher's full help if he is devoted to him, looking upon him as all things including Īśvara. The guru helps him not because he takes pride in the latter being exclusively devoted to him. Is not giving protection to the one who surrenders (śaraṅāgata-rakṣaṇa) lauded as superior to all other dharmas? It is in observance of this dharma that the guru does all that he can for the uplift of his disciple who goes to him for refuge.

Two great dharmas: the first is protecting the individual who comes for refuge; the second is being not forgetful of the help received from anyone, that is gratitude. The guru is the personification of the lakṣaṇa (the distinguishing mark, quality) of the first; the disciple is that of the second. It is the duty of the guru to rise to the heights of śaraṅāgata-dharma when the student goes to him for refuge believing that he is all things including Īśvara.

So when the disciple is exclusively devoted to the guru – one of the three bhāvas mentioned by me – he is strengthened and elevated to a high plane. If the fruit of the student's sādhana is one share in his progress what the guru does for him is a hundred shares or a thousand shares — it is thus that the śiṣya is raised to a high level.

Īśvara's grace

There are various attitudes of the mind, various attitudes of bhakti. One receives the blessings of Īśvara according to one's bhāva or attitude or feeling. When the Lord is approached directly with full trust in him, his blessings carry the devotee to great heights. At the same time his grace is in no way smaller in measure for those who are devoted equally to the guru and to him (that is Īśvara). If his own function and the guru's function seem to be divided it is because of his līlā. If an individual is exclusively devoted to his ācārya he is the recipient of Īśvara's supreme blessings. This is because the Lord is the antaryāmin (inner controller) of the guru (as of all beings) and accepts the devotions offered to the teacher. I spoke in yukti about this third bhāva. There is yukti for the other two experiences also. Today I felt like speaking about this bhāva, about this path of sādhana, that is of being exclusively devoted to the guru.

One must exert oneself to the best of one's ability to cultivate devotion for the guru. It does not matter whether the guru does no more than show the path leading to Īśvara, or whether he is, like Īśvara, equal to him. Nor does it matter whether one believes that the guru alone is needed and that there is no need for Īśvara. The important point is to be devoted to the guru, to understand what is good for us and follow the right path.

Knowledge through the guru

It is better to learn from a guru (through gurumukha) than by ourselves from books or from our experiences. The reason for this is that if we learn by ourselves we are likely to become conceited, thinking, "Aha, we have learned so much. We have learned all these important subjects through our own experience, without anybody's help."

Books, of course, must be read and one's experience also matters. The guru too gives his upadeśa from books. He urges you to read this or that book or this or that passage in a book again and again. Learning from one's experience is even more important. After all, the goal of the guru's upadeśa is to make one aware of truths from one's own inward experience, through realisation. If we learn by ourselves from books or experience, without the help of a great man, without his guidance, there is the danger of our becoming conceited. If you, on choosing your guru, submit to him in every way and serve him with all your heart, it becomes easy to efface the ego that vitiates the Ātmān. Learning to become an intellectual is not all. You must become mature within through affection and service. Above all, in place of the understanding gained from books or through the intellect alone, the upadeśa of a self-realised guru imparted with all his blessings will become a live force deep in you and will inspire you and take you on the path of realisation.

The Guru Tradition

In this way the disciple will not become a victim of vanity in being led to the great inner experience or realisation. It is so because this experience means the extinction of ahaṁkāra (ego) and the light of the Ātman burning bright. For such realisation the guru's grace is most essential.

All of you must become devoted to your guru as best as you can and attain śreyas (well-being, mokṣa).

Part Seven



Part Seven

Gurumūrti and Trimūrti

The three Mūrtis not understood as the Supreme Godhead

There is a verse that everyone knows or I believe everyone is familiar with:

*“Gurur-Brahmā gurur-Viṣṇuḥ gurur-devo Maheśvaraḥ
Guruḥ sāksāt Param-Brahma tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ”*

(“The guru is all the three mūrtis – Trimūrti. He is also the Supreme Godhead – the Paramātmān. Obeisance to him who is such.”)

Since the Parabrahman is mentioned after the gods constituting the Trimūrti have been mentioned individually as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara, none of the three (Brahmā, Viṣṇu or Maheśvara) has the place, it seems, of the Parabrahman, the first and foremost deity (the Supreme Godhead). They merely have the functions respectively of creation, preservation and dissolution. None of the three is spoken of as the original cause of all, the supporting power or the source of everything, the Parabrahman. Otherwise, after mentioning the three, why should the guru be described as *“guruḥ sāksāt Param-Brahma”*?

Brahmā is not known to have been worshipped as the Supreme Godhead. For long he has not been worshipped even as one who performs the function of creation. We have so many festivals and celebrations: Gaṇeśa-Caturthī, Skanda-Ṣaṣṭī, Rāma-Navamī, Gokulāṣṭamī, Navarātri. There are so many other celebrations apart from these. If you look at the almanac you will note that there is a festival every day to some deity or other. On the same day there may be even festivals for more than one deity. Thus there are a countless number of festivals. But of them there is not even one in honour of Brahmā, the Creator.

There are pictures or images of so many gods and goddesses. You probably keep quite a few in your home. But is there among them one of Brahmā? If you have a picture of Mahāviṣṇu recumbent on Śeṣa there must be Brahmā in it seated on the lotus emanating from Bhagavān’s navel. If you have pictures of the sacred weddings you will see Brahmā in them as the “officiating priest”. He is seen in a “crowd” (with other divinities) and we do not regard him as worthy of worship.

Temples for Brahmā?

There are so many thousands of temples in the country. In each temple there are so many sannidhis. So many utsavas or festivals are held in honour of various deities in these temples. But in none of them do we find anything for Brahmā. If you go searching, you may find a rare temple for him in a place like Puṣkar. When you speak of temples for Brahmā you at once think of Puṣkar. Many people do not seem to know that there is a separate temple for Brahmā in Kumbhakoṇam itself. There is Brahmā in the sannidhi for the Trimūrti in the Uttama temple near Tirucīrāpaḷḷi. In Kāñcīpuram and Kumbhakoṇam you stumble upon temples everywhere. While

there is a rare temple in Kāñcīpuram for Citragupta (who keeps an account of all our karma in our janma), there is an equally rare temple in Kumbhakoṇam for Brahmā who gave us the janma. It was in Tirukkandiyūr, near Tiruvaiyāru (Tanjāvūr district), that Śiva is believed to have plucked off one of the five heads of Brahmā. Śiva is called here Brahmaśtrakantīśar. There is a sanctum for Brahmā in this place. In the Trimūrti temple in Pāñdikodumuḍi, in the Kongu land, there is a sannidhi for Brahmā. In Cidambaram, as you go round the Kanakasabhā, you find Brahmā in a small recess – he is called here Caṇḍeśvara. But all these temples are like a drop in the ocean. Such is the lot of the god who decides our own lot. (In the original Tamil: “The writing is such on the forehead of the god who writes on our foreheads. Our destiny is determined by the writing on our forehead.)

Why no pūjā for Brahmā

A story is told about why there is no pūjā for Brahmā.

Once Parameśvara appeared as a pillar of light originating from his linga and spanning the earth and the sky. Brahmā and Viṣṇu went seeking, respectively, the crown and the base of the pillar of light. They had a wager: “Whoever first discovers the base or the crown is greater than the other.” Brahmā, because of his self-pride, thought it below his dignity to go looking for the base and he soared upwards assuming the form of a hamsa (gander). Humbly, Mahāviṣṇu went looking for the base taking the guise of a boar. The two, however far they went, did not succeed in their quest. They returned realising it not possible to go any further. But, on returning, while Mahāviṣṇu told the truth that he could not find the foot of the pillar of light, Brahmā told a lie saying that he had seen the crown.

Thereupon Śiva emerged from his form of light and cast a curse on Brahmā: “Since Brahmā told a lie hereafter there will be no pūjā for him.” It is said that even today Brahmā is not worshipped. I have given you only an outline of the story. They say that Śiva gave the cakrā or discus to Mahāviṣṇu who had told the truth, also the left side of his body.

We have now to go in search of the temple for the god who went in search of the crown of Parameśvara.

The story told above is according to the Śaiva tradition. Vaiṣṇavas do not accept it and would protest against it.

There are a few more stories about the wrongs supposed to have been committed by Brahmā. The one relating to Kandyūr is among them. Why should Īśvara have removed one of the five heads that Brahmā originally possessed? Stories explaining this are also from the Śaiva tradition.

Why is it that there is no sanctum for Brahmā in the temples of Viṣṇu? All Hindus, including Vaiṣṇavas, do not worship Brahmā. The sons of Śiva – Viḡhneśvara and Subrahmanya – are worshipped with much ceremony. There is pūjā for them and festivities are held in their honour. But why is it that there is no

pūjā for Brahmā, the son of Viṣṇu? One does not know the reasons given by Vaiṣṇavas for this. None occurs to me now.

In the Brāhmaṇa sections of the Vedas, a story is told of Prajāpati having committed a sin (Prajāpati means Brahmā). Could this be mentioned as the reason why Brahmā is not worshipped? Remember the Vedas are the basic authority for all Hindus. However, this also does not seem right because, long after the Vedic age, Brahmā was worshipped. Whenever the gods had a problem they first rushed to Brahmā for help. The asuras and rākṣasas have performed austerities and received boons from Brahmā. Even if it be that they did not worship him as the Supreme Godhead, they regarded him as one of the chief deities. It was only later that such a practice was discontinued. Why did Vaiṣṇavas also stop worshipping Brahmā?

We keep committing sins from dawn to dusk. So I would not like to tell stories about the sins committed by gods like Brahmā. Atheists exclaim in ridicule: "What sort of gods are they? Gods who are sinners?" The Śaiva stories I have told you are enough for our purpose. There is no need to go into the Vaiṣṇava tradition.

We may, if we wish, speak about one thing. Viṣṇu has two sons. One of them is Brahmā, the second is Manmatha. Brahmā was born out of the lotus issuing from the navel of Viṣṇu. Manmatha was born of Viṣṇu's mind – Viṣṇu willed the birth of a son or mentally resolved that a son be born. That is why this second son is called Manasija. Brahmā is Kamalaja. Śāstā is Viṣṇu's third son born by Śiva when he (Viṣṇu) assumed the form of Mohinī. The worship of Śāstā is becoming more and more popular. But there is no pūjā either for Brahmā or for Manmatha.

A reason occurs to me. Are not Manmatha and Brahmā responsible for the birth of jīvas? Manmatha creates the urge for procreation of progeny. And Brahmā it is who decides on the question of which jīva should be in what piṇḍa and thus he is instrumental in giving it a janma (birth).

All our difficulties stem from the fact of our birth. Is not the goal of all our religious traditions and exertions release from the bondage of birth? It seems this is the reason why Brahmā, who is the cause of our janma, is not worshipped. For Manmatha also it is the same reason. One more point. Manmatha inflames the worst of urges, the urge that creates a frenzy and plunges a jīva in turmoil. The topic of Manmatha cropped up in the course of my talk. While we were speaking about the concept of the guru as Trimūrti we discussed the subject of Brahmā. I said Brahmā is responsible for the birth of creatures – birth which is the cause of all difficulties. I wondered whether his worship would have been discontinued because we were angry that we thought of him as one who pushed us into trouble.

You may ask: "In the early age also was not Brahmā performing the function of creation? You said that he was highly honoured then."

We must remember that in those hoary times there was not so much adharmā or pāpa as now obtains and consequently people did not suffer from as many difficulties as we do now. Even the natural urges spring from the sins committed by man. Although evil forces have always existed, in the early ages they were not as rampant as they were to be in later times. The journey of life was not so bad then as

it is today. During those times, when there were activities of a divine nature everywhere, when numerous sacrifices were performed and when avataras and ṛṣis walked the earth, there was not the same reason to give way to anger as in later times for the fact that Brahmā was responsible for our janma.

We could give such an explanation.

Idols in Vaiṣṇava temples

There are no idols for the Navagrahas (the nine celestial bodies) in Vaiṣṇava temples. Perumāḷ, the goddess who is inseparable from him -- (that is the Mother) -- Viṣṇu's mount, the various avataras of Bhagavān, his attendants, the Āzhvārs immersed in devotion for him, the ācāryas belonging to the Vaiṣṇava siddhānta: only those connected with Viṣṇu have a place in these temples. The Navagrahas do not belong to this category. It is said about Vaiṣṇavas: "Even in a fit of forgetfulness will they not worship anyone outside the fold of Viṣṇu." They do not worship anyone except Perumāḷ, his consorts, those who have dedicated themselves to Perumāḷ, those who have served him and the ācāryas belonging to the Vaiṣṇava siddhānta.

As mentioned earlier Brahmā is a son of Viṣṇu. We note in the Purāṇas that he has great respect for his father. We do not, however, see him always in a state of devotional fervour for Viṣṇu or bound by service to him. He has the "office" of creation. Vaiṣṇavas believe that it is Nārāyaṇa, the first and foremost of the gods, the complete god, who assumes the form of protector or sustainer among the Trimūrti. Brahmā as the Creator seems to have a place that is equal to him among the Trimūrti. In the Vaiṣṇava temples only Perumāḷ, his avataras and his devotees have a place, but not even one who has an equal place with Viṣṇu. That is why, it seems, there is no image of Brahmā installed in the temples of Viṣṇu.

Brahmā in the Āgamas

However, as one of the Trimūrti, Brahmā chants the four Vedas with his four mouths (faces) and performs his function of creation through the power of the Vedic mantras. In recognition of this, the Āgama śāstras, believing that he should not go without a place in temples, have provided for the same. They have laid down the rule that each god of the Trimūrti must have a place on the top of the vimāna above the mūlasthāna¹, on the three sides of the door of the garbhagrha or *sanctum sanctorum*. Thus Brahmā too has an image in temples. It is installed in a place not ordinarily seen by devotees and it seems a place for dolls.

Brahmā's function is one of kindness

It would not be proper for us to refuse to worship the god who has given us our janma, the god whose writing on our forehead (destiny) cannot be changed. This writing is called "Brahmalipi". If at all anyone is to be blamed for our taking birth it is ourselves. It is because of the sins committed by us and our karma not being

1 "Vimāna" denotes the structure surmounting the "mūlasthāna", "the root place", the central fixed spot of the deity. Contrasted with the idol of this deity is the "utsavamūrti" or processional deity.

expended that a big load of pāpa is still borne by us. It is an accumulation of sin earned by ourselves. It is not that Brahmā created the karma in one human life-span. In the deha-dharma (bodily dharma) ordained by Īvara the body is subject to disease and decay and destruction and all karma is not finished in one lifetime. The body is shuffled off before the karma is spent. What is to be done then? It is not possible in this state (when the karma is not finished) to dissolve the life (the jīvātman) in the Paramātman by granting it mokṣa.

When so much karma still remains how will Bhagavān grant everlasting joy to the jīva? What will happen to the life, to the soul? Could it be made into a ghost or a piśāca? If so the karma that has accrued during the birth of an individual as a human cannot be expended in his form as a ghost or a piśāca. The ghost is subject to hunger and thirst. So without the karma being finished it will remain tormented by hunger and thirst forever. To assuage its hunger and thirst it possesses someone, obtains its food, and makes its burden of sin bigger. To save the jīva from such further misfortune the Paramātman, in his kindness, decides to give it another janma with another body. It is Brahmā who is appointed to carry out this function. The Lord gives us the opportunity again and again to perform good deeds and reduce the burden of karma. But we make the burden of karma bigger and bigger and are born again and again. Why should we blame Brahmā for this?

But, in our (unenlightened) state, when we are afloat on the sea of saṁsāra, we do not feel like worshipping Brahmā who has given us our janma.

Rudra – Śiva (Śivam, Naṭarāja) – Maheśvara

I started by speaking about the Trimūrti and I thought I would examine the subject of guru who is celebrated as the Parabrahman and is the source of the Trimūrti. My inquiry into the first mūrti, Brahmā, has become somewhat lengthy.

Gurur-Brahmā, gurur-Viṣṇuḥ, gurur-devo Maheśvarah

"Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra", that is how the three mūrtis are mentioned. Not "Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva." Devotees of Śiva believe that of the Trimūrti he is not the saṁhāra-mūrti or destroyer. They believe that Rudra is one of the many forms of Śiva whom they regard as the Paramātman. Indeed, they do not say "Śiva" in the masculine gender but "Śivam" in the neuter gender (or without a gender). It is this Śivam that is the Almighty Godhead responsible for all functions. From Śivam emanated Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra to perform respectively the functions of creation, preservation and dissolution.

In the Śaiva and Śākta systems, there are two more functions added, thus making the pañcakṛtyā – five functions. One of the two additional functions is "tirodhāna" or "tirobhāva". It is Māyā. How was the world created, out of what? We do not understand it all. By means of some unknown Māyā the Lord performs all this jugglery. And that is tirodhāna. Śivam is the source of all the basic functions of the Trimūrti. (We have accounted for the fourth kṛtya.) The remaining fifth function is anugraha or blessing. A jīva has to experience its karma or travail: it has to experience and expend it. Necessary for this are: (1) the body; (2) and, apart from the body's outward karaṇas (faculties, organs), also the inner karaṇas (mind,

intelligence, etc): (3) jagat (the phenomenal world) which is the land or arena in which the cultivation is carried out with the foregoing; (4) experiencing or realising the yield. In their order tanu (body), karaṇa, bhuvana (the world), bhoga (enjoyment): these four constitute the Paramātman's anugraha or blessings. This is understood as the smaller or lower form of anugraha. The higher or greater anugraha is release of the jīva from the Māyā created by tirodhāna – worldly life – and taking it to the realm of mokṣa or salvation. The kuncitapāda (the raised foot) of Naṭarāja grants you that realm. That is why the lifted sacred foot is spoken of in such lofty terms.

