

life (ashrama) prescribed by the Brahmins. He held that the religion without Bhakti was no religion at all, and all the asceticism, fasting and almsgiving had no value if unaccompanied by worship (bhajan and Hymn singing). By means of *Ramainis*, (a short exposition of religious truth) *Shabd* (a word or saying, relating to God), and *Sakhis* (evidencing the Lord's glory) he imparted religious instructions to Hindus and Muhammadans alike. He had no preference for either religion, but gave teaching that was appreciated by the followers of both. He spoke out his mind fearlessly and never made it his object merely to please his hearers”.

Formless Supreme Being (Nirguna)

Kabir is also a proponent of Nirguna, the Supreme Being without form and properties. This concept, which came into philosophy with the Advaita School, caught the imagination of Kabir as well as Tulasidas. Kabir's strong opposition to idolatry stems from this philosophy. He says, “If worshipping a stone idol gets Hari then I will worship a mountain. Better is the grinding stone, which grinds and feeds the world.”

Kabir's works are contained in two books. One is *Bijak*, and another is *Adi Granth*. During the lifetime of Kabir, his sayings were not documented, and the process of writing them down started at least fifty years after his death.

Sayings and Poetry of Kabir: Kabir's sayings are pithy, and many a time, sound like riddles, but the meaning is conveyed clearly. To illustrate the point, a few selected couplets of Kabir are given here.

“Fire does not burn it, the wind does not carry it away, no thief comes near it; collect the wealth of name of Ram, that wealth is never lost”.

“What is muttering, what austerity, what vows and worship to him whose heart there is another love?”

“Pearls are scattered on the road; the blind draw near and depart; without the light of the Lord, the world passes them by”.

“Sandal, restrain thy fragrance; on thy account, the wood is cut down; the living slay the living and regard only the dead”.

4.5 TULASIDAS: SOCIAL CONCERN AND FORMLESS RAMA

No work of literature in Hindi language is more read, followed, quoted, revered, and worshipped than *Ramcharita Manas*, “The Lake of Deeds of Rama”, composed by Saint Goswami Tulasidas. Tulasidas was born in Rajpur, in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh in the year 1589 AD. He died at the age of ninety one. Even though he was a great Sanskrit scholar, he is known for his works in Hindi, especially *Ramcharita Manas*. This work is known as the Bible of North India: many of its verses are recited everyday as part of ritual, many sentences are used as proverbs, many incidents from the book are used as exemplary anecdotes, and many phrases have passed into the common parlance, even without the speakers being aware of the origin. His doctrine, even today, has a powerful influence on the present day Hinduism. Even though he founded no cult or school, he is universally accepted as a poet and saint, an authority to guide everyday life. His composition, *Hanuman Chalisa*, a part of *Ramcharita Manas*, a forty stanza praise of Lord Hanuman, is recited by all Hindi speaking people.

Sources and Manuscripts

A manuscript of the Ayodhya Kand, said to be written in poet's own hand, exists in Rajpur in Banda, in his birthplace. Another manuscript, dated Samvat 1661, is in Ayodhya, and it is said to have been corrected in poet's own hand, nineteen years before his death. An excellent translation into English has been made by F.S.Growse, of the Indian Civil Service. An introduction to the grammar of Ramcharita Manas has been written by Edwin Greaves titled *Notes on the grammar of Ramayan of Tulasidas* (1895).

His magnum opus is written in a dialect of Hindi, known as 'Awadhi' which is spoken around Ayodhya in UP. Even though Tulasidas uses the Valmiki Ramayana as the source and acknowledges it, he definitely makes a departure from other poets who have narrated the epic before him.

The narration follows the pattern given by the poet, around the mythological reservoir, which is called 'Manasa'(consciousness); four banks have four pairs of speaker and listener, who are narrating the various episodes of Rama's life. The four pairs are

1. Yajnavalkya and Bharadwaja
2. Shiva and Parvati
3. Kakabhusundi and Garuda
4. Tulsi and assembly of saints.

Tulasidas, in course of his work, writes about all sections of the society, irrespective of caste, creed, and sect, and analyses their behaviour, emotions, and their opinions. His narration reflected the contemporary society, and good values are juxtaposed with the bad values. The ideal or desirable behaviour is advised and exemplified in it.

Tulasidas clearly states that his work is based on Valmiki's Ramayana, and derives its inspiration from Vedas and Puranas, Nigamas and Agamas. By this, he recognises the authority of the ancient texts, which is necessary for acceptance of any classical work on mythology.

Tulasidas has spoken about nine kinds of spirituality leading to Bhakti, the devotion to Godhead. Rama, in the course of Discourse to Shabari, speaks of the nine kinds of devotion (Navavidha Bhakti).

