

42. Ways of the Divine : Advent of Shankara

CLAY is one substance. But out of it a variety of products with different names and shapes can be made. Likewise, out of gold, a variety of ornaments can be made. The same white milk is got out of cows of different colours. The Supreme Self is one, but dwells in innumerable bodies, with different names and forms.

If you examine the cosmic scene, you will find that out of the same basic substance a variety of objects with different forms are produced. For instance, out of a single seed, comes a tree with various branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits. These different things vary in form, name and use. But they have all come from one seed.

"Ekoham bahusyaam" (The One chose to become the many).. There are three factors involved in this. For making a pot, a potter is the cause and the pot is the effect. The base for the production of the pot is clay. The pot may break but the clay remains as such. Out of the permanent substance, clay, the potter makes a pot. The fate of the pot does not affect the potter. The clay in the pot also remains as such.

The analogy applies equally to gold, the goldsmith, and the jewels made from gold.

On the same analogy, God is the changeless creator who creates the innumerable objects in creation which are subject to changes in names and forms. The relations between the three entities involved should be properly understood. The potter cannot make a pot without clay. No pot can be made if there is clay alone but no potter. Both potter and clay are necessary for making a pot.

Five forms of the Lord

The Creator is the *nimitha-kaarana* (instrumental cause of creation). The bodies are like the pots. They are used for various purposes and are a source of enjoyment. But, like the pots, the bodies are perishable. When their time is up, they fall away. But the Creator is permanent. The elements out of which the bodies were made remain. Only the bodies have gone. The bodies are capable of being put to good or bad uses.

Divinity has five names. The first is *Para-naamam*. Second, *Vyuha-naamam*. Third, *Vibhava-naamam*. Fourth, *Antharaathma-naamam* and fifth, *Archana-naamam* The Divine functions in the cosmos in these five names.

Para-naamam refers to the abode of the Supreme, Vaikunttha. Vaikunttha means that which is unchanging. There the Supreme Lord dwells under the name *Para-naamam*.

No one can enter that abode of the Lord. The Lord dwells there as an effulgence. He oversees everything. But He is not visible to anyone and no one can see His form.

The second is: *Vyuha-naamam*. This name refers to the Lord who reclines on a serpent on the ocean of milk. The Lord in this form can be seen only by *Dhevas* (the various deities).

Only those with special powers can see the Lord here. Ordinary beings cannot do so. But the Lord in His *Vyuha* form fulfils the desires of the: *Dhevas*. You are aware of the story of Hiranyakashipu. He was harassing the *Dhevas* in various ways. So, they went to the Lord's couch on the ocean of milk and prayed to Him. In answer to their prayers the Lord agreed to incarnate on earth.

Various human forms in which Lord incarnates

Third is: *Vibhava-naamam*. This refers to the various human forms in which the Lord incarnates on earth as *Avathaars* of Raama and Krishna to protect the good and punish the wicked and turn them to the righteous path. The incarnations that are adored as the ten *Avathaars* belong to this category of *Vibhava-naamam*. In this form, the Lord manifests the relationship between God and the devotees.

The fourth is: *Antharaathma-naamam*. In this form, the Lord pervades every part of a human being as an indwelling spirit. This indwelling spirit is Divine.

The fifth is: *Archana-naamam*. This refers to the form in which the Divine can be worshipped, praised and adored for securing His grace.

Man through the aeons

Avathaars of the Lord in these different forms have been manifesting themselves for aeons and aeons. This may be quite astonishing to children of today. For instance, when they hear about the state of things in the *Kritha Yuga* they will feel that they are amazing and incredible. Human beings in that age used to live for hundreds of years. Moreover, their bodies were not as small as in this age. They were gigantic figures, with arms as long as six feet. What kind of life did they lead? In the *Kritha Yuga*, life remained in the body as long as the bones were intact. All other parts of the body may disintegrate, but life remained in the skeleton.

In *Thretha Yuga*, the height of human beings was less. The longevity was also less. Life remained as long as muscles and flesh remained in the body.

In *Dhvaapara Yuga*, life remained as long as blood circulated in the body. As you may know, Bheeshma lay on a bed of arrows after he had been wounded in the Kurukshethra war. As long as blood remained in his body, he lived. His life lasted for 56 days.

In the present *Kali Yuga* life lasts as long as there is food in the body. Without food man cannot survive.

In *Kritha and Thretha Yugas*, men had intimate relationship with God. Food was not so important. In *Dhvaapara Yuga*, the head became important.

In the *Kritha and Thretha yugas*, *Dharma* was all-important. *Dharma muulam idham jagath* (The cosmos is based on *Dharma*). In *Dhvaapara Yuga*, the decline started and wealth became all important. *Dhana muulam idham jagath* (The world is founded on wealth). The war between the Kauravas and the Paandavas was over property rights.

In the *Kali Yuga*, neither *Dharma* nor *Dhana* (wealth) is as important as *Dhaya* (compassion). It is because of the absence of compassion that the world today is afflicted with so many troubles.

The advent of Shankara

In the early centuries of this *Kali Age*, Buddhism and Jainism were predominant religions. At that time, a young child was born in a village called Kaaladi in Kerala to a couple, Shivaguru and Aryaamba. In those days, there used to be frequent wars between Kings of different territories. These wars generated hatred between peoples of different regions. The feeling of national unity was lost. With the loss of unity, all kinds of bad practices developed. Untruth, injustice, dishonesty and disreputable conduct became the order of the day. Nor was that all. Even the learned *pandiths*, scholars and intellectuals of the time started interpreting the *Vedhas* in

perverse ways. The very face of the scriptures was blackened. With the result that the people's faith in the *Vedhas* and scriptures was undermined.

