

INTRODUCTION

The most important feature of any culture is its capacity to make man see his real place in a world of transience. *Human* values have no place in the scheme of reality and, even if they have, they are rushed out of existence as time rolls on. In the long history of man, man has worshipped at several altars, and has rent his soul seeking to see just one step beyond, that step that shall make him see light where he saw darkness, that step that shall make beautiful what was ugly, that step which will convert his misery into unexampled joy. Trees, stones, disembodied ghosts, and severe masters, teachers and all have been worshipped all the world over and all the time, for the sake of crossing over the misery of life. There was perceived or 'somehow' felt an inherent superiority in these. The original Vision of the primitive grant to all things a living glow, a numinous or pseudonuminous halo. This has been described rebukingly by some as animistic. But behind all these expressions of worship, however irrational, there was the enveloping consciousness. Gradually man ascending in his culture, seeking to discover the immortal in the mortal, to hold on to that immortal behind the changing flux, has begun to see not an infinity of souls or spiritual entities superior to the human, which tenant the trees and stones, brooks and rivers, awful mountain tops and deep yawning gulfs and valleys, but the One Infinite Being who indeed directs all these souls, if indeed these souls are many, and is Himself. The importance of this growth should not be underestimated. But this growth had not been achieved amidst cultured people without a lot of struggle. In this struggle, reason became the critic: and feeling, the defender of the earlier views about these powers of stones and trees, and others. Reason struggled to discover the exact nature and reality of these forces, for if people did not inspect and reflect they could not know how to approach these gnomes and spirits behind trees and stones and animals and other powerful creatures. The approach to these entities cannot be the sole privilege of the shamans and chanters and magicians. Reason dictates universality. And supposing the shamans have this unique power to converse with these powers, it should be possible for all persons by adopting the same approach to converse with these forces. If the same approach does not yield the result, the approach being valid, the object of adoration should be false. This situation arose. Reason, then, sought other ways of approach. It began a critical investigation into the sources of our knowledge, the process of our knowing and the constitution of the universe with the help of the assured sources of knowledge. Perception is the one verity, the other is the inference based on this. The history of philosophic thought all the world over has its beginnings in the strict limitation of the source of knowledge to perception at first, as can be seen in all materialistic schools, whether Hindu or Greek. The Cārvakā- theory in India was the materialistic counterpart of the Lucretian school in the West. Later, using as they did the apparatus of reason in inference, reason strictly limited to the observances of

uniformities of nature and causal sequence was accepted in addition to the perceptual self-evidence. Thus came into existence the important heretical schools of Buddhism and which had their opposite number in Pragmatism and Empiricism. The recurrence of these same schools in later periods of history, here and elsewhere, only means that the History of Religious Philosophy presented similar or modified objects of worship, and Reason harped back to the original reasons which met the earlier occasions. For *not until the fundamental scepticism of faith is removed and a foundational experience of the Divine, amenable to reason or rather satisfying it in its deepest and fundamental aspect as the most dependable and demonstrable Unity of the Universe, is granted*, will Reason cease to resurrect the ancient reasons against the source of truth which is known as the Divine Revelation, to which all must be inheritors. Such an assurance could not be given by the ordinary materialist, and no philosopher could give it, because he was in duty bound to resist the lure of the sublime and the holy, and not merely resist it, but also criticise it for its shortcoming in respect of universality and harmony and purpose.

Who then are the people to whom we owe the constant reformulations of our Religious Object? We should turn to the Seers, Ṛṣis, ĀḶvārs, Siddhas, who have faced these materialistic and philosophic problems from the standpoint of the Sublime Ecstasy of their discovery of the Real Ultimate. That is why the recurrent refrain of the ancient seers is reiterated in modern language in every age; suitable to each, there have come into existence or 'descended' as if from the haven of bliss, souls, pure and luminous to make men aware of and respond to the eternal truth. **If history does not show the continuity of civilisations, as it does not, if men have not survived the catastrophes of their environments, there has atleast been the one immortal flame, the Divine, descending into the scheme of things, in some form or other, to give it back its call to harmony and vitality to pursue.**

In the early period of this country there had been the Ṛg Vedic seers; in the middle period, we have had great seers of the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa and the Purāṇās, and just before the beginning of the great philosophical schools under the inspiration of Śaṅkara and Rāmāṇuja (or rather his grand teacher Nāthamuni), we had the ĀḶvārs and Śaiva nayanmārs. This development was exclusively southern, in the quiet country on the banks of the rivers of Tāmraparni and Kāvēri and sea-coast towns like Māmallāpuraṃ (modern Mahābalipuram). The language of these saints was Tamil, but so replete is it with the lore of the Bhāgavata and Pāñcarātra and Vedic truths, that it may well be, as it has been traditionally held to be, renderings suited to that age, of the imperative truths of Divine Life. The religious consciousness had devised several strata of mythology, that true medium of instructions into sacred truths as Plato held it, such as the Vedic (revelational) Brāhmaṇic (ritual) Upanisadic (Philosophic), Paurāṇic (historical) and Itihāsic (anecdotal and semi-historical). The ĀḶvārs made immense use of these in an integral manner, that is, by synthesising these versions whenever possible so as to yield unitary instruction or truth. There are

many points, of course left untouched. We should understand their mission, and that was to infuse the Divine Consciousness in men, low and high, vain and humble, seeker and sinner. We may not ask for an *integral philosophy* of mystic or religious consciousness from their writings. But a philosophic endeavour in this regard is necessary. Therefore this attempt