

PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Religion is the attempt to realise one's bond with God or the Highest reality or Spirit. It accepts the reality of the higher reality and the highest and the individual as aiming at or aspiring for attainment of it, in knowledge in devotion and in works,. This is said to be union with God or realization of that condition where nothing else remains to be attained and all further efforts are consummated.

Religion is thus what one does with oneself in this ultimate endeavour for that is considered to be this ultimate endeavour for that is considered to more valuable than any other end-wealth power social glory or fame or fulfillment of social welfare also by way of charity and dharma. Even social welfare is not an end but a means to that end by which one is assuredly beyond all these mundane values.

When we ask ourselves what is that within us which urges us to desire, strive after, sacrifice everything to, achieve this state or condition of fullest attainment that is found to be the human person. It is not a mere instinct or drive, for it is not intended for the survival or safety but for something that transcends the life-values.

Modern Psychology hardly seems to be concerned with this transcendental drive beyond life-values and social values. Social adaptation and the failures to do so stem out of the more dynamic nature of the transcendental call rather than the unconscious that struggles against the conscious inhibitions. In fact we have to have a critique of the entire gamut of the deep call of the spirit behind the unconscious of the individual's physiological –psychic which might now be considered to be evolved out of the social and animal conscious that demand expression on the plane of our ordinary life but get shunted out or repressed by the waking consciousness. That these repressed or inhibited instincts or drives have their vengeance on the consciousness of man is well known, as psychoanalysts have been very much concerned with the same phenomenon. All that we are studying in our ordinary consciousness and in relation to it is the phenomenon of social struggle with the instinctual method of expression. But it is also clear that the instinctual level of man is very much different

from the animal instinctual, which is below the human and the social. Survival that needs the inhibitions that tends to become the mores or ethos of society. Thus we have to realise that if the principle of sublimation is to be applied it is not by restoring the freedom for the instinct but by another process that releases the tensions of the instincts suppressed and unconscious at a higher level by giving it a transcendental meaning so to speak. Of this modern psychoanalysts hardly are aware though that is the pathway of religion. One of the basic facts that confronts the modern psychologist is whether mere socialization of instincts and behaviour is equivalent to sublimation and solution of the problem of individual life or it is necessary to arrive at a religious solution: The communist and cooperative rationality of today seems to prefer the adaptation of the individual to the social norms whatever they are at any time. Indeed one of the most troublesome of problems is whether after the individual is qua individual in struggle with society his going under is more important than society rising up to his level. We are confronted with different problems in different people and no one single solution is available.

The brute man, so to speak, is there with his lower impulses strong enough and seeking preservation of his rights, so to speak. Liberty for him has content only when these impulses can have great freedom of expression. But such a freedom for him may well mean the destruction of the like freedom of others. Society roused in each one of its individuals to a sense of danger created for itself frontiers and limitations, which go by the name of law and restraints. To the higher type of man who seeks the values of a higher individuality and rationality the limitations of society appear to be limitations rather than fences for freedom, and he seeks to break them for the sake of realizing those values that count. Society yields to this higher but resists the lower, placed as it is in the middle.

Religion as an institution of the higher values assists society to liberate or free the individuals from its practical law in so far as the individuals elect to seek the higher values, but helps society in so far as it also stoutly resists and inhibits the demonstration of the lower nature. Religion helps the higher the higher individualism whilst resisting

the lower individualism and society in so far as lower individualism in one with the religious, thought resistant to the higher individualism it is its opposite.

Religion and Society are known as opposites in higher religions. Thus the man of society cannot be a religious man. He must be one who has renounced all sanga or society, its norms and standards also which cater to the resistance to the lower. A war between society and religion whether open or veiled is always present: religion aiming at a meaningful society for its individuals, whereas socialism would make it meaningful only in so far as it assists safe security against the encroachments of the lower individualism. No wonder today religion can play in social reconstruction. The psychology of social behaviour and social formations as well as the psychology of religious consciousness and religious institutions seem to be imperative concerns of man today. What is needed is a critique of both types of psychologies.

