

YOGA OF RASA

Bhakti yoga and Bhakti –Rasa

All Life is yoga – an act of union with Reality. But it is necessary to remember that though all life that is to say all activities of growth and ascent and evolution are such there can be activities which lead to deterioration and death, degeneracy and so on which can hardly be called Yoga. However the special meaning of yoga has reference to realization of union or at-one-ness with Reality. Every soul aspires to Experience or have experience of the Ultimate Reality. In fact even the misguided person whilst seeking his goals assumes that he is pursuing the pathway to Reality and valuable. Therefore it can be assumed that all seek the Reality only and none other.

The very fact that there are different goals reveals the diversity inherent in all Reality – though here again it is likely that ultimately all will seek that which makes them seek behind all the several aspects of Reality or different values.

Values of truth, goodness and beauty too ultimately stem from something that is much vaster than any one of them or all of them taken together. Even as Śrī Kṛṣṇa has stated the Ultimate Reality is that from which all else receive their very light and life and being (Yad āditya gatam tejas yaccandramasi yaccāgnau tat tejo viddhi mamakama) To realize the experience of this basic ground of all, nothing can be the way experience of this basic ground of all, nothing can be the way except the way of union or yoga. Not ratiocination, not gifts and austerities, not mere study and repetition and memorization but a deliberate inward offering of oneself to the Ultimate is the path of Yoga.

As an aesthetic approach to this Reality – though jñānā, or knowledge is necessary it is a jñānā that seeks the Ultimate source of being of all rather than the phenomenal knowledge – the knowledge of matter (physics) or mind (psychology). But this knowledge is not easily got except by a devotion to the ultimate experience. Nor can the darsanas of the materialist and merely

ethical and ascetical modes of thought and practice lead to the experience of the Ultimate that transcends and sustains all of them. Therefore of empiricistic hedonistic (*cārvāka*) views do not go to the core of the Reality; for them Reality is the perceived and sensorially or Reality is capable of just becoming as mechanical as the karma which it tried to replace; and the asceticism of Jainism is equally purified mechanicalisation of the process of making oneself vacuous of all karma-matter and gaining the second light of the soul (*kaivalya īśvaratva*) but the reality lost amidst sevenfold predication is never regained.

Even the darsana of vaishesika and Nyāya, Sāmkhya and Mīmāṃsā had been able to give us the direction the Reality of the Experience. Logical thinking and psychological abstraction and analysis are those which are capable of giving a kind of experience of abstractions but not of the Reality, All that these have promised is freedom from misery and no positive bliss, all these promise a nirvana a nakedness of being free from the world and all its actions and nothing more: this is the meaning of moksa-literally freedom from the world and the bonds that have binded the soul all along. Of a positive bliss there is hardly any intimation.

Such knowledge is abstract knowledge – dry and void of all content such liberation in abstraction. Some thinkers hold as their goal, abstraction from the world experiences as such even in the mystical life. This conception of abstract experience of the ideal beauty of reality is due to the mistaken view that it is possible only through abstraction from the created world and mind itself.

The path of Sāmkhya or discrimination and abstraction or enumeration and mathematics or series without which Plato said one cannot enter into real philosophic truth or Reality is sanctified by so many sages of Yore. The Platonic experience of the Sunlight of idea, is really similar to the experience of the million fold Solar light of God¹ – to get accustomed to it is difficult but nevertheless necessary. Light is our image and symbol of freedom and reality and the increased light intimates utter dissipation of all darknesses – threefold or fivefold

as can be conceived by the human mind. This abstract beauty of the Idea or the Absolute undoubtedly is austere and exquisite. Such is the contemplation of the Suris – *sada pasyanti Surayah* of the Purusa Sūkta, Hymn of the Purusa. This is the *Parqmam padam* – Ultimate Place where there is hardly any distortion (Vaikuntha) of any kind and all are in their real nature exhibited. So much so Plato could exclaim that all things in this universe are seen there (from there?) in their real nature through the seer—vision permeated by the seer-consciousness everywhere. The initial abstraction is necessary for the more real and inward seeing of all things. Superficial outer seeing *paran cikhani* of the senses is gradually replaced by the inward seeing through the mind (reflection, imagination, and intuition – *sankalpa, abhinivesa, adhyavsaya*) and finally withdrawing from the entire organic patterns and instrumentation of the triple forces of *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*, one goes beyond this kind of knowing from outside once for all.