1. Cultivation of the company of Sadhus, or the people seeking devotion.
2. Deep interest in the 'lila' or life of the Lord.
3. Service at the feet of the guru.
4. Singing of the praise of the Lord, without any blemish.
5. Chanting the name of the Lord, with firm belief.
6. Practising self-control, self-renunciation, and craving for a virtuous life.
7. To regard the whole world as permeated by God and respecting the saint more than God.
8. Contentment with whatever one gets, and not craving.
9. Dependence on the Lord, simplicity, freedom from wile, no elation or depression.

Bhakti can be achieved by following any one of these steps, but the most important requirement is the company of the devotees. First, the devotee, by his constant love and devotion, becomes dear to the Lord. When the Lord sees the devotion of the devotee, he would take interest in him, and liberate him from the Karma, cycle of births and death. The Bhakta or the devotee, becomes free from lust, anger, greed, pride, and achieves a level-headed state, the Stoical state.

Another important component of Bhakti is Rama nama Japa, repetition of the name of Rama. Tulasidas says that the name of Rama is greater than Rama himself. It is said that Hanuman attained control over Rama by 'Rama nama Japa'. Even Gandhi got inspired by Tulasidas's words, and found solace in repeating the name of Rama.

Attitude towards Knowledge

Tulasidas thinks that seeking knowledge is a fruitless exercise, and one should become a devotee. He says, that out of millions of 'Jnanis' (knowledgeable person), one 'Vijnani' (enlightened person) is born, but a 'Bhakta'(a devotee) is rarer than a 'Vijnani'. He says that knowledge is difficult to express, difficult to understand and difficult to practise rationally.

Social Concern

He propounded two principles which brought about immense social integration and general acceptability of his works. The first principle was the social equality. He said that Rama will accept only the relationship of devotion. "He accepts the bonds of devotion only". "A high birth without devotion is like cloud without vapours". He said, "None will question your caste or creed, you devote yourself to God and you belong to Him". Thus he attacked the root of the caste system.

The second principle was his equality between Saiva (the devotees of Shiva) and Vaishnava (the devotees of Vishnu) cults. During that time, when the differences between the two schools of worship were becoming sharper, Tulasidas refused to see the difference. He showed great reverence to both Shiva and Rama. He pointed out that service to Shiva will beget perpetual devotion to Rama. He made no distinction between the two deities. In Ramcharita Manas, Rama says that he does not like the critics of Shiva. Rama says, "If Shiva's critic is called a follower of mine, to me he does not appeal even in dream".

Formless Rama

Tulasidas also adopted the conceptual symbol of Monoism (Adwaita) which says the Supreme reality is formless and propertyless. He adopted the concept of Rama, without body, as per the principle of Monoism. This concept was very dear to Gandhi. He says, "Tulasidas too has described Rama as without a body. This one without form pervades all forms. Him we worship. I am a worshipper of this Rama. How can I ever worship Ravana? You may kill me, spit me in my face, but I shall go on repeating Rama Rahim, Krishna Karim till my last breath. And even at the moment you shower blows on me I shall not blame you. Nor shall I complain to God. I am his devotee'.

4.6 VAISHNAVISM

The earliest occurrence of the word, "Vishnu" is in Rig Veda (1.22.20). This hymn of Rig Veda has been translated by the eminent scholar, R.G. Bhandarkar as follows: 'The wise

see the highest place of Vishnu (Paramam padam) as it were an eye fixed in heaven'. The hymn indicates that Vishnu had a high position in Vedic pantheon, though not the highest. Also, the Taittiriya Samhita mentions Vishnu, by saying, "Yajna vai Vishnu" thereby meaning, "Vishnu is sacrifice". It is clear from the above two references that the name of Vishnu occurs in Vedic and early literature.

"Vaishnava" means 'that relating to Vishnu', and it is generally used as an adjective, and to indicate a sect, by adding 'ism' with it. There are four schools of Vaishnavism, whose main principle is that Vishnu is the Supreme deity, and others are subordinate to him. They hold that Shiva is subservient to him, and a Vaishnava himself.

Four Schools of Vaishnavism

There are *four Schools of Vaishnavism*. They are:

1. Vishishtadwaita (Qualified non- dualism), a school founded by Ramanuja, whose sect is known as the Srivaishnava sect.
2. Dwaita (Dualism), a school founded by Madhwa, whose sect is known as the Madhwa Vaishnava sect.
3. Shuddhadwaita, a school founded by Vallabha, and others.
4. Kumara Sampradaya, a school founded by Nimbarka.
1. **Vishishtadwaita:** The important feature of Ramanuja's Vaishnava philosophy is 'Sharanagati' or 'Prapatti', which is surrender to the Supreme deity, Vishnu. Earlier to Ramanuja, the Alvars, a tradition of Vaishnava saints, had composed *prabandhas*, compositions in praise of Vishnu. Ramanuja in his work, *Gadyatraya*, declares that Bhakti (devotion) is the surest way to salvation, but 'Prapatti' is the direct route to salvation.

