

Further Results of Worship

So far we have been dealing mainly with the externals of worship and it is to be feared that some highly refined and sensitive souls might have been displeased thereby. These worthy persons wish to have the kernel, the very essence of the fruit of worship without having to deal with any shell or bark, skin or other outer coverings. It is true that mere formal performance of worship unaccompanied by the pure and fervent spirit counts for nothing and that the spirit is the essence. But so far we have had to deal with externals, as externals are indispensable to clothe, embody and convey the spirit from person to person, from place to place, from stage to stage and even from age to age just as husk and shell serve a similar purpose in Nature. It is the nectar we want, but the liquid nectar comes only in a cup, as its necessary vehicle, just as the grain we need comes and must come with chaff and cannot be grown without the husk. Sweetness is what we want. But except by getting sugar or other sweet article, sweetness is not got. This is so patent. Sugar stands for sweetness. So worship stands or should stand for the best form of worship, that worship which in every item is saturated by fervent admiration, reverence or love. It is on supposition that this is well understood, that worship has been and is referred to till now as a highly desirable object, as conferring on individuals, the country and humanity what is badly and urgently needed by them. But still to satisfy the demands of these specially sensitive readers referred to above, a few words on the nature and essence of the worship may be added here, to stress their importance.

Indian readers would appreciate worship better if we take them to the corresponding Sanskrit words and note what they connote. Those words are *pūja* and *upāsana*. These are well understood terms in constant use. We say a person

is doing *puja* when he offers flowers, water, food, scents and praise to a person or an image of a divine being. Yet all the while, that worshipper is not acting like a robot machine, but is simultaneously using speech and thought. He utters words, mostly *mantras* and *slokas* and his mind turns to their meanings for most of the time. Occasionally he may be merging himself in the object of worship mentally - attaining *Poorna laya*, or feeling perfect bliss and forgetting all ideas of his self being the actor. Most readers would have admired the simple hunter Kannappa's worship of a stone *linga* in *Peria Purana*. He just saw the *linga* on a hill covered by leaves and flowers, and water used by some adorer who had made formal worship of the stone. At once by some *purva Vasana*, some trace of memory from past births probably, *Bhakti* entered into his soul and he had a powerful urge to go to the *lingam* and worship it. He had no object to gain that is objects as expressed in the *sankalpa* or initial portion of every *puja* but simply felt the irresistible impulse to go to the image and to feel its beneficent presence. What was the worship he offered? The devotee, judges the worshiped, God only by standards and ideas applying to oneself. So besides leaves and flowers and *abhisheka* water brought in his mouth as he had no vessel, he offered roasted flesh to God as that was the food he liked and lived on.

Yadannah purusho bhavati,

Tadannah tasya devatah.

this means, Whatever is a man's food is also the food of his God. But however repulsive this flesh was to the orthodox *Saiva acharya* who was worshipping the image there, it was not repulsive to the deity that Kannappa worshipped in the *linga*. For the deity appreciated Kannappa's unmotivated but powerful love, and to prove the superiority of worship with such love to cold formal worship albeit with *Vedamantras* that deity Siva began to bleed in his eyes. Kannappa, who saw it, at once plucked out one of his eyes and placed it on the image in lieu of the injured and or bleeding eye. Then Siva made his second eye in the image bleed. Undaunted, Kannappa started to pluck out his second eye for replacing the second eye of the image, but in order to be sure of the place where the second eye of the image was, which, after plucking out his own second eye he would not

be able to see, Kannappa placed his foot with its *chappal* near the second eye. Then Siva appeared and stopped this sacrifice of the second eye. And the formal worshipper noticed how greatly God Siva esteemed the love freely flowing from Kannappa's heart and how much superior it was to his formal external worship with all *Vedic* rites, *mantras* and ceremonies. Sri Sankaracharya in his *Sivanandalahari* refers to this superiority in the oft quoted verse,

Marga avarita paduka Pascupateh angasya kurchayate,
Gandushamfpi mshechanam purdy'voh divya abhishechayate,
Kinchit bhakshita mamsa scesha kabalam navyo paharayate,
Bhaktih kirn nakaroti aho vancharo bhakta avatamsayate.

which means God Siva felt the touch of the worn out *chappal* delightfully thrilling,

The water given for bath *abhisheka* carried by the hunter in his mouth mixed with his saliva was enjoyed as a divine ablution,

The flesh which was previously tested by tasting had been found good and offered by the hunter, was felt to be as good as newly cooked food,

Well, what cannot devotion achieve? A forest hunter was esteemed as the highest worshipper.

Thus it is the spirit that matters. It is needless to quote other stanzas from *Mukundamala Amnayabhyasanam*, to illustrate the same truth.