The psychology of social behaviour would reveal that man are social as well as individual, but it is times of stress that men tend to become social and under certain circumstances even then men seek to save their individual skins. There is no inherent apparatus in men which decides when and under what circumstances the social or individual instincts or tendencies dominate. It may be that nature and custom or mores of social unity will decide in most cases, but when this can be broken through by dangers or drives more intense and profitable, social ethos or mores break down. It is usually said that every thing has its price, and provided one can pay the price any thing can be got; no honour is there that cannot be made to be given up. This

¹ Sarva-sanga-pari-tyagi, nissangah, jita-sanga-dosah are current phrases in religious literature, not only of Sannyasa

psychology of seduction or temptation, and in social life, corruption is one the most individuating factor which tends to social break-up standards. That it can be suicidal is well known. Fear is of the most important factors in social regimentation and individual restraint. All law is the use of force for the sake of uniformity of behaviour in society. The psychology of fear is a continuously cultivated factor in social as well as religious life.

The need to escape from this fear is not by renouncing it by violation of social life but to find out what in the fact is the gain achieved by renouncing it. Many think that socialisation based on fear-conditioning strikes at the very root of life itself and makes life meaningless. This of course is an exaggeration. Habituation to obedience of social restraints should be followed up by the exposition of the rationality of these restraints in the interest of individual himself. That reason is made to do this job of rationalizing or giving plausible reasons for social conduct is indeed necessary, for that reflective rationality- a reflection of the state of things, which is the preliminary to a creative rationality. To move forward towards creative individuality it is necessary to be assured of the social stability of the individual himself.

Social psychology being what it is, it is equally clear that religious psychology has its own unique problems. If religious experience is an experience of the transcendent and the holy, then it is something that is individual and personal. It is a personal and individual experience that is in one sense unpredictable in its operations. On the one hand, one feels oneself being absorbed in a vision that almost severs him from the society. He becomes a member of a vaster society or part of a vaster life which is not human even. He becomes a citizen of the universe and no longer seems to be restricted to the men around him. Here is an a-social a-humanistic that one enters into the man of religion. The values of the society, such as wealth, enjoyment regulated by the welfare of the individual and by his work seem to have no meaning and lose their meaning to him. An intimate call to renounce all that one lived by and held even sacred within society is felt in the depth of one's being. There is apparently a two fold frenzy in the religious experience, one that leads to the abrogation of all terrestrial values which are also social. We shall not enter into the metaphysics of this dual frenzy. But psychologists of religion are confronted with this a-social socialism of religious experience, as well as anti-individual superterrestrialism.

Religious psychology need not be wedded to the experience of holiness of Nature or its objects, which gives rise to naturalistic religious phenomena. Nor need it be wedded to the worship of personality-that somehow confronts man with the

challenges of a vaster world-universal and yet deeply personal in approach to each and every individual—a heart—speech that quells all dissatisfaction and grants a sense of peace and solution of one's own deep and disturbing problems.

However all these really lead to the one important issue in religion as well as society—what is man who seeks meaningfulness of himself and his being in this world or in himself?

Religious Psychology as portrayed in the Upanishads has clearly analysed the basic levels of our existence: the first is the material basis called the physiological that lives by food, drink and breath without which it cannot exist. The second is the vital basis which makes for life in the world possible, its own relations with parents and other members and other factors which are needed for life itself. The third factor in which one seeks to be is the mental which consists in getting impressions for the senses and mind. The three types of food are thus absolutely necessary for the mental being, whose life consists in satisfying the demands of the physical and vital and mental life. Each one of these is called a sarira or body because of the essential autonomy of the three levels of being of any human individual. There are certainly individuals who those who live more by the second than the first and would perhaps be willing to perish rather than give up the second. There are yet a third kind of men who would forego the other two for the sake of the third – mental. There is no doubt that all the sake of the third- mental. There is no doubt that all the three are interlinked and act as one but the higher supports the lower and renounces the latter for its own autonomy and existence. These are called in ancient times by the technical terms of *tamas*, (*annam*), *rajas*(*pranam*) and *sattva* (*manah*) qualities. It is indeed the privilege of the human being to be able to value the mental higher than the vital and the physical and seek to go higher up. These are however the basic triad of Human existence. Lack of these three kinds of food leads to difficulties. It is true however that the mental and vital are being yoked by the tamasic man to his physical needs. Similarly the rajasic man yokes the satvika and tamasic to his vital needs. So too the sattvika man yokes the vital and physical to the mental needs for gaining pleasure-sentiments.

