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Swami Vivekananda -The Rationalist

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda, the voice of Sree Ramakrishna (prophet of the nuclear age), established religion & spirituality on the basis of rationality, with a scientific bent of mind. His God-concept being 'the Universe objectified', pointed out the irrational approach of agnostics in vain intellectual pursuits (limited to sense world); as also of the dogmas of some illumined souls, who 'stumbled upon truths' attaining super sensuous state, but without realizing the science of transcending the rationale of their realization (God-perception).

He gave the rationale of transcending reason in God-realisation, and proclaims religion to be the science of transcending the super-conscious state, beyond reason; but asserts reason to be the guide to get there. Vivekananda, the illumined soul, assures of attainment of such realization for those having intense yearning for it. But perfecting the mind with chastity in thought, word and deed is a sine qua non, for such realization.

He said answer to our prayers come from within our Self (Brahma- an infinite conduit of power/divinity). Worship of different forms and symbols (Idolatry) is the reflection of our own self (Brahma), expressing our most extraordinary feeling of LOVE- which directed towards eternity, attains the highest realization of spirituality, termed Bhakti-Yoga.

Key words: *Agnostic, Super conscious mind, Vedanta, Illumined soul, Superstition, Bhakti-Yoga, Ramakrishna, Reason, God.*

Introduction: Kantian rationality, well known as the famous 'Categorical Imperative', suggesting the practical reason to build up the foundation of morality and ethics¹, cannot be considered to be the right approach to understand 'the rationality' as advocated by Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji). It is because morality and ethics were rather ingrained as the innate DNA in Swamiji's character, right from his early childhood; no instrument of rationality or, recourse to reasoning was needed to build up his moral character. Even as a small child he accepted the self imposed punishment for talking in the class whilst his unsuspecting teacher asked him not to, considering him to be innocent². In later years, his mentor and Guru, Sri Ramakrishna (Thakur) used to say about him to be as pure as Fire, whereupon all impurity (apparent for others), would at once burn out and get vanquished³.

Contrary to Kantian rationality, Hume however, dismissed the role of rationality to build up the foundation of morality. He rather opined, “reason, being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination ... of attaining happiness or avoiding misery”⁴. On the other side, George Bernard Shaw in his famous drama St. Joan, introduces a concept of ‘creative rationality’ which he theorizes to enable its moulding to justify natural impulse (perhaps, as a satire, belittling the supremacy of rationality; in the same way as he taunted so called British aristocracy in his drama- The Pygmalion). The peasant girl Joan Arc of France led the French army to victory, following the command of the ‘Voice’ of God, gives valid reason at every step of her strategy in leading the army, as presented in Shaw’s drama of St. Joan. But when the captain under command gave credit to her logic of the strategy for the victory, expressing doubt over her so called ‘Voice’, she bluntly replies, “But my Voice comes first, because you won’t believe in my Voice, so I create my reasoning afterwards”⁵.

But the approach towards rationality in case of Swamiji does not conform to any of the above thinkers. His rationality was intended in search of Truth, devoid of all emotive frills. In fact, philosopher mathematician Bertrand Russell also advocates adoption of rationality in search of truth and nothing but the truth⁶. His predecessor Robert Ingersoll also had the same philosophy in life, who later on became a friend of Swamiji with mutual regard for each other⁷. But the paradox is that, while both these great free-thinker intellectuals ended up as agnostics, for their firm steadfastness over rationally; Swamiji’s citadel of religion and spirituality, which he built up over the prop of Vedantic philosophy, could be accessed only through the gateway of rationality. Bertrand Russell opined that—“Religion is something left over from the infancy of our intelligence; it will fade away as we adopt reason and science as our guideline”⁸. Russell was dismissive of God concept taught in Christian religion and spoke rather confidently, “I cannot prove that either the Christian God or the Homeric gods do not exist, but I do not think that their existence is an alternative that is sufficiently probable to be worth serious consideration”⁹. Whereas Swamiji delved much deeper on the topic of spirituality and religion. His approach was, “All sages of all countries .. who had no motive but to do good to the world declare that they have found some truth higher than what the senses can bring to us, and they invite verification. They ask us to practise honestly, and then if we do not find this higher truth, we will have a right to say there is no truth in their claims; but before we have done that we are *not rational* in denying the truth of their assertion”¹⁰. As a staunch rationalist he added further, “If there is a God, we must see Him, if there is a soul we must perceive It; otherwise it is better not to believe. It is better to be an outspoken atheist than a hypocrite”¹¹.