The dance of Naṭarāja is called the "pañcakṛtya paramānanda tāṇḍava". Naṭarāja performs the function of creation with the sound of the drum called ḍamaru held in one of his hands. The abhaya-hasta (the "fear not" hand or mudrā) signifies the preservation of what is created. Naṭarāja performs his function of destruction with the fire held in another hand. With the right foot placed on Musalaka he performs the function of tirodhāna. Finally, by pointing to his sacred left foot (kunchitapada), he proclaims: "Hold it. It is the blessing that will finally liberate you."

Naṭarāja, as the Paramātman Śivam, is the source of all kṛtyās. From him appears a mūrti for each function. Like Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra for creation, sustenance and dissolution, should there not be a mūrti each for tirobhāva and anugraha? Īśvara is the maker of tirobhāva. Whatever the meaning of the word "Īśvara", in common parlance or according to other śāstras, in the Śāiva śāstra it means the mūrti associated with the Māyā that is tirobhāva. Instead of being known merely as Īśvara he is called Maheśvara. The bestower of anugraha is Sadāśiva.

In short, according to the Śāiva śāstra, the Paramātman called Śivam performs the pañcakṛtyā of creation, protection, dissolution, tirodhāna and anugraha through Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Maheśvara and Sadāśiva. In the Śākta tradition Śakti, described as "pañcakṛtyā-parāyaṇā", takes the place of Śivam.

Rudra is the destroyer. Maheśvara is mentioned in the "Gurur-Brahmā" verse as "Gurur-devo Maheśvarah". But it is more appropriate to know "Maheśvara" as the destroyer than as the maker of tirodhāna. Since, we have, in order, Brahmā and Viṣṇu as the creator and the preserver, respectively, is it not logical to call Maheśvara the destroyer? Instead of going into the subtler aspects of the Śāiva śāstra, we must note here (in the reference to the guru as Maheśvara) that Śivam, Śiva, Īśvara, Maheśvara and Rudra are commonly understood as the names of the same deity.

In Vaiṣṇavism

According to the Vaiṣṇava system, Viṣṇu is not merely one of the Trimūrti who has the function of preservation alone. He is the Supreme Godhead. All gods – including those performing the functions of creation, preservation and dissolution – are aspects of him and he is all-powerful. But, unlike the Śāivas, who speak of five functions and assign a deity each to them, Vaiṣṇavas do not have any such division of deities. Nor do they speak of deities for tirodhāna and anugraha. But

they do mention "Parā", "Vyūha", "Arccā" and "Antaryāmin" with different Vaiṣṇava mūrtis for them. But this is a different sort of classification (not similar to the Śaiva classification). However, if you look at it closely, you will notice that the idea of pancakṛtyā is implicit in it. But importance does not seem to have been given to such a division of functions nor is any such idea clearly mentioned. Like Śiva, who is above Rudra, they do not speak of a supreme deity higher than Viṣṇu, the protector or preserver. The name "Nārāyaṇa" is highly regarded in Vaiṣṇavism. "Nārāyaṇa" occurs in one of the important mantras known as "Aṣṭākṣari" and "Dvaya". However, there is no division into separate entities. In other words, Nārāyaṇa is not referred to as the supreme deity, nor is Viṣṇu mentioned as an aspect of him or as being subject to him. Indeed the system itself is known after Viṣṇu as "Vaiṣṇavism". When you mention "Viṣṇusahasranāma" or "Viṣṇu-Purāṇa", the suggestion is that Viṣṇu is the supreme deity. [The Paramaguru asks a Vaiṣṇava present in the audience about it. He – the Vaiṣṇava – says that the name Viṣṇu is part of the Vedic tradition and that "Nārāyaṇa" is in accordance with the Pāncarātra which is an important Vaiṣṇava tantra. The Paramaguru, smiling to himself, adds in haste: I do not say this. I am merely repeating what he, the Vaiṣṇava, has said.]

"Gurave namaḥ"

Let us revert to the "Gurur-Brahmā" verse. After describing the guru as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara (the deities performing the three functions), the guru is described as the Paramātman, the Supreme Godhead. Only Śaivas and Śāktas speak of five functions (as mentioned earlier). As is commonly understood, the verse mentions the gods concerned with the three functions and then of the Supreme Godhead, declaring that the guru is all these deities as well as the Supreme Godhead or the Paramātman. It concludes by making obeisance to him – "Tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ."

Our Ācārya has composed a hymn to Dakṣiṇāmūrti which contains the essence of all the Advaita doctrine. It is called the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Aṣṭakam*. An "aṣṭaka" means a stotra or hymn of eight stanzas. However, in this there are a few verses in addition to the eight – even apart from the "phalaśruti" (statement of the benefits to be derived from reciting the stotra). These are not only beautiful but pregnant with meaning. Just as the "Gurur-Brahmā" verse concludes with "Tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ", each of the first nine stanzas of the Ācārya's *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Aṣṭakam* concludes with

"Tasmai Śrī Gurumūrtaye namaḥ idam Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrtaye"

Why namaskāra?

If the guru is identified with all the three gods who constitute the Trimūrti and he is also the source of the three, that is the Paramātman, one feels like asking in amusement: "Why should we pay obeisance to the guru?" By "amusement" I don't mean a joke or *tamasha*. In a carping, argumentative manner one feels like asking: "Let him be Trimūrti, the Parabrahman or whatever. For that reason, why should we, sir, offer him namaskāra?" Amusement is mingled with the arguing spirit.

No offering made for the three functions

Since the "Gurur-Brahmā" verse mentions, in order, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara and thereafter the Parabrahman, it is clear that the three functions of creation, protection and dissolution are assigned to the first three deities.

Whenever the gods are in trouble they first go to Brahmā for help. Many asuras have obtained boons from him. They have prayed to him not merely because he performs the function of creation. We speak of divine power: the asuras have approached Brahmā as one possessing such power to the full. They have prayed to him to grant them all kinds of pleasures and enjoyments. As for the devas, they have prayed for the destruction of the asuras. And the asuras, in their turn, have prayed to obtain the strength to destroy the devas. Bestowing happiness and the enjoyment of pleasures are part of the function of paripālana or preservation and it is assigned to Viṣṇu of the Trimūrti. Destruction of the devas or of the asuras comes under the function of Rudra. That means both devas and asuras have sought the help of Brahmā not as one who has the function only of creation.

A number of asuras have asked Brahmā for the boon of immortality. The god on such occasions have told them: "I don't have the power to give you the boon of immortality without any condition attached to it. You may ask for deathlessness with a condition. I will grant you such a boon." In the Pūraṇas we see stories of Brahmā granting such boons. The fact is that a number of asuras have gone to Brahmā in the belief that he is more than the Creator (while he himself realises that he is not all-powerful).

Some have prayed to Brahmā to grant them such-and-such a type of birth next. Or they have asked him for the boon of a child. Perhaps they have prayed to him, thinking of him only as the Creator. But people have prayed to other deities like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Ambā and Subrahmaṇya also for similar boons. It means that even for boons related to birth Brahmā alone is not approached. To put it differently, devotees have prayed to Brahmā looking upon him not as one performing the function of creation alone.

Śiva and Viṣṇu too are not worshipped exclusively as the destroyer and protector respectively. Many have prayed to them for happiness both here and the hereafter and for mokṣa. The gift of children must also have been obtained by praying to them or by performing austerities to propitiate them. We hear stories that go like this: "Once upon a time there was a king. He was happy in all respects except for the fact that he had no child..." Or: "There was a ṛṣi. His mind was tranquil but all the same he was worried that he had no son to repay the debt of forefathers (pitṛ-ṛṇam)." The king or the sage, as the case may be, prayed to Viṣṇu or Śiva and their wishes were granted. Here we find Viṣṇu or Śiva performing the function of Brahmā.

Apart from this, we find that, as a result of the prayers of the devas and the ṛṣis, Māhaviṣṇu has descended to earth again and again to slay wicked asuras or rakṣasas like Hiranyakasipu, Rāvaṇa, and Karṇsa. His function of śiṣṭa-paripālana

(protecting the virtuous) in the early yugas meant also *dusta-nigraha* (destruction of the wicked). As for Śiva, he is generous in granting his devotees health, long life and prosperity. We learn this from the various *sthalapurāṇas*. So many Śiva temples have been built by various kings. Īśvara, for instance, cured the dread disease from which a ruler suffered. Another king lost his kingdom and dwelt in a forest. During his exile he worshipped the Śivalinga and, pleased with his devotion, Īśvara restored to him his kingdom. In gratitude such kings have built temples to Īśvara.

Different devotees have earned different boons from Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Māheśvara. But they have worshipped them not as gods capable of performing merely one function, that is not taking it that Brahmā is capable only of creation, that Viṣṇu is capable only of protection and that Śiva is capable only of destruction.

According to the "Gurur-Brahmā" verse we have, however, to take it that Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Māheśvara have one function each and that the guru is to be worshipped and namaskāra offered to him as one who *personifies* in himself all the three deities. "He is Brahmā, he is Viṣṇu, he is Maheśvara..." And so namaskāra is offered to the guru – "Gurave namaḥ." Does it mean that the namaskāra you make to the three gods for performing their functions must be offered to the guru? Namaskāra means *upāsanā*¹. It signifies the worship and service offered to someone in a spirit of devotion.

It is here that the element of amusement I mentioned earlier crops up, something that could provoke argument.

There is no need to worship a god who has the function of creation alone or for that matter of either preservation alone or destruction. We worship a god when he does something to make us happy. Are we happy that Brahmā created us? Probably we would like to quarrel with him for it. Beyond the function of creation Brahmā is not capable of doing anything, that is when he is worshiped only as the Creator. There is nothing that he can do for us in this life if his function is only that of creation. So why should we be devoted to him? It does not, therefore, make sense to say: "The guru is Brahmā. Make obeisance to him." We are citizens of modern times. We accept a statement only when it seems logical to us. We cannot bow to the guru for being Brahmā!

"Gurur-Viṣṇuḥ." I will come to the question of Viṣṇu later.

Now for Maheśvara. "Gurur-Maheśvaraḥ – tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ." This is even more difficult to accept than being asked to identify the guru with Brahmā. Rudra flourishes his trident and kills. He knows nothing else. Whether or not he knows, he is referred to in the verse as one responsible for the *saṁhāra kṛtyā*, destruction. How can we be devoted to one who is going to do away with us? Will anyone say to the god: "O Rudra, please kill me." However much we regret our janma and however much we are angry with Brahmā for it, are we ready or happy to be killed? Indeed, the biggest curse a man can cast, is that so and so must die. How can we be thankful to such a god who fulfils a curse like this and worship him for his blessings?

1 "Upāsanā" literally means "sitting by the side" and connotes worship, service, devotion.

The Guru Tradition

We must note one more point. Śiva – Maheśvara, Rudra, whatever the name – does not, as destroyer, release us from the cycle of birth and death. I said earlier that if a sentient body, according to the laws of nature, decays and perishes, the jīva has to take another body to expend its karma. Rudra grants release only for our body in this birth. He does not free us either from body or karma for all time to come. Whether or not we like it, if he frees us altogether from the cycle of births we may bow before him in devotion, saying: "O Lord, in my ajñāna or ignorance I did not know that I must escape from the wheel of birth and death. But you are determined to release me from it!" But the matter is not like that.

During the praḷaya (the great dissolution) the Lord destroys all of us and withdraws us unto himself. He gives us a rest until the next creation, which is after eons. Even so, in our ajñāna, we are afraid of the praḷaya and do not make obeisance to the Lord.

Can we speak, with our hand on our heart, that any of us really longs for death? So there is no question of our worshipping the god who metes out death. To say "Gurur-devo Maheśvaraḥ – tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ" does not make sense.

"Gurur-Visṇuḥ." On the surface, it seems, we can offer namaskāra to Viṣṇu because it is he who sustains us, who protects us. So he seems worthy of being worshipped. If the guru is Viṣṇu ("Gurur-Visṇuḥ – tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ") we feel we must pay him homage.

But if we look at the matter a little more closely a different opinion will emerge. It is all right that Viṣṇu has the title of protector or sustainer. In actual life, however, does he seem to extend us protection in any remarkable manner that we should go into ecstasies about it? Does anyone feel like offering namaskāra to Viṣṇu in gratitude, saying: "He is protecting me. I am not wanting in anything." As the deity protecting us we may offer him namaskāra thinking of this or that comfort we want him to grant us. We might worship him for the good he is likely to do in the future, not for what he has done in the past or is doing now. Not all of us will have such an attitude. It is not right for me to claim so. But the majority will worship Viṣṇu thinking only of the future. Very few, out of a sense of fulfilment, will say: "In how many different ways he (Viṣṇu) has blessed me." The majority (not just 51% but 90% or even 99%) lament thus: "O he hasn't blessed me with this and that. He hasn't given me such-and-such a boon. He has reduced me to this state." Even those who think Viṣṇu keeps them happy today will be worried about whether he will keep them happy tomorrow. They will always be worried about future problems, future wants and future inadequacies. Suppose Mahāviṣṇu appears before us and asks us to petition him for our wants, each one of us will bring him a long list of requirements!

What does this mean? We believe in our heart of hearts that, though Viṣṇu is called the paripālana-mūrti, the protector, he does not perform his function to our satisfaction.

In point of fact it is not true to say that he does not carry out his function properly or satisfactorily. What I said about Brahmā applies to Viṣṇu also. I said to you:

The Guru Tradition

“Brahmā gives us janma because of the burden of karma earned by us, not because he himself wants us to suffer. So it does not make sense to quarrel with him, asking him, ‘Why did you, sir, give me janma?’ In the same way if Mahāviṣṇu has given us this or that or not given us this or that, it is all because of our karma. And, if what he has not given is more than what he has given, it is because we get only what we deserve by virtue of our karma and not because of his personal wish or whim. People with a sense of discrimination must take it that way.

But we are avivekins (people without a sense of discrimination). If we possessed viveka would we need a guru? Is it not to obtain viveka that we seek a guru? So it is meaningless to speak to us about things that apply to vivekins. That being the case, how can we offer namaskāra to Viṣṇu when we feel that he does not protect us satisfactorily?

It is hard for us to make up our minds to pray to Śiva thus: “Please kill me, Svāmī”. Even though we are not satisfied with the protection Viṣṇu gives us we may pray to him thus: “Please protect me well, Svāmī, at least hereafter.” But consider this. Viṣṇu is the deity of protection and he goes on performing his function. Now, if we go and ask him “to protect us well”, will it not mean that we are suggesting that he is not doing his duty properly? Will it not mean blaming him (for a lapse on his part)? And, if in his anger, he tells you: “Do you have to remind me of my duty?” Also, suppose in his displeasure he reduces the extent of the protection he gives us? All right, suppose we do not in any way suggest that he is slack in his duty but pray to him in all humility and ask him for his blessings...

What will Viṣṇu say if we offer him our namaskāra and petition him for his protection? If you think over the matter you will be able to guess his answer. “I do not do anything on my own,” he will say. “Indeed, all three of us do not do anything on our own. We do not possess any authority to do so. We perform the functions allotted to us by the Almighty Paramātman according to the limits fixed by him. Brahmā gives you janma according to your karma. According to the burden of karma accumulated by you the Paramātman has fixed your lot in this janma (happiness and suffering). And I give you protection accordingly. If there is a great deal of sukṛta (result of good karma) I protect you accordingly. If the sukṛta is less my protection is also correspondingly less. I give you goods according to the money you have kept (or deposited). If you try to pass counterfeit currency I will punish you. After you live through your experiences, according to the measure fixed by the Paramātman, Rudramūrti will put an end to your life by making you fall ill or through some other means. So, altogether, if you long for better protection, the means for it is in your own hands. Start doing good deeds (satkarma). Then the Paramātman will make me give you better protection. But I won't give you any guarantee that if you do satkarma today I will give you happiness in return tomorrow. The result of your satkarma will be experienced during the birth to be decided by the Paramātman. There is no point in your quarrelling with me.”

It becomes clear now that there is no need to offer namaskāra to Viṣṇu also. Why, there is no need to make obeisance to all the three mūrtis (Brahmā and

Maheśvara besides Viṣṇu). Remember what I said a little earlier. You receive goods in proportion to the money in your possession. Everything is contained in this statement. Do you offer your respects to a trader for selling you goods fetched by the price you have paid.

There is someone who decides the fruits of our actions. But it is not any one of the Trimūrti. It is the Paramātman, the Almighty, who decides. The three deities perform their functions according to the power or authority derived from him. What is the use of going to an officer and asking him "to do this or that"? While, on the one hand it would be futile to do so, it would mean, on the other, that you are asking him for a wrongful favour (bribing him). After being guilty of all kinds of karma we will be trapped by the Paramātman. Worse, the Paramātman may further frighten us by asking: "Are you trying to bribe my officers to change my decision?" No, no, we don't want to have anything to do with the matter of offering namaskāra to the Trimurti. A namaskāra to the view that we must offer namaskāra¹.

We may worship Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara only in the same way as characters in the Purāṇas subscribing to the belief that the three deities will do good. But we will realise that there is no reason to worship them when we view the matter in the context of the offices they hold having been fixed by a higher authority, the Paramātman. Namaskāra to them may mean disrespect to the higher authority. And the higher authority may for that reason mete out extra punishment!

When do Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara really become worthy of worship? The answer is: when you believe that not only do they derive the power of performing their functions from the Paramātman but that the Paramātman in fact resides in them. You must look upon them as having identity with the Paramātman and believe that they are capable of doing all that the Paramātman does. You must also believe that, like the Paramātman, they too can forgive us our karma or even ignore it, that they will give us the maturity of mind to suffer or experience with equipoise what is meted out to us according to our karma.

The right manner of worship is this. Any deity must be looked upon as a form of the Supreme Godhead performing a particular function. If we pray to such a deity with our mind having attained oneness with it, the deity will also become one with the Paramātman and bestow on us the blessings to accomplish what can be accomplished only with the grace of the Paramātman.