The path of Yoga is one that is intuitive from the very start. It gets behind the external and the analytical mind and instead of knowing by abstracting itself it identifies itself with the object and knows it. It goes to the kernel of being and does not distort or make dead that which it touches. Everything springs to life by itself through this touch and reveals itself to the intuitive touch. This is real psychical knowing.

That the intuitive knowing is a different kind of knowing is well known. So too the *yogaja*-knowledge is a different kind of knowing. This is in lesser knowings classified as *sanyama* – the knowledge that comes by the yoga or intuitive knowing ability to utilize through *sanyama* – which means literally full control (*yama*). That this kind of knowing is utilized by so many practitioners for miracle mongering is well known in India and elsewhere. It does not require great spiritual attainment at all, but this trick of intuitive knowing.

But bhakti is not of this order. Bhakti is intuitive devotion for the purpose of knowing Reality in its fullness and wholeness. It is different from Jñānā of the

external analytical type – knowledge by separation. It is a deep and ardent dedication or pursuit of the Ultimate meaning of oneself and all arises from the peculiar knowledge of illusoriness of all things and of oneself *qua* such; therefore is bhakti a deep and irrepressible endeavour to love God or the Ultimate Reality, Bhakti is a means of intuitive love guided by the optimism of faith that man can know and live in reality. It is not merely to know reality that guides the bhakta or devotee of the Ultimate; it is to live in it to become one in nature with it (*sadharmya*) and live by it alone. This is the real goal of bhakti.

It is therefore seen that bhakti is a deeper want or need in man than even knowledge or action. Though knowledge is sought for action in the world, and all that knowledge may be said to be knowledge of the world, yet in the intuitive life

¹ Śrī Venkatanātha called realization Sankalpa Suryogdaya. Of course, its opposite or bondage is Vikalpa Chandrodaya.

or psychological awakening neither knowledge nor action seems to hold enchantment they seem to lose their value as such. All of them appear to be māyā or illusory in comparison to the love that the Ultimate holds or the attractiveness of that God.

The seeking to unite oneself with this source of all love is basic to reality and transcends all loves.

Thus this is the Ideal Object of one's being uniting with which alone one fulfils oneself. This is ultimate *kama* or desire which quenches all other desires and indeed it is in this consciousness the Vedic Sage Yājñavalkya, said that 'not for the sake of the husband is the husband dear but for the sake of the love of the Divine Self (na va are patyah kamāyā patih priyo bhavati priyo bhavati atma nastu kamāyā patih priyo bhavati.....)

Bhakti is usually derived from the root bhaj *sevayam* to serve. Service of the divine is indeed the first and foremost instruction. One is asked to dedicate

every one of his motor and sense organs to God or the object of adoration. Thus ear is to hear the names and commands of God: the eye is to see the form of God and receive the commands of God: the touch is to feel the presence of God: the tongue is to taste the sweetness of God and the nose is to smell the fragrance of God through the offerings of flowers and scents and so on; since the individual cannot super sensorily have these sensations he smells and tastes and touches the objects which have been offered first to the idols and images representative of God. The motor organs are similarly organized: vāk for the singing of the glories of God, hands for carrying God-idol; feet for running the errands in connection with the service of God and enjoy God in the performance of all the works in connection with the worship of God. All these are of course rendered possible by means of the pratika or image of God, the arca form of God designed by the agama for worship at home and temple. Thus arose the need in bhakti for the idol or icon from grossness by prescribing unnatural or non-sensorial and symbolic attributes and forms which we do not come across in life. The pure idolater unfortunately is naturalistic and makes images so much life-like that it becomes worship of the ordinary man (saint though he may be) or idealized hero or idealized animal. This cannot however remain for long the object of bhakti – for it cannot satisfy the basic need for love; though this is contested by very many bhaktas. There is no doubt that the need for a form of worship is much sought after as a necessity for fixing one's vision and mind. The need not be. However when the great mystics speak of the glorious form of God we cannot but hold that the Ultimate Reality beyond all forms yet appears for the sake of the love of the bhakta and such forms which have been received by the saints and god lovers have a validity for us for realization or visualization. This is how the idols and icon forms have come into being; they may be considered to be at first the forms in which the Ultimate appeared to the Saints and not mere imaginations of the lower primitive mind idealising its wants and needs.