Rationality of Swamiji in search of truth: In fact from his early childhood Swamiji did not to accept anything to be true, unless filtered through the sieve of reason. The kid Swamiji, then known as Narendranath, loved to swing with his head upside down, clamping his leg atop the tall branches of a *champa* tree. The grand old man of the house was alarmed that if the tender branches give way they may hurt him badly and thus in order to scare him off asked him to come down and never to climb it up again. On little

Narendranath's questioning of 'Why', the grand old man told the story of a naughty demon residing there, who would then break his neck. But once the old man left, Narendranath again started climbing up to perform his favourite acrobatic feat. His other friends were already scared by the story of the naughty demon and tried to dissuade him. Narendranath laughingly said, 'How fool you all are that you accept it to be true ! Had it been so, the demon-ghost would have broken my neck by now''¹².

Narendranath's intense desire in search of real truth brought him to his mentor and Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, at Dakshineswar. He was a God-intoxicated saint, and was the only person who could confidently claim and assure Narendranath, that he has not only seen God but can also make Narendranath feel the presence of God with the right devotion¹³. Narendranath accepted Him as GURU, and had the highest regard for Him, designating him as embodied love¹⁴. (The attribute of God, as per Hindu scriptures, is said to be: Love embodied; the Sanskrit version of which is: *sa isha premaswarupah*).

Yet, despite such high regards and love for his guru, young and aspirant Narendranath questioned his Master's visions and super conscious experiences with the eye of a sceptic-not as the shallow sceptic who disbelieves because he does not understand, but one who insists the truth be known with his whole being before accepting it as valid. Narendranath could never abrogate his reason for the comfort in an easy faith, and continued with his efforts in verifying the super-conscious experiences of his Master. Thus for more than four years he fought with his Master, torn between the obvious genuineness of Sri Ramakrishna's sainthood and his own refusal to accept anything that his own experience did not conform''¹⁵. His guru- Sri Ramakrishna, who declared Narendranath himself to be a saint (Rishi) as well, encouraged him in these cross-check tests that his favourite disciple carried out to establish the truth. Narendranath of course, kept on visiting his Master's abode at Dakshineswar, quite frequently drawn by his deep sense of love for his guru. But Narendranath's steadfastness to establish the bare truth was too deep to dissuade him from cross-checking his Master's revelation as a prophet, even at his Master's deathbed, despite his deep love and regards for his Guru¹⁶.

It may be relevant to add that, at that time most of the then spiritual leaders and intelligentsia considered Sri Ramakrishna to be the reincarnation of God and a prophet. But Narendranath—in his early 20's used to say, "Let everybody say so but I will not accept it, till I experience it myself. I want the truth and bare truth."''¹⁷. Then in later years, , when he realised himself, Narendranath –then known as Swami Vivekananda wrote to his fellow monk Swami Sivananda in 1894 from USA, "My dear brother, that Sri Ramakrishna was God incarnate; I have not the least doubt;He was the living commentary of the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence of India....Ramakrishna Paramhansa is the latest and most perfect - the concentrated embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity and the desire to serve mankind..... My supreme good fortune is that I am his servant life after life''¹⁸.

Realisation of Truth with Rational Approach: In fact, such realization and self-experience, is all the more important for perceiving the spiritual truth. Attainment of spirituality means, only being and becoming, not of gathering dry knowledge. It is a fact, that we may keep talking and reason out gathering all knowledge throughout our lives, but we shall not understand a word of truth, until we experience it ourselves. Swamiji the *spiritual leader* hence said, “Religion is life not thought”¹⁹.