At such times, God or a divinely inspired saint or messiah makes His advent on earth to reform the wicked and restore the reign of Dharma. Such incarnations are known as *Archana-naama* forms of the Divine. In this *Archana-naama* form, the manifestations are regarded as *Amsa-avthaars*--manifestations of aspects of the Divine.

The *Vibhava avathaars* (like Raama and Krishna) are *Puurna-avathaars* (total manifestations of the Divine). The *Archana-avathaars* are *Amsa-avathaars* (partial manifestations). Such *avathaars* incarnate from time to time, not only in India but in all countries.

Jesus declared at first that He was "a messenger of God." Who are these messengers? They are of two kinds: Yamadhuutha and Avadhuutha. Yamadhuuthas are messengers who inflict harm on people. Avadhuuthas are messengers who protect. Jesus belonged to the second category. In due course, he recognised his own inner divinity. Then he declared: "I am the Son of God." Thereby he proclaimed his right to a share in all the qualities of God. When he acquired all the qualities of the Divine, he announced: "I and my Father are one."

The same threefold progress can be seen in the pronouncements of Zoroaster. First, he declared: "I am in the light." Then he said: "The light is in me." Finally he declared: "I am the light." These declarations can be compared to the three systems of Indian philosophy Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism and Nondualism. In propagating the doctrine of Non-dualism, Shankara considered himself a servant of God.

Shankara and his *guru*

Shankara's father, Shivaguru, passed away when Shankara was barely three years old. In this context, it is interesting to note how the Divine operates. Ten days before his passing, Shivaguru had a vision of an effulgence. The effulgence conveyed a message to Shivaguru. "Perform the *upanayanam* of your son," was the message. Shivaguru hurriedly arranged to have the *upanayanam* performed for the three-year old child. The little boy started reciting the Gaayathri Manthra.

After the passing of Shivaguru, the grief-stricken mother devoted herself to bringing up the little boy. She took him to a *guru*, who taught the boy all kinds of scriptural knowledge. By the time he was 16, Shankara had completed study of the four *Vedhas* and the six systems of philosophy. Normally even 50 years would not have sufficed for such study. Shankara was a prodigy. He could grasp anything at the first mention of the subject. Even the *guru* was astonished at the boy's genius.

Meanwhile, the mother, was anxious to get the boy married and broached the subject with the *guru*. The boy was totally opposed to marriage. "I want to be a *sanyaasi* (renunciant)," he said. "I want to dedicate my body, mind and all else to God. They are all gifts of God. I have surrendered myself to God."

How Shankara obtained *sanyaasa*

The mother was in deep distress over the son's resolve. One day she was going to the river to fetch water. The young Shankara followed her earnestly pleading: "Mother! Permit me to take to *sanyaasa*." She did not agree. When she got into the river for her bath, Shankara jumped into the river and going down the river for a while, he raised one hand and shouted: "Mother, a crocodile

has caught hold of me. At least now permit me to become a *sanyaasi*." The mother said: "If you can be saved from the crocodile by taking to *sanyaasa*, you better do so, so that you may live." Shankara then came out of the river and told his mother: "In the ocean of *samsaara* I was about to be drowned by a crocodile in the form of a wife. When you let me become a *sanyaasi* I was free from the hold of the crocodile. No one could marry a *sanyaasi*."

Sanyaasa does not mean a mere change-in the colour of the robe. It is really a change in one's qualities.

Shankara prostrated before his mother and took her leave to embark on his career as ascetic. At that time, the mother made Shankara take a pledge that he should come and see her at her last moments.

Triumphal tour to all sacred shrines in the land

Shankara set out on his wanderings, visiting all the sacred shrines in the land. All travel had to be done by foot. He went to every assemblage of scholars and vanquished them in debates. He propagated the *Adhvaithik* doctrine. He declared: "The bodies are different, the forms are different, but the inner Self is one alone. The Divine is present in all like sugarcane juice which is the same, regardless of the cane from which it is got."

He had an encounter with Mandana Mishra, who was an upholder of the *Karma siddhaantha* (the doctrine of action). He defeated Mandana Mishra in the debate.

In this manner, Shankara went all over the country, from Kashmir to Kanyaakumari, several times. He convinced the scholars of the truth of Nondualism. "*Ekam eva Adhvitheeyam*" (The Self is one only; there is no second).

Aadhi Shankara was able to convince all the scholars about the truth of *Adhvaitha*. People are deluded by the multiplicity of names and forms. But the basis for all this diversity is the one Divine. Without the basis nothing can exist. This fact is recognised by all faiths. God is one and the goal is one. The doctrine of *Adhvaitha* is not easily understood. It has to be explained to the students in simple and intelligible terms.

Shankara passed away at the early age of 32. But he completed the mission for which he had come. Before his passing, he collected five lingas and installed them in five different centres: Puuri, Dhvaaraka, Shringeri, Benares and Kaanchi. At Kaanchi he installed the Yoga Linga. One of the pontiffs was Suresha, who was none other than Mandana Mishra before he took to *sanyaasa*.

By establishing these mutts and promoting the sense of spiritual oneness among the people, Aadhi Shankara promoted harmony in the country. Unfortunately some of his disciples started distorting Shankara's doctrines and attributing their own views to Shankara. Ultimately the disciples fell out and opposed each other's views.

Similarly, among Christ's eleven disciples differences developed and they fell apart. Only Mathew remained true to Jesus. He propagated the gospel. Peter was the first among Jesus's disciples. But he denied Christ when the authorities questioned him.

Raamaanuja who came after Shankara enunciated a modified version of Shankara's Non-dualism. Then came Madhvaachaarya, who propounded dualism. I would explain their doctrines in subsequent discourses.

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