

MADHURA BHĀVA

Among the several approaches to divine experience the Madhura-approach is estimated to rank very high. It is said to be identical with the approach of the lover to the beloved. The beloved is the Supreme Godhead and the lover is the individual soul which seeks the rapturous ecstasy of union. Though clothed in the figures of sensuality and sexuality, it is claimed that it is very significant as defining the nature of the soul to be utterly dependent on the Divine, seeking an inseparable union or a union that restores the significant nature to the soul. Just as the wife seeks the utter dependence on the husband, so as to share his life and being in all its manifestations, the soul seeks the Divine Lord so as to live and move and have its being in Him.

There are other ways of approach to the Divine, such as vatsalya of the mother to the child or in a reversed sense of the child to the Mother, as friend to Friend, as servant to the Master, as pupil to the Teacher, not taking into consideration the asuric approaches such as hatred to the Divine. These approaches relate the Divine to the soul and manifest the intimate relationship through which the Divine can be enjoyed. But the richness of the love approach is such that it seems to embrace almost all the rest in a fundamental manner. The soul in this approach evinces the eagerness of a mother for the health and welfare of the child, the friendliness of the friend for the life and prosperity of the friend without selfishness, the dasatva of the servant for the master Swami. Thus since it includes all the other attitudes available in other approaches, it is said to be rich. Love approach thus is that which is most sweet of all approaches: it is madhura-bhava.

The mythical Rasalīlā, the later bridal approaches of Āivārs, like Sathakopa (Nammālvār). Tirumangai, Kulaśekhara, and Andal, the love approach of Manikyavacagar in the Southern Śaivism, the later medieval adoption of this by Caitanya and Mīrābāī, all reveal that Śrīngara or love approach is utilizable and does not lead to disastrous consequences predicated

of it by many worthy thinkers. Madhura-bhava is not prohibited. On the other hand it is that which can express to the fullest the ānandanubhava, and restore the primitive unity which is indeed the most fundamental attraction of the Divine in its depths to the soul's existence. Thus in a sense it cannot only be considered to be a vital ideal but also a metaphysical fulfillment.

What then is the meaning of the insistence upon this method of approach amongs Āivārs or the seekers after Ānanda (bliss of union)? The transmutation or the sublimation of this vital approach is what is said to happen when there is the substitution of God s the beloved in the place of the finite husband of the normal life. Two ways of viewing this can be suggested. Firstly the husband can be seen to possess the of the archetypal husband or Lord God-Beloved could be made. This idealization of the actual husband or lover has been the cause of great tragedies in life. The 'cloven feet' unfortunately intrude too often to permit the status of the idealized husband or lover to continue. Thus all such processes of idealization or exaltation of the actual to the status of the perfect Being or God are spurious escapes into unreality. The other alternative is to substitute in the place of the actual the perfect Being who is not considered to be an idealized individual but the real perfect Spirit who can satisfy perfectly the demand for a perfect union. The substitution is valid and acts as the transformative principle if not also as a transmutive agent. The principle gets the sanction of the psychological rule of sublimation through substitution of a higher end or higher object in the place of the lower. The Yogic rule is *vitaka bādhane pratipaksabhāvanam*: the substitution of the opposite in the place of the bad habit. The Alvar practiced this substitution or adaptation of their mental life to the Infinite Personality of the Divine. This adaptation of course entailed the adjustment of one's entire psycho-physical organism to the experience of the Infinite Being instead of the finite being.

The will is turned to the receptive mood of accepting the Divine by means of the practice of resignation of all to the Divine, the cognitive is so tuned as to perceive the Divine as ever present in everything. A new attitude of looking out

for the beloved in everything develops from this practice. This is of course identical with the Jñānā-yoga attitude of seeing the Divine in everything and everything in the Divine. Whereas in that case the impersonal is sought here the personal transcending the human is sought with the added zest of seeking union with Him. The vital is dedicated to receiving the light and the power and the glory within one's body (adhyatma). Lastly the physical is sanctified and kept pure for the embrace of the beloved without pampering to the temptations of the flesh. That this triple transformation through substitution of the perfect (idealized divine) in the place of the normal and the vital and the physical leads to extraordinary spiritual experiences is a fact of mystical history. The view under consideration almost emphasizes that the really metaphysically natural beloved is God but that we have fallen into error and sin in having substituted the merely human and the animal object in the place of the real object.

The process of release from this animal bondage or bondage to the 'libido'-impulses is thus achieved by this sublimation through substitution. Some writers hold that this is nothing but a 'psychic projection'. Mere psychic projection would certainly be a type of escape from the problem of the confronting sexual finite human. But when in addition to the fact of the ideal object it is also experienced as the 'real existent' and indeed the One existence which grants to all existence, or God, then this projection ceases to be 'fictional' or hallucinatory. The overlooking of this difference has led to thinking that religion is fictional, is escape, is like poetry an art of 'creating or building ivory towers on whose walls one paints whatever is to one's heart's desire'.

This is the medium of self-creation in art, but religion is the Primary impulse towards perfection, completeness, integral oneness and existence (sat).

