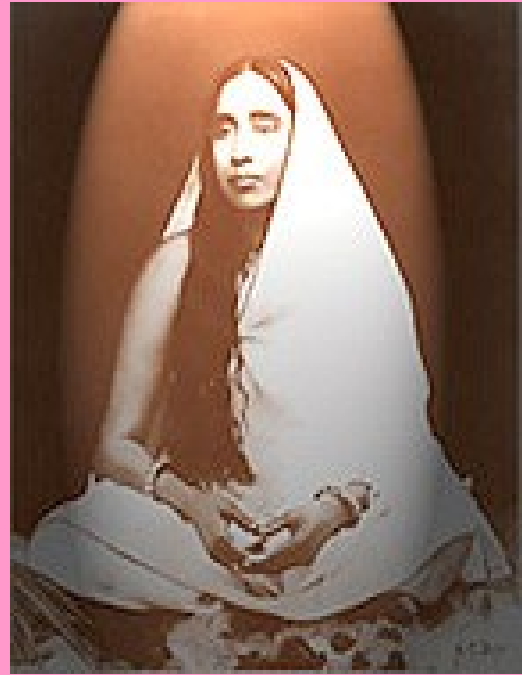
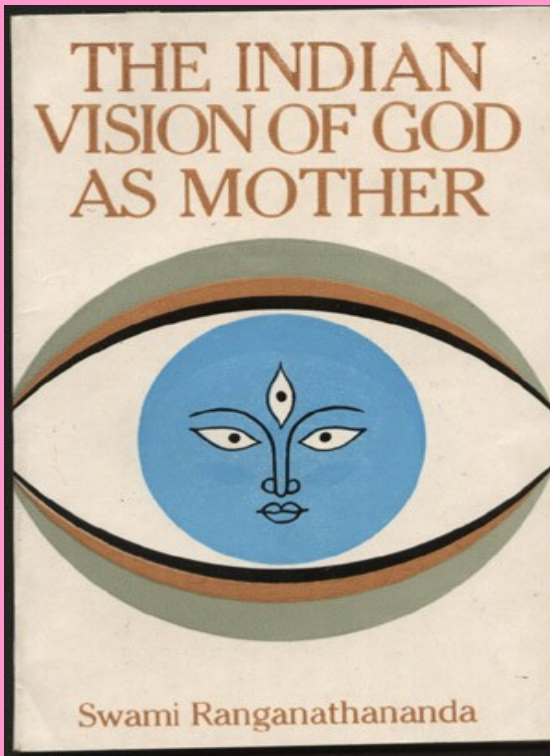


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"Women whether naturally good or not, whether chaste or unchaste should always be regarded as images of the Blissful Divine Mother."

-- Sri Ramakrishna

**THE INDIAN VISION  
OF  
GOD AS MOTHER**

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## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

The present booklet is based on a lecture delivered by revered Swami Ranganathanandaji, Vide-President, Ramakrishna Math, at Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on 'The Indian Vision of God as Mother'. The illuminating lecture, later published in the *Prabuddha Bharata* in the issues of August, September and October 1991 was highly appreciated by the readers.

We have great pleasure in publishing the lecture containing a lucid and thought-provoking exposition of the sublime thoughts on the subject for the benefit of a wider section of the readers. May the readers' hearts be drawn towards the Divine Mother, Who, as aptly described by the revered Swami, is ever-present in all of us as a living 'mother-heart' full of love and compassion.

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## THE INDIAN VISION OF GOD AS MOTHER

### INTRODUCTION

In the West today, there is great interest in this wonderful idea that we speak of, and an approach to God as Mother, not only as Father. In fact, since the post-second world war years, big changes have been going on in Western religious thinking. Imagine the Christian church in America, Presbyterian or Methodist, passing a resolution that God can be called hereafter not only as Father but also as Mother. It is against the whole tradition of the two thousand years of Christian history. In all Semitic religions—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic, Father is the supreme word for God and Mother has no place there. But the concept of God as Mother was present in the various cults that existed in the Mediterranean region; all such cults were destroyed by Judaism and Christianity.

### EVOLUTION OF THE MOTHER CULTS IN INDIA

Only in India were the original Mother cults preserved and developed and eventually given a very high status throughout our history. We can see the blending of the pre-Vedic Mother cults and the Vedic Father cults, and of the two peoples following these cults, mingling and merging in few centuries to become the Indian culture and the Indian people. With the touch of the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, our Indian Mother cults developed into the full Sakta religion and spirituality, and spread to all parts of India its Saiva, Vaisnava and Sakta forms, turning out devotees and teachers, simple as well as extraordinary, one of the greatest of whom was Sankaracarya. This great Advaita teacher stressed this concept of God as Mother about twelve hundred years ago, and today we have in Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, great teachers who have highlighted this idea once again. This truth is having increasing appeal to people in many parts of the world, that behind this universe, there is a pulse of the Mother-heart; the pulse of the energy of compassion, love, and protective attitude—all that is associated with the idea of Mother.

Our great sages discovered the pulse of that Sakti, of that prakrti, of that Mother-heart, behind the universe. So they spoke and sang of God as Mother, as *para sakti*—the Supreme Energy, *para prakrti*—the Supreme nature, and Her unique manifestations as Durga, Kali, and Radha. India has cultured it throughout the ages. India speaks of God as Father; India speaks of God as Mother; India also speaks of God in the neuter, as 'It', as Brahman, as *Om tat sat*. Brahman is beyond all 'he' or 'she'. India presents the human soul also as essentially the sexless Self, on the realization of which truth, every man or woman transcends the limitations of masculinity and femininity which it relegates to the physical body.

Some of the great writers in English, German, and other languages have also sometimes given a hint of the presence of this Mother-heart behind the universe. One of them is the famous German poet and dramatist Goethe in his famous book, *Faust*. The last line of that book is wonderful: 'The Eternal Feminine leads us on and on.' What a beautiful expression! There is an Eternal Feminine behind us, behind the passing manifestations of the world, and behind all the world's masculine and feminine. Another



The second stage involves coming to new terms with the family—new terms with love and with work.

The second stage may not even be a women's movement. Men may be at the cutting edge of the second stage.

The second stage has to transcend the battle for equal power in Institutions. The second stage will restructure institutions and transform the nature of power itself. (*Original in Italics*)

That conclusion has come from the great author of *The Feminine Mystique*, and she says now that the family must be kept intact and that there is no liberation for women without involving men also in the process. Side by side with the efforts for women's liberation in the socio-political sphere, there has come the struggle to remove all gender bias in religion also. Why God should be described only as masculine, as the Father; why not speak of God in feminine terms, as the Mother? So books on the subject by women authors are coming out in a steady stream now in America. These books endeavour to revive the concepts of the Mother Goddess upheld in all pre-Christian religions, which were considered as superstitious by the Christian church and were wiped away; but now they are being revived once again. Naturally, the Western mind turns to India which has cultured and nurtured the whole range of the Mother Goddess cults all these centuries through authoritative books and theology and rituals. Books on God as Mother, as understood in India, are thus coming out in the English language. It is an extraordinary development; and one good thing that is revealed in these books is that, whereas, formerly, Western authors used to write scholarly books, but with little or no respect for our religious ideas—even belittling religion often—today they write with sympathy, appreciation, and even *bhakti*. The following three books reveal this changed attitude. They reveal also the increasing Western interest in the concept of God as Mother:

1. *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India, A Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purana* by Cheever Mackenzie Brown, 'Foreword' by Daniel H. H. Ingalls (published by Claude Stark & Co., Vermont, (U.S.A)). The inner page vii carries this reverential inscription:

'To my parents, true *amsas* of Radha and Krsna.'