Deities that are supreme

They speak of the differences between Brahmā on the one hand and Viṣṇu and Rudra on the other. Whatever the functions outwardly performed by Viṣṇu and Rudra – for instance, working as a coolie for a humble woman selling eatables – they are within themselves one with the Paramātman. Also, they know themselves to be all-powerful and, at the same time, as the Nirguṇa Brahman (the Brahman without any attributes), that is beyond such considerations as power. Ambā and Parāśakti are also like that. Mahālakṣmī is never separated from Mahaviṣṇu and is

¹ The Paramaguru has used the first "namaskāra" in the sentence in the sense of "goodbye" – goodbye to an idea.

one with the Paramātman. Vaiṣṇavas accord her a lofty position in their system and look upon her as one possessing the power to urge Mahaviṣṇu to grant blessings to devotees. They call her movingly as "Mother". Our Ācārya, too, while extolling Mahālakṣmī, calls her Girdevatā or Sarasvatī and Śaśīśekhara Vallabhā¹, that is the Śakti of Candramaulīśvara (meaning Ambā).

Gaṇapati is not merely the remover of obstacles (Vighneśvara), nor is Muruga (Subrahmanya) merely the commander of the celestial army (Devasenāpati). The one is as much the Supreme Godhead as the other and capable of bestowing grace. Ārjjaneya, while being Rāmadāsa (minion of Rāma), has attained the position of an all-powerful deity worthy of worship. Brahmā is not like any of these deities. Appayya Dīkṣita, who was conversant with many śāstras, has said that Viṣṇu, Śiva and Ambā are each "Brahmakoti" with full power. But he has not said the same about Brahmā. Although Brahmā and the Brahman sound similar, there is no pūrṇatva or completeness in Brahmā. We saw earlier that when any devotee asked Brahmā for the boon of immortality the god said he had no authority to grant it.

Why exception for Brahmā

Another reason occurs to me why Brahma has no temple. For a temple to be built to a god or for him to be worshipped otherwise, he must either be identified with the all-powerful Paramātman or he must be the presiding deity of a subject of concern to us. Lakṣmī gives us wealth (she is the presiding deity of wealth); likewise Sarasvatī gives us knowledge; and Vighneśvara removes the obstacles from our path. Similarly, Dhanvantarī as well as Sūrya (the sun god) endows us with health; the Navagrahas (the nine heavenly bodies) dispel the baleful influences indicated by our horoscope; and Ayyanār (the guardian deity in villages in Tamil Nadu) and Māriamman (the goddess usually associated with smallpox) protect us from evil or unhealthy forces. The deity to whom we perform pūjā must be one who, in his grace, answers our prayers. We saw earlier that the function of sṛṣṭi or creation is different. (We have to gain nothing by praying to Brahmā.) Apart from gods and goddesses, a great devotee (bhakta) or an ācārya also merits worship in a temple. Brahmā does not belong to either of the latter categories.

There are temples for the Navagrahas, the Āzhvārs, the Nāyanmārs, Māriamman. There are shrines even for Iruḷan and Vīraṇ (kṣudradevatas or inferior deities of the South). But there is hardly any temple for Brahmā who, with his four faces, is always chanting the four Vedas. We do pity him indeed!

Brahmā does not recognise himself as the Paramātman or, even if he does, he is not revealed to be so. That is why there is no pūjā for him. Inferior deities like Vīraṇ and Iruḷan, though by no means aspects of the Paramātman, are helpful to us in removing some evil influence or other. Brahmā is not worshipped because he does no such thing. But here a question arises. "Mother, father, husband and the like have no capacity for blessing. But is it not stated that, though they have no power of

¹ Kanakadhārstavam (10th stanza)

grace or jñana, when we worship them, the Paramātman dwelling in them will bless us through them? You have yourself said so. You have also said: 'What is important is devotion and the act of surrender (śaraṇāgati). It does not matter to whom we are devoted or to whom we go for refuge. If our devotion is pure and sincere, the Paramātman, who is the inner controller of all beings, will bless us.' When we can receive blessings from inferior deities or from ordinary mortals like father and mother, why should Brahmā alone be an exception? What wrong has he done?"

Brahmā has not done any wrong. He is accorded a high place and installed on an elevated pedestal. Although not the all-powerful Paramātman, he is given a place next to the Supreme Godhead in the Pūraṇas and the śāstras. We see that Sūrya (the sun god), Candra (the moon god), Indra and others have so often fallen at his feet. Though not belonging to the category of Brahmaṇi, he is one who mixes with all-powerful deities. So the devas, who cannot approach Śiva, Viṣṇu and Ambā easily, take his help to see them. His father is of the Brahmaṇi category but he has descended to earth again and again as a human. During his incarnation as Rāma there is the incident of Sītā performing the agnipraveśa (entering the fire) after Rāvaṇa has been slain. Brahmā then appears in the sky to remind Rāma: "Are you a mere man? Are you not Nārāyaṇa himself? And is not this Sītā Mahālakṣmī?"

Even today when something is finished for ever without the likelihood of its cropping up again, we say: "The Brahmāstra has been discharged." Here we have an indication of Brahma's strength.

In spite of all this, because of his "peculiar position", no temple has been built for Brahmā. Instead of saying that he has committed wrongs or that he is in a "peculiar position", would it not be better to state that it is we who are in a "peculiar position" and that we do not therefore worship him or build temples for him.

The Paramātman is in everything and everyone and, if we are devoted to Brahmā, believing that the Paramātman is in him also, the Supreme Godhead will bless us by being present in that god. There is no doubt about it. But the trouble is that we are unable to become devoted to him. If only we worship him, the Paramātman who is the inner controller of all will bless us through him. But our mental attitude is such that we are prevented from worshipping Brahmā in this manner. We are able to attune our minds to worship Śiva, Viṣṇu, Murugaṇ (Subrahmaṇya) as the Paramātman but not Brahmā. For some reason it has become customary not to worship him as the Supreme Deity and our attitude is such as not to look upon him as the Paramātman. Our Ācārya established the Śaṅmata which includes worship of Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya. But why did he not found a system based on the worship of Brahmā who is one of the Trimūrti, that is "Brahmamata"? Such being the case, for a very long period, we have been unable to look upon Brahmā as a primal deity.

Our devotion to a god increases with the passage of time even though to start with we might look upon him as one performing only a particular function. Eventually we become exclusively devoted to him not only as our iṣṭadevata (chosen deity or deity specially dear to us) but as the Supreme Godhead to whom we pray for all blessings.

Whoever is worshipped, the Paramātman will bless us through him. But when there are so many deities dear to us, it would not be natural for us to worship one who is not in any way specially dear to us and who, we think, cannot bless us in the same way as the Paramātman. Devotion to such a deity will not have the force of a living reality. If we like a god for some reason we tend to have increasing bhakti for him.

There is then the psychological factor to consider. We respect an individual whom we know and who happens to be present right before us, be it father, mother, guru, a great man or what is nowadays called a "leader". This respect leads to devotion and our feeling for the individual concerned is the same as that we have for the Paramātman and we go to him for refuge. We cannot elevate a devata, that is not seen by us, to the position of the Paramātman in the same way as we elevate the leader, guru, mother or father. "Elevate" is not the right word. It implies in the present context, a view of the Paramātman that belongs to the intellectual plane. The relationship with the leader, guru, etc, be it one of affection or of respect, is not formed on such a plane. When we form an attachment to someone there is the implication that the individual concerned means everything to us, that we must dedicate ourselves to him.

The Paramātman blesses us through any mūrti or deity. We may become aware of this truth on the intellectual plane. But this is not enough because it is not in our nature to be attached to a deity who is not to our liking and without the full involvement of our mind and heart.

Suppose there is a sanctum for Brahmā in a temple... The Śivalinga, Ambā, Viṣṇu, the Mother Goddess are almighty and we worship them. The Navagrahas (the nine heavenly bodies), the great devotees of various deities, are not like them. But we know that they have the power to bless us and grant us our wishes. So we worship them.

An average devotee looks upon a mūrti only in two ways: as one possessing universal power (sarvaśakti) or as one possessing some special power. We are incapable of feeling that the Paramātman can bless also through a deity possessing only a little power. Are we inclined to pray to Candikeśvara or to Viśvāksena as deities through whom the Paramātman will bless us? We clearly divide the deities thus into those possessing sarvaśakti and kimcitsākti (a little power). There is a departure from such considerations in the case of the mūrtis of the ācāryas. We bow before them thinking them to be the Brahmākoti and therefore capable of blessing us. We tell ourselves: "The Paramātman who appears in so many forms is easily seen by us in this form also (as ācārya or guru)."

We divide deities into three categories to worship them. The first are clearly recognised as the Brahmākoti or the Supreme Godhead. Belonging to the second category are those whom we do not clearly recognise as the Brahmākoti. The third category consists of deities who, *as far as we are concerned*, are identified with the Supreme Godhead.

Now to go back to Brahmā and his supposed sanctum. Brahmā does not belong

to the category of Brahmakoṭi. Besides, the idea has taken root in our mind that he is the Creator God among the Trimūrti. During the Pūranic age it was believed that the Supreme Being could be approached or attained through him, through his agency. But devotion to Brahmā declined for a long period thereafter. This decline must be attributed to the world becoming increasingly afflicted by Kali and, as a result, birth in it being regarded as a matter for regret. Devotion to Brahmā (as mentioned earlier) declined and the practice of approaching the Brahmakoṭi through him faded out. It means that neither do we look upon Brahmā as the Brahmakoṭi nor do we believe that the Brahmakoṭi may be attained through him. Also, we do not regard him in the same manner as we regard our ācāryas, each one of whom, in our view, is none other than the Supreme Godhead.

In the temples we bow before the Āzhvārs, Nāyanmārs and others in deference to their great devotion. Brahmā is not included in this class of devotees (*aḍiyars*, devotees who hold the feet of the Lord).

We also worship deities who have only a little power. If we can do so in the case of Brahmā what exactly is his śakti or power? Performing the function of creation. In other words giving us our janma in this world and deciding our destiny according to our stock of karma. That is all he does and no more. There are certain laws in each and every sastra. They are unalterable, aren't they? Rules that cannot be changed. Brahmā who ordains our destiny or "vidhi" is himself called "Vidhi", that is he himself is seen to be a "rule" that cannot independently give us any blessing. So there is nothing to inspire in us devotion for him.

Although Brahma possesses only a small measure of power, he is far superior to us in strength and greatness. Considering this, should we not adore him? It is here that we see him to be different from other gods and it is here that we note his "peculiar" position.

How is that? Without himself being the Brahmakoṭi Brahmā remains a part of the Trimūrti and an equal of the other two members of the Triad (Śiva and Viṣṇu) who are both identified with the Brahmakoṭi. The Almighty Śivam manifests Itself as Rudra, the god of destruction, with his partial power. Similarly, Viṣṇu, who is the Supreme Godhead, also manifests himself as the sustainer with only a little power but bearing the same name. Brahmā, whom we do not know to be the Almighty, remains the Creator and an equal of the other two of the Trimūrti.

We do not view Brahmā as possessing any power other than that of creation, nor do we look upon him as one who can "commend" us to the Paramātman. He acts on the orders of the Paramatman and allots our janma according to our karma. How do we look upon Viṣṇu and Śiva? When we call Viṣṇu to mind we think of him as the Paramātman possessing universal power. We do not see him, reduced in stature, as an "official" of the Paramātman performing the function of protecting us and ordering the journey of our life according to our karma. And do we think of Śiva as one dealing us death? We think of him as the Supreme Being, as the Almighty, as one who bestows all grace on his devotees. If we regard him only as the destroyer we will not go to his temple or worship him otherwise.

Confusion is caused in our "average" state of mind when we associate Brahmā,

whom we can think of only as the Creator among the Trimūrti, with Śiva and Viṣṇu whom we think to be not merely the destroyer and sustainer respectively but to be capable of performing all functions. We wonder how Brahmā got in as an equal with the other two. To consider the matter not in the abstract... If a temple were to be built to Brahmā, the question would arise – or might arise – as to how he who is neither the Supreme Godhead, nor a great devotee nor an ācārya, acquired a place as an equal of the Brahmaṇḍī. This must be the reason that no temple was built for him.

Once doubts arise as to how Brahmā can be an equal of Śiva and Viṣṇu, both of whom we regard as the Supreme Godhead, there will be a certain reservation in our mind about giving him our respect even as one who is vastly superior to us in power though not belonging to the Brahmaṇḍī category. It seems to me temples were not built for Brahmā in order not to give room for any such mental reservation on our part.

Brahmā is not inferior to so many other devatas. Still we do not evince total devotion to him. If a temple is built for him people will feel like visiting it. But at the time of the darshan affection and devotion for the god will not come welling in their hearts. (Have you heard anyone saying that he has bhakti for Brahmā?) All right, it does not matter that there is no special devotion for him. But is there any special devotion for Citragupta and the like? But, then, in their case no questions are asked and we still pay obeisance to them looking upon them as deities far greater than we ourselves are.

Questions are asked only in the case of Brahmā: how he came to have an equal place with Śiva and Viṣṇu. He does not claim any equal status with them himself and we need not find fault with him on that score. But because we hear the phrase "Brahmā-Viṣṇu-Śiva" frequently mentioned, the idea of Brahmā having an equal place with Viṣṇu and Śiva is deeply etched in our mind. So questions are bound to arise. And where questions arise will there be true, whole-hearted devotion? Let alone any special devotion. How do you expect even ordinary respect for a god about whom doubts arise or questions are asked? Namaskāra offered with such an attitude of mind cannot be genuine. The temple is a place where we seek the means of expiating our sins, the wrongs we have committed. If a namaskāra is offered merely for form's sake, insincerely, will it not mean adding to our burden of sins? It may be to avoid such an unwelcome possibility that no temple was built for Brahmā.

It is not that there is anything lacking in Brahmā. It is we who have something lacking in us. We are unable to find out the exact power possessed by Brahmā and place him in any of the three categories worthy of worship (these categories were mentioned earlier). If we include him in the class of deities possessing a little power, the question will arise as to how he has got a place as an equal with those possessing universal power. If we pay obeisance to him with doubts in our mind it will be a sign of our insincerity: the namaskāra we make him will be a false one. It seems it is out of compassion, to save us from the possibility of incurring a sin from insincere devotion, that no temple was built for Brahmā.

The inclusion of Brahmā among the Trimūrti

The reasons

I will tell you the reason for Brahmā being included among the Trimūrti along with the all-powerful Śiva and Viṣṇu.

The One and Only Reality that we call the Parabrahman or the Paramātman resolved to assume separate forms to perform its worldly līlā or sport in association with Māyā and, at the same time, to release jīvas from this very Māyā and grant them mokṣa or liberation. When the Paramātman who has neither a form nor a function assumes a form to perform a function he pleases himself in a variety of playful ways. When the intent arose to assume various forms for the Māyājagat (the illusory phenomenal world) and the mokṣa arising out of jñāna, he resolved to have, for each function, pairs of male and female forms. Accordingly, Mahāviṣṇu and Ambā appeared as deities for the sportive display of Māyā (Māyālīlā). The function of the two is the same. They are both dark-blue like the rain-cloud. Since they arose with the same form and attributes they are brother and sister. Similarly, Paramaśiva and Sarasvatī appeared as deities for jñāna which is the means of liberating a jīva from Māyā. They are both white-complexioned and are also brother and sister.

It occurred to the Paramātman that if the division were to be such that one pair had the function of Māyā alone and the other had the function only of jñāna the two would be totally different. It would also mean that they would be devoid of Brahmaśakti. So the Paramātman willed that the two pairs would have pūmaśakti (power that is complete) and that they would be capable of bestowing any blessing. But the function of one pair was to be chiefly that of Māyā while that of the other was to be chiefly that of jñāna.

Is it not in the nature of the Paramātman to be playful by manifesting himself in many different ways? We may take it that now too he demonstrated a little bit of his līlā. Viṣṇu, Ambā and Śiva, apart from possessing complete Parabrahmaśakti and also being capable of giving all blessings, were assigned one important function. Sarasvatī, apart from being assigned the function of dispensing jñāna that leads to mokṣa, was made goddess of all arts and śāstras.

The Parabrahman thought to himself now: "The deities must not be divided into independent or isolated pairs. They must be related to one another or brought under one kinship. Only then will there be harmony of outlook and people will become devoted to them without trying to observe differences among them.

How is relationship created? Through marriage, is it not? But there was an obstacle to forming marital alliances among the two pairs. If the god in one brother-sister pair were married to the goddess in the other brother-sister pair and, similarly, if the goddess in the first brother-sister pair were wedded to the god in the second, it would mean an "exchange". It would mean giving away a bride in marriage and accepting a bride in return. This would be improper.

So to solve the problem another brother-sister pair had to be created. When there are only two brother-and-sister pairs – 1-1 and 2-2 – an "exchange" becomes inevitable, 1-2 and 2-1. But if the pairs are 1-1, 2-2 and 3-3 there is no compulsion

for the exchange and the marriages will be between 1-2, 2-3 and 3-1.

It is for this purpose that the Paramātman caused Brahmā and Lakṣmī to appear. They too are brother and sister and are both the colour of gold. Besides, both are seated on the lotus. You must have heard of Lakṣmī being the mother of Brahmā. But I am going to tell you something based on a new story. Though apparently new it is a very old story from the Puranas¹ and you may have already heard it. Brahmā married Śiva's sister Sarasvatī; Viṣṇu married Brahma's sister Lakṣmī; and Śiva married Viṣṇu's sister Ambā. There is no "exchange" in these matches.

Let it be that Brahmā and Lakṣmī arose in order to solve the problem that would otherwise have been created by "exchange marriages". But once the deities appeared they had to be assigned some function or other. The conduct of the affairs of the universe through Māyā and liberation through jñāna: these two embrace all functions. Brahmā and Lakṣmī had to be allotted their respective roles from these functions. The function of jñāna cannot be shared. So Brahmā and Lakṣmī had to be allotted some aspects of the Māyājagat affairs. It was thus that Viṣṇu seemingly divided his own function and allotted to Brahmā the part of creation. And out of his "office" of sustaining the world he allotted to Lakṣmī the function of bestowing wealth or material prosperity on jīvās.