Bhakti of the grossest order deals with the aspiration to know and love the idol or iconic representation, and try to grant it all the devotion of mother or

parent on it. The saints have reveled in thinking of God as their own child and then companion and playmate; then they have tried to live with him as lovers even going to the extent of assuming the role of the feminine; and they played also the part of heroines of God and then these experiences in the anthropomorphic style got their expression in lover poetry and divine hymns. Acting every part towards God in the representative heroic and historical forms assumed by them to be the One transcendent Being they sought to experience God. The question would arise whether in fact they go the experience of God or only experience of he symbol taken as God and for God. Richly endowed though the symbol might be, heavily laden with the rich confluence of myths and mysteries and miracles, such a God perhaps becomes the ideal of the human seeker, an object of adoration. This bhakti is most evident in the worshippers of the icon: and the temple institution has been perfected so s to give fully objectification of all the services to the Goodhead – something similar to what one does in sheer reverence to a great man or king. God verily s the King of the Universe is served with all humility and sincerity in the temple. No paraphernalia is omitted to serve the King (Maharaja) as the Lord of Śrīranga is called endearingly and reverentially by all the devotees. But the bhakti that is thus objectified worship of the object adorable grants an aesthetic experience of enjoyment rather than knowledge of the Ultimate Divine. This Reality for as the bhaktas realized the icon is the most accessible to the senses and can only be an *alambana* (basis) for the further experience of the Divine, who is inner self of all, and historical avatar and the cosmic creator and beyond.

The *rasa* experienced and expressed by the poets of creative enjoyment is so much tied upto the sensuous and the physical and vital approach that the mind itself refuses to go beyond these. Love poetry for all its commentators and annotators remains sensuous and appeals more to the senses than to the mind seeking the intuitive experience of knowledge the true Vidya or Vijñānā which might present the true essence or *rasa*. Bhakti itself however at the hands of lover-poets is a *rasa* in the sense that it is made to resemble though suggested

the poets or poetic minds concerned with claiming bhakti as the transcendental *rasa* that they subordinated the *santa* to it, and tried to transform *Śrīngara* (erotic) into bhakti. Moksa or liberation from all the tossings of the senses was just by passed and love of this order of sŚrīngaraa was substituted in its place as the paramount *Rasa*.

The valiant attempt of leading bhakti-school thinkers especially of the Caitnya school to make bhakti the chief *rasa* only led to a sophisticated attempt to bring it down to the level of the *alamkra-rasās* and the cosmic conception of lila or play made the identification end acting one's parts a *rasa* (sentiment).

It would certainly be impossible to consider this to be seriously so except for the fact that the persons who upheld this concept of reality were indeed very great devotees as well. The Vedānta Sūtras speak of the whole of creation as Lila of Brahman: *Lokavattu Līlā kaivalyam*. This is an aesthetic concept surely only if we consider the word lila to mean play. That this word does in fact mean something very much different ad devotional can be shown. The whole creative process is process of taking up of the clinging, a kind of sublimation of the individual by the descent of God into him so to speak. It means that the purpose of god is not play though it may be appear to be trifling an affair – so easy for him to do (avalila), but a redemption of man who has devoted himself or surrendered himself to God: (*liyam Ititi Līlā*) However the direct suggestiveness of the word *Līlā* as play seems to have made these thinkers assume that Reality is play though a real play and not an illusory one.

However the concept of play itself demands an aesthetic measure and there have been indeed any number of persons who have felt that the manifested world is the creative delight of God and to participate in it through aesthetic idealism is necessary to get over the extraordinary gloom that has cast itself over every one in the theories of māyā and Buddhism and others which hold that all is illusion, all is sorrow (*duhkam*). Even if it be held that all these plays of the world are to be interpreted and seen through the vision of the delight Ultimate, they

have hardly reconciled the creation with the creator. Devotion as the aesthetic intuition that transforms this world of delight would certainly be needed. But this cannot be either a simulated experience on the basis of our drama-concepts or a significant one in terms of iconic temple ritual.