The experience of the Āivār and the Gopis and the Nayanmars is one side of the picture. The medieval poets, called religious, developed a new method of sublimating by their erotic. It is seen that the great Jayadeva, the author of Gītā-Govinda has described not his own experiences and approaches to the Divine,

but the drama of the Divine Couple. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. The enjoyment of the process of their 'historical' drama of marriage or union in through a process of for each other, their viraha, their first meeting, their love for each other, their viraha, their union and so on. It is not my purpose to detail this process of recreation which is more pertaining to the poetic sphere of study or the dramatic. The madhura bhava here is without restraint expressed in sexual terminology. The psychology of eroticism (madhura) is clearly based on the well-known axiom of anubhava or experience. Experience of the erotic works itself out till finally the residual experience of the knowledge of the divine nature. How far we could think that like a fire which extinguishes itself by burning itself out as well as others this would be the case with the erotic-fire within is precisely the point in dispute. This is of course not the direct experiencing of the erotic, but a sublimated 'emphasizing' so to speak. The poet-mystic identifies himself with the heroine (the lover) who seeks the beloved God. Rādhā is the personality on whom the poet lavishes his own personality and gets what we may call a substitute-enjoyment. This of course removes the direct carnality of the participant and grants the indirect projected ideal carnality of the creative artist. The sacred object—the union of the Divine Pair, Rādhā Kṛṣṇa, or Śiva-Parvatī, or union of the Divine Pair, Rādhā Kṛṣṇa, or Śiva-Parvatī, or Lakṣmī and Śrīnivāsa in the compositions and writings of Annamacārya gives enormous scope for the manifestation of the desire for substitute enjoyment or 'virtual enjoyment' by one-self of the erotic. The erotic descriptions of these gifted poets do indeed flood-light their psychology which all of us in a sense and in some degree share as when we read a novel by D. H. Lawrence. Maurice Dekobra. The obscenity and reduction of the divine natures to the level of the all too fleshy human persons renders it rather difficult for us to consider this to be a species of 'trans-valuation'. That such compositions do give extraordinary pleasure (rasa-svādāna) of the artistic is a fact which makes us even to day acclaim Jayadeva, Kālidāsa, Kṣetrājñā and annamacārya as the greatest composers. But what exactly is the scope of this method as a psychological technique for sublimation as religion demands it? If our psychic drama within is just projected and imagined

or played up with a set of divine characters, it is true that our natural or normal eroticism expresses itself in other channels than the vital natural. If this is the aim it cannot be quite a substitute or escape from the actual demand for gratification. The Indian Gods even as the Homeric gods have all been interpreted by some as representatives or symbols of our libido. The study of these epics may produce in us some knowledge of the way our libido works. Of course we are enlightened about the meanings of our epic symbols, male and female. In trying to manifest the eroticism which refuses to be sublimated the poets perform the peculiar reversed midwifery so to speak of delivering gods to men, create gods in their own imperfect images. Rightly this process has been condemned. Such poetry, epic or music, does not result in a real solution of the problem of the Union-seeking consciousness. While it is to be assumed that real 'existential' (satya) union is possible between any two souls or spirits only through the central Self or God even as Brhadaranyaka Seer Yājñavalkya says, to reduce the Self or God to the erotic drama is not to sublimate or trans-value the entire energy of the spiritual but to divert it to idealism or virtual enjoyment, a māyā of libido. The transference of the actuality of experience (sexual) into a contemplation or dhyana of the act with substitute characters is a peculiarly unsatisfying virtuality. Inhibition of the erotic processes in oneself is the only achievement but it heightens the expression of the same in and through these counterfeit characters albeit divine. That it has been practiced with success by some great souls like Jayadeva, Annamacarya Ksetrajñā and others is not due to the method adopted but to the supreme genius and character of their religious consciousness which exalted them above the ordinary practisant.

There is no way by which the erotic (*retas*) can fully be transmuted or sublimated into the spiritual creative energy called technically *ojas*. The fire of the vital can hardly be made into the light of the spiritual by the process allegedly called sublimatory. The theory of catharsis or purification of the libido by artistic expression in the sense of playing up a divine drama or the drama of the divine couple (Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa or Śiva-Parvatī) is less useful for the purpose intended

than the other practice of approaching the Divine or the Infinite as the lover approaches the Beloved. The high seriousness that really belongs to an 'existential' approach, that is to say which almost poses the mortal question 'to be or not to be' is simply lacking in the dramatic-approach of the artistic catharsis. The madhura-approach indeed prevents it from being even asocial or pro-social. It is in fact a more vividly imagined eroticism which is in many respects much more dangerous than the real-which but for the characters we are expected to think of as divine has the opposite effect of stimulating the erotic and the profane in the reader and the audience. The claim of the Vāmachāri Sakta (left-handed path) to sublimate the five fundamental temptations (panchamakara), despite all the symbolic persuasions to the contrary, has been found to be untenable. That equally applies to the Madhura-bhava of the second variety which we have been considering. What saved the noblest practicers of this path of poetic madhura-bhava from falling or what made for their success in sublimation is above all the grace of the Divine. The saving or redeeming Grace of the divine may happen to be the only meaning of the 'transcendence over sex and libido through ideal sex-expression in objective fine arts'. What is true of literature may well be taken to be true of other fine arts like sculpture, painting and dance.