At the same time, Swamiji, *the rationalist* also proclaimed, “Stick to your reason until you reach something higher; and you know it to be higher, because it will not jar reason. The stage beyond consciousness is *inspiration* (Samadhi); but never mistake hysterical trances for the real thing.All religion is going beyond reason, but reason is the only guide to get there”²⁰. Stressing upon rationality at the helm, Swamiji said in his discourses of Bhakti-Yoga, “How are we to distinguish between inspiration and deception? In the first place, inspiration must not contradict reason. The old man does not contradict the child; he is the development of the child. What we call inspiration is the development of reason.”²¹. He explains with a simile of what is meant by inspiration, or reaching supernatural transcending the reason and adds, “Instinct is like ice, reason is the water, and inspiration is the subtlest form, or vapour. Only one follows the other”²⁰. Like an authority and an illumined soul who experienced the super natural, Swamiji continues with his assertion, “Faith is not belief, it is the grasp of the Ultimate, an illumination. First hear, then reason and find out all that reason can give about the *Atman* (God concept of Vedanta, which proclaims ‘I am that’; Sanskrit version of which is: *Aham Brahma Asmi*); let the flood of reason flow over It, then take what remains..... Finally in perfect rest and peace meditate upon It, concentrate your mind upon It, *make yourself one* with It.”²⁰

In fact, there remain a huge difference in the quality itself, between ‘the Faith earned’ illuminating our souls, as Swamiji spelt out; and the ‘Belief entertained’ over which we are normally allured from the influence of a superior power. That is why Swamiji, the staunch rationalist cautioned, “Whosoever, ... asks anyone to believe blindly, or drags people behind him by the controlling power of his superior will, does an injury to humanity, though he may not intend it.avoid everyone, however great and good he may be, who asks you to believe blindly”²². Swamiji’s earnestness of his advice, of not to believe anything blindly for efforts in search of truth, can best be understood from the following two illustrations shown on his approach to impart religious discourses. The first example cited below was on Gita lessons that he imparted in 1897 to the religious aspirants in Calcutta, and the second example was on a discourse given to an American audience at New York, in Nov.1899. They are elucidated as below.

It was sometimes in 1897. Swamiji was taking class on Gita, to the religious aspirants of Alambazar Math in Calcutta. Since time of yore, this Hindu scripture Sreemad-Bhagbat-Gita, one of the most if not the most important sacred scripture of Hinduism, is believed to be the part of the epic Mahabharat; where the then prophet ‘Sree Krishna’ imparted the highest spiritual thoughts to Arjuna, in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. But Swamiji, like a very stern critic, started raising questions - as to the truth on the historical existence of ‘Sree

Krishna', even of the war at Kuruksetra (whether it was an allegory indicating constant fight between good and evil thoughts of our mind), and even challenging the probability of noting down all the long 18 chapters of Gita, in the heart of a battle field. Of course, these are the pertinent questions raised of a doubting mind, over which there remain much controversy between historians and scholars. Swamiji did not decry their doubts raised. Because being a seeker of truth, it was the truth which was of supreme importance to him, and hence encourages for the truth to come out²³.

In the end he concludes with a very important note: "One thing should be especially remembered here, that there is no connection between these historical researches and our real aim, which is the knowledge that leads to the acquirement of *Dharma* (as imparted in *Gita*). Even if the historicity of the whole thing is proved to be absolutely false today, it will not in the least be of any loss to us"²³. Swamiji then questions himself, "Then what is the use of so much historical research....?" He then answers himself, "...our duty should be to convince ourselves to the truth, to believe in truth only"²³. Truth is God and it never comes in the way of spiritual thoughts imparted, by whomsoever and wherever it is imparted. The high spiritual thoughts (besides its wider acceptability guiding the way of life) and the contents of Gita however, remain unaffected whatsoever these historical research may yield.