A change in the heart of things, in the very eyes of perception of the object of one's love is necessary and this as already suggested is begun with the self or antaryamin. The vision that this antaryami can grant is something that is stupendous in its range and multiplicity. Though worshipped in one's heart through dedicated devotion with the flowers of truth, chastity, ahimsa, liberality and sympathy and non covetousness, through in one word true morality *vinaya* and *svadharma*, one gradually becomes aware of the one omnipervasive being or Reality or God. The Upanisads constantly remind man of this perception that follows the inward perception of the Self (*anupasyati*): he who perceived (*anupasyati*) the Self in all and all things in the Self such a person never recoils from anything (as if it is ugly or undesirable or dangerous etc) and also he who knows (*vijnatah*) that it is that Self that has become (pervaded) all things fully. Such a person has neither sorrow nor delusion (attractiveness *moha*) any longer. (Isa. 6 & 7).

The aesthetic perception is similar to the *Visvarupa darsana* of the Gītā wherein all things seem to be going out of him and entering into Him: though this experience has been represented to be terrifying to Arjuna yet it illustrates the need for the dimensions of Consciousness which are firstly of different order from the sensory, and secondary, cosmic in extension and quality, and thirdly, divine in so far as it revealed a status of the Divine Self in his full plenitude inclusive of all reality.

The grandest of this experience, and much more the subtle expression given to this vision by Vyasa, have verily made this Cosmic Vision of the Omnipresent Reality and Personality classic. It is not just the experience of a lightning (*vidyut*) nor merely a scent or sky or sounds or even the oceans of bliss

but an all inclusive Reality which should set at rest all doubts about the Ultimate Godhead – transcendent to all and immanent in all. This is undoubtedly a lila, in the sense that the All embraces all and is embraced by all. Verily the roots of this experience are in trans-cosmic reality.

The aesthetic experience as high divine intuition is a gift of the divine something that is given from above not forced from below, the aesthetic theory of creative evolution. Bergson only speaks about the inimitable irrepressible force at the very beginning of creative unfoldment as the sustaining force of evolutionary ascent and perhaps even its beauty lies in this. But it is seen that though inimitable this is an upward movement, an aspiration that breaks itself on the obstructions which it itself produces. What is required is a trans-cosmic pull or attraction which descends into the self of each person and snatches as it were at his heart and takes his heart away from its world. Such is love that seems to be not so much a movement of oneself desiring another, but a force pulling one away from oneself. This is the experiencing of losing oneself which grants at once the sheerest fear and delight and this is exploited by artists of love. But the delight is very much of the so called means towards love rather than the culmination of love itself in that which can only be called laya, absorption and merging which is the final release from one's isolated condition or the isolate ego.

The bhakti yoga here raises itself to the Reality itself be it personal or impersonal, formed or without form, and is only concerned with the experience. The antaryamin-reality or Reality as antaryamin is a very valuable experience in every sense. It is that which makes love a central experience and in both its aspects as lover and beloved the Reality seems to be a dynamic factor transcending both sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure, success or defeat and thus love becomes a core of being.

As already intimated the antaryamin is yet a particular experience in the heart of oneself: but seen to be in all else it becomes a deep and intuitive

experience of beauty in all. It experience of beauty itself. The world becomes beautiful to one whose love has been evoked firmly for it is the love that blinds one to ugliness and defects whilst emphasizing the beauty and assets. Beauty experience s love-experiences is a deeper intuitive experience –it is the cause of our seeing all things as beautiful. The cosmic Vision seen through the eyes of love becomes supremely beautiful itself. But this love intuition in lower levels of carnality or sensuality corrodes and causes illusions and delusions, optimisms and pessimisms end tempestuous emotions which are out of place in the real experience of the love of God. It is the intrinsic value of a thing experience of the love of God. It is the intrinsic value of a thing that is discerned in this experience of beauty through love and this love demands is its purest search for Reality and existence. In this act of love or bhakti there is a search for real existence discerned to exist in another; but when this other or another is imperfect there is always the frustration and sense of despair and enfeeblement and sorrow. That is no reason however for considering that individual particular objects are not lovable or beautiful. The co-existence of beauty or lovability as well as imperfection of the object loved which prevents a total dedication urges the individual soul to leave the particular imperfect objects of love for the sake of the very best and eternal and perfection. In beauty we seek the perfect, in love we seek perfection. In beauty we seek the perfect, in love we seek perfect union in all our nature.