In his 'Foreword' Ingalls says (p. xiv):

What is strange about this Indian record is not so much the replacement of female by male heirophanies, a phenomenon that has occurred over most of the civilized world, as the fact that in India the Goddess reappears. In Mediterranean culture, her embodiments disappeared for good. Diana and Bercynthia, Isis and Cybele, were exiled with the coming of Christianity. Somewhat later, Islam was to prove as severe. Tabari tells us that the Prophet at first spoke of the principal goddesses of Mecca as 'holy beings whose intercession is to be sought', but that these words were later expunged from the *Qu'ran*. What we actually have in *Qu'ran*, 54-19-23 is an attribution of such statements to Satan, and the Prophet's followers continued to be intransigently masculine in outlook. In Christianity, female heirophanes reappeared in the figures of Mary and the female saints. But here one cannot speak of a reappearance of ancient Goddesses. The figure of the

virgin and its supporting theology are subordinate to those of her son and his father. Diana is as surely dead as are the *puellae et pueri integri* who sang her praise.

The author, Cheever, begins his 'Introduction' to his book with these words:

Recently, it seems, theologians in the West have seriously begun to ponder whether the ultimate reality in the universe is male or female, or somehow includes or transcends both. What difference, we may ask ourselves, would it make to us personally if the supreme Reality were a Woman, instead of a Man, or some union of the two? How would it affect our faith, our attitudes and conduct towards men and women in our everyday lives, our ultimate fate? Would it alter our perception of the relationship of man and nature, spirit and matter, mind and body, intellect and feelings, subject and object? Such diverse concerns are more interrelated than they may at first appear. In any case, many Hindu thinkers, teachers, and writers, from at least the early Christian centuries, have deeply involved themselves with the problem of the feminine and masculine dimensions of ultimate reality and their ramifications within different aspect of life.

2. *Devi Mahatmya : The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition*, by Thomas B. Coburn, with a 'Foreword' by Daniel H.H. Ingalls published by Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, First Edition, 1984, Reprinted : 1988.

The author commences his 'Prolegomena' to his book thus"

The central concern of this study is with a text from classical India. More specifically, it is with the vision of the ultimate reality in the universe that is articulated in the *Devi Mahatmya* (DM). ... The outstanding feature of its vision is that the ultimate reality is understood as female, as the Goddess.

3. *The Politics of Women's Spirituality : Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement* (Edited by Charlene Spretnak, Anchor Books, New York, 1982).

The author writes in the 'Introduction' (p. xxiii):

The title, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* refers to our attitude toward life on Earth (i.e. spirituality) and the perception, manifestation, and use of power (i.e. politics) that stem from that attitude. The world-view inherent in feminist spirituality is, like the female mind, holistic and integrative. We see connectedness where the patriarchal mentality insists on seeing only separations. An excellent example of the integrative approach to issues was the unity statement of the Women's Pentagon Action in November 1980, which addressed the network of horrors that flow from patriarchal values, the domination and exploitation of 'the other' foreign countries, women, minorities, and the earth (see *Spiritual Dimensions of Feminist Anti-nuclear Activism*).

In the first chapter on 'What the Goddess Means to Women', Charles Spretnak writes (pp. 5-6):

Being a retired catholic with an interest in Buddhist meditation, I attempted to express my feelings about spirituality and nearly always they would ask, 'Do you have a book?' They felt that a holy book of any sort ... would signify legitimacy. Sometimes I sense that same reaction among contemporary theologians, and people in general, toward Goddess spirituality ... to which I respond: 'We are older, much older, than books.'

Many of the sacred myths of the Goddess that were told by our pre-patriarchal ancestors have survived and are now being gathered into books, although much of the Old Religion has been destroyed during the suppression of the patriarchal era. *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood: Our Goddess and Heroine Heritage and Lost Goddess of Early Greece* are examples of such collections. To sift through the surviving fragments of the ancient Goddess spirituality is a sobering experience. How close we came to losing that wisdom forever, to believing the patriarchal assertions that their politics of separation are the natural—the only— way to live.

Patriarchal governments and religions regard the current Goddess revival with deep-seated fear. Nothing threatens their power structure so resoundingly as the ancient consciousness that they believed had been crushed ...

Feminsits do not claim to own the Goddess. She has meaning for all people as a symbol of the holistic nature of life on Earth, in which all forms of being are intrinsically linked and are one (see 'Introduction'). She also has special meaning for women as an expression of the power of the female body/mind. As such, it is not difficult to deduce why almost none of the history presented in the following selections appears in patriarchal textbooks. I am not suggesting a 'conspiracy' among scholars but, rather, a pervasive cultural attitude that all pre-patriarchal religions were less worthy than the Judeo-Christian system. For example, one never reads of 'the religion of Artemis' and 'the cult of Jesus'; it is always the other way round. Similarly, the ancient Near Eastern words for 'sanctified women' or 'holy women' were translated by patriarchal scholars as 'temple prostitutes'...

Contemporary Goddess spirituality, with its roots in pre-patriarchal culture embodies a multiplicity of meaning for women. She is ever, She is all, She is us. (*Original in italics*)

In her earlier book *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece, A Collection of Pre-hellenic Myths*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1981, Charlene had quoted from Gunther Zuntz's book: *Persephone – Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (p.12):

To be gripped by the realization of deity in woman, the spring and harbour of life, mankind did not have to wait for the invention of agriculture. Everywhere, from Spain to Siberia, so many palaeolithic documents of this devotion have emerged, and with traits so specific recurring in neolithic relics, as to forbid the facile inference that this change, however epochal, in man's living habits could by itself account for what is loosely called 'the cult of the Mother Goddess'.... What evidence there is – and it is not a little – points to concerns more comprehensive and profound. This is the oldest godhead perceived by mankind.





As to imagine one can swim across  
the boundless sea.  
But while my mind has understood,  
alas! My heart has not;  
Though but a dwarf, it would strive  
to make a captive of the moon.

The *Devi Mahatmyam* is the most authoritative book on the subject of God as Mother; it is known also as *Durga Saptasi* and *Candi*. Beginning with the *Vag-Ambhrni Sukta* of the *Rg-Veda* (10.125), the oldest book of humanity which according to many scholars, has directly influenced the *Devi Mahatmyam*, the vision of God as Mother became the focus of devotion and philosophical and mystical exposition in India down the ages. Thus sing *Suktas* 3, 4 and 5 (as rendered by Thomas Coburn in his book referred to above, p. 256):

I am the queen who brings treasures together  
wise, foremost of those worthy of worship,  
The gods have put me in many places,  
variously abiding, of manifold presence.  
Through me a man eats food; he who sees,  
who breathes, who hears what is spoken  
(does so through me).  
Unknowing, they depend upon me: Hear,  
O famous one – I am telling you  
(something worthy of faith).  
I myself proclaim this (state of affairs)  
which is approved by gods and men,  
Whomsoever I wish, I make mighty—a  
Brahmana, a seer, a sage.