The other example being cited was of Swamiji's discourse at New York, in Nov. 1899. At that time Swamiji used to give periodic religious discourses to the audience of New York. On one such day, when his audience were listening to him engrossed with rapt attention, Swamiji stopped abruptly and left. On being asked later, for such an act of leaving them with his talks unfinished - Swamiji replied that he felt, his eloquence had made their minds too malleable like a lump of clay and the audience was ready to accept whatever Swamiji said. Swamiji thought it would be wrong to overpower their individual alertness of mind and rationality, and did not want them to accept his message blindly. He did not want them to be thus enlightened (from his talks), losing their individual judgmental capability²⁴.

Swamiji's introspecting mind could at once recognize the superficiality of some of the so-called rational minds breeding irrational superstition, from their total disregard to the higher truths, preached by the illumined souls, terming it unscientific. On the other side, Swamiji could also see to the limitations of certain illumined souls, who could not come out from the shell of their dogmas and bigotry that remained ingrained in them, despite their otherwise enlightened approach in realizing higher truths. In addition to the above, he also made a paradigm shift in the very concept of rationality, to transcend reason with the tools of reason, when needed for realization of higher truth. All these three approaches propounded by the rational mind of Swamiji, in search of truth, have been elucidated below.

Superstitions of the rational minds: Swamiji rightly said, "There was an ancient superstition that because Moses gave a 'revelation of the will of God', therefore everything Moses wrote must be true. There is a modern superstition that because there are mistakes in the writings of Moses (on creation etc), therefore nothing Moses wrote is true. When Moses wrote of the tables of law he was inspired. When he told of the creation what he said was

merely the speculations of Moses, the Jew’’²⁵. Swamiji also observed, “Surface Scientists unable to explain the various extraordinary mental phenomenon strive to ignore their very existence’’²⁶. It may be added here that not only surface scientists deny the extraordinary mental phenomenon, but great extraordinary scientists deny even scientific truths, since that does not conform to their respective personal bias, though that amounts to irrationality. Example may be cited of Einstein the great Physicist. Einstein (having firm faith on the philosophy of Spinoza) could not accept Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, for his understanding of Nature that ‘God (meaning Nature) does not play dice’. At that, Niel Bohr (Copenhagen School of Physics) retorted back, “Stop telling God what He can do’’, and showed from Einstein’s own equation, the uncertainty factor ingrained in quantum mechanical concept to explain the micro-world. ’’^{27,28}.

The talk that Swamiji had with the famous American orator Robert Ingersoll, may be quite significant in understanding the fallacy in the logic on the perception of free-thinker agnostic, with that of the lofty idea of all pervading God- concept of the Vedantic Swamiji, who asks to ‘put God behind everything- man, animal, food, work -and to make this a habit’²⁹. Swamiji narrates their dialogue as: “Ingersoll once said to me, ‘I believe in making the most out of this world, in squeezing the orange dry, because this world is all we are sure of’²⁹. Swamiji says to have replied, “I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do, and I get more out of it. I know I (*Atman*) cannot die, so I am not in a hurry; I know there is no fear, so I enjoy squeezing. I have no duty (having renounced the world being a *monk*), no bondage of wife and children and property; I can love all men and women. Everyone is God to me. Think of the joy of *loving man as God!* Squeeze your orange this way and get ten thousand fold more out of it. Get every single drop’’²⁹.

We do not know whether Ingersoll then changed his perception of the world and Truth, from such figurative dialogues with Swamiji, or not. But we can all see the futility of the fallacious logic of agnostics and the lofty God-concept of Vedantic Swamiji, which is beyond sense perceptions. All the so called knowledge that we gather (including scientific data, though not on scientific truth), is only through our five sense perceptions, and is just *mediated knowledge*, or indirect knowledge, gathered through our five sense organs. But the knowledge earned beyond the sense perception is super consciousness and is the *immediate knowledge* (direct knowledge) which thousands of seers and inspired souls, in all countries at different times had not only perceived but also told us the ways and means of achieving it. The agnostics discard them without even trying suggested methods of achieving it. Perhaps Mr H. G. Wood is right when he writes “Russell did not know what Christianity is” in response to Russell’s proud announcement that, “I am not a Christian’’³⁰. May be, Russell, the ardent seeker of truth and rationalist would have changed his view, if he had known Swamiji’s concept of God, from what he said, “This Universe is God objectified’’³¹(Sanskrit version of which is- ‘*Sarbam Idam Khalidam Brahma*’); everything that we come across in the universe is God, there is nothing else other than God.