In keeping with his līlā of creating differences, he gave Lakṣmī the lofty position of Lokamātā or mother of the universe. To proclaim to the world that Brahmā, who carried out a part of his function of creation, was subject to him, he made him manifest from the lotus emerging from his navel.

Now you understand, don't you, how Brahmā, who does not seem to us to possess full Brahmaśakti, found a place among the Trimūrti along with Śiva and Viṣṇu who possess such śakti?

Brahmā appeared when the need arose for a third brother-sister pair. It is for this help rendered that the other two of the Triad, Śiva and Viṣṇu, keep him by their side as their equal. That is why he is closer to Śiva and Viṣṇu than to other deities. That apart, the Paramātman has endowed him with the knowledge of all the Vedas and imparted to him the power of being one of the gurus of the Brahma-vidyā.

Even so it is part of the Paramātman's līlā that Brahma has no temple.

The Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Purāṇas extol Brahmā as Prajāpati, Hiranyagarbha. If such a god is worshipped he must be worshipped properly with the respect due to him, it would be better not to worship him instead of worshipping him in a casual manner. Brahmā does not lose anything by not being worshipped. His father gives him all support, keeping him in the lotus emerging from his navel. And his mouth holds the Vedas that are the support and substance of all the universe. So he does not require a temple: nor does he need one considering the attitude of people towards him. May at least this god remain peaceful without being bothered by them!

¹ In the "Pradhānika Rahasyā", which occurs towards the end of the *Devīmāhātmya* or *Durgāsaptasatī* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa*, it is said that Viṣṇu-Ambikā, Śiva-Sarasvatī and Brahmā-Lakṣmī appeared as brother-sister pairs.

Why Sarasvatī has no temple

Here is an example of the saying that when you inquire into one subject you stumble upon another. I realise that, while speaking about the glory of the divine couples, Śiva and Ambā and Mahāviṣṇu and Mahālakṣmī, I omitted the subject of Sarasvatī, the consort of Brahmā. But the reason is that I thought I would deal with the subject then on hand, that is Brahmā, without any interruption, and come to Sarasvatī later.

What is our attitude to Sarasvatī? How do we look upon her? Whether or not we regard her as complete Brahmasakti, we give her a very high place as the presiding deity of vidyā, as the goddess of knowledge and the arts. We derive a sense of tranquillity by merely contemplating the goddess wearing white and holding books and the vīṇa in her hands. We perform Sarasvatī pūjā and chant hymns in her praise, beautiful Tamiḷ hymns composed by great men like Kambar, Oṭṭakūttar, Kumara Kuruparar and Subrahmanya Bhārati. We sing compositions by Muttusvāmi Dikṣita and others. Even as tiny tots, when we start going to school, we recite verses in praise of Sarasvatī with devotion.

In spite of all this, in spite of there being a thousand temples for other deities, there is none for Sarasvatī. In the whole of Tamiḷ Nāḍu there is a temple for her only in Kūttanūr, Tanjavūr district. It was built by Oṭṭakūttar (Kūttanūr is his birthplace). In Kāmakōṭṭa (in the temple of Kāmākṣī in Kāñcīpuram) there is a sanctum of Sarasvatī. But it is said that the image here is not of Sarasvatī, consort of Brahmā, but of Rājaśyāmalā or Mahāsarasvatī, the mantriṇī or minister of Rājarājeśvarī. Even in such temples where there are idols or sanctums for Sarasvatī you find them relegated to a corner.

All told, in the matter of temples, Sarasvatī too, like Brahmā, has not been given any importance. But there is this difference. While many do not evince any special devotion for Brahmā, they do worship Sarasvatī with fervour. All extol her and sing her praises. Devotion to her is never erased from our minds because it is instilled in us from the time we are initiated into our studies as children and it endures like a nail driven into a sapling. To borrow the language of newspapers, Sarasvatī, unlike Brahmā is a popular deity while Brahmā is an 'impopular' one. It seems logical not to build a temple for an impopular god. But the question is why there should be no temple for a very popular goddess like Sarasvatī.

It is here that we have to consider our national culture or ācāra. Pātivrāṭya, utter faithfulness and devotion to the husband combined with constant service to him, is rooted in our culture. A pativrātā refuses to own or enjoy that which her husband does not own or enjoy. Sarasvatī is a pativrātā residing in the tongue of her husband Brahmā. Which means the tongue of Brahmā itself is her temple. How can she then dwell in a temple that is different when her husband himself does not have one. That is why there are no sanctuaries for her too.

She comes to us in our home if we invoke her. Is she not our Mother? So she comes as a member of the family. Since it is her duty to teach us and to impart us knowledge, she will come to our home on her own also. But she will not agree to be worshipped in a temple or to be honoured without her husband. It is in recognition of this great womanly quality of hers that no temple has been built for

her. During Navarātri, there is a pūjā for the Śaktis and she too comes to receive our devotion along with Durgā and Lakṣmī. But she will not agree to be worshipped, without her consort, in a common place, in a temple, with all the people of the place gathered together and with daily pūjā and festivities.

Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, Nārada

Brahmā has three wives: apart from Sarasvatī, Gāyatrī and Sāvitrī. Chandas (metre) which is the outward form of the supreme mantra called Gāyatrī is Gāyatrī. Savitrī is the light, the inner life-breath of Gāyatrī. Although they are related to the mantra that is the very essence of all the Vedas, there is no temple built either for Gāyatrī or for Sāvitrī. The reason is the same as mentioned earlier (in connection with Sarasvatī): they do not desire to have that which their husbands do not have.

We see that Nārada too has no temple. He is foremost among the devotees of Bhagavān (Bhāgavatottama) and an *aḍḍiyār* of Viṣṇu. He has indeed the top place among devotees and is the author of the *Bhaktisūtra*. The special path to salvation in the age of Kali, the most suitable path, is *sankīrtana*, singing the praises of the Lord, chanting his various names. Considering that Nārada is all the time singing the names of Bhagavān, to the accompaniment of the vīṇa, one should think that temples must be built to him in place after place. As a matter of fact there is none and what could be the reason? His father Brahmā does not have a temple, nor does any of his three mothers. Would it be proper for the son alone to reside in a temple? Nārada follows the noble principle of the virtuous son who refuses that which his parents do not have.

Another reason also occurs to us. There is a story that once Dakṣa Prajāpati, in his anger, cursed Nārada thus: "You will never stay in one place and will always be roaming." That is why Nārada is always on the move, roaming the three worlds. How can we install in a temple one who is on the move all the time?

Is it not appropriate that we have arrived at the subject of Nārada after journeying through the three worlds? Nārada is the guru of *sankīrtana* (singing the praises of the Lord) and as such the guru of Tyagayya also. He is a guru who, at the same time, is also a *śiṣya*. He received the māntra special for this age, the māntra that can be chanted or muttered by all, at any time or at any place, the māntra that takes you across the evil age of Kali ("Kalisantarāṇa").

Harē Rāma Harē Rāma Rāma Rāma Harē Harē

Harē Kṛṣṇa Harē Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Harē Harē

It was from his father Brahmā that Nārada received the upadeśa for this māntra.

Brahmā in the gurupāramparā

One is reminded here that, apart from being the Creator, Brahmā has a primal place in the guru-paramparā or lineage of teachers. He gave the upadeśa of nāma-mantra (chanting the names of the Lord) to Nārada. And Nārada himself is not only the bhakti-guru but also a Vedānta-guru or jñāna-guru. Considering our present theme it is apposite to the discussion of the place of Brahmā also as a guru.

All three – Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva – are part of the Brahma-vidyā guru-paramparā of Smārtas who are followers of Śankara Bhagavadpāda. The very first

in this lineage is the guru who teaches in silence, Dakṣiṇāmūrti – he imparts jñāna without giving oral upadeśa. He who personifies Śiva as the supreme jñāna is the first guru. Then there is Dattātreyā who with his three heads is the conjoint form of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. (Though he is the jñāna-guru in this form, the three individually signify only creation, protection and dissolution. Let that be.) It was only after Dattātreyā that the guru-śiṣya lineage through oral upadeśa came into existence. At first for five or six generations the guru-paramparā consisted of a succession of fathers and sons. It was from Śukācārya, who remained a celibate all his life, that the lineage of sannyāsa-gurus and sannyāsa-śiṣyas commenced.¹ Of the father-son paramparā the first guru is Mahāviṣṇu, then his son, Brahmā.

“Nārāyaṇam Padmabhuvam”: first Nārāyaṇa, then Brahmā who appeared from the lotus. After having received upadeśa in Brahma-vidyā from his father Viṣṇu, Brahmā gives upadeśa to his son Vasiṣṭha, and thus becomes a guru himself. Like Nārada, Vasiṣṭha is also a son of Brahmā. Brahmā has ten sons and they are called Prajāpatīs. In the Vedas Prajāpati is Brahmā but it is customary to call his ten sons also Prajāpatīs. Among these ten ṛṣis Vasiṣṭha is also like Nārada. Brahmā has given him upadeśa, the supreme upadeśa of Advaita. In the guru-paramparā of Śrīvaiṣṇavas the first is Mahāviṣṇu, next Mahālakṣmī (in Tamil the two are called “*Periya Perumāl*” and “*Periya Prāṭṭī*”). The next guru is not Brahmā. Just as Gaṇapati is the chief of the hosts of Śiva, the hosts of Viṣṇu also have a lord. He is not Brahmā, the son of Viṣṇu, but Viṣvaksena, what they call “*Senai Mudaliar*” in Tamil. He is the Śrīvaiṣṇava guru next to Mahālakṣmī. After him come gurus who lived on earth (as mortals) beginning with Nammāzhvār.

In the Smārta tradition it is Brahmā who comes next to Mahāviṣṇu. Though no temple is built for him and no pūjā offered, when Smārtas start their meditation on the gurus, during the time they learn Vedānta, they recite the verse “Nārāyaṇam Padmabhuvam Vasiṣṭham”; etc. Thus namaskāra is offered to Brahmā here. This is a matter for comfort! When sannyāsins perform Vyāsa-pūjā every year they worship both Sarasvatī and Nārada.

Students of Vedānta and sannyāsins have no sentimental reservations with regard to Brahmā. They pay obeisance to him not because he performs the function of creation but because he is a guru. But among the common people such worship is the exception rather than the rule.

No reason for namaskāra

What do we understand from all this? “The guru is Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara. So pay obeisance to him.... Tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ.” If you understand the verse thus you are wrong. You may be exhorted to offer namaskāra to the guru and you may be right in offering it for any other reason. But if Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara are thought of in their respective roles of creator, protector and destroyer, there is no need to offer them any namaskāra. And, similarly, there is no need to pay obeisance to the guru also! (The Paramaguru laughs.)

“Guruḥ sāksāt Param-Brahma; tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ.” “The guru is the

¹ This has been dealt with in the first chapter.

Parabrahman. So pay him obeisance." Is it right to say so? At least is *this* right? No, this is also not right. "Why is it not right?" The Paramātman is beyond mind and speech. You cannot pay It obeisance on knowing It. Even if you offer namaskāra It will not accept it because It is without attributes and without any function or action. We say "Parabrahmam Jagannatham", referring to the state in which there is no doing and no knowing. What is the use of paying obeisance to It? If you truly know the Parabrahman then it means you yourself are It. And then too there is no meaning in any namaskāra. Do you bow to yourself?

The very first verse taught to the student by way of obeisance to the guru is wrong!

True meaning of the "Gurur-Brahma" verse

What is the true meaning of the "Gurur-Brahmā" verse?

The guru does not perform the functions of Brahmā, Viṣṇu or Maheśvara, namely creation, sustenance and dissolution. He does not give janma to a being, nor does he sustain it or put an end to its life. It is Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva who perform these functions.

When the guru is mentioned as the Trimūrti it only means he performs the three functions *like* them and not that he *does* their functions. He does perform three functions and they *resemble* the functions performed by the Trimūrti. He is spoken of as the Trimūrti by way of a simile.

While caressing a child, if you lovingly call it "*Kaṇṇe, Maṇiye*" (the words mean "eye" and "jewel"), it does not mean that the child *is* the eye or a jewel. It only means that, just as the eye is indispensable and very dear to us and has to be protected with great care, so too is the child dear to us and precious like a jewel or gem. "Maṇi", in addition to meaning one of the nine gems, means the apple of the eye. Even the Lord is addressed as a gem in Tamil ("*Mazhapāṭiyuḷ māṇikkamē*").

All such talk is in the form of similes. An object or thing compared to another is the "upameya". We bring in another object to liken to it. That is the "upamāna". In some respects the two are the same. But only in some respects, not in all. If the two objects were the same in all respects they would be identical and there would be no sense in differentiating them as upamāna and upameya. Comparing one object to another is upamā. If the one is the same as the other you don't speak of the figure of speech called the simile or upamā. You cannot compare the moon to the moon. Even if the two objects likened to one another are not the same they may be identical in some respects and not necessarily identical in some other respects. Take the term "candravadanā". It means a woman with "a face like the moon". It means that the face in question has the lustre of the moon, also the purity and coolness of the moon and its attractiveness. The similarity is in these respects. Not in others. The moon does not have eyes, ears and a nose like a human. The face does not float in the sky nor does it wax and wane.

It is the same with the guru being spoken of as the Trimūrti. In some respects the guru is like the Trimūrti and in some other respects he is different from the Trinity.

I am reminded of another verse. It is about Vyāsa who is the source of many of

our religious and philosophical traditions. In this verse how Vyāsa differs from the Trimūrti is described. "If he is Brahmā he does not have four faces; if he is Viṣṇu he has only two hands, not four; if he is Śiva, he does not have an eye on his forehead."

*"Acaturvadano Brahmā
Dvibāhuraparo Hariḥ
Abhālalocanaḥ Śambhuḥ
Bhagavān Bādarāyaṇaḥ*

"Bādarāyaṇa" is another name of Vyāsa. He got the name by practising austerities under the badarī or ber (jujube) tree.

In comparing Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara to the guru there must be points of sameness among them as well as points of difference. Did we not mention earlier that there was no need to worship them simply because they performed the three functions? If the guru is different from them in this respect there is nothing wrong with the verse. Let us see if it is so.

Since the names of the gods who constitute the Trimūrti are mentioned in the verse, the guru also performs functions that seem similar to theirs. Mind you, not the same functions, but functions similar. In a way the guru performs the functions of creation, preservation and destruction. In what way? With a little thinking you will know.

The guru gives us a new birth in the jñāna-loka, the world of knowledge, and in the Adhyātma-loka, the world of the Self. He opens our eye to knowledge and changes our mental outlook, moulds it anew. Changing or giving another shape means creating, giving a new birth. Since the guru creates the birth of knowledge in us or, in other words, since he makes jñāna to be born in us, he qualifies to be called Brahmā, the creator.

Then sthiti or preservation. How does the guru take care of us? He sustains us by bestowing on us the Adhyātma riches in our life of jñāna. Just as Mahāviṣṇu gives us wealth and health to nurture our body, the guru protects us by giving us upadeśa and books and by showing us the path of sādhana to foster the Ātman. Instead of finding bliss for himself (or instead of enjoying himself) in samādhi, he sacrifices his happiness for our sake and does all he can to liberate us from saṁsāra. He takes care of us and removes all our difficulties in this world too. In our worldly life he teaches us how to live in such a manner as we can develop our Self. His chief function is taking care of our Ātman. In this way he is like Viṣṇu, the protector.

What, then, about saṁhāra, destruction or dissolution?

Is not the guru a man of the highest sāttvika qualities (qualities of goodness and clarity)? How can he be a destroyer like Rudra? The very mention of words like Rudra, Rudratāṇḍava, Raudrākāra rouses fear, does'nt it? The guru, on the other hand, is full of compassion and grace. How can we speak of him as Rudra? It is probably because they did not want to create fear in our hearts that the name "Maheśvara" has been used (in the verse) instead of Rudra. ("Gurur devo Maheśvaraḥ"). Even so the reference must be to the function of saṁhāra. Since Brahmā and Viṣṇu have been mentioned, in order, for creation and protection, we

cannot understand the function of Maheśvara in any other way.

You may ask: "Explaining the figure of speech called the simile, did you not say that in any two objects that are compared to one another there must be aspects in which they differ? Looked at in this way, are there differences between the guru and Maheśvara?"

Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara are mentioned in a sequence. As we have already noted the guru performs the functions of the first two (creation and sustenance), albeit in a way different from Brahmā and Viṣṇu. The third function is destruction and it must also apply to the guru. Does this then mean that the jñāna that the guru inspired in us as Brahmā and nurtured in us as Viṣṇu will be destroyed by the guru as Rudra?

No. There are evil forces that constantly drag us down into the mire and prevent us from obtaining the light of knowledge. The guru battles with them patiently and destroys them. That is the function of saṁhāra (the function of Rudra) that he performs. When a crop is grown the weeds have to be removed. Similarly, it is as important to remove our intense ignorance as it is to impart us knowledge. It is indeed more difficult to destroy ignorance than to impart jñāna. It is an arduous task to make the ascent up a slippery tree: if we climb one span up we tend to descend one cubit down. We are enveloped by evil on all sides. If the good sticks out its head a little bit, the evil comes down heavily on it to crush it. The guru as Rudra dispels the darkness of ignorance. The definition of the word "guru" itself is he who dispels darkness: "gu" means darkness; "ru" means dispelling.

Three functions are performed by the guru: causing the birth of jñāna in the student; nurturing the jñāna so created; and destroying the obstacles on the path of jñāna. These encompass the functions of creation, protection and destruction. It is thus that the gurmūrti becomes the Trimūrti.

