

3. The One Alone

The very first experience in the history of Indian thought is the thrill of wonder. This is expressed in the *Rks* or hymns found in *Rig Veda*, the earliest revelations of the Bharathiya mind. The *Rks* are all about the Gods or the Shining Ones (the *Devas*). Of these *Devas*, there are many; Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Parjanya—these are the names of a few. They appear in these *Rks*, one after the other. Of these, Indra with the Thunderbolt (*vajra*) as his weapon is the chief. He is the mighty One who confers rain upon the earth. Indra is called so, since he is the Master of the *Indriyas* (the senses) of man, that is to say, he is the Mind which handles the senses. He is also known as *Puruhutha*—*puru* meaning “often” and *hutha*, “invited”—the entire name meaning, “the God who is most called upon.” The Mind (which is identified with *Indriyas*, since it masters them) is also adored in the Vedas as Rudra. The Mind contacts the objective world and experiences it

through the instrumentality of the five senses. This aspect of the Mind is the Indra aspect. It has also another capability. It can master the senses, and become aware of the Universal Inner Truth of the multiplicity called the Objective world. This aspect of the Mind is designated as “Rudra.” This is the reason why the Vedas describe Indra and Rudra as the One with two names.

About the other Gods too, it is possible to quote many such descriptions. Yet ultimately, all descriptions lead to the same conclusion. The *Rks* adore Deities, first, as presiding over some function or other. Then, these latter get transformed into different names and forms of the One God who has all the worlds in Himself, who is the Witness, resident in all hearts, and who is the Sovereign of all Creation. Gradually, all other meanings and reactions are suppressed, as not relevant. For example, an element of fear is associated with the deity, Varuna. The fear sprouts and spreads in some *Rks*, but soon, the wisdom of the *Aryas* (Noble seekers) subjugates the fear. Many *Rks* are prayers to Varuna from people afraid of being punished by Him for their sins. But the idea of a terrorising God cannot flourish on Indian soil. Nor can many Gods of many natures. Bharathiya culture and spiritual outlook upheld the One God or Easwara.

Next, the *Ekeswara!*(One God) This axiom, that there can be only One and not many, is current in India from very ancient times. Even in the ancient Vedic and Samhitha literature, this faith is already evident as an age-long belief.

But the notion of a personal God struck the thinkers and practitioners of this land as rather elementary, a kind of unripe stage in spiritual progress. It did not satisfy their highest aspirations. This attitude found in the revelations of Rishis has not been understood or appreciated by scholars and writers of other countries who have studied and commented on the Vedas and affiliated texts. They still dwell on the earlier belief in “many gods” or the later belief in “one personal God.” Ignorance of this kind brings a smile to the lips of the Hindu.

Really speaking, even those who learn in their mothers’ laps to put faith in a God equipped with attributes, known by a name and having a recognisable Form, have later to rise up to a stage higher than this and become aware of the One, that is spoken of as “having many names and many forms.” The sadhanas (spiritual practices) are directed to the realisation of this Truth.

The ONE—in Him alone is all this flux, all this changing Cosmos, established. He is the guide and guardian of every consciousness. All such denotations touch only the fringe of the ONE. Westerners said that the intelligence of man can succeed in this venture. But the seekers of this land showed a heroism that could not be measured or limited. This is a fact that cannot but be accepted. Western Philosophers renowned for their daring flights into the realms of the spirit have shown only a tiny spark of this heroism. So, they are amazed at the speculative and experiential heights

reached by the sages of India. This feeling of wonder has been charmingly expressed by Professor Max Mueller. “Into whatever unknown realms of experience their causative and positive inquiry led them, the Indian seekers ventured boldly therein. They never hesitated to discard, for the sake of success in this adventure, whatever they felt as an encumbrance. They were not affected by fear of how others might judge them.” Max Mueller exhorted people to involve themselves in Bharathiya *Paramartha Vahini*, (the Nectarine stream of the search for the Supreme, flowing in India), for he felt the Indian Sadhakas pursued the path of Right, the path of Truth.

Ekam sath; vipraah bahudhaa vadanthi. (One alone is; the wise speak of It as many). This indeed is most sublimely meaningful. This is the basic truth behind the spiritual efforts of India since ages. Even the theistic principle and practice that will spread all over the world with unprecedented benediction in the coming years have as their basis this great axiom laid down by the sages of India, long, long ago.