The Upanishads then take the individual higher to the awareness of a higher type of body, the supermental, vijñana sarira, or kosa. This is the body that leads to the experience of the transcendental. Its range of receptivity is the cosmic. It lies by means of the cosmic influences flowing into the individual. The experience of the cosmic is indeed so very difficult for the mental being who lives on single and selected impressions that come to him through the sense-organs and the motor organs. He enjoys these particularized and fragmentary impressions and does not attempt to synthesize them except within the limited necessity of his vital and physical life. Thus it is that the individual mental being is incapable of anything more than the vital and physical interests of itself namely its food and sex and society limited to the fields and areas of these wants. Thus the definition of society itself is such as to show the field of physical and sex-wants—a materialistic society. Most mental beings are imprisoned in this social set-up and dare not look beyond these two basic necessities which alone make life meaningful in terms of these. A society that does not provide these two is no society and would disintegrate. Economic materialism is the basis of modern society. The vijñana kosa or sarira makes a radical departure in the context of our mental life. In one sense it appears almost as if it would break up this insulated mental existence that renders the individual meaningless in the context of the Vijñana. It almost abolishes the mental individual. The individual of the Vijñana is not tied up to the three lower bodies. It works in and through them if possible or else it works independently. In this sense those who have risen to the level of the vijñana are not those who have risen to the level of the vijñana are not very much concerned with the maintenance of the mental-vital-physical aggregate as such. In this sense too they consider that the Vijñana is the sign (linga) of the spirit or soul (atman) and not the aggregator of the mental-vital-physical (skanda). When Buddhi was equated with Vijñana it happened that this term was applied to it and thus in certain systems the Buddhi is called the linga (sign) of the purusa. In another sense the Buddhi itself was known to have been caused by a higher type of individuality (atman or aham) and came to be known as ahamkara from which vijñana arises but they are so close to one another that they are inseparable. The Vijñana kosa thus is universal body living by transcendental and cosmic influences and impressions and thus responds deeply from

them in respect of mental vital and physical itself. The Vijnana is called the Real Knowledge contracted with which mental etc are ignorance. Indeed it was felt by some that the discarding of mental etc. is a necessity for attaining the Vijnana ; so disparate as to make them incompatible. In fact the starvation of the mental-vital-physical configuration, or abstraction from it, were considered to be necessary preliminaries for the experience of the vijnana. Thus one who would like to undertake this higher path or gain the living in the higher body of Vijnana was asked to be a faster (anasakayana), one who renounces speech (mauni), and who abstains from the vital life of sex. These are the necessities of one who will be prepared for treading the path of Brahman (brahmacari : Ch. Up.).

The Vijnana kosa makes one enter into the cosmic consciousness. It makes one aware of ones continuity with the entire manifested universe and not only with the material vital and mental universe of the human being. It makes one attain the status of a mahatma – whose self has become Vast, whose body is the Vast (mahat which is another term for Buddhi and the Vijnana).

The psychological conditions of the supramental being or Vijnanakosa area next to be considered.