What, then, is the difference between Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara on the one hand and the guru on the other? Rudra destroys the body created by Brahmā and sustained by Viṣṇu. The guru creates jñāna and sustains it. But it is not this jñāna that he destroys. Obviously he cannot destroy that which he has himself created with difficulty. The Trimūrti consist of three. What one god creates is protected by the second god and destroyed by the third. Here (in the world of jñāna) it is the same individual who performs all the three functions. But there is this important difference: what is created and sustained is jñāna; what is destroyed is ajñāna.

What the guru creates and sustains is not like the body that is bound to perish one day. What he creates is amṛta. It is imperishable and cannot be destroyed by anyone or by any agency.

In this way what Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra do together to a jīva in worldly life the guru does all by himself in the life of jñāna. It seems strange: three great gods are needed for your worldly life which is not enduring and not capable of giving you everlasting bliss. But just one individual, the guru, seen in human guise, is all that is needed for the jñāna that will never perish and is everlasting. But the deities constituting the Trimūrti, it must be said, perform their functions for millions and

millions of jīvas, while the guru performs his functions for a select group.

To sum up, we saw how the guru is like the Trimūrti. We also spoke about a god who is the Trimūrti conjoint, Dattātreyā. All gurus are like Dattātreyā. Like Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara who create the body, nourish it and destroy it respectively. The guru creates jñāna in the student, nourishes it and destroys ajñāna. If the guru is called Brahmā, Viṣṇu as well as Maheśvara you must note, as in a simile, the aspects of correspondence between the three gods on the one hand and the guru on the other.

Worthy of namaskāra

While the three (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara) are not worshipped if we keep in mind the three functions they perform, the guru must be worshipped for the functions he performs similar to those of the Trimūrti – “Tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ”. It is in this context that one must understand that, in the figure of speech called the simile, there are points suggesting sameness between the two objects compared and points of difference.

Why are we unable to pay obeisance to the Trimūrti?

Why do we offer namaskāra to any individual? One likely reason is that we are happy about what he has done for us and we prostrate ourselves before him in gratitude. Or we offer him our namaskāra and pray to him hoping that, pleased with us, he will do us a favour or do something that pleases us.

We are not happy that Brahmā created us, nor are we satisfied with the way Viṣṇu protects or sustains us. We are also not happy about the prospect of Maheśvara doing away with us. We are unable to offer namaskāra either to Brahma or Viṣṇu as an expression of gratitude for the fact that the former created us and for the sort of protection the latter gave us in the past or is giving us now. In this birth there is nothing that Brahmā can do for us. As far as we are concerned his work was finished with the act of creating us. But, if you think we could pray to him for a good or better janma next or a janma better than this, the fact is he has no authority of his own in the matter. He can give us a janma only according to our karma and he has to act on the orders of the Paramātman. So we do not have to worship Brahmā even for the purpose of a better birth next. The same logic applies to Viṣṇu. He cannot hereafter give us any protection according to our prayer because his function as far as we are concerned is in keeping with our karma.

Maheśvara's function is that of putting an end to our life. There is nothing that he has done for us so far in our present janma. As for the question of his having performed the function of saṁhāra in our previous janmas, we know nothing about it since we have no knowledge of our past lives.

So there is no need to thank Maheśvara for the work of saṁhāra he performed in our past lives. It is also not necessary to worship him out of any sense of happiness that he is going to put an end to our present janma. It is no use prostrating ourselves before him with the prayer: “Do not kill me, Svami!” He puts an end to our life according to our karma.

Thus we do not feel like worshipping the gods constituting the Trimūrti because we have no reason to be happy about what they did for us in the past, what they do for us now and what they will do for us in the future. But what about the guru? How do we feel about what he has already done for us, what he is doing for us now and what he will do for us in the future?

We ignorant people (ajñānins) are trapped in saṁsāra and suffer a great deal. In our sorrow and difficulties the guru throws open the path of self-realisation for us, the path to discover tranquillity and bliss little by little. He leads us on this road, holding our hand and taking us forward step by step. No amount of gratitude will measure up to his blessings. And no number of namaskāras will be adequate.

Think of what the guru is yet to do for us. It will be far, far greater than what he has already done. What we have experienced is just one or two rays coming to us through a narrow aperture from the world of light, the world of light known as the Ātmasvarājya. Later and finally – let it be at any time – it is with his grace that we will attain this world of light. And further still, with his grace, we will ascend higher and become this very Light. The guru will work tirelessly for us until we have reached this supreme goal. It does not matter that we do not attain this goal in this birth. We may have to be born again and again but the guru will journey with us throughout and will not give up until we are united with the Light (become ourselves the Light).

Even if it means taking janma after janma a true guru will not remain content until he succeeds in taking his disciple, who is also true like him, to this goal. Yes, we are speaking here only about the true guru. Why should we waste our time and speak until our voice becomes hoarse about the guru who is not true. The true guru deserves anantakoṭi namaskāras (countless crores of namaskāras) for the happiness he has showered on us so far, for what he does now and what he will do in the future for our sake.

After saying "Gurur-Brahmā gurur-Viṣṇuḥ gurur-devo Maheśvaraḥ", we now realise that there is nothing wrong or inappropriate in concluding the verse with "tasmai Śri Gurave namaḥ".

The functions performed by Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra are only in keeping with our own karma. (We should bear in mind here that we are speaking of Viṣṇu and Śiva not, as we generally do, as the Supreme Being but only as gods who perform the functions, respectively, of protection and dissolution. Looked at this way, they do not do anything beyond what is dictated by our karma.) As for the guru, he helps us in expending our karma and in wiping it away. Even when the karma keeps yielding its fruits (its consequences), he protects us by investing us with the armour of jñāna. His grace is capable of attenuating the severity of our karma. Indeed the guru may even take upon himself our karma and lighten our burden.

This is the difference between the Trimūrti and the guru: the Trimūrti's role with regard to our life is based on our karma; the role of the gurumūrti is to take us across this karma, to release us from it. So he becomes specially entitled to our obeisance. Truly is it said: "Gurur-Brahma, gurur-Viṣṇuḥ gurur-devo Maheśvaraḥ.... tasmai Śri Gurave namaḥ."

Guru as the Parabrahman

There is yet one part of the verse the meaning of which has not been explained.

Guruḥ sākṣāt Param-Brahma

This statement must also be true if our concern is with the true guru. To the question, "How is he (the guru) Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara?" we have given an elaborate answer. There is no need for a similar elaborate answer to the question how he is the Paramātman.

The guru takes us to the goal beyond which there is nothing. The meaning of this, the meaning of the statement about the Ātmasvarājya and jñānajyotis is that he transforms us into the Paramātman. He opens our inner eye to the truth that we are ourselves the Parabrahman. "Child," he tells addressing us, "it is the Parabrahman that has taken your guise" ("You are indeed the Parabrahman"). The guru helps you to discard the guise and reveal yourself as It (the Parabrahman). Unless the guru himself is one such, that is the Parabrahman, will he be able to bring about such a transformation? So there is not the least doubt about the truth of the declaration: "Guruḥ sākṣāt Param-Brahma".

The one who has reached the other shore...

The definition of a guru is one who has crossed the ocean of saṁsāra and, at the same time, takes others across it. If he himself is immersed in the ocean how can he lead others out of it to the other shore? Those who have not thus gone across the ocean of saṁsāra themselves but have written big books on "Advaita" or given lectures on it are but professors or individuals who have earned a doctorate. They are by no means gurus in the true sense.

If a man has gone across but remains aloof as an Ātmārāma (he who delights in the Ātman) he too is a great man, a Brahmajñānin. But he is not a guru. (This does not mean that such a Brahmajñānin is belittled. I have just mentioned a fact.) The Brahmajñānin who has attained the other shore of the ocean of saṁsāra and also takes others across is a guru. Reaching the other shore, crossing the ocean of saṁsāra – all these mean nothing but attaining knowledge of the Brahman.

The Ācārya has pointedly spoken thus in defining the guru: he goes across to the other shore and takes others also across.

Śankara's definition of an ācārya

In his *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* Śankarācārya describes the ācārya or teacher thus:

Tīrnāḥ svayam bhīmahavārṇavam janān

Ahetunā- Jnyānapi tārayantah

The guru is he who has himself crossed the terrible ocean of saṁsāra ("Bhimabhavārṇava" means the terrible ocean of saṁsāra). Those who are gurus must have crossed it (tīnah). They must also make others cross (anyānapi tārayantah) this ocean. It is not a bald statement that the Ācārya makes of the gurus who make others cross the ocean of saṁsāra. In the previous two lines (that is the first two lines) of the verse he mentions how they do it:

The Guru Tradition

*Śāntāḥ mahānto nivasanti śanto
Vasantavallokaḥitam carantāḥ*

Verbal beauty and beauty of meaning are combined in these lines. The Ācārya uses a number of adjectives for gurus: śantāḥ = peaceful (men); "mahāntāḥ" = great men; santāḥ = sadhus, saintly and virtuous people. What follows is very beautiful, revealing the mature poetic insight of the Ācārya: "vasantavallokaḥitam carantāḥ". "Vasantavat" = like the season of spring; "lokaḥitam" = the well-being of the world; "carantāḥ" = creating.

When spring comes it is green everywhere. Until then one would be shivering in the cold of winter. In autumn the leaves fall and, shorn of their foliage, the trees look bare and strange. With the advent of spring there is burgeoning everywhere; you see tender shoots on all sides. You feel neither very cold nor very warm: the weather is equable and pleasant. The scent of jasmynes and mangoes fills the air.

But is there anything physically perceptible to the eye as Vasanta? No. Vasanta does so much good to the world, without any trace of ego, without showing itself.

The guru is like the season of spring without the least trace of ego or ahaṁkāra. But if at all he shows himself it is only for our benefit. When we suffer such anguish on account of our inability to recognise Īśvara he, the Lord, himself sends us the guru as a symbol of himself, as a sign of himself. So it is meaningless to state that the guru shows himself. He does so not in an attitude of pride suggesting that it is he who is doing everything. He reveals himself for our sake because we need a sign to recognise him. He is in fact the Brahmavastu who is without a sign. Brahmavastu is described as "nirliṅga". "Liṅga" means a "sign".

Good things keep happening to us, as if on their own, without our knowing that they keep happening through the agency of our guru. One day, all of a sudden, we will wonder about it all, about how they happened. "Was it due to this or due to that? But how did this and that fit together so well to our advantage? How was our work accomplished?" We will recognise in a flash that it was guru-kṛpā, the compassion of our teacher, that imperceptibly brought together things in our favour.

There is one similarity between the guru and the season of spring which surpasses all other points of resemblance between the two. I have not spoken about it yet. The Ācārya mentions it in one small word of four syllables. The word is "ahētunā". "Tirṅāḥ svayam bhimabhavāṁnavam janān ahētunā nyānapi tārayantāḥ".

"Ahētunā" means "without any cause or reason". Spring brings blessings to the world without any reason for the same. So is the case with what the guru does to the world. "Nivasanti" means "they (the gurus) exist" or "they reside". The ācāryas exist as men of peace, as great men, as saintly men who have crossed the terrible ocean of saṁsāra. And, apart from crossing the ocean themselves, they make others also cross it. In this way they are like the season of spring which brings benefits to the world without any reason for the same.

There is no reason why our gurus should bless us in this manner. Why should they keep giving us upadeśa day and night? Why should they go from place to place and why should they be so concerned about people? How are we fit to

receive their blessings? Or are they indebted to us in any way that they feel obliged to give their blessings to us? Apart from all this, what do they gain by giving us upadeśa or their blessings? Gain apart, instead of resting peacefully and delighting in their own Ātmān (Ātmārāma) they are concerned about our troubles.

Looked at from our angle or from the guru's angle there is no reason for him to keep blessing us all the time. If he does so it is indeed "ahētunā". He does not profit a bit by taking us across the ocean of saṁsāra. We are not fit to be so taken across. Even so he works tirelessly, determined to make us fit for being taken to the other shore. The beauty of the term "vasantavat" (like spring), and its appropriateness, become clear to us from the use of the word "ahētunā".

During winter people shiver in the cold. The green landscape turns drab and gloomy. Then comes spring transforming the earth into a world of tender shoots and green foliage. The trees burst into flower and fruit. It is a riot of colours and a pleasant, cool wind blows. It is Vasanta, it is spring. What is the reason behind the advent of Vasanta? We don't know. "Ahētunā."

Is there any way by which we can do something in return for the blessings given us by spring? Even if we can, how do we do it since it is showering its blessings on us without showing any indication of itself? How could we then "get hold of it" and return its kindness?

We saw earlier that the guru does give an indication of himself, some sign by which we recognise him. We also got to know the reason for it. It might now be asked: "We didn't return the kindness of spring. In the case of the guru we act differently, don't we? We serve him to the best of our ability. We offer him a gift in some material form. The śāstras have much to say about guru-śusrūṣā (serving the guru) and guru-dakṣiṇā (offering gifts to the guru). We have to repeat here what we said earlier about the reason why the guru gives an indication of himself. It is for our sake that he accepts our service and gifts. It is because we derive satisfaction and earn merit through the service and dakṣiṇā offered that he accepts them. He gives upadeśa and blessings not because he expects any service or gifts in return.

Like the season of spring the guru also brings benefits to the world without any reason for the same.

Compassion wells up in the guru's heart without his being aware of it himself. It is Śvara who creates this spring of kindness in him. As a result, he sincerely desires the well-being of the world and keeps doing good to it all the time. The ultimate good performed by our gurus is mentioned in the above-quoted verse of the Ācārya through these words: "Bhimabhavāṁṣavam janān tārayantah." They lead people out to the other shore of the terrible ocean of saṁsāra. How are they able to do it? The answer is they have themselves crossed this ocean. That is why it is said, "svayam tīrṁāh". It is because they have crossed the ocean that they are able to lead others across, "anyān tārayantah".

The Ācārya has conferred a blessing on us in the form of a work called *Upadeśasāhasrī* consisting of (as the title itself indicates) one thousand pieces of advice. To most people (90 out of 100) mention of the Ācārya at once brings to mind the hymn called *Bhaja Govindam*. The next famous of our Ācārya's works is

Saundaryalaharī. When *Vivekacūdāmaṇī* is mentioned, 50 out of 100 people will be reminded of the Ācārya. Only 10 out of 100 will have heard of his work *Upadeśasāhasrī*. Great truths are propounded in it and the Ācārya also tells you how to apply them in your practical life. The first part of the work is prose and the second poetry. At the very beginning itself the Ācārya speaks about the guru liberating people from the ocean of saṃsāra.

“Vidyāsantatiśca prānyanugrahāya bhavati nauriva nadīm titīrṣṇoḥ.” (Imparting vidyā according to the paraṃparā is as helpful to the community of creatures as a boat is to the man wanting to cross the river.)

“Nadīm titīrṣṇoḥ” = to him who wants to cross the river; “nauriva” = like a boat. Both “nau” and “nauka” mean “a boat”. The Tamil *navay* is from “nau”. (According to the Bible, the man who was saved during the Deluge by the grace of the Lord by being placed in the boat was called Noah. Similar is the story told of our Vaivasvata Manu.)

It is the guru who plies the boat in the swollen river of saṃsāra. “Karnadhāra” means a boatman. The guru is known by this name also. To express differently the idea that the guru crosses the ocean of saṃsāra himself and takes others across it: being himself the Parabrahman the guru makes others also It. His being the Parabrahman is expressed by the words, “Guruḥ sāksāt Param-Brahma.”

Such a guru is himself the Parabrahman, not one who merely mouths Vedāntic truths, not one indulging in empty talk on the Vedānta. Of course he can speak ably on the subject of Vedānta. He has the capacity not only to argue positively in support of his system but also to refute other systems. Such a dual capacity refers to his ability for “ūhāpoha” (“ūha” plus “apoha”). After dwelling on all this and the many lakṣaṇas or qualities of a guru, the Ācārya mentions the crowning lakṣaṇa of the guru. This supreme lakṣaṇa is expressed in the words, “Brahmavid Brahmaṇi sthitaḥ.” “Brahmavid” means one who knows the Brahman. No, to say so is not entirely correct. The Brahmavid is not one who merely knows the Brahman through his intellect like a professor or a doctor (of philosophy). In order to avoid any such misunderstanding of the word “Brahmavid”, the Ācārya adds at once, “Brahmaṇi sthitaḥ” – one who dwells or is rooted in the Brahman. It means one who is the Brahman Itself.

So the statement “Guruḥ sāksāt Param-Brahma” is right. The question now arises only with regard to the statement, “Tasmai Śrī Gurave namaḥ.”

The guru as Brahman – still entitled to namaskāra

We said that there was no reason to offer namaskāra to the Trimūrti in their reduced roles as Trimūrti (that is as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara performing the limited functions of creation, preservation and destruction). The Brahman is never reduced or contracted and it is so vast that it is beyond the reach of mind and speech. Even if we offer namaskāra to It, It will not reach It. Since the Parabrahman is without any function, will It receive our namaskāra? We mentioned earlier that there is no meaning in paying obeisance to It. To sum up, it is not necessary for us to offer namaskāra to the Trimūrti as well as to the Parabrahman.

Now the question arises: if the guru is the Parabrahman, why should we offer namaskāra to him? We noted earlier that, though the guru is in some respects like the Trimūrti, there is still much justification in our paying him obeisance. Does not the same logic hold good if we consider the guru to be the Parabrahman and we prostrate ourselves before him?

Yest, it does.

That we must pay our guru obeisance is evident. Even though he is the Parabrahman, is he inaccessible to us? Is he without any function or action that he neither accepts nor rejects anything? That which is inaccessible and that which has no function has come to us assuming the form of the guru, in a form that is accessible to us, and does so much for us.

Although it is not necessary to offer namaskāra to the Parabrahman as *the Parabrahman*, we must offer anantakoṭi namaskāras (countless crores of namaskāras) to the Parabrahman that is the guru. Strictly speaking, it is the one and only Parabrahman that comes in the form of the guru. It is out of compassion for us that the Parabrahman has appeared as our guru to correct us in all ways instead of remaining in a state of actionless quietude. We must prostrate ourselves again and again before such compassion.