I have not in this lecture tried to explain even the manner of how beauty is apprehended and made in terms of modern schools. I have dealt with these writers in my contributions several years go on the subject of beauty.

The way of bhakti or devotional love dedicated to the highest Reality is capable of making us apprehend the reality as such. To know God as He is in himself is almost an impossible task for all those who seek to know him as in relation to themselves. All the modes of approach in bhakti sadhana or yoga are yet at the state of relating oneself with that Divine and having the permutations and combinations of an anthropomorphical or anthropological existence in regard

to that pre eminent object. Thus all art is relativistic in so far as it tries to portray the relationships of the individual aspiring soul in respect of the Divine. It may be said to be the record of the pilgrim's progress or lover's progress. That these themselves can cause ecstasy of a sublime kind need not be in the least doubted. However this is not the sole reality. To know and experience the Ultimate reality as it is in itself is a goal that bhakti in its fullest, nature demands. Our logical thinking can interrupt this progress to the Ultimate. In fact some contend that to attain and be dissolved in the Ultimate Reality is to miss the delights of the earlier phase of relationships. It is argued that since the enjoyment of the object is in relation to the subject and since neither the subject nor the object by themselves can give rise to enjoyment or bliss or joy, their relation perpetual is the essence producing experience. Therefore enjoyment being our goal the subject and object should be in relation all the time and the falling apart of subject and object or the merging of one into the other is not *rasa*. But this is to exaggerate the value of relative *rasa* at the expense of reality. Reality in fact is the seat of *rasa* and the arising of *rasa* is in fact the experience in the relative consciousness owing to the twofold experience as subject and as object. Bhakti as the relation of lover and beloved is productive of the relative *rasa*; a transcendence of the subject in and through the object would reveal the founts of the eternal and infinite nature of the Divine Being.

In fact this is the indescribable state. This is however the Ultimate Experience where one is said to lose all duality and have the experience of the Self (Angi) as contrasted with the anga (part) or limb. The concept of the Angi as the Whole or the All including subject, object and knowing or experiencing which knowing is in its fullest sense or consciousness is about the most significant. Such a person is one who has attained the Angirasa – the essence-experience of the Self and the All the purna that which fills all.

The attainment of sayujya or oneness with the Ultimate Object is the goal of devotion, but the goal of all ways is not so much the experience of devotion as the Reality itself. Bhakti yoga starts with the relating of oneself with God through

devotional surrender or self-offering in all one's parts and culminates in the attainment of the status of oneness with that Ultimate Being. Reality seized by that consciousness is the unadulterated and unmediated condition of all in their essence.

The Divine is then experienced as the *Rasa*, the *Ānanda* or bliss or that which causes bliss in everything and in all.

Philosophical analysis is based on this experience though it cannot reach it at all. One passes beyond the intellectual philosophy. As the *kana Upanisad* says it is by the self that one gets all energy: *ātmana vindate vīryam*. But the realization of this fact is something that makes the touch and experience of real reality.

Mystic experiences are deeply intuitive and of the nature of dedicated devotion which stems out of the increasing awareness of the Ultimate. Not poetic inspiration that seeks expression of experience but an intuition or *rasa*-experience it is that leads to Reality awareness far beyond all relative manifestations.

But there are lapses of intuition as Śrī Aurobindo pointed out. But the management of these intuitions for poetic expression does indeed intimate and delineate the Reality though it must be confessed that such a delineation might overshoot its mark supported as it is by the imagination. Śrī Aurobindo points out that in his great epic *Savitri* the higher mind or supermind has been utilized both for vision and expression. That the great poets of old most often attained the over mental vision and not the supermind is also his view. The aesthetic expression of these intuitive experiences undoubtedly helps the understanding of the modes of expression or utterance and representation. However it must be a fact of great importance to know whether these are real and not imaginary. In fact it was a great philosopher who almost and poetic philosophers was no more than fanciful imagery almost Utopian and idealistic. Such scenes of beauty cannot be true;

though the poets do not discern it since they live wrapped up in their imaginative Vision.