What is the *mahatmyam*, or glory, of the *Devi*, or the Divine Mother? She is conceived as the universal Sakti or energy and the whole universe is the expression of that Sakti; She brings forth this world from within Herself, protects it, and finally reabsorbs it into Herself at the time of final dissolution. That is how the *Devi Mahatmyam* deals with the concept of God as Mother. This spiritual truth is inculcated through many a myth and legend. The philosophy behind all this myth and legend is the truth that *cit sakti*, the energy of Consciousness, is the ultimate reality behind the universe and that it is Masculine-Feminine, as Brahman-Maya, as Siva-Sakti, as Impersonal-Personal. Its quiescent state is the masculine aspect and Its active state is the feminine aspect. It is the integral unity of nitya and lila, Eternity and Time.

The *Devi Mahatmyam* presents the nature of this Divine Sakti through the invocation of Brahma, the Firstborn Cosmic masculine Person from whom the universe evolves (1.75, 77-79; and 81-82):

*Tvayaitat dharyate visvam*  
*tvayaitat srjyate jagat;*  
*Tvayaitat palyate devi*  
*tvamatsyante ca sarvada*

'By You is supported this whole universe; by You is projected this whole universe; by You is this whole universe protected, O Devi, and You also always reabsorb all this into Yourself.'

*Mahavidya mahamaya  
mahamedha mahasmrtih;  
Mahamoha ca bhavati  
mahadevi mahasuri*

'You alone are the great knowledge, the great Maya or illusion; the great insight, the great memory; You also are the great delusion, the great Goddess, the great demoness.'

*Tvam sri tvam isvari tvam hrih  
tvam buddhih bodha laksana  
Lajja pustih tatha tustih  
tvam ksantih santireva ca*

'You are prosperity and welfare, You are the Supreme, You are modesty, You are the intelligence of the nature of the nature of illumination; You are bashfulness, well-being, also satisfaction; You are also forbearance and tranquillity.'

*Praktistvam ca sarvasya  
gunatraya vibhavini  
Kalaratrih maharatrih  
moharattrisca daruna*

'You are Nature (behind) all (the manifested universe), Manifester of the three gunas (*sattva, rajas and tamas*); You are the dark night (of the periodic cosmic dissolution), the great night (of final dissolution), and the terrible night of delusion.'

*Soumya soumyatarasesa  
soumyebhyastvatisundari  
Paraparanam parama  
tvameva paramesvari*

'You are pleasing, more pleasing than all the pleasing things; You are the Supreme beyond the high and the ordinary; You alone are the Supreme Queen.'

*Yacca kincit kvacit vastu  
sadasad vakhilatmike;  
Tasya sarvasya ya saktih  
sa tvam kim stuyase maya*

'Whatever or wherever a thing exists, effect or cause, O Self of the entire cosmos, and whatever power they all possess, You are all that; how can You be extolled by me (in words)?'

The Sanskrit word for nature is the feminine word *prakṛti* and *prakṛti* includes, unlike the word nature, not only the whole range of the objective world, but also the world of subject, the world of consciousness, that observes it and handles it. This *prakṛti* is of a twofold totality, *apara-prakṛti*, or ordinary nature subject to change, and *para-prakṛti*, or higher nature, which is *jivabhutam mahabaho, yayedam dharyate jagat--*'consists of intelligence, O Mighty-armed, by which this universe is sustained' (*Gita*, 7.5). And the Divine Mother is the totality of that twofold *prakṛti*; She is also called *cit sakti*, consciousness-energy; *para sakti*, Supreme energy; *adya sakti*, Primordial energy. And this world is the *lila* or play of that Divine energy. If modern astro-physics conceives of the ultimate reality, out of which the cosmos has come through a big bang, as an inert background material, the cosmology of Indian philosophy of Vedanta, conceives of that ultimate reality, out of which the universe has evolved as infinite Pure Consciousness. And if consciousness is the essential stuff of the ultimate reality, its description in terms of personality becomes perfectly valid. And so ancient Vedanta, and Sri Ramakrishna today, speak of the ultimate reality in its twofold aspect of *nirguna-saguna*, the Impersonal-Personal, *nirakara-sakara*, the Formless-Formful, as Brahman and Sakti, Siva and Kali. Sri Ramakrishna expounds this truth in these luminous words (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 271):

Govinda: 'Revered Sir, why does the Divine Mother have a black complexion?'

Master: 'You see Her as black because you are far away from Her. Go near and you will find Her devoid of all colour. The water of a lake appears black from a distance. Go near and take the water in your hand and you will see that it has no colour at all. Similarly, the sky looks blue from a distance. But look at the atmosphere near you; it has no colour. The nearer you come to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. If you move away from the Divine Mother, you will find Her blue, like the grass-flower. Is Syama male or female? ... That which is Syama is also Brahman. That which has form, again, is without form. That which has attributes, again has no attributes, Brahman is Sakti; Sakti is Brahman. They are not two. These are only two aspects, male and female, of the same Reality, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.'

Sri Ramakrishna loved to sing the following song about Kali, the Divine Mother (*ibid.*, p. 386):

Is Kali, My Mother, really black?  
The Naked One, of blackest hue,  
Lights the lotus of the Heart....

He compares the immobile Brahman to a sanke coiled up, and Sakti to the same snake in motion. That motion constitutes the evolution of the universe from within Itself, which is entirely within the jurisdiction of that Sakti aspect of the Divine Reality, the Divine Mother, which also is the inseparable power of Brahman. Here Sri Ramakrishna introduces the concept and term Maya as an alternative to Sakti; both mean the one Divine Power which has manifested this universe from within Herself. Brahman is the One; the world is the many; and that One is hidden in the many, It is hidden by the many.

This is called the Lila or play of Maya. Sankaracarya describes Maya in (*Vivekacudamani*, verse 109) as *mahadbhuta anirvacaniya-rupa*—‘a great mystery, of the nature of the indeterminate or the undefinable.’ Expounding the immense comprehensiveness of this concept of Maya in his lecture on ‘Maya and the Evolution of the Conception of God’ in London in 1896, Swami Vivekananda says (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. II, p. 112):

What you call matter, or spirit, or mind, or anything else you may like to call them, the fact remains the same: we cannot say that they are, we cannot say that they are not. We cannot say they are one, we cannot say they are many. This eternal paly of light and darkness –indiscriminate, indistinguishable, inseparable—is always there. A fact, yet at the same time not a fact; awake and at the same time asleep. This is a statement of facts, and this is what is called Maya. We are born in this Maya, we live in it, we think in it, we dream in it. We are philosophers in it, we are spiritual men in it, nay, we are devils in this Maya. Stretch your ideas as far as you can, make them higher and higher, call them infinite or by any other name you please, even these ideas are within this Maya. It cannot be otherwise, and the whole of human knowledge is a generalization of this Maya trying to know it as it appears to be. This is the work of Nama-Rupa—name and form. Everything that has from, everything that calls up an idea in your mind, is within Maya; for everything that is bound by the laws of time, space, and causation is within Maya.