But when all is said and done, one must recollect that Kannappars are not found everywhere, and every one cannot imitate Kannappa. The ordinary man has to remember that his gentle plant of devotion has to be grown and tended and hedged with considerable care and for that purpose the regular forms of worship and the usual directions for the growth of devotion by attending *pujas*. *Bhajan*s and other ceremonies must be followed for a long time before attaining full fruition of *Bhakti*. Especially the nine modes of worship mentioned in the Bhagavata and stressed by Sri Sai Baba often have to be attended to and followed. In setting out those nine forms, one can see how the external and internal are inextricably interwoven and combined and how one gradually progresses with lower and external forms till his inner kernel of devotion attains maturity and perfection.

The nine modes are,

Sravana Listening to accounts of the deeds of God, his *Avataras* and Saints.

Kirtana of Vishnu, reciting these or repeating God's names and praise,

Smarana constantly recalling these, especially uttering God's names⁶⁴.

Padasevanam falling at the feet of God and Saints.

Archana formal worship, for example with flowers, water, food, scents and all the 16 *upacharas*

Vadana prostration before God and the saints.

Dasya, for example service, doing every work for God or Saint.

Sakhya remaining in the company of God or Saint.

Nivedana that is, surrender of the self that is forgetting oneself entirely in the contemplation of God after formally offering the self as a gift to God.

The devout reader would like to have a further sketch of the nature and the works of devotion at this stage before we deal with the expansion of the mere system of worship of Sai Baba throughout the country and its diversification. So, once again we may refer to Sri Adi Sankaracharya who, though a perfect adept in the metaphysics of *advaitism* and an authority in respect of the Impersonal Absolute or Brahman, in his numerous works has also shown his grip of the subject of the *bhakti marga*. This is how he describes what *Bhakti* is :

Ankolam Nijabhija Santatih, ayaskantophalam,
Suchika, Sadhvi Naijavibhum,
Lata Kshitiruham Sindhuh Sarid Vallabham,
Prapnoti Iha Yathatatha Pasupateh Padaravinda Dvayam
Cheto Vanchati Sada Sa Bhaktir Iti Uchyate.

This means, as the seeds of the *Ankolam* tree or plant are regressed by the parent tree,

as the parent magnetic block attracts needles one behind another,

as the chaste wife clasps her husband,

as the tendril creeper clings to the adjoining tree and mounts upward and upward,

as the waters of the rivers are for ever drawn downward and downward till they reach the ocean and get inextricably and indistinguishably lost in it, similarly the heart of the devotee longs after the Divine feet of Pasupati, God Siva to be ever there.

This is called *Bhakti*. The ideas of Sri Sankara are very well thought out, and we see in example after example here, how *bhakti* is to be understood as a natural force which is found working in all creation namely, vegetable, animal, mineral, and human. Each illustration takes *bhakti* one stage further up. First comes the tendency of the *Ankolam* plant and its seed. After the seed is first shed from the parent tree, it gets reattached to the tree. Thus the tendency even in vegetables is to get back to the original source and get reabsorbed in it. That is the real nature of devotion in the human being also, for we are parts, *amsas*, or sparks from God, and are drawn by a natural force to look to and reach the original source of all creation and of ourselves, namely, God. this force being devotion. The second example is from *Ayaskanuj*, that is the magnetic stone. The magnet, when approached by a needle. magnetises It. and then draws it to itself and converts it into a magnet that is it gives parts of itself, its force to the new corner, and that in turn acts in a similar way towards other needles, and thus a string of even seven needles might be found attached one behind another to a big magnet. This shows the nature of devotion. *The jiva's* contact with the parent body is ever to strengthen devotion to God, and every growing *bhakta* tends to attract others and impart his devotion to them and through them to others ad infinitum. These are inert pieces of creation, and even these exhibit the nature of devotion. The third is human. The chaste wife longs for her husband, and even his slightest absence for even a short period makes her full of unrest, *viraha* and pant for his presence, and when that presence is regained she is full of bliss and joy and sticks to him. This again is quite descriptive of *bhakti*. The Bhagavata treats all devotees as females, Gopis, and the only male in the Universe is Krishna. So in the *Rasakrida*, Krishna by his flute or magic sound draws all the Gopis to himself, and they form a ring round him. Between every two Gopis is Krishna and between every two Krishnas is a Gopi. That is, each Gopi sees only