In fact, Swamiji’s novel approach to God concept and the assurance given on the scope of achieving divinity for all, does not leave any scope to refute it; even to a sceptic mind.

He proclaims in his teachings of Raj-Yoga, “In the study of Raj-Yoga, no faith or belief is necessary. Believe nothing until you find it yourself; that is what it teaches us. Truth requires no prop to make it stand.....Just as you take up any other science, exactly in the same way you take up this science (of Raj-Yoga) for study”³².

Swamiji, the rationalist gives an important message in his inspired talks, saying, “Science and religion are both attempts to help us out of the bondage (bondage of the materialistic forces in nature from which we strive to be freed); only religion is more ancient, and we have the superstition that it is more holy. In a way it is, because it makes *morality* a vital point, and science does not. ...Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall only see God”³³. In his lessons given on Raj-Yoga (the practical lessons for achieving divinity), Swamiji stresses upon saying, “Chastity is the cornerstone of all morality and all religion. In Raj-Yoga especially, absolute chastity in thought, word and deed is a *sine qua non*.....the great seers of all ages were monks and ascetics.....only the pure in life can see God”³⁴.

In fact, these clauses of ‘morality’, ‘chastity’, ‘purity of mind’ etc terms, used as the *must in God- realisation* (unlike unveiling the scientific truths), creates all confusion in the God-concept (through Raj-Yoga etc) versus scientific truths. It is to be appreciated that if we want to gather knowledge on astronomy, we use a telescope and not a microscope. Nor can we use common sense approach to understand the recent scientific concepts like: ‘matter is the condensed form of energy’, ‘accelerated expansion of the universe’ or, ‘dark energy and dark matter (unknown stuff) constituting more than 90% of our known Universe’, etc., terms used by the present physicists. We believe in them since the physicists tell us so. Also, for micro-analysis in analytical chemistry major effort is made in purification/rinsing of the tools used, so that impurities even in traces do not affect the results. Like that, it is no wonder that in spiritual realisation, where *mind is the only tool* used, the major part of the effort should be needed in the purification and perfection of the mind; neither common sense approach nor, intellectual gymnastics can reach the truth. In spirituality and religion, the ultimate truth must be *experienced and realised*. Life is all the more important than knowledge.

Swamiji, an ardent seeker of truth who himself is a realised soul, could interpret the rationale, for the so called spiritual miracles, answer to prayers etc, from the prerogative of both as a rationalist with scientific bent of mind, and also as an ascetic with strict moral values who experienced and realised spirituality. He explained, “The man who thinks that he is receiving response to his prayers does not know that the fulfilment comes from his own nature, that he has succeeded by the mental attitude of prayer in waking up a bit of this infinite power which is coiled up within himself. What thus men ignorantly worship under various names, through fear and tribulations, the Yogi declares to the world to be the real power coiled up in every being, the mother of happiness, if we but know how to approach her. And Raj-Yoga is the science of religion, the rationale of all worship, all prayers, forms, ceremonies, miracles”³⁵.

Despite stressing upon so much on morality, purity of mind, etc. Swamiji, the rationalist was against even making moral legislation, without explaining the rationality of it. In a discourse in Prairie club, USA, in Dec. 1993, Swamiji lamented that Indians are dwarfed intellectually with the weight of too much of moral legislation, and have ended up as a degenerated race; having no individual choice between right and wrong.....they are mere automatons³⁶. Similar views were expressed by Swamiji in his letter to one of his disciples; whom he wrote- “ Our motherland is a glowing example of results and consequences of the eternal subjection of individual to society to forced self sacrifice by dint of institution and discipline.If it be virtue to follow the rules and customs handed down through generations, say, then who is more virtuous than a treeever known cattle to commit a sin? ...It is more blessed, in my opinion, even to go wrong impelled by one’s *free will* and intelligence, than be good as an automaton. ...Why make people virtuous by teaching superstition...Can bondage be removed by Bondage? ³⁷” Such was the teaching of Swamiji, the rationalist free thinker, who put more stress on free will and rationality, than even of attainment of virtue with mechanical following of moral legislation, like a thoughtless machine.