This Maya, says Sri Ramakrishna, has two aspects, namely, *avidya-maya*, Maya of ignorance and *vidya-maya*, Maya of knowledge. And every human being is free to choose to be under the one or the other. What is called evil comes out of men and women when they allow themselves to be under the control of *avidya-maya*, and they consequently become stagnant at the sensate level, become a problem to themselves and to society, and miss their evolutionary march to spiritual freedom and fulfilment. *Vidya-maya*, on the other hand, helps them to understand and manifest ethical and humanistic values, to become a friend and helper of society, and advances them on that human evolutionary road to spiritual freedom.

It is the privilege of every human being to convert his or her heart into a playground of the forces of *vidya-maya*. If the world has come from the Divine Sakti, evil in the world is as much the Divine Mother's play as the good also is. The dirt on the earth, as much as its clean and beautiful things, are all only condensations of solar radiations. Mother loves all her children, but specially loves those who struggle against the evil forces in her universe, as also those who courageously face even death in that struggle; that is what is hailed as the hero of all tragic dramas.

Accordingly, the religion centred in the Divine Mother has been the nursery of several heroic souls in the Indian tradition, like Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh. That religion does not say to humanity the soothing idea that all good comes from God and all evil comes from an entity called the devil. No, the Ultimate Reality is both life and death, not life only. 'Whose shadow is both immortality and mortality.' sang the *Rg-Veda* several thousand years ago (10.121.2)

*Ya atmada balada yasya visva  
upasate prasisam yasya devah;*

*Yasyachaya amrtam yasya mrtyuh  
kasmai devaya havisa vidhema*

'Unto Him who gives us our individuality, who gives us strength, whose commands all beings, together with the gods, obey, whose shadow is immortality as well as mortality, we offer our oblation!'

The philosophy, spirituality, and ritual centred in the religion of the Divine Mother is based on this philosophy of Advaita, non-dualism. *Devi* literally means the luminous female, the goddess; but, as used in the *Devi Mahatmaya*, it means the Goddess, the one Divine Mother of all, the *Para Sakti* which is the dynamic feminine counterpart of the immobile *Parama Siva*. They are inseparable from each other, like word and its meaning, as expressed by ancient India's greatest poet and dramatist, Kalidasa, in the opening verse of his *Kumara-sambhavam*:

*Vagarthaviva samprktau vagartha pratipattaye  
Jagatah pitarau vande Parvati Paramesvarau*

'In order to achieve the comprehension of word and meaning, I salute the parents of the universe, Paravati and Parameswara, who are inseparable like word and its meaning.'

In Vedanta and the Tantra system, Brahman and Sakti, or Siva and Sakti, are used alternatively. Siva or Brahman is immobile, and the energy of movement is in the Sakti or the immanent aspect. This world of multiplicity, this world of manifestation, is thus in the realm of Sakti. When one transcends this world of duality in the deepest *nirvikalpa* state of *Samadhi*, one realizes Brahman, the impersonal aspect of the Ultimate Reality. But very few can reach that dimension. All else come under the jurisdiction of Sakti, the personal aspect of the Ultimate Reality. This is what is conveyed in the passage from Vivekananda about Maya quoted earlier, that we are all under the jurisdiction of Maya which, as the *cinmayi sakti*, the energy of infinite Consciousness, is viewed as a person, as the Divine Mother. We are all under the jurisdiction of Sakti from that point of view, whether we know it or not. The Divine Mother is, and remains, the Supreme Reality for you and for me, and for all, except when you or I merge in that deep *nirvikalpa* state beyond the jurisdiction of the Divine Mother and become one with the transcendental Impersonal Brahman. Therefore, in all aspects of life and work and inter human relations, we all live and move our being in the Divine Mother, like fish in water.

### SANKARACARYA ON THE DIVINE MOTHER

This glory of the Divine Mother is expressed by India's greatest philosopher of the eight century A.D. Sankaracarya, in some of his hymns. He was a great teacher of Advaita, non-duality. He built up the unified structure of Indian philosophy, and intellectually and spiritually influenced the whole of India during his brief life of thirty-two years. About his greatness, the late internationally known Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India, writes (*Indian Philosophy*, vol. II, p. 446):

It is impossible to read Sankara's writings, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a

very fine penetration and profound spirituality. With his acute feeling of the immeasurable world, his stirring gaze into the abysmal mysteries of spirit, his unswerving resolve to say neither more nor less than what could be proved, Sankara stands out as a heroic figure of the first rank in the somewhat motley crowd of religious thinkers of the medieval India. His philosophy stands forth complete, needing neither a before nor an after.

The comprehensiveness and breadth of Sankara's religious outlook and sympathies made the people of India to confer on him a unique title, namely, *sanmatasthapanacarya*, 'one who established six religions'! And this great philosopher was also a passionate devotee of the Divine Mother whose glory he has sung in several soul-stirring hymns. He has sung in praise of the Impersonal Atman and Brahman, as also of many other divinities of the Hindu pantheon, knowing all of them to be manifestations of the one and non-dual Ultimate Reality. One of his many famous hymns is *Soundarya Lahari*, 'Waves of Divine Splendour'. In its very opening verse, he sings the glory of Sakti, the Divine Mother:

*Sivah saktya yukto yadi bhavati kincit  
prabhavitum  
Na cedevam devo na khalu kusalah  
spanditumapi ...*

If Siva is united with Sakti, He becomes capable to project this universe; if not, He is not capable of even moving His limbs!

In the Indian presentation of Siva as Natraja, 'the Great Dancer', dancing the world of manifestation into existence, we have the integration of Siva and *Sakti* into a unity. There is another wonderful hymn of Sankaracarya where he even goes into a humorous eulogy of the feminine at the cost of the masculine, as it were. That is the *Devyaparadha ksamapana-stotram*, 'Hymn asking for forgiveness from the *Devi* for mistakes and sins.' There one finds that the last line sung in refrain in most of the verses is *kuputro jayeta, kvacidapi kumata na bhavati ...* 'There may be a *kuputra*, or bad son, but never a *kumata*, bad mother'. A son or daughter may reject a mother, but a mother will never reject her son or daughter. That is the mother-heart; that, raised to the infinite dimension, is the heart of the *Devi*. Addressing Her by one of Her many sweet and dear names as *Bhavani*, wife of *Bhava* (i.e. Siva), Sankaracarya sings: (*Devyaparadha ksamapana stotram*, verse 7)

*Cita-bhasma lepo garalamasanam  
dik-pata-dharo  
jatadhari kanthe bhujagapati-hari-  
pasupatih  
Kapali bhuteso bhajati jagadisaika-  
padavim  
Bhavani tvat panigrahana-paripati  
phalamidam*

‘One who was smearing his body with ashes taken from the cremation ground, whose food was poison, whose clothes were the four quarters of space, whose ahir was matted, who wore a snake as a garland on his neck and was the Lord of animals, who uses a skull as an eating bowl, and was the Lord of *bhutas* or ghouls—that Siva now holds the undisputed status of the Lord of the whole universe; O Bhavani, this is only because of His being married to you!’