Two types of surrenders are illustrated in Vishishtadwaita. One is the "*Marjala Kishore Nyaya*", where the individual surrenders like a kitten to the mother cat. The kitten makes no effort, but its complete surrender to the mother ensures its welfare. Similarly, complete surrender by the man to God ensures his salvation.

The second one is the "*Markat Kishore Nyaya*", where the relation is like between a baby monkey and its mother. Even though the mother is making all efforts to protect the baby, the baby also has to make efforts to cling to the mother. Similarly, man should make some efforts to seek the God.

2. **Dwaita (Dualism):** This school was founded by Madhwa (1238 to 1317 AD). As the name suggests, it holds that the soul (jeeva) and Supreme soul (paramatma) are different, and hence the duality between them, unlike in Adwaita philosophy, the God is of full of virtues (gunapurna) and flawless (nirdosha). Brahman of Vedanta philosophy and Vishnu of Dwaita philosophy are one and the same, and Vishnu is the Supreme Godhead in Dwaita. Hence the Bhakti cult developed in this philosophy, as the devotees could sing and praise the attributes of Godhead. The Vaishnavism in Dwaita is the revival of the Pancharatra School, considered to be authoritative; the Pancharatra literature has two branches, Brahma Sampradaya, and the Sri Sampradaya. Sri Sampradaya has been adopted by the Vishishtadwaita, and the Brahmasampradaya has been adopted by the Dwaita School of Vedanta. Both are Vaishnava traditions.

3. **Shuddhadwaita:** Vallabha's philosophy is known as 'Shuddhadwaita', or Pushti Marga which translates as 'the way of grace'. Bhakti of any kind depends on His grace. Krishna is the supreme deity according to this school, and he is 'Para Brahman', 'Sachidananda' or the Supreme Bliss. The devotion that results from common grace is known as the 'Maryada Bhakti' and that which results due to His special grace is known as Pushti Bhakti. In this kind of Bhakti, God becomes the only object of desire, and in this state, even Moksha or the salvation becomes secondary. Vallabha lists *four kinds of Pushti Bhakti*.
- **Pravaha Pushti Bhakti:** Here the devotee's ego, 'I' and 'mine' are retained, and the devotee is inclined to do the deeds that are dear to the Lord (Pravaha-flow).
 - **Maryada Pushti Bhakti:** All desires disappear, and the devotee is on the path of renunciation. He wants to listen to the scriptures.
 - **Pushti-Pushti-Bhakti:** In this state the devotee receives the special grace of the Lord, and becomes omniscient. He possesses the knowledge about the Lord, and his Lila (play).
 - **Shuddha Pushti Bhakti:** This is the ultimate state of mind where the devotee has nothing but love for the Lord. This state is supposed to be extremely rare.
4. **Kumara Sampradaya or Nimbarka School of Vaishnavism:** The start of the philosophical school is claimed to have a hoary tradition. In R.GBhandarkar's Report of the Search for Sanskrit Manuscripts, 1882-83, it is stated that the first teacher of the Nimbarka School was Hamsa, and his pupil was Kumara, of the form of 'four Vyuhas'. Kumara's pupil was Narada, who preached '*prema-bhakti*' in Treta Yuga. It is said that Nimbarka was the pupil of Narada, and an incarnation of the 'Sudarshana Chakra' of Vishnu. Nimbarka's time is said to be immediately after Ramanuja, as he refers to Ramanuja in his works. This school specialises in the worship of Radha and Krishna, the divine couple, and devotion towards them.

According to Nimbarka, there are three kinds of 'Jivas' or souls. Those that are eternally free, others who have gained freedom from bondage, and those who are bound by the cycles of birth and death. In the Free State, the individual soul can enjoy Brahman. The God is the only subject of enquiry, for those who want salvation (Mumukshu).

Vaishnavism and Bhakti Movement: Vaishnavism inspired the Bhakti movement, as Vishnu, or his incarnations, Rama and Krishna, become the personal Gods of the devotees, due to their history and character, and endeared themselves to the worshippers. The people could find all the qualities they sought in Gods in these two Godheads, and they could become ideals to emulate, strong characters to seek protection, and could be father, son, or brother, as the devotee desired. Narasimha Mehta, Gujarati poet composed the song, 'Vaishnavajana', which had immense influence on Gandhi. Gandhi hoped that all the good qualities which Narasimha Mehta expects in a Vaishnava are in him, and that he always made efforts to fulfil Mehta's description of a true Vaishnava. This song became the part of Ashram prayer.