He did not spare even the illumined souls, if he noticed illogical dogmas and bigotry in them. Swamiji, having a scientific rational mind, who was also thoroughly conversant with different dimensions of religion and spirituality, could discern the rationale of the irrational superstitions and bigotry of these illumined souls. They are discussed as below.

Superstition and Dogmas, even amongst some Illumined souls: Swamiji once said to his disciple Ms. Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) “I fought my Master (Sree Ramakrishna, his Guru) for six years with the result that I know every inch of the way! (way of God-realisation)”³⁸. In fact, during Yogic practices, when Swamiji himself reached this super-conscious state and started achieving and experiencing supernatural Yogic marvels, he took pains to cross-check them himself, not only to verify their truth, but also delved deep within to determine their rationale. That is why he could confidently assert, “Each man is only a conduit for the infinite ocean of knowledge and power that lies behind man.wherever a prayer is fulfilled, it was of this infinite magazine that the supply came, and not from any supernatural being”³⁹.

Swamiji cites the religious history of ‘some illumined souls’ of different countries and at different periods, who did experience this ‘super conscious state’ revealing them the Truth and of God realization. He observes that some of them were not conscious of the hard Truth as to ‘how it got revealed to them’. Some said, the message were reached through the angels, some mentions of Devas etc, depending on their personal bias and background. For them, Swamiji uses a strange term, “stumbling upon the super conscious state”⁴⁰.

Swamiji certainly does not deny their claim of reaching this super-conscious state and also of the fact that they indeed were ‘illumined souls’ born to do good to the society and the people. He also could realise that attainment of such super conscious state is possible only when one can transcend reason. Simultaneously, Swamiji, the prophet of the nuclear

age, the saint with a rational scientific mind revealing the truth says, “The mind has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a super-conscious state,This transcendental knowledge beyond reasoning.....may sometimes come by chance to a man who does not understand its science; he, as it were stumbles upon it; he generally interprets it as coming from outside. ...Various men ... stumble upon this super-conscious state.there is a great danger ...however great they were who had stumbled upon this super-conscious state without understanding it, groped in the dark, and generally had along with their knowledge, some quaint superstition.They were inspired no doubt but that inspiration was stumbled upon... He brought away from it not only some truths, but some *fanaticism and superstition* which injured the world as much as the greatness of the teachings helped⁴⁰”.

Swamiji added, “we have to transcend reason, but we must do it scientifically, slowly, by regular practice and we must cast all superstitions. We must take super-conscious state as any other science. On reason we must lay our foundation.When you hear a man say, I am inspired, and then talk irrationally, reject it. Real inspiration never contradicts reason. Just as a great prophet said, ‘I came not to destroy but to fulfil it’, .. so inspiration always comes to fulfil reason and never to contradict it and is in harmony with it⁴⁰”.

It would however be useful to delve deeper into Swamiji’s thoughts as to the rationality of transcending the rationality, as have been enumerated in the subsequent section.