The physical sensory and motor behaviour are no longer explicable in terms of the sensory and nervous system of the human. In fact it was claimed that the subtle functions of these systems might develop and one might be able to develop new abilities in these organs themselves. Whilst this is very questionable , it is just likely that the manner of knowledge got through the activities of Vijnana and its autonomous apparatus would be at the beginning bordering on the miraculous and later thanks so the relationship it yet has with the lower body – congregate the latter would mould itself to its demands. This is not impossible for we know that the mental has success in domesticating the vital and physical to its own needs and culture. The theory of evolution of the vital and the mental from the physical beginnings may not be wrong nor should there be any objection to the claim that the Vijnana body can emerge from the mental-vital-physical configuration. It is however certain that we require the descent of

the Vijnana impressions into the mental. This may not be done by the wearing of the mantle of the Vijnana over the mental –vital- physical body and thus help the organization of the same or it may mean that one gets out of this configuration as absolutely impossible to mould for the activity of the Vijnana in and through it. Yoga psychology has different views even as Vedanta has. One view holds that the giving up of the mental-vital-physical is necessary; we get liberation only after we die of this body: another set says that we can experience the Vijnana and Ananda even in this body though not fully and steadily ; and both these schools feel ultimate liberation is possible only after the death of this body of the three lower sheaths. Still another set holds that the omnipotence of the Vijnana is such that it can transform the ignorance and make this conglomerate immortal and full of divine cosmic being .

The psychology of the Supramental activity proceeds then to speak of the frame of the Vijnana as not limited to the cognitive (jnana) alone but includes integrally or organically the cognitive , creative and affective cosmic experience and work. It is in this transcendent development of the cosmic cognitivity and experience that a further ascent is made in the Upanishad. This it calls the ananda-maya Kosa or Body of Bliss. This is said to be the ultimate body and identical with the Self or the 'I' beyond which we cannot go. It does not recognize any other of which it is the body or something that is used by it. This is the criterion psychologically arrived at of the self : a self is that which uses something as its body and is aware of its being different from itself which it can discard without any loss to its enjoyment or being. There are some who hold that even this anandakosa is a kosa or body and not the ultimate self which transcends all these attributes or qualities or formations. Other psychologists do not accept this since they rightly hold that it transcends experience itself and can be but a metaphysical postulate trained to abstractions.

Be that as it may, the ancient psychological felt that the conception of being or experiencing at such trans-cosmic levels can only be represented by feeling of bliss (ananda) whose limits cannot be determined and therefore infinite (ananta). In fact the vijnana itself takes all the experiences of the world as negations the higher experiences which it can no longer call experience, for the individual and the universal,

the cosmic, are so entwined and interpenetrating that the lower appears to be the negations of the higher if not inversions of the higher and vice versa.

The denial of the lower means only the refusal to look or experience things from the outer forms and shapes and not the denial or refusal to come to terms with it from within creatively. Every kind of external reaction or activity produced precisely the conflict which leads to a denial of the value of such activity. But the inner approach to the reality of each thing leads to an assimilation and integration that lends meaning to it and to oneself who so experiences.

The psychological approach to this inward being of all things is enforced on one at each level, even at the level of ananda as it appears, for there is the transcendent to it also.

This absolutely transcendent state surely cannot be experienced except in the form of the transcendent and entailing all denial. This has been called the Asat-the being that is beyond all being, the Sunya-that which is Zero that leads to the abolition of all desire-nirvana. The touch of the absolute or Para annihilates all existence because it absorbs all into it-one loses all name and form and like a river or moth one becomes utterly nameless and formless.

Some consider this to be that Darkness beyond all Light: but some speak of this as the experience that is the source of all light itself being beyond all-*yad adityagatam tejo jagadbhasayate-khilaṃ yac candramasi yaccagnau-Tamasah parastat*, would refer to that which is beginning of all light which is blinding light, which is the beginning of all manifestations. This condition of utter transcendence and loss of all experience is considered to be void of all materiality and religious experiences itself. For religion is the experience of bindingness with God or the Holy object or the luminous. It seeks union with God. But God is considered in relation to man or the individual in religion and as to what He is in Himself is the aim of the spiritual experience. Even in mysticism which seeks absorption in God or the Ultimate the aim is in respect of the individual cum God experience which of course is what cannot be experienced at all as such. It is losing that dies not find the individual at all nor God. It is perhaps verily the darkness of the soul or its

dark night. One can hardly have that inward realization that makes one affirm God and soul or self are one and the same or the expression of One-All. (Ekam and Sarvam).