The human heart seeks and responds to the love of the mother-heart; in verses 10 and 11 of the hymn, Sankara sings:

*Apatsu magnah smaranam tvadiyam  
karomi durge karunarnavesi  
Naitat sathatvam mama bhavayethah  
ksudhatrsarta jananim smaranti*

‘Immersed in dangers, O Durga, I turn my mind to you, O Ocean of Mercy and spouse of Siva; please don’t consider this as my deceitfulness, since children remember their mother when they suffer from hunger and thirst.’

*Jagadamba vicitramatra kim  
paripurna karunasti cenmayi;  
Aparadhaparamparavrtam  
nahi mata samupeksate sutam*

‘O Mother of the Universe, what wonder is there if You have full compassion on me who am enveloped in a succession of sins! For a mother never forsakes her son.’

When I recite some of these verses during my lectures in America or Europe, listeners are very much impressed with the absence of fear and trembling, the sense of love and fearlessness, and the sense of intimacy that is present in the approach to God as Mother. This is the expression of the *bhakti* in the heart of a *jnani* that Sankara was, one who had realized the inseparable unity of the Impersonal-Personal God.

In fact, one of the songs composed in Sanskrit on Sarada Devi the Holy Mother, by Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who helped Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta work in the U.S.A., which we often sing during the evening service in the centres of the Ramakrishna Order in India and abroad, also expresses a similar sentiment of mother-child love relation:

*Snehena badhnasi manosmadiyam  
dosan asesan sagunikarosi;  
Ahetuna no dayase sadosan  
svanke grhitva yadidam vicitram*

'With love You bind our hearts to You, and all our evils You convert into good; spontaneous is Your compassion on us who are with evils, what a wonder is this that You take us on Your lap even with all our evils!'

That explains the great hold of the Mother Goddess concept on the Indian mind. We understood that here is a person who embodies a unique value, namely, love. If God



is love, as many scriptures say, here is a unique expression of that love. This value is found in the female of all species--the urge to care for and protect the offspring, even at the cost of one's life. Some years ago, I read in one of the newspapers a report of a very touching incident that took place somewhere in Georgia in the U.S.S.R. One out of a pack of wolves chased a flock of deer in a forest; the flock ran for safety. A fawn entered into the hollow of a tree for safety and its mother covered the hollow with her belly to protect her offspring. Soon a bear appeared and killed that chasing wolf, and the fawn and its mother were saved.

In his book *Bhakti Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda expounds the truth that love knows no fear (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. III, pp. 88-89):

Love conquers naturally all fear. Think of a young mother in the street, and a dog barking at her; she is frightened, and flies into the nearest house. But suppose, the next day, she is in the street with her child and a lion springs upon the child. Where will be her position now? Of course, in the very mouth of the lion protecting the child. Love conquers all fear. Fear comes from the selfish idea of cutting one's self off from the universe. The smaller and the more selfish I make myself, the more is my fear.

If the mother-heart is a truth of life within an individual, and if its expression in life makes for fearlessness, Vedanta says, it is also a truth within the cosmos as a whole. That is the vision of God as Mother, and Vedanta therefore calls her *Jagadamba--Amba*, i.e. mother of the *jagat*, world. Not only in a mother, but also in other areas of human experience, in all parts of the world, you can see verification of the truth of the above statement that love knows no fear. Our country now has soldiers in the snowy Himalayas, living a hard life, guarding the frontiers of India. What makes them face these challenges? Love for the freedom of the nation. Anyone who loves one's nation, or an ideology, or a worthy cause, experiences less fear compared to one without that love and has contracted oneself to become a mere bundle of complaints and grievances. Love strengthens one to bear stresses and strains with less and less complaint and inner tension.

#### NEED FOR THE PULSE OF THE MOTHER-HEART IN OUR NATION TODAY

I wish we realize this truth a little more in our own country. If any one of our state employees is posted to a far-away village for work, he or she will try to avoid it, will try to bring influence to get the posting cancelled, and if such avoidance is not possible, he or she will remain apathetic and shirk all responsibilities. Many of our Union and State Government employees are of this type. And the nation suffers. What is behind such attitudes and behaviour? No genuine love for the nation or the people, but only contraction into self-love. Millions of our educated people do not think much of what happens to the common people, or to their own society. But if they have that love and humanist concern they will take all such occasions as a challenge to serve their nation and its weaker sections. That will reveal the presence of this *mother-heart* in them even in a small measure. The pulse of that mother-heart is lacking in many of our people

today. That *mother-heart*, as said earlier is not confined to the feminine only, but is the prerogative also of the masculine, as much as that of the feminine. Genetic motherhood alone is exclusively a feminine privilege, but spiritual motherhood is the privilege of all humanity.

The *Devi Mahatmyam* (V, 14-34) gives us this universal dimension of the Divine mother-heart pulsing in various forms in the hearts of all men and women. Verse thirty-three sings thus:

*Ya devi sarva bhutesu  
matr rupena samsthita  
Namastasyai namastasyai  
namastasyai namo namah*

‘That *Devi*, who exists in all beings as mother, I salute Her again and again.’

A father has the *mother-heart*; a mother has the *mother-heart*. But there is a speciality in its manifestation in women. That *mother-heart* in its universal dimension is the Divine Mother of the Universe. In spite of our annual noisy ritual worship of the Divine Mother, in our society in India, we lack the *mother-heart* in adequate measure. We have mothers, but even they lack that *mother’s heart* in great measure. We become narrow; our hearts become contracted, said Swami Vivekananda, and he referred to our practice of untouchability, suppression of our common people, for centuries together, as a result of the lack of that mother-heart. There was only the brain, but not the heart. In many of our women the *mother-heart* became limited to mere genetic motherhood, and to the small genetically-related family group, which made our women (more than our men) greater supporters of untouchability, and the suppression of the common people. They manifested many other virtues and graces, but failed to manifest along with our men the spirituality of the *mother-heart*. Every woman is privileged to become a genetic mother and a spiritual mother, and every man is privileged to become a spiritual mother.

Love and care and service outside one’s genetic relationships alone shows the presence of this spiritual *mother-heart* in its true form, ever free and ever expanding. Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘I and mine’ is *maya*; ‘Thou and Thine’ is *daya*, compassion. This *maya* is the *avidya maya*, referred to earlier, and this *daya* is the *vidya maya*. *Avidya maya* confines one’s love and care to one’s own genetically limited family. There is nothing spiritually significant in it; it is found in the animals also. But its absence will be disastrous for the species concerned. The human *mother-heart* can transcend that limitation and embrace in thought and action (according to one’s capacity) all those who need and seek love and care; and that expansion of *mother-heart* will take in also all the sub-human species. According to one’s capacity, though that capacity may be, and certainly is, limited, one’s intention can be and must be wide—even in spite of the individuals grouping themselves into organizations. Swami Vivekananda often spoke of the heart-lessness of our upper classes and wanted us to utilize our worship of the Divine Mother, and all our bhakti tradition, to inspire our people with a *mother-heart*, so that we can take in love and care and serve the millions of our country’s weaker sections. They belong to us; we belong to them. That great attitude, which inspired us for decades before political independence, has been slowly vanishing since. There is now very little of that pulsing of the *mother-heart* in our nation. We concentrated instead on the development of

the brain of the people. And, today, that brain power, without the pulse of the *mother-heart* behind, is doing immense havoc.