To emphasize the intuitive and supremely aesthetic approach through *rasa*-discernment is the path of Bhakti or devotional union. Intuition demands this devotion or dedication to know reality. The aesthetical *alamkarikas* searched for the methods by which they could induce emotions and sentiments and the *rasa* they exploited was all in emotions and sentiments and the *rasa* they exploited was all in all away from reality. It is emotionalism and enjoyment of the emotionalism. The most sublime producers of this enjoyment through emotional sentiments were those who made the Ultimate Divine or God in His incarnations as human or divine person the players and the heroes and heroines. This is however to have already well made patterns of personalities. Mysticism does not enjoin this method nor does real devotion do this. As the Alvar said one does not like to waste one's time over the idols of Gods when God himself is before us. The attempt to create situations under which deep intuitions of the divine could occur is a kind of dramaturgy – technically flawless but incapable of producing or presenting the Reality. Most yogas suffer from this defect of inducing union with God from below, from the physical and vital and mental controls rather than descending from above. However the human mind is very much anxious to produce and induce the states of enjoyment rather than gain the Object which can give the enjoyment – of course any one can see that this is a kind of chasing the illusion rather than seeking the reality.

It is however clear that as George Santayana said, "it is only a passionate soul that can be truly cotemplative" and seize the essence of all. The mystic soul is a passionate pilgrim of the essence in all though by itself it is the most universal and capable of being experienced as unique and individual and not an abstraction.

The true metaphysician goes beyond the instruments of knowing available to all others, and in a sense discarding senses and ratiocination and even poetic imagination not indeed in spirit of contempt for them but because they cannot

grant this unique knowledge-experience by way of intuitive discernment an intuitive discernment that is higher than all over mental intuitions also. This may be said to be the knowledge that comes by means of the direct psychic being (*atma*) or the divine within as a kind of vision-experiences (*sāksatkāra*) as Śrī Aurobindo calls the knowledge – by – identity – or in our own language it is knowledge or experience by God through God of God. It is the Reality that leads us to the experience of Itself and in this lies the supreme quality of the Reality experience. It is the bliss of unmediated experience and the expression of that bliss through mediated instruments is indeed impossible.

It is not through works or the yoga of works (*karma-yoga*) nor through intellectual knowledge (*jñānā yoga*) of discrimination but through bhakti-yoga alone, a direct plunge into the core of reality through a passionate love for that alone without aid without support from any other source or power lower than the ultimate that works the miracle of a triple kind, the knowledge, the vision and the entering into the heart of Reality, as the Lord of the Gītā has stated: *bhaktiyatvanānyāya sakyam ahamevatvidho arjuna/ jnatum drastum ca tattvena prevestum ca parantapa.*

Bhakti yoga therefore secures not only salokya (equal seeing or equal dwelling) sarupya, (same form of luminous existence) sānnidhya (nearness to the Ultimate) but sadhrmya also out of this initial relationship union sought by the soul. Sayujya leads to all the rest though it is very doubtful whether the others are such as can hinder the attainment of sayujya.

Śrī Vaisnava Yoga, is Bhakti yoga or the path of devotion. Its purity is in the search for the Ultimate for the sake of Experience of that Ultimate-not its enjoyment as such nor its ecstasy for the soul. The Ultimate may be the Supreme Person who is the source of all personalities as well as the Impersonal. Anyway it holds the key to all problems of life and dharma, as well as truth and the good. Its very nature is to abolish all illusions by revealing their real nature. This harmony of all experience is one characteristic of Beauty though it is not everything at all.

Infinity is the greatest factor about this experience of Reality but it is something that refutes nothing at all. In this experience illusion itself becomes an excellence, defect a deep truth and imperfection an element of true perfection.

Such is the experience that the mystics have vouchsafed to us.