The namaskāra that is itself wealth

It is this namaskāra that is our greatest asset. The Ācārya says so. Perhaps you know the story. As a child brahmacarin he prays to Lakṣmī and sings the "Kanakadhārastavam" out of his consideration for a poor Brahmin lady. Listening to his prayer, the goddess blesses the lady with a rain of gold. The Ācārya does not take even a grain from this wealth. But will the goddess Lakṣmī be satisfied without giving her blessing to the avatāra-child who composed such a beautiful hymn that moved her to bless the poor Brahmin lady for whom he prayed? As for the Ācārya, he thinks it is not proper to suggest: "I prayed to you to bless someone else. I don't need anything from you myself." Such an attitude is likely to mean disrespect. So it occurs to the Ācārya, in his humility, that he must pray to Mahālakṣmī to grant a boon for himself. However, he does not really need anything, nor does he desire anything. He does not know what blessing to ask of the goddess. He offers her his namaskāra thinking that he will ask the goddess herself about what he should ask her. But soon it occurs to him: "What other riches should I ask her for? There is fullness in remaining small and paying obeisance to someone. So this namaskāra itself is great wealth." The Ācārya expresses this idea in the following lines:

Sāmpatkarāṇi sakalendriyanandanāni
Sāmrājyadānaniratāni Saronuhakṣī
Tvadvandanāni duritoddharaṇodyatāni
Māmeva mātaraṇiṣam kalayantu nānye

The Ācārya uses the word "nānye" in the end. The "final word" or "last word" means that there is nothing more to be said (about a subject), that there is no new decision to be made. "Mother, Mahālakṣmī, the namaskāra I offer you constitutes

the great riches that you can give me as the goddess of wealth. I want nothing else.”

“Tvadvandañāni” = the namaskāras offered to you; “māmeva” = me alone (I will speak to you about “māmeva” later); “aniśam” = always; “kalayantu” = reach, attain; “na anye” = nothing else.

“I do not pray to you for anything other than this namaskāra sri itself.”

“The grace of the Lord is the wealth of all wealth,” so says Tiruvalluvar. Grace originates in the Lord. The namaskāra that the Ācārya mentions is that which we make ourselves. People like us offer namaskāra to the Lord desirous of the wealth of his grace. But the Ācārya’s namaskāra is different. For him the namaskāra he offers is itself great wealth. So he does not ask for anything else. “May this alone come to me”: “Tvadvandanāni māmeva mātaranisam kalayantu...”

“Mātāḥ” plus “aniśam” = “mātaranisam”. Addressing Lakṣmī as “Mother,” the Ācārya prays for the Namaskāra – Lakṣmī to reside in him all the time, “aniśam”.

Father, Mother

“Mātā”, “Ambā” – these words are known to everyone. To a child the word “Ambā” comes more easily. “Ammā” and “Ambā” are the same. “Mātā” is used in refined speech, like “tāyār” in Tamil. “Ambā” and “ammā” suggest a humble position and “mātā” and “tāyār” a position that is higher. Speaking about Parameśvara’s consort we say (in the South) “Amman”. We also speak of “Amman sannidhi”. “Amman” is more suggestive of baby-talk than even “Amma”. “Appa-Appan”: similarly “Amma-Amman”. Only names in the masculine gender has an “n”-ending in Tamil. You don’t look for grammar in baby-talk. So “Amma”, even though feminine, becomes “Amman”. We call Parameśvara’s consort “Amman”. In ordinary speech she is also called “Ambā” or “Ambāl”. We refer to Mahāviṣṇu’s consort as “Tāyār” and speak of “Tāyār sannidhi” also.

In the *Amarakośa* Viṣṇu’s consort is called “Indirā, Loka-mātā”, etc, and Śiva’s consort is called “Aparṇā, Pārvatī, Mr̥ḍāni, Caṇḍikā, Ambikā”. The name Ambā is made more beautiful with the suffix “kā” – “Ambikā”.

It seems we address Lakṣmī respectfully as “Tāyār” and “Mātā”, looking upon her as a great lady, because we go seeking her for wealth. The Ācārya, who addresses her as “Mātā” in “Mātaranisam”, describes her also as “Saroruhāksī”, meaning one with lotus-eyes. Bhagavān is “Puṇḍārikakṣa”, which means his eyes are also like lotuses. Both husband and wife are alike lotus-eyed.

Blessings of namaskāra

“All I want is the namaskāra that I offer you,” says the Ācārya. “That gives me fulfilment by itself and that alone will be enough for me.” Such a statement does not perhaps denote humility. It might suggest: “Oh, I am very mature in my wisdom. Others ask for wealth, grain, health, children. They ask for eight kinds of aiśvarya from Lakṣmī who assumes eight different forms (Aṣṭalakṣmī). I alone ask for fulfilment in the very namaskāra I offer to you.” The Ācārya thinks that such an attitude would mean that he does not care for any of the blessings that the Mother

gives, that he is not the sort who accepts anything submitting to anyone and that he finds fulfilment on his own by offering his namaskāra. So (in order to remove any suggestion of pride or ego), he mentions the blessings to be derived from it, instead of stating that the act of namaskāra itself brings fulfilment. "The namaskāra that brings all these blessings is enough for me," he says. If it is said that the namaskāra made to Lakṣmī brings such-and-such benefits, would it not mean that it is Lakṣmī who grants them? In other words the Ācārya shows with humility that whatever he has received has come to him as her blessings. Now what are these blessings or benefits?

"Sampatkarāṇi" = they (the namaskāras or vandanas) give riches in abundance.

"Śakalendriyanandanāni" = they give enjoyment to all the senses. In other words they bless you with pleasures of all kinds.

"Sāmrājyadānaniratāni" = they are enthusiastically engaged in gifting away a big empire to devotees. In the *Laṅkāsaahasranāma*, the goddess is called "Rajarajeśvarī", "Rājyadāyini" and "Rājapīṭhaniveśita-nijāśritā" (she who installs on the royal throne the devotee who goes to her for refuge).

Why does the Ācārya mention all these blessings? He thinks that it is only if he mentions the worldly benefits conferred by namaskāra that ordinary people will be persuaded to prostrate themselves at the feet of Lakṣmī (and other deities). He describes the blessings in the first part of the stanza. But when he comes to "tvadvandanāni" (the namaskāras to you) an idea occurs to him.

How can he, who has no attachment to the world, pray for great wealth, pleasures of the senses, overlordship of a big empire, etc? He thinks about it. For a great genius like the Ācārya a moment's thought is enough. Or not even a moment's thought. When composing a verse he does not stop for words. Each word occurs to him before he has finished the previous one. He composes without stopping; the flow of words, ideas, is unhindered.

It is when he starts the second part of the stanza with "tvadvandanāni" that he thinks of all the worldly blessings he has mentioned earlier. At once, he finds an answer to the apparent drawback and the phrase "duritoddharanodyatāni" strikes him with the speed of lightning. The Ācārya who mentioned two or three words denoting worldly blessings before "vandanāni" now adds the word "duritoddharanodyatāni" that is related to the inward life of the Ātman. In poetry, unlike in prose, words sometimes can be used in any order. And in this way the poem becomes more beautiful. In Śanskrit, particularly, there is the freedom to weave together words in many ways and play with them. So without doing any damage to the meaning of the stanza the Ācārya composes thus:

Tvadvandanāni duritoddharanodyatāni

Great men like the Ācārya pour out their poetry divinely inspired. In between they think for a moment or two. But they seem only to us to stop to think. Perhaps they do so to enhance our own sense of appreciation of their work.

A correction

In a number of editions of stotra books (collections of hymns) containing the "Kanakadhārāstavam" I have seen a mistake in the "Sampatkarāṇi" stanza. "Duritāharaṇodyātāni" is used instead of "Duritoddharaṇodyātāni" which is the correct version. This correction must be carried out.

"Durita" means pāpa, sin, demerit.

Nowadays, some people use the term "durita-kāla" apparently referring to fast tempo in music. This leads to the absurd suggestion that you earn puṇya or merit by singing in a slow tempo (viḷamba-kāla) and earn pāpa by singing in a fast tempo. "Durita" meaning sin is here wrongly used for "druta" meaning fast. "Tvarita" also means fast and that word must have been corrupted in ordinary speech into "durita" to mean fast.

"Durita", as mentioned earlier, means pāpa, sin. In the saṁkalpa or resolve (to translate the word loosely) before we perform any ceremony we say "Duritakṣayadvārā Parameśvaraprītyartham". Our goal is propitiating, pleasing, Īśvara. The sins we have committed are an obstacle in our efforts to please Īśvara. When our sins are destroyed, when they at least diminish (when there is a "kṣaya" of our sins – duritakṣayadvārā) we earn the blessings of Īśvara.

"Duritāharaṇodyātāni" may be split into "durita + āharaṇa + udyātāni". "Haraṇa" and "āharaṇa" mean the same, that is "dispelling". "Udyātāni" means "exerting (themselves)". "Duritāharaṇodyātāni" thus means "exerting themselves to dispel pāpa". The namaskāras we offer to Mahālakṣmī exert themselves to dispel, to destroy, our pāpa. It may seem such a meaning is correct.

According to the dictionary – and grammatically – "haraṇa" and "āharaṇa" mean the same. But in actual usage there is a difference. "Haraṇa" means to "dispel" and "āharaṇa" means to "bring in". To make the meaning of the word "haraṇa" more forceful the prefix "apa" is added (for instance in the word "Sītāpaharaṇa"). The addition of the prefix "a" to "haraṇa", instead of making the act of "dispelling" more forceful, might mean the act of "bringing in" more forceful. However, since "āharaṇa" has also the meaning of "dispelling", we cannot conclusively establish that "duritāharaṇodyātāni" is not textually possible.

However, it is because "duritoddharaṇodyātāni" yields a better and more appropriate meaning that I said the text containing the other version must be changed.

The term "duritoddharaṇodyātāni" is split into "durita + uddharaṇa + udyātāni". "Uddharaṇa" is the longer form of uddharana. The precise meaning of the word is to "pull up something by its roots and throw it away". The act suggests that there is something that is deep within which must be brought up and cast away. What is on the surface need not be "uprooted": it has just to be picked up and thrown away. "Pulling up" something or "uprooting" is necessitated only when it is deeply embedded or is caught inside. We say that Kṛṣṇa performed "Govardhanoddharaṇa". Without understanding the meaning of the phrase fully, we describe the act denoted by it as a wonderful feat thinking that Kṛṣṇa, by putting

his hands underneath the mountain on ground level, lifted it up. What he did was a more wonderful feat. He dug in his hand deeply into the earth, extracted the mountain and lifted it up. And he did so with great ease like plucking out a mushroom from the soil.

We describe work on a temple as "jīṃoddhāraṇa" without understanding the meaning of the word. "Jīṃa" means old and crumbling. If a temple has wholly or partly crumbled what do we do? Is it enough if it is filled with some material, or if something is poured over it? Or will the whole building have to be demolished including the inner structure? But sometimes we may have to resort to a more difficult measure. A structure that has crumbled outside with its foundation shaky may have stones that cannot be just gathered together, broken down and thrown away. They will have to be dug out, pulled out by the roots so to speak. If there are trees or small plants growing in the prākāra (ambulatory) or gopura they will have to be uprooted. "Jīṃoddhāraṇa" means pulling out and casting away stones, trees, shrubs embedded deep in a structure. Pulling out a thorn is called "kaṇṭhakoddhāraṇa".

We somehow think "jīṃoddhāraṇa" is the same as "renovation", renewing something. In reality it means uprooting that which is old, that which is in decay. In this age of Kali, avatāra-puruṣas, divine incarnations, have performed the uddhāraṇa of the world. What does it mean? Purandaradāsa has in one of his compositions sung of "Jagadoddhāraṇa". The avātaras have retrieved the earth or the universe trapped in the mire of adharma. They have put in their hand underneath the earth to pull it out.

It is not necessary that what is brought out in this fashion must be thrown away. It could be repaired, mended. That is how the divine incarnations, after retrieving the world from adharma, brought it the blessings of their good deeds. It is good to retrieve anything from adharma. Bhagavān did not throw away the Govardhana mountain after pulling it out from the earth. He held it aloft as an umbrella.

"Uddharāṇa" is pulling out something and bringing it up. the object so pulled out could be thrown away, destroyed, or repaired and used. It all depends on the context in which the word is used.

What is "duritodddharāṇa" then? It means pulling out the thorny bush of pāpa by its roots, the pāpa that has taken root in us. An undesirable object or article that has got into us is dangerous to the body. Similarly, our sins embedded deep within are a danger to our life, our Self. To take them out and to throw them away is "duritodddharāṇa".

"Uddharāṇa" is more meaningful than "āharāṇa" with reference to the act of pulling out by its roots the big thorny bush of sins that has grown in us over many births. Pulling out this big tree of sins by its roots with the help of a sturdy implement is expressed in a nutshell by the word "uddharāṇa".

We become utterly pure when all our sins have been extracted, that is when the jīṃoddhāraṇa of our life has been completed. In this stage it is nothing less than

being bathed in the ambrosia of immortality, virtually a kumbhābhīṣeka with amṛta. The Ācārya demonstrated that this is accomplished by our namaskāra to Mahalakṣmī in his "Kanakadhārastavam". He says: "May those namaskāras (that removed my sins) be mine." "Māmeva kalayantu."

It does not seem right for the Ācārya to ask for the namaskāra-kriyā which bestows wealth, sensual pleasures and overlordship of an empire because he cannot accept them. So he thinks about the blessing that he can add to these, the blessing he himself longs for. He thinks only for a moment – less than a split second – and the namaskāra that carries out the duritōddharana suggests itself to him and he completes the stanza accordingly. As a matter of fact, the Ācārya is not tainted in the least by any durita or sin. He is so pure and sacred that no sin can attach itself to him. If he asks for the blessing of the namaskāra-kriyā it is because he places himself in our position. He does so for our sake and in order to teach us how to pray.

Wealth, sensual pleasures, authority over a kingdom are pleasures of this world. Papoddharana, to be rid of sins, serves the next world. This alone serves our ultimate purpose (paramārtha). As if to make our foregoing discussion clear the Ācārya includes the first three (worldly) blessings before the word "vandanāni" and "duritoddharanodyatāni" in the part following "vandanāni".

Not for "me" alone

"Māmeva kalayantu – "Vandanāni mām eva kalayantu" – may the namaskāras attain me (may the namaskāras which remove my sins be mine).

"Mām kalayantu" means "may something (in the present case the namaskāra-kriyā) attain me." With the addition of "eva" ("māmeva kalayantu") the meaning is: "May the namaskāra-kriyā attain me alone." In other words it means that the namaskāra-kriyā should not attain anyone other than the author of the verse. The Ācārya lived his life for others. He has said that great men, great teachers, are like the season of spring and do good without expecting anything in return. And he himself was an example of what he taught. How can such an Ācārya want to monopolise the blessings of the namaskāra-kriyā?

However, some people, without giving much thought to the subject, get the wrong meaning of the words with the "eva". Worse, they change "kalayantu nānye" to "kalayantu nānyam". With "nānye" our version means: "All that I want is the namaskāra-kriyā. Nothing else." With "nānyam" the same would mean: "The namaskāra-kriyā must attain me alone. No one else." The selfishness implied in the words, "the namaskāra-kriyā must attain me alone", is several shades made worse. The Ācārya surely has not said anywhere that the namaskāra-kriyā is meant only for him and not for anyone else.

Some have thought about the question whether it should be "nānye" or "nānyam" and have, in order not to invite trouble by choosing either, found a solution in a third alternative, "mānye":

Māmeva mātaraniśam kalayantu mānye"

“Mānye” is used as a vocative in addressing Lakṣmī. It means: “O you worthy of respect”. You find the word similarly used in the honorific “Lokamanya” before the name “Bāl Gangādhara Tilak”.

A question arises: “If some people manage the problem with “mānye” and you with “nānye”, what about the “mam eva” in the verse? Does it not mean “only for me” or “for me alone”? What have you got to say to this, Svami?”

I will say this.

In poetry, whatever the language, the order of the words does not matter. There is the practice of rearranging the words of a poem in “prose order”. In Sanskrit, particularly, there is licence in the matter of the order in which words are used. In fact, even in Sanskrit prose there is this licence. In poetry, the order of words is determined not only by the demands of the metre but by euphony.

Although, in this way, “eva” is tagged on to “mām”, it should not be taken to mean “me alone” or “only for me”. Everything will be in order if “eva” is read with the “vandanāni” in the previous line of the stanza: “vandanāni eva”. “Mother, although you are the bestower of many kinds of riches, I do not want anything else (‘nānye’). I want only the vandānas (namaskāras) made to you. May they alone come to me” (as a blessing). In the verse, although it is “vandanāni...māmeva kalayantu”, you must understand it as “vandanāni eva mam kalayantu”. So, instead of the “namaskāra-kriyā attaining me only”, you will have the correct meaning: “May only the namaskāra-kriyā attain me.” Mahālakṣmī, the Mother, need not give any other blessing. The only grace needed from her is that she must so bless (the Ācārya or us) as to inspire us to offer her our namaskāra.

I said “kalayantu” meant “may (they) attain”. This is not the only meaning of the word. “Kal” is the root and it has a number of meanings. Apart from that of “attaining to” it has the meaning of suggesting something higher as in “may it have sway over something”. The Ācārya uses the word to suggest that the namaskāra-kriyā must have complete hold of him (vandanāni mām kalayantu).

As stated earlier the Ācārya makes this prayer not for himself but for us. It is to instruct us in how to pray. “Even if I forget, O Tongue, chant the prayer ‘*Namahśivayave*’.” Similarly, the Ācārya’s words suggest that “even if I abandon the act of namaskāra or vandana, may it have complete hold of me”.