As remarked by Prof. William McDougall of the Harvard University in his *The Character and the Conduct of Life*, which I read over five decades ago, every youth must have ambition; but that ambition must be inspired by an ideal of character. If that ideal is not there, that ambition will make for unscrupulousness; for scruples stand in the way of ambition. Our post-independent India amply and tragically illustrates the truth of this remark.

## THE STORY OF SAVITRI AND SATYAVAN

In fact, the whole world is today suffering from this power of brain without the qualitative enrichment by the purifying and elevating power of love. Wisdom is the product of harmonizing love and knowledge. Now, we in India worship the Divine Mother as part of our national religious heritage. Yet we do not appreciate the worship in a practical way. It is but a custom and tradition with us; we do not feel the need for imbibing the spirit of it. But in the West, the very concept of God as Mother is appealing to more and more people; they find in it a much needed message for themselves.

If you ask what is the word that they in the West use most in life, in the family and in society, it is the word love. It is love, love, love. What does it indicate? Psychology will say that when people talk too much about a subject, it only shows that they have no adequate experience of the thing. If you experience a value, you do not talk, need not talk much about it. In the West, there is a real dearth of the experience of love. Bertrand Russell, whom I shall quote fully later, passionately spoke of the need for love--"Christian love", as remedy for the current evils of Western society. Pitirim Sorokin of Harvard University also spoke of the urgent need for a little *altruism* in the human heart. Many other thinkers have expressed similarly.

Addressing the students and staff of a college in Portland, Oregon State, U.S.A., in 1969, during the course of my talk I referred to the need for a little self-discipline in life. Several students stood up and said: 'Well Swamiji, we do not believe in all this. We believe only in love!' This was said with all courtesy but there was a firmness and a triumphant note in it. 'Oh keep still!', I replied smiling. 'What do you know about love?' They all looked around a little puzzled. I continued, 'A little nervous titillation and temporary attraction--a sentimental coming together; that is what many of you know about love. That is not true love. It is here today, and tomorrow it goes away. It is not that abiding love which binds two souls together. True love can withstand many tests and trials. Do you desire to know something about such abiding love? I shall tell you a story.' They said in chorus: 'Yes, do tell us the story, we want to hear it.' Then I told them the famous ancient Indian mythically presented real story of Savitri and Satyavan. You would have been surprised to see the tremendous impression it made on the minds and faces of those students! They had never heard such a type of story where even death could not break the bond of love.

Savitri, a beautiful princess, when asked by her father, King Asvapati, to freely choose her husband, fell in love with Satyavan who was a refugee youth living in a forest with his blind father, Dyumatsena, who had been defeated in a battle. Savitri's parents resorted to every means to dissuade Savitiri and the sage Narada also informed her and

her father that the young Satyavan was destined to die within a year. Yet Savitri, strong in pure love of soul to soul, whose heart had been captured by that refugee prince, married Satyavan and went with him to live the hard life of exile in the forest. She knew of Narada's prediction, but one year passed happily. She sought permission to accompany her husband deep into the forest on the fated day. On that very day Satyavan died his head on the lap of Savitri. Yama, the god and King of Death arrived to take away Satyavan's soul. Savitri followed Yama and a wonderful dialogue ensued between the two, in the course of which Yama gave Savitri some boons, including that her father-in-law would regain his eyesight and his lost kingdom. When Yama asked Savitri: 'Suppose, Savitri, your husband was a sinner and has to go to hell, what will you do?' She replied: 'In that case, Savitri goes with the one she loves.' Highly pleased, Yama replied: 'Blessed are your words, my child, I am pleased to give you any boon other than the soul of your husband.' Savitri replied: 'May the royal line of my father-in-law be not destroyed; let his kingdom descend to Satyavan's sons.' Impressed by the power of Savitri's pure love--a death-conquering love-- and her intelligent subtly- framed request, Yama returned to her husband's soul, saying: 'Love has conquered Death; woman never loved like you, and you are the proof that even I, the God of Death, am powerless against the power of the true love that abides.'

#### LOVE AS THE PANACEA FOR OUR MODERN ILLS

This story is generally presented as love conquering death and has been a favourite theme of dramas all over India for ages. Many examples are there of men and women with abiding love for their spouses long confined to bed in sickness, or of those cherishing true love not marrying again after their wives' deaths. When such soulful love disappears from life, the heart's hunger for love finds much expression in *much talk* of love. Sometimes, when I addressed women's groups in Canada, U.S.A., Holland, West Germany, or Australia, I used to raise this subject of love in married life and ask in a humorous vein: 'How do you sustain married life in your society?' Then I myself would answer: By saying a thousand "thank yous" to each other from morning till night!' The wife brings a glass of water to the husband, and he says 'thank you'; the child brings a glass of water to father or mother, evoking a 'thank you' from them. The child may even protest, saying, 'I brought a glass of water for you and you did not thank me!'

In spite of all these many 'thank-yous', and use of other endearing terms for each other, marriages do not last in many cases. Sometimes it is like supporting a crumbling house with external bamboo poles. Can a toppling house with broken cement joints between the bricks be kept intact by buttressing from outside? There must be some integrating values inside the house—within the husband and wife—to sustain a marriage. And that value is *love*, a soul to soul relation. It is the capacity to enter the heart of each other. And this comes only from the soul, from a deeper dimension than the sense organs and the intellect; and it is uniquely human; and modern humanity has neglected it—even denied it. That is what impelled psychologist Carl Jung of Zurich to write his book with the title: *Modern man in Search of a Soul*.

The agnostic thinker, Bertrand Russell, to whom I referred earlier, in the chastened state of mind after the second world war, says in his book, *Impact of Science on Society*, (Unwin Paperbacks, 1976, pp. 70-72):

In a good social system, every man (and woman) will be at once a hero, a common man, a cog, to the greatest possible extent, though if he (or she) is any one of these in an exceptional degree, his other two roles may be diminished.

...The Cog Theory, though mechanically feasible, is humanly the most devastating of the three. A cog, we said, should be *useful*. Yes, but useful for what? You cannot say useful for providing initiative, since the cog-mentality is antithetic to the hero mentality. If you say useful for the happiness of the common man, you subordinate the machine to its effects in human feelings, which is to abandon the cog theory. You can only justify the cog theory by worship of the machine. You must make the machine an end in itself, not a means to what it produces. Human beings then become like slaves of the lamp of the Arabian Nights. It no longer matters what the machine produces, though, on the whole, bombs will be preferred to food, because they require more elaborate mechanisms for their production. In time, men will come to pray to the machine: ‘Almighty and most merciful Machine, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost screws; we have put in those nuts which we ought not to have put in, and we have left out those nuts which we ought to have put in, and there is no cogginess in us’—and so on.

This really won’t do. The idolatry of the machine is an abomination. The machine as an object of adoration is the modern form of Satan, and its worship is the modern diabolism.

