

seeing, *darśana*.³

These categories of everyday experience assume a special importance in Hindu religion and philosophy. The 'knower' or 'seer' is the self, *atman*; Brahman or God is the object of knowledge, and *jñāna* is the knowledge the self has of God. For Sāṅkhya and Yoga philosophies, which do not acknowledge a supreme God, the object of knowledge, standing over against the 'knower' (*puruṣa*) is matter (*prakṛti*).

While these discrete categories belong to ordinary life, the unitive life, the life of 'union' with Brahman, is described as one that is devoid of these distinctions.⁴ Brahman is beyond the distinctions of 'seer', 'seeing' and 'seen.'⁵ Brahman as the eternal subject is never an object.⁶ In reality there is no devotee or object of devotion, no ruler or ruled;⁷ the mind under the influence of *mayā* sees 'duality'; it imagines itself as the 'knower.'

Long before these categories were recognized and used in the philosophical systems, Yājñavalkya in the Upanisads shows his awareness of the implications they had for philosophy. To grant that *atman*, the individual self, could know Brahman would be to imply that they were separate. Such a view would be contrary to the stand that Yājñavalkya took. To him and other Upanisadic philosophers, Brahman was not different from the individual *atman*. As Yājñavalkya says:

3. *Naiṣkramyasiddhi* of Sri Suresvarācārya, trans. S.S. Raghavahar, Mysore (1965) ii.53; *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* of Sankara, ed. Swami Madhavananda, Calcutta (1944) 247.

4. *Vedānta Sūtras*, op.cit. I.i.4; SS. viii.22.

5. *Viveka*, op.cit. 241; 401.

6. *Vedānta Sūtras*, op.cit. I.i.4; *Viveka*, op.cit. 185.

7. *Vedānta Sūtras*, op.cit. II.i.14.

"Where there is a duality (*dvaita*), as it were (*iva*), there one sees another; there one smells another; there one hears another; there one speaks to another".⁸ But "you could not see the seer of seeing. You could not hear the hearer of hearing. You could not think the thinker of thinking. You could not understand the understander of understanding. He is your soul, which is in all things".⁹ He is 'the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker, the understood Understander'.¹⁰ To Yajñavalkya Brahman could never be an object of perception; the ordinary categories of knowledge would not apply here. He sees, though not too clearly, that the knowledge of Brahman was unlike ordinary knowledge, that there can be no 'knower' distinct from the 'known.'

As one delves further into the philosophical literature, it becomes clear that the unitive knowledge that the Upanisads speak of requires, in reality, that the category of 'knower' be superseded. The soul in bondage in *samsara* sees itself as separate from Brahman; it sees itself as a 'knower' and 'doer.' But in the unitive state (that is, the experience of liberation) the soul loses all self-consciousness. The Upanisads compare this state of self-transcendence to that of a man in the embrace of his wife, who "knows nothing within or without".¹¹ The *Maitrayaniya Upaniṣad* describes it as *niratma-katvam* 'selflessness'.¹² Post-Upanisadic literature often describes it as being free from the consciousness of 'I' and 'mine'.¹³

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8. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, trans. R.E. Hume (1954) II.iv.14.
9. *ibid.* III.iv.2; vii.23.
10. *ibid.* III.viii.11.
11. *ibid.* IV.iii.21.
12. Hume, *op.cit.* vi.20-1.
13. *Naiṣk.*, *op.cit.* ii.22; 29; 30; iii.60; *Viveka.*, *op.cit.* 75; 180; 392; 437.

The unitive knowledge, however, is not mere selftranscendence. It is also 'union' with Brahman. In other words, it is a merging of the 'knower' in the 'known.' The *summum bonum*, according to the Upanisads and indeed of all Vedantic thought, is becoming 'one' with Brahman. "He, verily, who knows that supreme Brahma, becomes that very Brahma", says the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*.¹⁴ *Brahmabhāva*, "becoming of the nature of Brahman", is *mokṣa*, says Sankara in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*.¹⁵ The ideal of *jīvanmukti*, 'liberation in life' that Advaita philosophy speaks of, maintains that man can attain this unitive knowledge even in *saṃsāra*.

These two aspects of the unitive experience — self-transcendence and 'union' with Brahman — which are hinted at in the Upanisads, become more explicit in the *Mahābhārata*, and more particularly in its *Bhagavadgītā*. These aspects, moreover, are correlated in a manner that would imply that liberation was dependent on self-transcendence. By the time of the *Bhagavadgītā*, *ahaṅkāra* 'I-ness' is clearly distinguished as that element of the individual psyche that makes man think in terms of 'I' and 'mine.' *Ahaṅkāra* thus becomes synonymous with egoism. The *Mahābhārata* in the *Anugītā* says:

He who does not desire anything and has no egoism about anything becomes eligible for assimilation with Brahman, even while dwelling in the world.