In the very act of praying the Ācārya shows to the world the true path of prayer.

Guru of the three worlds

The Ācārya has in this hymn (“Kanakadhārāstavam”) extolled Mahālakṣmī as “Tribhuvanaika-gurostarunī”. It means “the beloved wife of the guru of the three worlds.” Just as Mahālakṣmī is regarded as the Mother, Mahāviṣṇu is regarded as the Father and, therefore, may have been called “guru”. We may take it that the Ācārya speaks of Mahāviṣṇu and Mahālakṣmī as the Father and Mother of the three worlds. The sanctums of Lakṣmī and Pārvatī are usually referred to (in Tamil Nadu) as *Tayar sannidhi* and *‘Amman sannidhi*’. But Viṣṇu’s and Īśvara’s sannidhis are

not usually called "Takappanār sannidhi" and "Appan sannidhi". It is only in Keraḷa that they add "appan" to the names of deities – thus "Guruvayurappan", "Vaikkattappan" and Ayyappan¹.

It would perhaps be right to think that the Ācārya has in mind Mahāviṣṇu as "tribhuvanaguru" (like lokaguru and jagadguru) when he refers to his consort Mahālakṣmī as "tribhuvanika-gurostaruṇī". When Bhagavān incarnated himself as Kṛṣṇa and as our Śankara Bhagavadpāda, he got the name of "lokaguru" since he had assumed human form and was guru of the world of mortals. In his divine form of Nārāyaṇa he was tribhuvanaguru (guru of all the three worlds). As such, on different occasions, he has given upadeśa to men, devas and asuras. Lakṣmī is his consort. It is not possible to do namaskāra to her all the time separating her from her husband. Often when we want to pay our respects to a man and his wife: we tell them: "Please stand together as a couple (dampati). I will prostrate myself before you both." So the guru of the three worlds (who is always with Lakṣmī) ever receives our namaskāras (with his consort).

Our guru is both Parameśvara, the lord of the three worlds, and the Parabrahman who is beyond all the three worlds. There is no need to seek anyone else as the guru of the three worlds. Our guru is a new kind of Trimūrti, a new kind of the Parabrahman and worthy of our grateful prostrations – indeed our namaskāras easily reach him. So let us keep prostrating ourselves before him saying

Namaste, namaste, namaste, namostu.

May the namaskāras that are solely meant for our duritōddharana protect us, remaining in us as a treasure.

Guru vandana and nindana: amṛta and viṣa

The Ācārya throws light on a variety of subjects in his *Praśnottara-ratnamālikā* ("A Garland of Gems of Questions and Answers") through questions and answers. One question in it is: "What is poison?" ("Kim viṣam?") The reply: "Avadhīraṇḍa guruṣu" (showing disrespect to the guru). "Avadhīraṇḍa" means disrespect. The opposite – respecting the guru and mentally prostrating ourselves before him – is amṛta or the ambrosia of immortality.

[Reciting to himself the verses of *Praśnottara-ratnamālikā*, the Paramaguru continues.] Occurring later in the work is the question about amṛta. It is not put like this: "What is amṛta?" but in this form: "What is amṛta to the ears?" We speak of "kaṇāmṛta". The idea is similar.

"Pātum kaṇāñjalibhiḥ kim amṛtam?"

"What is the amṛta to be drunk with the ears?" The external ear or pinna is like a leaf-cup. Just as we take pāyasa (usually rice cooked in milk with the addition of sugar or jaggery) with the leaf-cup, what is the amṛta to fill the ears and to take into the heart?

¹ "Guruvayurappan", Śrī Kṛṣṇa of Guruvayūr; "Vaikkattappan", Śiva of Vaikam; "Ayyappan", Dharmasādhā.

The Guru Tradition

The answer is "sadupadeśa". Or the "the good upadeśa given by the guru is amṛta".

Instead of putting the question simply, "What is amṛta?", the Ācārya asks; "What is amṛta for the ears?" In such a question there is something of advantage to us. We saw that guru-nindana or speaking ill of the guru is poison. So its opposite, guru-vandana (obeisance to the guru), we decided, is amṛta. This is obvious even to a child. The Ācārya thinks it is not necessary to ask the question, "What is amṛta?" So with the intent of emphasising the importance of the guru's upadeśa he asks the question that elicits the reply "sadupadeśa".

There is a special significance in saying "amṛta imbibed with the pinna of the ears" instead of saying "kaṁāmṛta". "Kaṁāñjali" means the pinna of the ear. In Tamil "añjali" means *maḍal*. It is like a bud unfolding. When the pinna is kept folded, close to the cheek, it looks like a bud. When it is unfolded it receives sounds. That is why the term "kaṁāñjali". "Añjali" usually means namaskāra (praying with folded hands). The shape of our hands when we fold them in devotion is that of a bud.

"Amṛta" means guru-vandana (worshipping the guru). Since "viṣa" means guru-nindana (speaking ill of the guru or being disrespectful to him) amṛta cannot be anything else. We saw the special significance of "amṛta for the ears". The Ācārya further develops the idea in a subtle manner and speaks of "amṛta for kaṁāñjali". Here he confirms that namaskāra is amṛta, so it seems to me. We learn that the namaskāra that is añjali is amṛta for our life and that the amṛta for kaṁāñjali is sadupadeśa (the salutary upadeśa of the guru).

Guru's exertions

One thing leads to another... Going through *Praśnottara-ratnamālikā*, another point arises in the context of the subject of duritoddharaṇa we have been speaking about all the while. Another matter has been "pulled out" after digging into the text.

Praśnottara-ratnamālikā has this question in the beginning itself: "What is worthy of acceptance?" To explain, what should we accept as the authority on which to base our life? "Kim upādheyam?" The answer is "Guruvacanam." ("The word of the guru.")

Then comes the question: "Who is a guru?" ("Ko guruḥ?") The answer is a bit long: "Adhigatatattvaḥ, śiṣyahitāyodyataḥ satatam."

"Adhigatatattvaḥ" means he who has fully grasped the meaning of tattvas (truths) and realised them.

Now comes our subject of duritoddharaṇa. "Satatam" = always; "śiṣyahitāya" = for the good, or well-being, of the student; "udyataḥ" = exerting (himself). The matter has been mentioned before. The guru is he who has not only realised by actual experience what he has learned — he imparts to others what he has learned and helps them to realise such learning. He must also exert himself to the utmost to do good to them. Indeed he must always be engaged in this task. "Udyataḥ" =

exerting (himself) to the utmost.

While speaking about dūritoddharaṇa (in his "Kanakadhāraṣṭavam") the Ācārya uses the same word, "udyataḥ", "dūritoddharaṇodyatāni" ("dūrita + uddhāraṇa + udyatāni").

He has shown that among the various blessings to be had from namaskāra the efforts taken to pull out by its roots the pāpa that is deep within us is the final as well as the most important. It is here that the word "udyataḥ" signifying the efforts taken, or the hard work put in, for dūritoddharaṇa is used. In granting other blessings there is no such exertion. It is accomplished easily. The bestowal of wealth and sensual pleasures and even the gifting away of an empire are carried out easily. In fact, the word "nirata" here suggests that this is done gladly. A devotee is even installed on the throne with ease.

It is after these worldly blessings that are easily granted that we come to dūritoddharaṇa. The term "udyatāni" refers only to this. Even with the great strength possessed by it the namaskāra-kriyā finds it difficult to pull out by its roots the pāpa we have earned in birth after birth.

We should not take it that the Ācārya suggests that the namaskāra-kriyā is weak by any means. On the contrary, all that he suggests is the extent and deep-rootedness of our evil karma and the habits formed as a consequence.

In *Prasnoṭtara-ratnamālikā* the Ācārya says that the guru exerts himself for the good (hitāya) of his student. What is hita? It is the good of the student, his welfare or well-being. This means nothing but putting an end to his karma (releasing him from the bondage of karma). There is no other way of liberation from saṃsāra. That ultimate and everlasting bliss for attaining which a student comes to a guru is attained only through release from saṃsāra. And when one is freed from karma one is at once freed from saṃsāra.

Cessation of karma is cessation of pāpa. And it is dūritoddharaṇa.

The Ācārya who observes that the namaskāra-kriyā exerts itself for dūritoddharaṇa also has it that the guru too is ceaselessly making efforts for the good of his student. It means the guru's work is also dūritoddharaṇa. The namaskāra we offer to our guru will quicken his power to bless and will go deep in us to extract our pāpa and discard it.

We must approach Lakṣmī for wealth, lordship over a kingdom and such other worldly blessings and we must go seeking our guru for the eradication of our pāpa – such is the practice, the tradition. Slightly altering the prayer that the Ācārya makes to Mahālakṣmī let us pray to our guru thus: "The namaskāra that we offer you, the one who is always making efforts to rid us of our pāpa – may that namaskāra remain with us as a treasure that can never be taken away from us". We must pray to the guru again and again, receive his blessings, his anugraha, his grace that is a cascade of gold (kanakadhāra). We must live in bliss, feeling ourselves as light as cotton.

The Ācārya addresses Lakṣmī as "Mātā". Let us address the guru and pray thus:

The Guru Tradition

"Guro, we wish to have nothing other than our namaskāra to you as our wealth. We do not want to have anything else. We do not want to possess the right to anything else. The act of namaskāra must always abide with us. That is all. There is no other possession or asset or wealth we have other than that of laying down our body before you and offering our heart at your lotus feet." We must pray like this and find fulfilment in the prayer itself.

तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः

Glossary

The translator is indebted to Principal Vaman Shivaram Apte's *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Prasad Prakashan, Pune) in the preparation of the glossary. He has also referred to the works of a couple of indologists. Most of the words included here are explained in the text itself. Unless otherwise indicated the words listed are all Sanskrit.

Ābhoga (आभोग) : Enjoyment; curving; fullness or extent; expanded hood of the cobra. Name of work by Lakṣmīnṛsimha, *Ābhoga* is a commentary on Amalānanda's *Kalpataru*. It is in the latter work that a reference is made to ghatikāsthāna.

Ācarana (आचरण) : The act of conducting oneself according to a tradition or system.

Ādhīnakartā (आधीनकर्ता) : Head of a Śaiva religious institution or monastery.

Adhyātama (अध्यात्म) : Belonging to or concerning the Ātman or the Self.

Advaita (अद्वैत) : Monism; non-dualism.

Āgama (आगम) : The śāstras relating to the construction of temples, yantras, icons, etc, and the worship of deities; sacred texts dealing with ritual and iconography.

Āhuti (आहुति) : Offering an oblation to a deity; solemn rite accompanied by oblations made in the sacred fire.

Alakṣmī (अलक्ष्मी) : Goddess of misfortune; evil fortune; opposite of Lakṣmī.

Āmalaka (आमलक) : *Emblica officinalis*; *āmḷa* in Hindi; *nellikai* and *nellikka* in Tamil and Malayalam respectively.

Ānanda-maya-kośa (आनन्दमयकोश) : The sheath made of bliss. According to the śāstras the Self is concealed within five sheaths or kośas. The first is made of food, *anna-maya-kośa*; the second of the vital airs or forces, *prāṇa-maya-kośa*; the third of the mind, *mano-maya-kośa*; the fourth of understanding, *vijñāna-maya-kośa*; and the fifth of bliss, *ānanda-maya-kośa*.

Antah-karaṇa (अन्तःकरण) : The internal organs or faculties: the mind, intellect, consciousness and the ego. According to Principal Apte, the heart, the soul, the seat of thought and feeling, the mind and conscience.

Antarātman (अन्तरात्मन्) : The inner Self; the *jīvātman*. Some take it to mean the inmost conscience.

Antaryāmin (अन्तर्यामिन्) : The inner Controller; the Supreme Godhead guiding mankind; the Indwelling One.

Anuvāka (अनुवाक) : A Vedic sub-division, chapter or section.

Arcā (अर्चा) : Idol or image intended to be worshipped; worship.

Arcāvatāra (अर्चावतार) : Deity who does not go from place to place but is installed in a spot.

Ārṣa (आर्ष): Belonging to the ṛṣis or seers; archaic; sacred, divine.

Aruḥ: Tamil word meaning grace, blessing.

Ārutozhilājar: Tamil term for Brāhmins, those who have "six occupations": *adhyayana* (learning the Vedas), *adhyāpana* (teaching the scriptures), *yajana* (conducting sacrifices for one's own sake), *yājana* (conducting sacrifices for others), *dāna* (giving away gifts), *pragrahaṇa* (receiving gifts).

Āśiriyar: This Tamil word is derived from "ācārya". *Āśiriyar* also denotes an editor. The Paramaguru wonders whether such a usage originated from the belief that the editor of a paper also nurtured knowledge and wisdom like an ācārya.

Ativamāśramin (अतिवर्णाश्रमिन्): One who is beyond *varṇa* and *āśrama*, that is one who is not bound by the rules of caste or the stages of life.

Adiyār: Tamil word of great poetic and mystic significance, meaning a devotee who carries the feet of the Lord on his head.

Ātman (आत्मन्): The Self; the individual Self. The English word "soul" may not adequately express the idea of the Self. In Advaita the Ātman is identical with the Paramātman (the Oversoul or the Supreme Godhead or the Ultimate Reality).

Ātmārāma (आत्मराम): One who delights in one's Self; he who has realised himself.

Ātma-sāmrājya (आत्मसाम्राज्य): This is a difficult word to translate. Literally it means the everlasting empire or kingdom of the Ātman, an empire that knows no extent.

Avidyā (अविद्या): Nescience, ignorance; the stage of being not illumined; unawareness of the truth that transcends the perceptions of the mind and the senses.

Āzhvār: Tamil Vaiṣṇava saint-poet; one who is immersed in devotion to the Lord. There are twelve Āzhvārs and the sacred work, *Nālayiradīvya-prabhandham*, is made up of the hymns composed by them.

Badarī (बदरी): The jujube tree or its fruit. The fruit is more strictly "badarīphala" (बदरीफल).

Bhaktaparādhīna (भक्तपराधीन): Subject to devotees; the Lord who is subject to his devotees.

Bhaṇḍāra (भण्डार): Store-house; treasury.

Brahmaid (ब्रह्मविद्): One who knows the Brahman.

Caḥṣu-dīkṣā (चक्षुदीक्षा): Initiation given by the guru's glance.

Cāitya (चैत्य): Place of religious worship, particularly Buddhist; relating to a pile; anthill.

Caturdaśa-vidyā (चतुर्दशविद्या): The fourteen branches of learning belonging to the Vedic tradition: the four Vedas, the Vedāngas (Śikṣā, Vyākaraṇa, Chandas, Jyotiṣa, Kalpa), Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya, the Purāṇas and the Dharmasāstra.

Caṭṭa (चौळ): Tonsure which is one of the *saṁskāras* to be performed in childhood. It is called the *mundana* ceremony in the North.

Chandas (छन्दस्): Vedic metrical science; prosody; one of the six Vedāngas (see "Caturdaśa-vidyā").

Cilappatikāram: "Epic of the Anklet", famous Tamil poetic work by Ilango Aḍigal, Cera prince and Jaina monk belonging to the 5th century AD.

Daiva-sānnidhya (दैवसाग्निध्य): The living presence of the divine spirit; divine presence; nearness to the divine.

Damaru (डमरु): Small drum shaped like an hour-glass; Siva's drum.

Darśana (दर्शन): Seeing, looking at; vision; point of view. The word has come to mean a doctrine or system of thought. There are six orthodox darśanas: Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Pūrvamīmāṃsā and Uttaramīmāṃsā.

Devair: Term used in polite Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava speech in addressing a person.

Devasenāpati (देवसेनापति): Commander of the celestial army; Kārttikeya or Subrahmaṇya.

Dhāranā-sakti (धारणाशक्ति): Retentive memory.

Dikkai: Tamil for dikṣā.

Dramiḍa: A variation of "Drāviḍa": there is an interchanging of "va" and "ma".

Durita (दुरित): Sin, demerit, calamity.

Duritodharana (दुरितोद्धरण): Discarding sin or demerit by pulling it out by its roots. The subject is discussed in detail in the concluding part of this volume.

Eka-sandha-grāhin (एकसन्धग्राहिन्): One who has to listen only once to grasp what is said (on a subject).

Garbhādhāna (गर्भाधान): Impregnation ceremony; one of the samiskāras or purificatory ceremonies performed to facilitate the conception of virtuous and auspicious progeny.

Ghana (घन): Compact, solid, heavy; a particular manner of chanting the Vedas.

Ghaṭikā (घटिका): Small pot; time, occasion; small apparatus for irrigation.

Ghaṭikāsthāna (घटिकास्थान): Ancient and medieval school or college for the study of the Vedas and śāstras.

Iluppar: Tamil word for *Bassia latifolia*; mahua.

Īśvaratva: The quality of being Īśvara; overlordship.

Jātakarma (जातकर्म; stem जातकर्मन्): Ceremony performed at the birth of a child—one of the samiskāras.

Jñāna-jyoti (ज्ञानज्योति): The radiance of knowledge; inner illumination.

Kaivalya (कैवल्य): Mokṣa or liberation, isolation, separation.

Kalpa (कल्प): One of the Vedāngas, Kalpa explains the performance of Vedic

rites. It deals with the division of karma according to varṇa and āśrama and how sacrifices are to be conducted, etc; an eon.

Kamaṭha (कमठ): Tortoise.

Kamaṭna-dikṣa (कमठदीक्षा): "Tortoise-initiation", explained in the chapter dealing with various types of dikṣā.

Kāpālīka (कापालिक): Follower of a sect whose members carry skulls of humans as garlands.

Karaṇa (करण): Sense organ; religious action; a dance movement.

Karṇājali (कर्णाजलि): Pinna; "the auditory passage of the outer ear", according to Apte.

Katākṣa (कटाक्ष): Sidelong glance.

Kaupīna (कौपीन): Small piece of cloth covering one's modesty.