The psychological condition in this anubhava or rather bhava or being is incommunicable and is far removed from the level of the physical and vital and mental and the supramental and even the level of delight or blissfulness. Such a condition is that of complete Rest or cessation of all objectification. Whatever that is that is the state of non-birth into experience or descent into ignorance or descent into ignorance.

The social in such a condition no longer remain the human social; in one sense it includes a compassion for all that lives and all that does not live. The compassion for all that does not live is to give it that integration with life or vital breaths or vibrations which will make it realise its fullness in the higher levels, so too the vital is sought to be lifted upto mindlevels and mental beings are assisted to cross the borders of the mental into the supermental (vijñana). This compassion is universal and undertaken through knowledge rather than ignorance which does this violently and by killing. A destructive technique is substituted by the constructive technique that liberates rather than annihilates the individual into a vaster frame of being and existence.

The psychological techniques of sublimation do not even go down to the level of the vital and the mental; they seem to tinker with the three levels of consciousness alone as we know it and seek to integrate them without such success. We require a New Psychology based on the recognition of the dimensions of personality and individuality which recognizes their continuity with the cosmic and supracosmic forces and orders of existence, forces and orders which seem to be available only to those who have renounced their present bodies. The dead alone have access their present bodies. The dead alone have access to them so to speak normally and even abnormally (scripturally). It is one of the claims of spirituality if not through the medium of religious experiencedirectly. By a linking with this central transcendent experience to achieve the transfiguration and inversion of the earth-consciousness. Spiritual awareness is in its action transfigurative and operates inverselyso as to effect transformation of the psycho-physical organism and the mental. Mental life is what undergoes the first change. So

much so there are cases where the proper adjustment of the mind when not effected leads to the break up of the mind itself --- leading to insanity. The cases of insanity are due to the maladjustment between the psycho-physical and the vital nature. Thus in yoga psychology, the prana or breath or vital forces which operate on the mind are regulated. It is true that the modern technique is corrupted by a greater concern to the health of the physical, and breath-control has become meaningless if not dangerous. Similarly the physical exercises hardly help in the adaptation of the to the highest aims of intelligence, and delight and experience of being, or well-being, in harmony not only with the society but with humanity at large and the spiritual world itself.

The psychology of the mind-control begins not with restraining its movements by trying to feed it with another type of food, namely, spiritual fare counteracting and in one way supplying the deficiency produced by denying the habitual fare. This subtle food of good impressions, ideal objects or great ideas of the good and the cosmic visions from a greater basic diet and help in the substitution of activities also geared to their realization. This is the sublimation effected by substitution of the contrary about which the Yoga-sutras speak : vitarkabadhance pratipaksabhavamam. (II.33). The arising of the higher type of mind is possible only through the focusing of the being on the goal of transcendence. The process of unsheathing from the lower levels gradually leads to the absence of diversion towards the needs of the physical and vital and mental and promotes devotion and dedication to the transcendental and the cosmic denoted by the term Isvara and Brahman. In fact, it is the shift of the atman or living spirit to the ultimate levels of transcendence over mind and imagination that makes finally for the identity being affirmed between the Brahman who becomes the atman of oneself. It is thus we find that sublimation of the lower self takes place by a gradual process of identification with the Brahman or the Para (transcendent) over all process and cosmos. Thus it is clear that the religious psychology itself has to undertake an upward course till it arrives at the spiritual reality which is the discernment and discovery of the Self which can be called the self rather than a body.

The degradation of religion has happened when the self has been identified with the societal group or the humanity as such, in itself as an abstraction or in the

embodiment of a person, historical or significant. Institutions of religion are but the means to the realisation of the religious awareness or spiritual dynamism towards the ultimate. The psychological urge tends to lose force whenever it can attain a limited satisfaction and apparent fulfillment. However in the heart of things there arises a dissatisfaction over anything that is not the ultimate. This urge towards the condition attaining which one does not seek anything else may be an illusory urge but it is an urge nonetheless for its being self-negatory.