... a wise man who is free from (the thought that this or that is) mine, and who is devoid of egoism, is emancipated; there is no doubt of that.

Those high-souled ones who are devoid of (the thought that this or that is) mine and devoid of egoism,.... obtain the great and highest world.¹⁶

14. Hume, *op.cit.* III.ii.9.

15. *Vedānta Sūtras*, *op.cit.* I.i.4 (p.33)

16. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol.8, *Bhagavadgītā*, *Sanatsu-jā-tīya* and *Anugītā*, trans. K.T. Telang, p.313; 371; 389; *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition, (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute) Poona (1960) XIV. 47.8-9; 14; 50.22.

Besides the many occurrences of the words *ahaṅkāra*, 'I-ness' *nirahaṅkāra* 'free from egoism' and *nirmama* 'free from mine-ness', the *Gīta* emphasises many times that man should surrender himself and his activity to God and thus become united with Him. The *Gīta* says: "He whose soul is bewildered by *ahaṅkāra* thinks, "I am the doer". But casting aside self-sense, force, arrogance, desire, anger, possession, egoless and tranquil in mind, he becomes worthy of becoming one with Brahman".¹⁷

These thoughts are even more clearly enunciated in the later literature of Advaita Vedānta. The *Naiṣkaramyasiddhi* sums them up thus:

The seer is conjoined to the seen and the seen is conjoined to the seer. Both of them are conjoined in and through the functioning of the ego. In the elimination of the ego, the self abides in perfect nonduality.¹⁸

So we see that the unitive experience, in which the self transcends itself and becomes one with the Divine, is one in which the 'knower' becomes one with the 'known'.

Saiva Siddhānta philosophy further elucidates the nature of this unitive experience. Saiva Siddhānta is unique among the Hindu philosophies in regarding egoism, not as a mere propensity of the human psyche and a concomitant of the psychophysical body, but as a 'root-defilement' (*mūla māla*) of the soul. This egoism *aṇava* is the cause of the soul's estrangement from God. It creates the delusion which makes the human being think of himself as an agent. Saiva Siddhānta texts repeatedly emphasise the need to give up egoism and the clinging to one's limited intelligence and to 'sink' oneself in the Divine.¹⁹ Saiva saints speak of 'melting' with

17. Trans. S. Radhakrishnan, Bombay, India (1977) iii.27; xviii.53.

18. *op.cit.* ii. 53.

19. M.M. Arulchelvam, 'The Concept of Liberation in Saiva Siddhānta', *Philosophical Heritage of the Tamils Madras* (1983) p.10-11; *SJB.* x.1; *SS.* xii.3; *Siva.* 71.

love for God, which is symbolic of the dissolving of the hard core of egoism in man. The triple categories of 'knower', 'known' and 'knowledge' too find mention in the Saiva Siddhanta texts.²⁰ It is said that the sages 'see' because they see without the distinction of 'seer' and 'seen'. Saiva Siddhanta too, like Vedanta, is emphatic that the soul can never see God objectively. "The soul can never see Him, who makes it see".²¹

It becomes clear now that the knowledge that the Hindu religious texts speak of is no ordinary knowledge. It is not to be had by the natural organs of perception. As the Upaniṣad says, the natural organs of perception reach outward:²² they relate to the world outside. But unitive knowledge is found within, when a man turns his mental eyes inward and looks into the 'cavern' of his heart.²³ The mind, says, Sankara, causes a perception of duality. With the elimination or suppression of the mind, duality ceases and there is *asparśayoga* 'union without touching'.²⁴ Saiva Siddhanta too speaks of the 'defective human vision' that must be replaced by 'divine vision'.²⁵ The unitive knowledge is, therefore, something that is beyond the natural channels or levels of intellection.

That this knowledge is more an 'experience', a participation or 'entering into' the Divine, is indicated by the words *anubhava* and *anubhūti*, which are increasingly used to denote this experience.²⁶ This is the perception of Christian theology too. Paul Tillich, writing about this knowledge, which is in reality participation, says:

20. SS.viii.22; xi,2; *Tiru.* 27; *Viṅāveṅpā* 11; *Tirumaruṭṭpayan* viii.9; *Tirumantiram* (Tinnevely: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society 1973) 154; 1580.

21. SJB. vi.2.d;e.

22. *Kātha Upaniṣad*, Hume, *op.cit.* iv.1.

23. Hume, *op.cit.* *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.i.1; *Kātha Upaniṣad* ii.12; 20; iv.6; 7.

24. *Māṅd. Kārikā*, *op.cit.* iii.29; 31; iv.2.