4.7 ANASAKTI YOGA

'Anasakti Yoga' is the name given by Gandhi to the spirit of Bhagavad Gita. The word, 'Anasakti Yoga' is not to be found in any ancient text on Yoga, one of the eight schools

of philosophy. Patanjali is held to be the authority of the ancient school, and he does not use this word anywhere. Gandhi held *the Gita* in high esteem, and it inspired his thought and work throughout his life. He wanted the message of *the Gita* to reach the common man and resultantly he published “Anasakti Yoga”, which was mainly meant for the Gujarati readers. Gandhi, while writing this book, deliberately kept out the complex technical terms, and did not delve on the subjects, which would not interest the ordinary reader. He did not mention the word, “Upanishad” anywhere, in his notes, or even in the introduction to his work, even though *the Gita* is said to be the essence of Upanishads.

Gujarati Translation:

When Gandhi was imprisoned, he could read Tilak’s book on *the Gita*, in its Gujarati translation. He says that this work whetted his appetite, and he began to read more works on *the Gita*. His first acquaintance with this work was when he read Edwin Arnold’s *Song Celestial*. Later, he read the Gujarati translation, and says that reading all the possible works on *the Gita* could not get him enough courage to do his own translation, as he felt, “My knowledge of Sanskrit is limited, and my knowledge of Gujarati too is no way scholarly.”

The driving force behind his translation into Gujarati was to give this great work for the benefit of the ordinary people like women, commercial class, and the downtrodden sections of the Gujarati population. He was a staunch practitioner of this work, and says that whatever knowledge he possessed, he wanted to pass on to the ordinary people of Gujarat. He was assisted in this work by his fellow workers like Vinoba, Kaka Kalelkar, Mahadev Desai, and Kishorilal Mashruwala.

English Translation:

Gandhi took Swami Anand’s suggestion to translate the Gita into English seriously. During his prison term in Yerwada, he undertook this task and the translation appeared in the column of *Young India*, on 6.8.1931.

He later entrusted the work to his trusted secretary Mahadev Desai who diligently translated it according to Gandhi’s expectations. Mahadev Desai, gave the title to the book, *The Gospel of Selfless action*, or *The Gita according to Gandhi* and was first published in August, 1946. Gandhi vouched for the accuracy of the translation.

Many principles which were dear to Gandhi got corroborated, underlined, and emphasised in the work. The concepts of Ahimsa, bread labour, and above all, selfless action are the main principles. Gandhi makes it clear that selfless action does not mean the ‘absence of purpose’. He said that there should be selfless purpose behind our action. To be detached from the fruits of action is not to be ignorant of them or to disregard or disown them. To be detached is never to abandon action, because the contemplated result may not follow. On the contrary, he said, it is the proof of the immovable faith in the certainty of the contemplated result following in due course (*Young India*, 15.3.28). Gandhi states with emphasis, that even at the risk of repetition, he would like to point out that “the matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of labour”.

In his commentary, Gandhi also brings out his argument that the main message of Gita is Ahimsa, or non-violence. He says that if one understands the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow truth and Ahimsa. When there is no desire for the fruit, there is no temptation for the untruth or himsa (violence); untruth and violence will be found at

the back of the desire to attain the cherished end. He opined that a strong desire to achieve the fruit in itself involves violence, and the only way to achieve non-violence is to get into a situation where the violence is not needed, that is liberating oneself from the desire to get the fruit of action. Gandhi's translation is unique, as it upholds his philosophy, and gives strength to him, and millions of other people who follow him.

4.8 SUMMARY

Post-Buddhist period in India generated a debate as to what constitutes the essence of Vedic thinking. This led to the development of Vedanta literature, which discussed the relation between the Supreme Reality and the individual. Three schools emerged Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita that have been dealt at length. Bhakti movement also emerged between eighth and fifteenth century, which took the devotion to God from an intellectual and dialectical level to a relation of love. This movement reached the common man through the great leaders of this movement like Kabir, Tulasidas, Nanak, Alvars in Tamil Nadu, poet saints of Maharashtra, Dasa movement in Karnataka, Chaitanya's Gaudiya Vaishnavism and similar movements all over the country. Vaishnavism is closely related to the Bhakti movement, as most of it came out in Vaishnava tradition, with some examples from Saiva tradition. Anasakti Yoga is Gandhi's work on **Bhagavad Gita**, which had the greatest influence on him. Gandhi gave his own interpretation, and he held that the central message of this work is to forego the fruits of labour or selfless action. Undoubtedly Gandhi drew enormous strength from these philosophical sources in order to emerge as a true Satyagrahi.

4.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Examine the debate about 'Brahman' and 'Atman' in three schools of Vedanta.
2. Discuss the conceptualisation of 'Ultimate reality' in Vedanta.
3. Bring out the contribution of Bhakti movement.
4. What is Vaishnavism? Discuss the tenets of four schools of Vaishnavism.
5. Critically examine Gandhi's Anasakti Yoga.
6. Discuss the efforts of Tulasidas to bring about harmony in society.

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