Kaustubha (कौस्तुभ): Jewel obtained during the Churning of the Ocean and worn by Viṣṇu on his breast.

Khālsa: An order known as "the chosen of God" created by Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708), the tenth Guru of the Sikhs.

Kolam: Designs drawn with rice flour in front of houses or inside in many parts of Southern India.

Kumbhābhīṣeka (कुम्भाभिषेक): Sanctifying ceremony connected with the building, renovation or reconstruction of temples and the installation of deities.

Kuñcitapāda (कुञ्चितपाद): Raised left foot of Naṭarāja.

Kurunta: *Physalis atrobellalona*

Kuśa (कुश): Kind of sacred grass that is an essential requisite of religious ceremonies; one of twins born to Sītā after her banishment.

Lāsyā (लास्य): Dance, especially feminine; dance denoting feminine grace.

Likhita-pāṭhaka (लिखितपाठक): Student who learns the Vedas by reading (not by listening). Such a student was looked down upon.

Linga (लिंग): Sign, mark, symbol; sign or symbol of Śiva.

Lobha (लोभ): Greed, covetousness, avarice.

Mada (मद): Rut, intoxication, lustful passion; arrogance.

Mahāvākya (महावाक्य): Great Upaniṣadic utterance or declaration; great proposition; Zimmer translates the word as "great formula".

Māpākkān: Student in Tamil

Manava (मानव): Man; descended from Manu.

Mānavan: Student in Tamil

Maṇḍala (मण्डल): Circle, wheel; globe; circle formed by king's neighbours; a division of the Ṛgveda.

Marapu: Tamil word meaning cultural tradition or conduct: cultured behaviour.

Mātsarya: (मात्सर्य): Jealousy; hostility; rivalry.

Mīmāṃsā (मीमांसा): Inquiry, investigation. The word "Mīmāṃsā" by itself means Jaimini's "Pūrvamīmāṃsā" "Uttaramīmāṃsā" is Vedānta, an inquiry into the nature of the Brahman.

Nācciyār: A Tamil word meaning heroine, devi or queen. It is also used in Malayalam.

Nālāyiraprabandham: The collected hymns of the twelve Āzhvars. The work is sacred to Śrīvaiṣṇavas.

Nāyanār: One of the 63 saint-poets of the Śaiva tradition of the Tamil-speaking region which once included Kerala.

Nāyanmār: Plural of Nāyanār

Nirguṇa-Brahman (निर्गुणब्रह्मन्): The Brahman without any attributes or properties; the Supreme Godhead without any qualifications.

Nirukta (निरुक्त): One of the Vedāngas dealing with glossarial explanation of Vedic words and their derivation.

Nīti (नीति): Policy, guidance, political science, justice.

Nityānanda (नित्यानन्द): Eternal bliss; beatitude that is everlasting.

Nyāya (न्याय): One of the six darśanas or systems of philosophy founded by Gautama; law; justice, equity; the science of logic.

Pañcāgni-vidyā (पंचाग्निविद्या): Knowledge of maintaining the five fires (Dakṣiṇa, Gārhapatya, Āhavanīya, Sabhya and Āvasthya).

Pañcakṛtya (पञ्चकृत्य): The five functions of Śiva-Natarāja or "Śivam": creation, preservation, dissolution, concealment through Māyā, and bestowal of blessing or release.

Pañcapatra (पंच पात्र): Vessel used in religious rites, in worship; five vessels taken collectively.

Pañcarātra (पंचरात्र): One of the two Vaiṣṇava Āgamas.

Paramahansa (परमहंस): Ascetic of the highest order; one who has controlled his senses and attained the highest jñāna.

Paramapada (परमपद): The highest state; final beatitude.

Paratattva (परतत्त्व): The transcendent principle; the Supreme Reality.

Paripraśna (परिप्रश्न): Constant inquiry; questioning (the guru) again and again as a method of learning.

Parivrājaka (परिव्राजक): Wandering ascetic.

Parokṣa (परोक्ष): Beyond the range of sight; hidden, secret. Knowledge gained by listening and not inwardly experienced is "parokṣa".

Pāsuram: Tamil Vaiṣṇava hymn.

Perumāi: Tamil word applied to Viṣṇu and his avatāras; one who is invested

with greatness; title of Cera kings; noble.

Piṭṭai-Lokācārya: Śrīvaiṣṇava teacher who wrote works on the Viśiṣṭādvaita doctrine (or the philosophy of Qualified Monism).

Pinda (पिण्ड): Ball or lump of rice offered to one's departed forefathers; foetus; representation of the microcosm.

Pittalāttam: This term used in Tamil Nadu for "fraud" or "deceit" must have originated from alchemy, from the fraudulent claim made by some alchemists that they can convert brass into gold ("Pittala" = brass; "hātaka" = gold).

Ponnāḍai: Literally "gold cloth" presented to people who have distinguished themselves in some field or other (silk laced with gold). *Ponnāḍai* is Tamil.

Pracāraṇa (प्रचारण): Propagating knowledge; going forth. In modern times the word has come to mean propaganda in a political, commercial or business sense.

Pragrahaṇa (प्रग्रहण): Accepting charity; taking.

Prahasana (प्रहसन): Farcical comedy; loud laughter.

Prajā (प्रजा): Offspring; subjects.

Prāṇamayakośa (प्राणमयकोश): Sheath made of the vital airs or forces.

Prāṇapratīṣṭhā (प्राणप्रतिष्ठा): Installation of a deity with rituals and mantras to impart it the vital breath; making an image a living presence.

Prapanna-jana-kūṭastha (प्रपन्नजनकूटस्थ): Literally, head of a concourse of devotees; another name of Nammāzhar, believed to be the most important of the Āzḥvars.

Praśasti (प्रशस्ति): Praise, laudation; panegyric or small poem written in praise, particularly, of a patron.

Pravaktā (प्रवक्ता; stem प्रवक्तृ): Exponent; speaker.

Rāga (राग): Musical mode; colour; passion; love.

Rāgamālikā (रागमालिका): A succession of ragas strung together like a garland.

Rājasa (राजस): Relating to the quality of rajas; as a guna it denotes passion and violence. (Rajas means dust, dirt, pollen, menstrual discharge.)

Rasavāda (रसवाद): Alchemy.

Śabda-Brahman (शब्दब्रह्मणु): Sound conceived as the Brahman; the Vedas; the sound that pervades everything.

Śabda-pramāṇa (शब्दप्रमाण): Verbal or oral evidence.

Sabrahmacārin (सब्रह्मचारिन्): Fellow student in a gurukula.

Saccidānanda (सच्चिदानन्द): The Supreme Bliss; sheer being and bliss; the bliss of sheer being. The term is made up of sat (being), cit (consciousness) and ānanda (bliss).

Sadguna (सद्गुण): Good or virtuous attribute; possessed of good qualities.

Sādhana (साधन): Accomplishing; pursuit; practice; spiritual or artistic practice.

Sadvidyā (सद्विद्या): Good learning or education.

Saguna-Brahman (सगुणब्रह्मन्): The Brahman with attributes or qualities.

Sahapāthin (सहपाठिन्): Class-mate. The word has the extended meaning in common usage of fellow worker.

Śaiva-Siddhānta (शैवसिद्धान्त): Doctrine which holds Śiva to be the Supreme Being and is based on Advaita.

Samāvartana (समावर्तन): Return; the pupil's return home after finishing his studies in the gurukula – the rites performed at this time constitute one of the samiskāras.

Samhitā (संहिता): Collection of Vedic hymns; placed together.

Samit (समित्; stem समिष्): Twigs or sticks for the sacred fire.

Samidādhana (समिदाधान): Offering the sacrificial twigs, sticks in Agni, a daily rite of the brahmacārin.

Sankhya (संख्य): One of the six systems of philosophy attributed to Kapila; relating to numbers; calculating, enumerating.

Sampradāya (संप्रदाय): Way of life handed down from generation to generation; way of life peculiar to a religious sect or system; code of conduct.

Samiskāra (संस्कार): From the root "samskr" meaning to make ready, to fashion, to transform, to refine. Samiskāra is a sacrament, a rite of refinement. There are forty śāstraic samiskāras.

Samyama (संयम): Restraint, control; one of the many stages of yoga; religious devotion.

Sanātana (सनातन): Eternal; firm, settled.

Sannidhi (सन्निधि): "Putting together"; proximity; appearance. Place where we perceive the living presence of a deity.

Sarvasanga-parityāga (सर्वसंगपरित्याग): Renouncing all attachments and associations.

Satīrthya (सतीर्थ्य): Class-mate; one who is taught by the same guru.

Satpātra (सत्पात्र): Worthy or virtuous person; person worthy of receiving education or gifts.

Sattva (सत्त्व): Virtue, goodness; ideal state or being; the supreme state of matter; essence.

Śikṣā (शिक्षा): Learning, study; teaching, instruction; one of the Vedāngas – the science that teaches proper pronunciation and euphony; punishment.

Śiṣṭaparipālana (शिष्टपरिपालन): Protection and sustenance of the good and virtuous; function of Viṣṇu.

Smarāṇa-dīkṣā (स्मरणदीक्षा): Initiation given by mere remembrance of the pupil or devotee.

Smṛti (स्मृति): Remembrance; recollection; a code of law.

Somayājīn (सोमयाजिन्): One who performs, or has performed, the Somayāga.

Sparśa-dīkṣā (स्पर्शदीक्षा): Initiation given by the guru by touching the disciple.

Śraddha (श्रद्धा): Trust; implicit faith, belief.

Śrāddha (श्राद्ध): Rites performed in honour of the departed.

Śrautin (श्रौतिन्): One who is versed in the Śruti or the Vedas.

Śravaṇa (श्रवण): Act of hearing; study; fame or glory; an asterism or lunar mansion (Aquilae).

Śrāvāṇa (श्रावण): Relating to the ear or the asterism of Śravaṇa; a lunar month.

Śrāvāṇī (श्रावणी): Full-moon day in the month of Śrāvāṇa; day of upakarma for Yajurvedins.

Śraviṣṭhā (श्रविष्ठा): An asterism or lunar mansion; also known as Dhanīṣṭhā Delphinīṣ).

Śruti (श्रुति): The Vedas; hearing; report; learning; scholarship; sound in general.

Sthalapurāṇa (स्थलपुराण): Historical account and legend relating to a place and particularly to the temples there.

Sthapati (स्थपति): Master-carpenter; sculptor; architect; charioteer.

Svādhyāya (स्वाध्याय): Study of the Vedas; sacred study; persual of sacred books, self-recitation; duty of Brāhmins.

Svānubhūti (स्वानुभूति): Self-experience or self-realisation.

Svara (स्वर): Sound, voice; note of a musical scale; tone; method of chanting the Vedas.

Tāmasa (तामस): Darkness; mental darkness; ignorance; one of the three gunas which may be understood as "darkness-inertia".

Tamizhakam: Land in which Tamil is spoken. It included, apart from the present Tamil Nādu, most of present-day Kerala.

Tāṇḍava (ताण्डव): Male dance; Śiva's cosmic dance.

Tāraka-mantra (तारकमन्त्र): The mantra that helps one to cross the ocean of saṃsara or worldly existence.

Tarka (तर्क): Logic, reasoning; conjecture.

Tāyār: Tamil word meaning mother.

Tengalai: One of the two Śrīvaiṣṇava sects of the South, the other being Vadagalai.

Tiru: Tamil equivalent of Śrī; honorific used for deities and men.

Tiruvāruḷ: Tiru + aruḷ, meaning sacred blessing; grace of the Lord or of the guru.

Traivarnikas (त्रैवर्णिका): The first three varnas.

Udayavar: Tamil word meaning owner, yajamāna, the guru, the Lord., used commonly with reference to Śrī Rāmānuja, the Vaiṣṇava preceptor.

Upamā (उपमा): Comparison of two objects different from one another; simile.

Upanayana (उपनयन): Leading to or near...; presenting, investiture with the sacred thread.

Upāsana (उपासना): Attendance, waiting near; devotion, meditation of a deity.

Ustād: Urdu word meaning master. Hindustani Muslim musicians are referred to as *ustads*.

Vaḍagalai: One of two Śrīvaiṣṇava sects of the South.

Vaikhānasa (वैखानस): A Vaiṣṇava Āgama.

Vājapeya (वाजपेय): Name of a Vedic sacrifice.

Vānaprasthāśrama (वानप्रस्थाश्रम): The third stage of life in which a man, after his life as a householder, goes to the forest accompanied by his wife to lead a life of study, meditation and austerity.

Vapa (वप): Fat or marrow of an animal.

Vārtika (वार्तिक): Further commentary on a commentary

Vātsalya (वात्सल्य): Affection for one's children or for those much younger; tenderness.

Vāttiyār: Tamil word derived from upādhyāya; teacher

Veṅba: A genre of Tamil poetry.

Veṣṭi: South Indian dhoti that is wrapped round the loins.

Vibhūti (विभूति): Might, power, prosperity, welfare; splendour; exalted rank; ashes of cowdung (bhasma); superhuman power resembling that of Īśvara.

Vidyārthīn (विद्यार्थिन्): Student, scholar.

Vimana (विमान): Superstructure or tower over the *sanctum sanctorum* of a temple; heavenly car; open palanquin.

Vineyan: Tamil word meaning one who has humility.

Vipra (विप्र): Brāhmin.

Vrata (व्रत): Religious act of devotion; austerity; observance of a religious vow; resolve.

Vrātya (व्रात्य): Man belonging to any one of the first three varnas who has lost his caste because of the non-performance of the principal *saṁskāras*; a man of low character.

Vyūha (व्यूह): Military array; a squadron; large quantity; assemblage, multitude.

Yajana (यजन): Act of sacrifice; conducting a sacrifice on one's own behalf.

Yājana (याजन): Conducting a sacrifice for someone else.

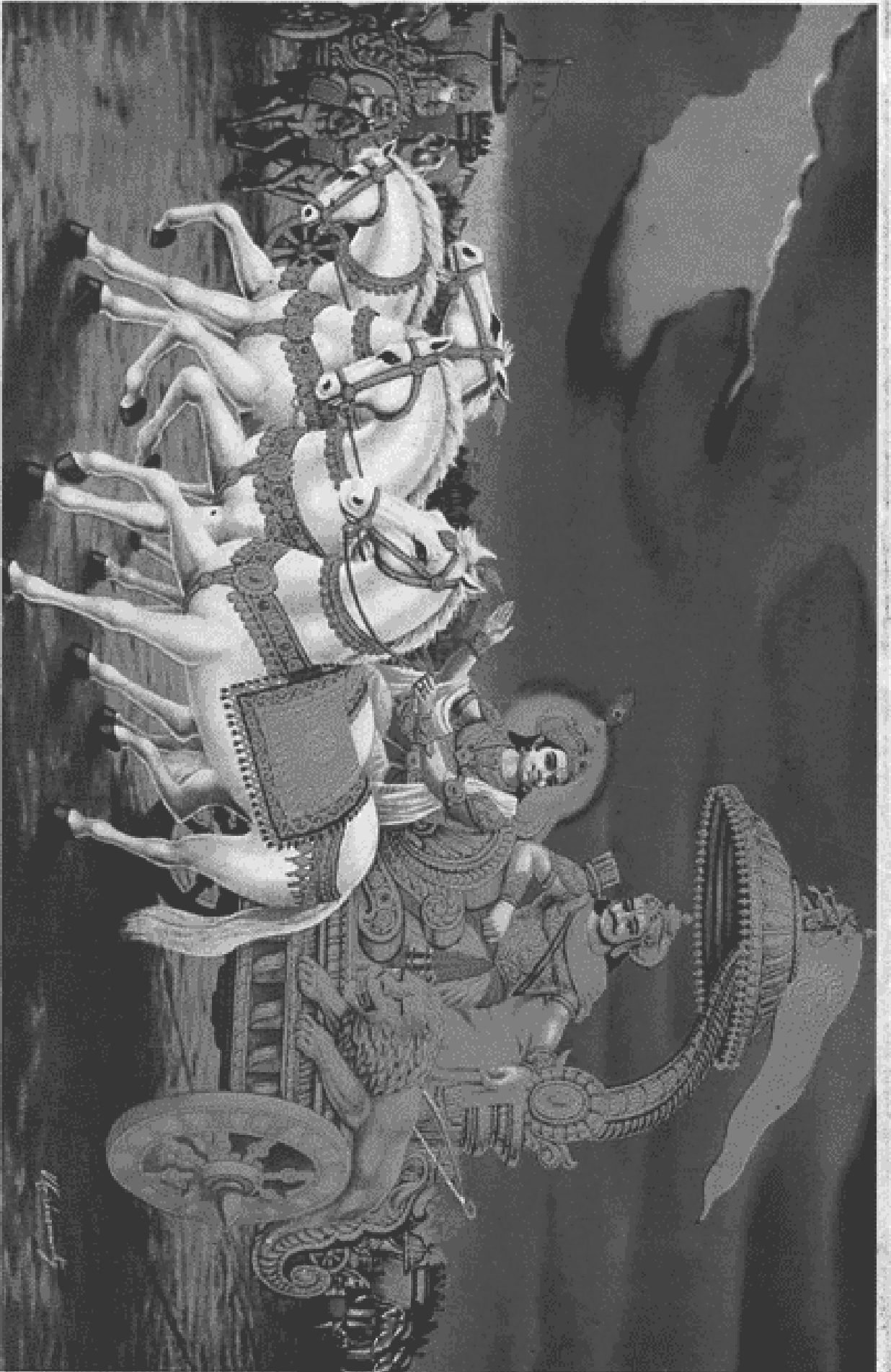
Yati (यति): Ascetic; one who has renounced the world and controlled his passions; restraint; a pause in music.

आ नो भद्रः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।
ā no bhadraḥ kratavo yantu viśvataḥ
Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rgveda, 1-89-i

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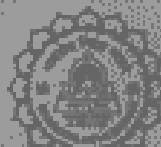
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