25. SJB. ix.

26. SS. viii.34; xi.1; *Viveka. op.cit.* 2; 64; 121; 277.

Knowing is a form of union. In every act of knowledge the knower and that which is known are united; the gap between subject and object is overcome. The subject "grasps" the object, adapts it to itself, and, at the same time, adapts itself to the object.²⁷

Nicholas Berdyaev in his *Destiny of Man* writes:

When philosophers seek intuition, they seek knowledge which is not objectified but is communion with being, penetration into its depths... Consciousness presupposes the subject-object relation; hence philosophical knowledge, which transcends objectification and relativity, is rooted in the subconsciousness and rises to superconsciousness.²⁸

Evelyn Underhill, in her classic study of mysticism, gives us the characteristics of mysticism. She says:

It implies, indeed, the abolition of individuality; of that hard, separateness, that "I, Me, Mine" which makes of man a fine isolated thing. It is essentially a movement of the heart seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality;...

(It) passes over into that boundless life where Subject and Object, desirous and desired, are *one*.²⁹

This element of self-transcendence is seen also in the word 'ecstasy'. Ecstasy, as Paul Tillich explains, means 'standing outside one's self' without ceasing to be oneself.³⁰

27. *Systematic Theology*, vol. I Chicago (1951) p. 94.

28. New York (1960) p. 12-13.

29. *Mysticism* New York (1955) p. 71.

30. *Dynamics of Faith* New York (1958) p.7.

In the experience of ecstasy, one 'transcends the basic condition of fine rationality, the subject-object structure'. The Sanskrit word for ecstasy, the word *paravaśa*, which is also used in Tamil, focuses on the experience of 'union'. *Paravaśa* means to be 'subject to another's will'; to be 'ruled by another'. The experience of ecstasy or *paravaśa*, then, is one in which man transcends self in a joyous 'union' with God. Hindu mystics, as also mystics of other religions, vouch for both these aspects of the unitive experience. It is this experience of self-transcendence, this disappearance of the ordinary subject-object scheme, that the Hindu mystics seek to communicate in describing the numinous experience as one that is beyond 'knower', 'known' and 'knowledge'.

Dhavamoney, in his book *Love of God according to Saiva Siddhanta*, says that this knowledge is subsumed in *bhakti*. He explains the four types of Saiva *bhakti* as the 'process of deification' which consists of 'alienation and integration'. This process requires "alienation from the egoism of the self and realization of the divine form of grace" as also "alienation from the dual objective realization of God and the non-dual subjective realization of God".³¹ "Knowledge and love", he says, "are mutually inclusive". In *bhakti*, as in *jñāna*, one transcends the consciousness of 'knower', 'known' and 'knowledge'. As Sage Narada says in his classical work on *bhakti*, the *Bhakti Sūtras*, in *bhakti* the triple consciousness (of worshipper, the object of worship and the act of worship) is dissolved.³²

Yoga too records a similar experience. Describing the state of *samadhi*, the *Yogasūtra* defines it as the state in which the mind shines with the light of the object alone and "devoid, as it were, of itself".³³

31. Oxford (1971) p. 357: 359.

32. *The Philosophy of Love*, ed. Poddar Hanumanprasad (1968) sutra 66.

33. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali*, ed. B.D. Basu *Sacred Books of the Hindus*, vol. iv, Allahabad, (1924) iii. 3.

This unitive experience is not, however, the prerogative of the mystics. It is said that musicians, poets and lovers of the arts too share this experience, and that aesthetic appreciation at its deepest levels requires the same self-forgetfulness and 'entering into' the work of art or literature.³⁴ This perception finds corroboration in Sanskrit literature. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* uses the word *rasa* 'aesthetic pleasure' for Brahman.³⁵ Abhinavagupta in his *Tantrāloka* uses the word *tanmayībhavana* 'being absorbed in or identified with that' to describe the identification that takes place in aesthetic appreciation. In a verse that is significant for our purpose, he says:

Those who do not identify (with the object of contemplation) who do not know the merging of the body etc. (in that object) and whose intellect as a means of cognition is not merged (in that object), they are known as insensitive.³⁶

Moreover, writers on poetics, Bhattanayaka, Abhinavagupta and Visvanatha, compare the aesthetic experience to the numinous experience, *brahmasvada* 'tasting of Brahman'.³⁷

34. Deussen, P. *The Philosophy of the Upanisads* New York (1966) p. 383; Evelyn Underhill, *op.cit.* p. 233; 237; M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* London (1956) p. 67.
35. Hume, *op.cit.* ii. 7; Hiriyanna, *op.cit.* p. 67, n. 4.
36. J.L. Masson and M.V. Patwardhan, *Santarasa and Abhinavagupta's philosophy of Aesthetics* Poona (1969) p. 49.
37. Raniero Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta* Serie Orientale Roma XI, Rome (1956) p. 55 - 6.

So we see that this experience, which is familiar to mystic, poet and musician alike, is a 'knowledge' which transcends the intellectual level, yet is 'more direct than thought or perception'. It is a going beyond the consciousness of 'knower', 'known' and 'knowledge.'

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