Paradigm shift of rationality transcending reason: Swamiji’s reply in response to a question on an enigma of God-concept, from one of his devotees, Surendra Nath Sen, has a deep connotation to ponder over. Swamiji replied him, “It is a mistake to ask ‘why’ with respect to God; we can only do so regarding one who has wants or, imperfection. How can there be any ‘why’ considering Him who has no wants and who is ‘One Whole’?”⁴¹. On another occasion while giving Raj-Yoga lessons to his disciples, he pronounced more or less the same message, saying “We can be conscious of the Absolute, but we can never express It. The moment we try to express It, we limit It, and it ceases to be the Absolute. We have to go beyond sense limit and *transcend even reason*, and we have the power to do this.....Religion is question of fact not of talk.....Religion is not in books and temples. It is an *actual* perception.The watchword of Vedanta is- realise religion, no talking will do”.⁴². The same idea is also echoed in the Vedas, the source- book of the authentic scriptures of Hinduism. Perhaps, Vedas is the only scripture that boldly declares that studying Vedas, or believing it or, reason it out, is only secondary in attaining God-realisation. (as said in Sanskrit- ‘*Vedah avedah bhabati*’- Vedas then become futile for attaining realisation)⁴³. What is needed is only to achieve *super-conscious perception* to realise ‘the unchangeable’ (attribute, if at all, can be given to the God-concept).

Analysing the implication of the terms ‘perception’ and ‘reason’, Swamiji explains in his discourses of Jnan -Yoga that, “Reasoning is the method of comparison between certain facts which we have already perceived. If these facts are not present already, there cannot be any reasoning.”⁴³. Swamiji also explained on another occasion in his discourse of Jnan-Yoga, “If we push perception far enough in the world of perception, we must reach a plane

beyond perception. Reason is really stored up and classified perception. We can never imagine or reason beyond our sense perception.We feel the limited character of reason, yet it brings us to a plane where we get a glimpse of something beyond. in man there is a power to reach beyond reason.It is impossible in the very nature of things to translate spiritual ideas and perceptions into the language of reason...It can only be asserted that these are *actual experiences* and can be had by all.Religion is the science which learns the transcendental in nature, through the transcendental in man”⁴⁴.

Swamiji in trying to project the rationale as regards the ‘Absolute’ (the Infinity concept of God) transcending rationality, introduces a concept of three phase system. He says, “The Infinite Absolute, degenerates to the finite phenomenal world, the Universe, when viewed through the layer of time-space-causation. Absolute is manifesting itself as many, through the veil of time, space and causation In asking what caused the Absolute,we have to suppose that ‘Absolute’ is also bound by something,dependent on something.....we (then) drag the Absolute to the level of the Universe. . . . there is neither time, space nor causation in Absolute”⁴⁵. Hence Swamiji also points out Schopenhauer’s philosophy of introduction of ‘will’ as a quality of Absolute, to be an unacceptable proposition”⁴⁵. It is to be taken note of that by this term of the Universe, he includes not only material world, but mind world and spiritual world as well.

Swamiji’s scientific bent of rational mind could realise, “Everything limited by mind becomes finite. Therefore to know Absolute isa contradiction.A God known is no more God; He has (then) become finite like one of us. ...He cannot be known. He is always the Unknowable one.But what Advaita (Vedanta) says is that God is more than knowable. This is a great fact to learn.....He is neither known, nor unknown, but something infinitely higher than that. He is your Self.Because in and through him we breathe, in and through Him we exist.He is the essence of all this, the soul of my soul”⁴⁵.

This apparent contradiction between ‘God - Knowable’ vs. ‘God -Unknowable’, could be resolved from Swamiji’s conversation with one of his disciples, explaining the essence of Vedanta, which goes as below.

“Q: Then Swami, what you claim is that ‘all is God’.

A: By no means. My claim is, that is not all- ‘only God is!’ That makes all the difference”⁴⁷.

The above short conversation speaks volumes about God-concept and the Universe -as per Vedanta Philosophy. Echoing the above God-concept, Swamiji was more explicit in proclaiming, “It is impossible to find God outside ourselves. Our own souls contribute to all the divinity that is outside of us.The concentrated mind is a lamp that shows us every corner of the soul. No one method can suit all.Ceremonials are the lowest form; next God external, and after that God internal”²⁰.

Giving justification & rationale on polytheism from the Vedantic perspective, Swamiji explained, “All knowledge is of the reflected as we can only see our faces reflected in a

mirror. So no one can know his Self or Brahma; but each is that Self and must see it reflected in order to make it an object of knowledge. This seeing the illustration of the unseen Principle is what leads to idolatry- so called. The range of idols is wider than is supposed. They range from wood and stone to great personalities like Jesus or, Buddha”⁴⁸.