Rks arose on various Deities and Divine Forces, because the Rishis knew that the “One that alone is,” can be cognised by each one only from his own viewpoint, and that it is different for different persons, depending on the stage reached in clarifying and purifying the vision. They announced, through that statement, their discovery that the One is the subject which all the sages and saints, seers and

poets, hymnists and composers adored and praised in various languages, during various moods, through various styles of expression. Thus, from the declaration quoted above “*Ekam sath; vipraah bahudhaa vadanthi,*” emerged consequences of the highest value to the world. For example, many are surprised that India is the one country where religious fanaticism is absent and no one hinders or harms the religious observances of another. There are, in this country, theists, atheists, dualists, non-dualists, monotheists and others. They all live together in peace and harmony, without causing or suffering injury.

Materialists stood on the steps of temples (held sacred by Brahmins and resorted to by them for worship) and defamed and denied God. They called upon all to follow them. They declared that the idea of God is but an insane fancy. They condemned God, scriptures, codes of morality, righteousness and guiding principles and said that they were all superstitions designed and developed for selfish aggrandisement by the Brahmins. They roamed across the land and propagated these conclusions. And no one hindered them. Buddhism, which systematically slighted Hindu rites and religious beliefs was allowed to coexist in an atmosphere of respect. The Jains too did not accept the Vedas and the Vedic Gods. They asked in derision how such Gods can exist and be believed in. Examples of the spirit of tolerance rooted in the revelatory statement quoted above are innumerable. Until the ravaging Muslims sprang on this country, no one in this land of Bharath knew what was meant

by violence. It is only when foreign hordes fell upon them and resorted to violence that the people came to know how intolerant man can be.

Hindus helped Christians to build churches in India. They showed readiness to cooperate with Christians. This is evident all over the country. There was no bloodshed, at any time, in dealing with Christians. The stream of thought directed to the supreme Truth would not allow itself to be polluted by violence. To confirm this fact as well as to understand the validity of this attitude requires clear thinking and strength of intellect.

Buddhists who were the very first propagators of religion, spread their faith by travelling over the world. That religion entered all countries famed in those days as civilised. The monks who ventured into those lands were tortured. Hundreds were killed by imperial decree. But soon, good fortune smiled on Buddhism. Buddhism taught that violence has to be eschewed. Buddha was accepted as a God, as another Name for the One, which has many names, according to the Vedic dictum, “*Ekam sath, vipraah bahudhaa vadanthi.*” He was Indra, He was Rudra. That was the unifying effect of the basic revelation of the sages. May this declaration be ever in the memory of man!

Bharathiyas, grown up in the culture of India, have deep faith in the equality of all faiths. Whether it is Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism or Christianity, they believe that no one should talk lightly of the worship of God. They

believe that when anyone talks lightly on any One of the Names of God or any of the Forms of God whom others adore, they are insulting the One God. This was the message held forth by the Indian way of spiritual life. Those who have learnt this truth and adhere to it are the real sons and daughters of India.

This Truth is beyond the grasp of all. Not all can achieve this knowledge: who is the ruler of the Universe? Who is it that stands outside it and guides it? What is the cause of the existence of this Cosmos? Whence did this originate? How did it happen? What caused this existence? The Vedas have many Rks dealing with these mysteries. Bharathiyas have probed into them.

Creation involves the putting together of substances. What is put together must come apart, in course of time and get liberated. The individual is created and so he has to disintegrate and die. Now some are born happy. Some are enjoying healthy, happy lives. Some are born miserable. Others are born without hands or legs. Some are born feebleminded or as defectives. Who hurt them or injured them? God is proclaimed as just and kind. It can be argued: how can such a God ever be so partial and prejudiced? How can such differential treatment come into the Realm ruled by God? Such doubts are natural. But the vision of the sages of Bharath who moulded the thought of this land revealed to them that God is not the cause of these differences. They are the consequences of the acts indulged

in by the individual in lives previous to the present one. They result in happiness and misery, health and handicaps.

Good and bad are self-made, the effects of what was done in previous lives. Can the bodies of men and their conditions, the ups and downs men meet in life, can they not be the accumulated result of hereditary impacts and tendencies? There are two things that stand like parallel lines before us, when we consider this subject, mental and material. If satisfactory solutions can be found for the problems relating to human nature and its special qualities in materialism, then there can be no basis for believing that there is a factor called Atma or the Soul! But it is impossible to demonstrate that the capacity to think, for example, has evolved out of physical matter.

When an item of work is done again and again, it becomes a habit, a skill; is it not? Therefore, the skill or habit that a new-born exhibits must be due to constant repetition indulged in long ago. Of course, such practice must have taken place in a previous life or many lives. So, it is necessary to posit the validity of the belief in past and future lives, for all living beings. This is a basic belief in Bharathiya spiritual thought.