... Whatever else may be mechanical, values are not, and this is something which no political philosopher must forget.

Again, (*ibid.*, pp. 104-05):

There are certain things that our age needs, and certain things that it should avoid. It needs compassion and a wish that mankind should be happy. ... The things that it must avoid, and that have brought it to the brink of catastrophe, are cruelty, envy, greed, competitiveness, search for irrational subjective certainty, and what the Freudians call the death-wish.

The root of the matter is a very simple and old-fashioned thing, a thing so simple that I am almost ashamed to mention it, for fear of the derisive smile with which the wise cynics will greet my words. The thing I mean—please forgive me for mentioning it—is love, Christian love, or compassion. If you feel this, you have a motive for existence, a guide in action, a reason for courage, an imperative necessity for intellectual honesty.

A little love in the heart of human beings can save this otherwise rich modern civilization. Therefore, in the West today, there is tremendous interest in the concept of God as Mother. Mother represents love. Freud and his psychology had one very bad effect on Western society; it made some women ashamed of their femininity. That sad chapter is now giving place to a sense of feminine self-respect and even self-assertion. A balanced attitude is slowly taking shape. In the meantime, the Freudian impact made more and more mothers lose their mother-heart, children getting deprived of mother-love, with the resulting social distortions. Children, deprived of love, lost also their love for their parents.

That Freudian invasion, along with a ruthless materialism bereft of some of the sterling virtues of its Western expression, are coming to our country also, making many of our so-called educated people into money-making machines bereft of love in the heart, and often leading to wife-burning on the part of the husband, and utter unconcern for the weaker sections of society by both. We can see in it the setting in, in our people, of a condition of soullessness, and the family distortions and social evils flowing from it. Our people also will experience, after advancing a little more on this downward road, a desire to seek their lost soul, and fruitful methods by which to experience true love, and give the same to others.

Vedanta will then become a living and practical philosophy to us and beckon our people to a truer and fuller life, as it is happening now in the West. We shall then appreciate and learn from the great examples of mother-love such as Sarada Devi's, the Holy Mother's (1853-1920)-- the spouse of Sri Ramakrishna. The verses about the *Devi* quoted above are not mere mythology. An event of great significance occurred in the life of Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna.

One of the many aspects of the Divine Mother is Her aspect as the embodiment of all Beauty; She is called *sodasi*, the youthful virgin or Lalita, the Beautiful or *Tripura-sundari*, the condensed beauty of all the three worlds. As the consummation of his twelve-year-long spiritual experiments and the experiences at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple near Calcutta, Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Goddess *sodasi* on a dark new-moon night of May 1872, with all the prescribed rituals of the Divine Mother's worship. But one thing was unusual, and remarkable; he worshipped the Divine Mother in the person of his wedded wife, Sarada Devi. And at the close of the worship, he offered the fruits of all his spiritual experiments and experiences, including his long-used rosary, at the feet of Sarada Devi; and both entered into deep Samadhi till a very late hour of the night. This act of husband worshipping his wedded wife as divine is unprecedented, even in India's long and rich religious history. I was deeply drawn to the Holy Mother in 1924 when I was hardly fifteen. I had a loving mother who gave birth to me, but I found a thousand such mothers in the Holy Mother. And during my several lecture tours round the world these forty years, I could witness increasing numbers of Western women and men being drawn to the Holy Mother for the holy and pure *mother-heart* she embodies, a mother-heart which excluded no one, but encompassed in its love Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and others--sinners and drunkards, and the people of East and West. No dogmas or creeds stood in its way. Many serious-minded people in the West are consciously in search of this value called love, and they turn back again to Christianity, not for its creeds and dogmas, but in search of this precious value of love in Jesus Christ and the saints.

So I present these central themes of pure religion before the audiences I address in the West. I tell them: You cannot build a happy married life by the mere external support of many 'thank you's'. When real love is present the need for 'thank you' becomes reduced to the minimum. 'Thank you' are mere words; there is need for feeling behind them. The audience very much appreciate these ideas and express the longing to make changes in that direction..And there was an interesting sequel to this discussion in one of the meetings. At the end of the week-long Vedanta retreat in Oosterbeek, in Holland, there was a farewell session. One of the audience got up to speak, and in hesitation, said: 'We are afraid to say "thank you" to you, Swami, for this week-long intellectual and spiritual service,' creating loud laughter among the audience.

## PLACE OF SENTIMENTS IN HUMAN LIFE

This concept of God as Mother is attracting the minds of the people. Why God as Father alone, why not God as Mother? For us in India it is natural. While in the West and in Islamic countries, they call their country fatherland, we call our country mother land--*matrbhumi*. The *Ramayana* expresses in one place the idea: *Janani janmabhūmisca swargadapi gariyasi*—'Mother and motherland are superior even to heaven.' What a beautiful concept! In the Prophet Mohammad's teaching also, in the *Qur'an*, there is this sentiment expressed, that heaven lies at the feet of your mother'. The capacity for love is also called today the capacity for human communication, heart communicating to heart. I heard the use of this term for the first time used in that sense, from a girl student in America in 1971.

I was sitting in a hall of the Princeton University. An American lady came up to me and said that her daughter wanted to give up her studies and go to India; would I give proper advice to the girl to finish her university studies and then only go to India? I agreed, and the girl came and sat near me. I asked her: 'Why don't you finish the graduation and then go to India?' She replied with much feeling: 'It does not help me to communicate with people.' 'You are right,' I said. Present-day education makes one a prisoner of one's individuality, makes one a billiard ball (in the words of Bertrand Russell) which cannot enter into, and communicate, but only collide with another billiard ball. When there is stress on intellect only but not on feeling also, man becomes reduced to a machine. Father, mother, daughter, son—these relationships are to be based not on logic and utility alone, but also on emotions and sentiments. When these sentiments are taken away, inter-human relations become reduced to nuts and bolts of a machine, as remarked by Bertrand Russell.

I was one day sitting in our office of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta; a number of tourists from France entered the office in an exasperated mood. I received them and they all sat down. The conversation started when they asked: 'What is all this worship of cows going on in India, when its human beings are dying of hunger and malnutrition? We consider this illogical.' I told them: 'I shall tell you about it; please patiently listen. There is meaning in it. India was a beef-eating country, long long ago. In the course of several centuries, a certain sentiment began to be built around the cow. Our babies were first taking mother's milk, followed later by cow's milk; slowly that mother-sentiment became transferred to the cow which, along with calves was part and parcel of the household. After centuries of such experience, the nation developed a mother-sentiment with respect to the cow. It was not dictated by logic alone--such as the importance of cattle for agriculture, but primarily by sentiment. Human life is enriched by a number of such sentiments. If a family is starving, all the children themselves will object if it is suggested that they can be fed by killing a cow or a calf. Is it not a sign of high culture?

Certainly, logical it is not, utilitarian it is not. But if logic and utility alone guide human life, and all sentiment is set aside, serious consequences will follow. Here is one's father and mother. They have become old; they have become economically a burden. Logically speaking, the best thing is to kill them off; utility dictates it. But no one will do it yet, though some will dump them off to old age homes. There is still a little sentiment left in the human heart. Similarly, the Hindus have a sentiment for this one animal, the

cow. It has been feeding us as babies, like our mother, for a few thousand years, and we have slowly transferred upon it our sentiment associated with our mother.' Hearing all this, the tourists jointly said: 'Now we understand and appreciate this Hindu custom. Nobody ever presented it this way to us. Thank you!' And they took leave, satisfied.

## SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION OF THE ULTIMATE REALITY

Indian philosophy teaches humanity not to contract, but to expand the mother-sentiment. The moment you visualize God as Mother, that mother-sentiment goes on percolating into various aspects of human life. It is that expansion of love that is capable of uniting human beings to human beings, and human beings to nature. That is the holistic concept and approach that is appealing to people all over the world more and more. For any human being, man is not an enemy to conquer and exploit; neither is nature an enemy to conquer and exploit. These are the holistic attitudes fostered by feminine nature, different from the separatist attitudes fostered by masculine nature, as remarked by Charlene Spretnak in her book *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*, I referred to in the beginning of my lecture. One needs, and uses, one's mother for one's own development, but one does not exploit her. So also is prakrti, nature, our mother, to be used wisely for our development, but not to be exploited. The spiritual orientation of this idea is the vision of God as Mother. That *para prakrti, para sakti, adya sakti*, is the infinite Mother who nourishes us all through Her nature's bounty. There is a truth to which India has given a spiritual orientation. Whereas modern Western cosmology calls and conceives of the ultimate reality as merely a physical entity—a background material, ancient Indian Vedanta calls it the Impersonal-Personal Brahman, of the nature of Pure Consciousness. Says the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.1):

*Brahmavid apnoti param; tadesabhyukta,  
Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma*

'The knower of Brahman attains the Supreme. That truth is expressed thus: "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity".'

Where do you realize this truth? 'In your own Self', says the Upanishad, *yo veda nihitam guhayam parame vyoman*—'who realizes It hidden in the supreme cavity of one's heart.'

Because we, and the whole universe, have been projected from that Brahman, have been ensouled by It, and will be absorbed into It eventually, says the same Upanishad (3.1):

*Yato va imani bhutani jayante;  
yena jatani jivanti  
Yat prayanti abhisamvisanti  
tat vijjnasasva, tat brahmeti*

'From whom all these manifestations have come, in whom they exist after manifestation, and unto whom they return and enter into, know That. That is Brahman.'

This is how the Ultimate Reality is presented in Vedanta. It interpenetrates everything in the universe. Being of the nature of pure consciousness, that reality is not



only the *ultimate* Reality, but is also the *intimate* Reality, and is ever present at the depth of our own consciousness; and nature has given us the organic capacity to realize it as well.

The British astro-physicist, Fred Hoyle, had written a book on modern cosmology which I read many years ago, and in which he expressed completely materialistic views about the nature of the universe and its background material; but a few years ago, he wrote another book on the subject, *The Intelligent Universe* in which he reversed his earlier materialistic world-view. Last year he had visited Hyderabad and I had occasion to hear him and talk to him. He wrote in *The Intelligent Universe* (First American Edition, 1984, p. 189):

The picture of the origin of the universe, and of the formation of the galaxies and stars as it has been unfolded in astronomy, is curiously indefinite, like a landscape seen vaguely in a fog. This indefinite unsatisfactory state of affairs contrasts with other parts of astronomy where the picture is bright and clear. A component has evidently been missing from cosmological studies. The origin of the universe, like the solution of the Rubic Cube, requires an intelligence.

His concept of intelligence in the universe is far away from the all-encompassing Brahman of Vedanta; but it is the first step, the right step, in that direction. The steps are halting, mainly because of the fear of modern science being contaminated by the concept of the supernatural, and of the extra cosmic God, upheld by all Western religions. Indian thought does not believe in the supernatural, since its concept of nature, as I have mentioned before, is wide enough to include matter and intelligence, and science, and religion without any mutual conflict. This is revealed a little in another later passage of Fred Hoyle's book, (*ibid.*, p. 236):

So, starting from astronomy and biology, with a little physics, we have arrived at religion. What happens if the situation is inverted, and we look at science from the religious point of view? How do the two approaches match up? The answer to this question turns on the form of theology. In contemporary Western teachings, the point of contact are few, essentially because 'God' is placed outside the universe and in control of it. By contrast, in many other religions past and present, deities lie very much within the universe. This is the case with god Brahma in modern Hinduism, for example, and it was also true of the gods of the Nordic peoples and Greeks many centuries ago.

Fred Hoyle's knowledge about Hinduism is still elementary; this is revealed from his remark that the 'Brahma' concept is of modern Hinduism, whereas that concept has been well developed in the two aspects of its masculine Brahma, the projector of the universe from Himself, and the neuter Brahman, the Impersonal Absolute behind the Personal Brahma, a few thousand years ago.

This comprehensiveness of the Vedantic truth of Brahman as the source of the universe has been pointed out by Professor Fritjof Capra in his *Tao of Physics* (pp. 130-131):

The most important characteristic of the Eastern Worldview—one could almost say the essence of it—is the awareness of the unity and mutual inter-relation of all things and events. ... The Eastern traditions constantly refer to this ultimate, indissoluble reality which manifests itself in all things, and of which all things are parts. It is called *Brahman* in Hinduism, *Dharmakaya* in *Buddhism*, *Tao* in *Taoism*....

## CONCLUSION

Vedanta, as we have seen, calls Intelligence *cit sakti*. *Cit* is a beautiful word in Sanskrit, meaning consciousness. *Cinmaya jagat* will be the exact Sanskrit rendering of the title of Fred Hoyle's book, *The Intelligent Universe*. Vedanta also speaks of the universe as the play, *lila*, of the Divine Mother. Behind the universe is that mother-heart, whose manifestation, along with all its various good and evil elements, non-violence and violence, can be seen in the cosmos, in the animals, as much as in human beings; and the human being has the power to transcend these limitations. The *Devi Mahatmyam*, therefore sings (11:6):

*Vidyah samastah tava devi bhedah  
Striyah samastah sakala jagatsu*

'O Devi, all types of knowledge are Thine own diverse forms; all women also in the world are Thy diverse manifestations.'

We have the concept of the Divine Mother as Lakshmi, embodiment of all material welfare, and as Sarasvati, the serene Goddess of vidya, all knowledge--secular as well as sacred. We do not have the big gulf between secular and sacred, as in the West. It is one continuous pursuit of *vidya*--*vidya* secular and *vidya* higher; both are spiritual and are manifestations of the Divine Mother. Sarasvati is described in a famous Sanskrit hymn as *nihsesajadyapaha*--'one who destroys completely all *jadya*, i.e. inertness or laziness or dullness.'

And so, these are the blessings to humanity from the Divine Mother, in the forms of Sarasvati and Lakshmi--i.e. knowledge scientific and spiritual, and the fruits of knowledge, as material prosperity and social welfare. She is therefore described as *bhukti mukti pradayini*--'Giver of worldly prosperity and spiritual freedom'. And that constitutes the totality of human cravings and satisfactions; and that also proclaims the *mahatmya*, glory, of the *Devi*, the Divine Mother.