In fact, Swamiji extended this concept of worship of different forms and symbols to be the reflection of our Self (Brahma) only, in explaining our most extraordinary feeling of ‘LOVE’. Quoting scriptures Swamiji said, “No one ...loves the husband for the husbands sake, but because Self is there. It is in and through Self that she loves the husband.....No one ...loves the wife for the wife’s sake, but in and through Self”⁴⁹. If we direct this Love towards God, in whatever forms and symbols we may chose, Love would then attain spiritual dimension with eternity, termed Bhakti -Yoga.

Love directed towards God (Bhakti-Yoga):

It is impossible to express the supreme ideal of love, in human language.

It has been said the highest form of Love is ‘Divine Love’. Such Love stands on three pillars. The first one is: Love never asks....it gives. The second one is: Love knows no fear (of losing anything etc). And the third pillar on which Divine love (along with all sorts of *Real Love*, even in our material world, which then transcends to Divinity) stands is: “Love is its own end.What is the end and aim of Love?. To Love God (in whatever form and symbol), that is all.Only be thou my love forever! That is what love wants.At last, love, lover and beloved becomes one.”⁵⁰.

How to achieve the wonderful fruits of such divine Love? It has been said in scriptures that by constant practice with imposition of such love (of course with hard practice of renunciation, purity and fixity of purpose), with suggestion of the sort of auto-suggestion, we may reach our goal. It is to be remembered however that ‘imposition of such suggestion’, is certainly not a false suggestion, as often referred to for normal auto-suggestion practices. The omnipresent omnipotent God, or Self, or Atman, or the continuum of the infinite ocean of consciousness, in whatever term we define it- may certainly be apparent taking the forms and shapes, as per the prayer of the devotee. Comparison may be drawn with the vast fathomless ocean water, taking shapes and forms in ice-burgs from intense cold. Like-wise God can take a form and shape as per the intensity of devotion of the devotee.

A typical example may be cited of one devotee ‘Aghormani Devi’, popularly known as the mother of Gopal, the child God. She worshipped Gopal, imposing her intense motherly love towards the child-God, all her life with great motherly devotion and practising austerity. At last, she had the vision of the Child- God playing with her and constantly moving with her. Choked with emotion and tears in her eyes, she narrated of her visions and wanted from Swamiji, whether it was all a fantasy of her mind or, real. Swamiji, a visionary saint, who himself had such experiences and realisation on extreme stage of the fulfilment of Love towards God, assured her replying in tearful eyes to the old lady, that all

her visions were indeed true. Swamiji the rationalist, being also himself an illumined soul, could not only confirm the reality of her visions, but also knew the rationality of such rare spiritual experiences, as the reflection of the self in different forms with desired shapes and symbols⁵¹.

Concluding Remarks: The God-concept of Swamiji repeatedly harps on the fact, that God is not up above the sky, but it does reside up above the sky of our mind, when we reach a super-conscious mind, which is beyond the world as revealed through our sense organs. This super-conscious mind is termed as the intrinsic divinity of man. In order achieve it, only two things are needed: the utmost purity of mind and a sincere yearning for it as that of the hankering of oxygen for a drowning man. The proof of religion of course lies in real perception of it, not in vain intellectual pursuits.

It may be relevant to mention here the quotes of Sister Nivedita, an Irish intellectual luminary of nineteenth century and the disciple of Swamiji, who devoted her whole life for the fulfilment of the missions of Swamiji. She wrote in the preface of the complete works of Swamiji, “When he (Swamiji) began to speak (at Chicago Parliament of Religion), it was the religious ideas of the Hindus. But when he ended Hinduism had been created”⁵². Echoing in the same tune we may add that Swamiji not only developed a modern version of Hinduism and of Vedanta; but Swamiji- the Voice of the prophet of the nuclear age Sree Ramakrishna- having a true scientific bent of mind could firmly establish all religions & their scope of spirituality, anchored at the adamant rock of rationality.

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