The charm of the mystic nihilism is as much a real psychological urge as the Oedipus complex itself, both of them seek a meaning in terms of a higher experience of being and higher type of relationship -- even as the urges are not anything but aspirations and ascents which are replies and reactions to higher levels of experience.

Thus we find today religion itself is being claimed to be a psychotherapeutic instrument by some, whilst it is being denied both by materialists and spiritualists alike on different grounds, that it is incapable of satisfying the human needs of the physical and mental and vital and that it is incapable of leading to the satisfaction of transcendent experiences which alone can grant meaning to life and being itself. A true spiritual activity would transform and sublimate and divinise the very impulses to preserve and propagate the physical-vital-mental configuration or skandha and make them transcendental urges or displace them with such urges that transcend this individual and mental-physical-vital mechanism called the human body. By such demands we have seen again and again the willingness to surrender life itself with all its hopes : this basic impulse towards divination of Godhead and perfection of man himself in terms of spirituality that goes beyond the mortal elements of one's personality is the fullest meaning of an evolutionary impulse at the back of creation, individual and cosmic, which no psychologist can afford to dismiss and much less ignore.

It is clear that what we need is the basic realization that the psychological tools that we have been using are inadequate to the spiritual and moral situation of

man today; our physical and materialistic needs themselves seem to demand a different approach in order that even those securities could be guaranteed to all men. This new attitude and approach has to be not merely global for this term only defines the extensity of the problems but also spiritual, revealing that the meaning of life itself seems to be beyond itself. The eternal discontentment which is manifested by the will to sacrifice this life and all its appurtenances for something higher is our only measure of perfection. that is not yet. It is not only by quenching this discontentment which is vague, inchoate and nebulous but by revealing the lines by following which a new meaning could solve this individual as well as universal and cosmic problem. Psychology must brace upto this new adventure in higher lines and levels of perceptions and experiences : it has to devise new and novel methods suited to the higher level behaviour which might go beyond our measurative systems and data. The ancient psychologists were bold enough to venture into inner and higher frontiers that were closed to life through an exploration that produced or induced death-states and deep sleep conditions for which they held moral and technical preparations are necessary. It is well known that the moral and spiritual discipline goes a long way in removing the many mistake even in our physical science : how much more is needed in psychical and spiritual matters and observations need not be emphasized. However today it is indeed a sorry spectacle that we witness that personal mortality should be written off and psychic awareness and inward observation are unnecessary for any scientific or religious or philosophic work. It is this poverty of modern education vision in matters of greatest moment and the eagerness by which other so-called social and athletic and other equally meaningless rituals of regimentation and tamasha that make saddest reading and reflection. As Śrī Auribindo said all life is Yoga- its goals is divinisation of man by supramental disciplines that is to say which lead to the experience of all and by all of that One World in which lead to the experience of all and by all of that One Reality and One people and men could indeed be brothers of all. Disciplines that comes naturally and develops into real freedom in all and for all is the goal. it is that which is a conqueror of death it self and so our seers called disciplines of truth, ahimsa, aparigraha, asteya and brahmacarya, Yama, not our death but the death of death – dealing forces of the lower

nature. Psychology should realise that the religious attitude of yama and divine union is the essential condition of its own progress towards understanding.

Brahma-vidya as the essential psychology of knowledge into the nature of Brahman- the Ultimate which has been and beyond, which business of seekers after the infinite, here and beyond, which knew no frontiers again is the business of every man. Sarvamukti ideal can only be realised not by humanism but by a transcendence of materialistic values and by an adventure into Infinity which beckons all towards its own splendid worlds of freedom. Let us realise that man is a bridge to the immortal and also the bringer of the immortal to man. Such souls are verily Brahmabhutas-Brahmajas. May their Race increase.