Krishna on either side of her and not the other Gopis. Perfect white heat of love converts everything into Krishna. This feminine devotion to the Purusha is the loftiest love and bliss known to humanity and that, therefore, is the best way of indicating what devotion is. Next comes the creeper. The creeper is a very feeble tendril and it must be sending up tendrils which intuitively clasp a strong, powerful tree next to it. The wind will shake out and break the creeper to pieces. But when it twirls round and round a big tree, the wind can do no harm. The natural tendency of the creeper is to go further and further upward and upward till the top of the tree is reached. This helps it to get more light from the Sun, more of air, and more of freedom and safety from animals which will bite and eat up the creeper. Similar is the tendency of a weak human being who resorts to God as the source of his strength, just as the creeper resorts to the neighbouring tree as the source of its strength, and clings to God and ever tends to mount up higher and higher in his spiritual levels to achieve nobler and nobler objects and to transform himself into more and more of the like-ness of God till he reaches full *Sarupyam*, *Sameepyam* and *Sayujyam*. So long as *bhakti* is in the lower stages, there is the danger of his *bhakti* being disturbed or his safety being affected by other creatures or beings. But when he mounts up higher and higher and reaches the top stages of *Sarupyam*, *Sameepyam* and *Sayujyam* there is no more danger to his existence or perfection. Lastly comes the example of the rivers. All the above mentioned examples are all objects which retain their identity as separate from the objects to which they are drawn. In the last, namely, the rivers, the perfection of the current of devotion is attained by losing one's own entity or existence in that of the Divine or the end of the course. The river is inevitably drawn down. Does water go back or upward? It is drawn downward and downward, and finally it meets the ocean. The waters of the rivers were originally part of the ocean, and after being held up in the form of water vapour, cloud and rain, they take the shape of a river. So, it is the oceanic waters that flow through the rivers and get back to their original source. The devotion of the river which was issued out of that immense, endless, infinite expanse called the ocean, makes it get back to that ocean and be lost in it. Once the rivers Ganges,

Indus, get into the ocean, they Cannot be pieced out again as Ganges or Indus water. *Purnalaya* is the end of the devotion and that is obtained by the *jivas* surrendering themselves, that is, making *Atma nivedana*, which is the ninth mode mentioned in the *Navavidha bhakti*. That is both devotion and also absorption. After that there is nothing further to reach. Thus the various stages, attitudes, and relations of a *bhakta* can be very well dwelt upon and learnt by studying the above illustrations and applying them to oneself.

Another stanza, which may be quoted next, sets out the names of a number of loving *bhaktas* so that they may ever remain in one's heart and show how *bhakti* achieves its ends. The end of *bhakti* is not achieved by the offer of money to God or by mere learning or by age or beauty of a person, God does not want any of these. God wants only your heart, that is, your self, and he will not be satisfied with anything else. The stanza runs as follows,

Vyadhasya Acharanam Dhruvasyacha Vayah Vidya
Gajendrasya
ka Ka-jatir Vidhurasya Yadavapateh Ugrasya
Kim Pourusham
Kubjayah Kamaniya Rupam Adihikam
Kintat Sudhamno Dhanam
Bhaktya Tushyati Kevalam
Natu Gunaih, Bhaktipriyah Sripatih.

This means, as for the hunter *Kannappa* what. *Achara* or religious course of conduct had he?

For *Dhruva*, what was his age?

For the elephant *Gajendra*, what education or degrees and titles had he?

Had *Vidura* favourite of Krishna any qualification in respect of caste? He was the son of a slave or dancing girl.

For the king of *Yadavas* called *Ugrasena*, who was favoured by Krishna what manliness had he? He was a great coward: ,

For *Kubja* also was favoured by Krishna, had she any great beauty? She was deformed in person.

For *Sudhama*, known as *Kuchela* who also was favoured by Krishna, had he any wealth?

Therefore, God is pleased with and wants only *bhakti* or devotion. God is captured by *prem* or love. The above stanza refers to well known *bhaktas* who received great help or favour from Krishna or God on account of their *bhakti*. One's profession or conduct, that is, whether one is a hunter or a *Vaideek Brahmin*, whether one is young or old, whether one is highly learned or a creature without education, whether one is a high caste person or the son of a slave whether one is a brave man or a coward, whether one has beauty or wealth, none of these are the reasons for God's help and favour. God is pleased by *bhakti* alone and *bhakti* can capture Him. This contains the essence of the doctrine of *bhakti* or devotion, and, therefore, earnest readers who are anxious to study the history of Sai Baba, who realised in himself the perfection of Godhead by attaining *Purnalaya*, concentrating his mind always on God with intense love from his earliest period of life, and thereby attained *Aikya*, so that he could say *Mainm Allahum*, that is *Aham Brahmasm* and could exhibit all the powers of God; would find the use of the above stanzas. Sai identified himself with Krishna and with every other form of God. As the object of everyone should be to please God in Sai form or in any other form, one may note how in point of historical fact, from this biography, numbers of people were drawn to Sai Baba and achieved the love of Sai Baba, and thereby achieved every object of human existence. The succeeding chapters of this book would deal with the details of a large number of devotees being drawn to and benefiting from Baba, and would fully illustrate the truth of the above verses. At present we have sufficiently satisfied highly sensitive readers who wish to have the essence of Sai Baba's *Marga* placed before them, before we deal with the expansion of the Sai movement and the details of persons who approached him, and the problems that arise for consideration in the life of Baba.