

II.4. Karma Yoga

This article is based on a talk given in Okemos, MI in the first quarter of 2005.

Q1: What is Karma Yoga?

The word *Karma* has had a long usage in several traditions (Vedic, Buddhist, Jaina, and others) and has been used at different levels and for different purposes. So there is an inherent problem in understanding the concept of Karma. For today's conversation, we will focus on Karma in the framework of the Vedic tradition, where the word is used as the subtle as well as the gross expression of living. In fact, in this tradition, life is Karma; they are co-equal and they never end. All of us are participating in this continued cycle of relationships. The term *karmacakra*, meaning "wheel of relationships," is used to describe this cycle.

Life is full of good and bad things. We make judgments all the time about what is desirable and what is not. We like to increase the desirable things in life. Since all aspects of life (ethical, moral, interpersonal) are governed by the laws of Karma, control of life is derived by the control of Karma. Recognizing this, we like to operate our life introducing new ways of doing things such that one Karma is controlled by another and the desirable things in life increase.

Karma always has the need for an agent. When we understand the nature of the agent of Karma, we would like to influence it to do the Karma in a particular way. In other words, in order to control Karma, we would like to orient, modify, or in some cases destroy the agent. As an example, the agent for some diseases is a bacterium or a mosquito. Once we find how the disease works through that agent, we wish to control or exterminate the agent. When we do such things consciously, we are introducing a value scale of desirable and undesirable things.

All our training in human society, starting with the family and going through the established institutions of learning, has the purpose of making us understand how the agents of Karma perform their actions, so that we are then able to enhance the desirable things in life and avoid or reduce the undesirable things. In fact, it is fair to say that all of modern scientific research is organized to shed light on the agents of Karma so that, using that knowledge, we can control Karma. Thus the subtle aspect of Karma is the basic means by which life is understood, managed, and made to work towards particular goals. That is the power of Karma.

Next we turn to the word *Yoga*. *Yoga* means putting things together in such a way that some desired objective is achieved. (There is the underlying implication of plurality, of different pieces or processes, which Yoga brings together and unifies into a coordinated idea or system. Whenever I organize my life to reach a particular goal in life, I am said to be on the path of Yoga.)

Some people, looking at the consequences of their participation in life on themselves and others, have realized that anything they say or do (no matter how good it is) always has some distant undesirable consequence when the whole sequence of Kārmic effects is considered. They have then asked the question: Is there any way to live my life such that I do not become a part of the wheel of Karma, with all its complications, all its good and bad things, all its pleasures and pains? After pondering this question, they have concluded that, yes, this is possible; one can enjoy life without becoming a part of the Karma enterprise; the source of enjoyment in such cases will be elsewhere, not in the Karma. When a person chooses this approach, which is the pursuit of happiness, freedom, of everything that is good in life, in a manner that is independent of Kārmic interactions, he/she is on the path of Karma Yoga and is called a Karma Yogin. The methodology to be used in this approach is discussed later (as answer to Q2).

A person who instead chooses to use Karma for his happiness is called a Karmī. A Karmī may continue to do good things; good or bad things may come to him; he may enjoy good things or suffer bad things when others in his community are undergoing them (for he is a member of that community). All these are the effects of Karma, which works at both the individual and the aggregate level.

Q2: How does one practice Karma Yoga?

Karma Yoga practice consists of a series of skills that the practitioner brings to bear on the performance of Karma. These skills are spread over different domains. The practitioner must pay attention to the two facets of Karma: it has a series of cause and effect relationships and it has an agent. As an operator in the field of relationships, he has to play different kinds of roles; and he must be clear about his specific role in that field for any specific operation and the type of skills and aptitudes he brings to that operation. He has to become more and more aware of his competency, his capacities, and the fields where he can operate or be operated upon. In his other facet as an agent of Karma, he has the capacity to direct the consequences of his Karma to one or other of several entities – to one section of society or to another section, for example. He can operate in such a way that he maximizes the good effects and minimizes the bad effects of his agency. Or he may work in such a way that only good things come to him and bad things go elsewhere. These are all decision-making points, and the agent has to pay attention to these things. Like a general on the battlefield, he has to calculate how to minimize the casualties arising from his actions. The practitioner of Karma Yoga must progressively increase the domain where the results of his actions are beneficial – from his family to his community to his species to all living beings, for instance. As he thus increases his domain of responsibility, there will be increasingly greater demand on him to understand the chain of Karma relations through time, space, and generations; and his decision-making rules will change.

Q3: What are the benefits of practicing Karma Yoga?

As we saw above, the practice of Karma Yoga broadens the practitioner's sense of who he is and how and under what conditions he belongs to any particular entity. In the theistic

tradition, this ultimately leads to God – when the practitioner says that whatever he does is for God. The “I,” “you,” and the “other” are brought together into one field of operation. In this way, the practitioner will be able to work continually in whatever role he has to play. He will be freed from a sense of guilt, frustration, disappointment, and loss, and even a sense of fulfillment, as he goes beyond those kinds of limitations and tries to understand his own nature and the nature of life that is full of Karma. As he progresses on this path, nobility, compassion, and unconditional love, all the qualities we hail, become his natural values. Eventually he will be able to root himself in the nature of his own being, which is free of Karma, and he will get the knowledge of that source of joy and happiness that is not in Karma but beyond Karma.

The same benefit is attained in the non-theistic tradition. Here, instead of saying “I am doing this for God,” the practitioner says, “This is my nature. My very being is joy itself, it is not dependent on Karma. I am joyful because of having discovered the nature of my being. So I have no interest in getting benefits for myself.” With this outlook, the practitioner of Karma Yoga in the non-theistic tradition achieves the same benefits as one who practices in the theistic tradition.

Q4: What are the results of practicing Karma Yoga?

Karma Yoga benefits the practitioner, as discussed under Q3. In addition, the practitioner becomes a channel for the Karma to flow in such a way that he does not add his interest to it. So it becomes a pure flow of energy. That is, the purity of life flows all around him. That is the benefit of Karma Yoga for all of society, indeed all of creation, is the availability of pure energy, unconditioned and unpolluted.

Sometimes, when we practice Karma Yoga, we are called upon to do certain things that appear to inflict pain on others. But in fact it is not pain but a way to help that person get out of the mis-understanding or non-understanding he has of the nature of Reality, so that the person also gets to participate in the search for freedom. So one of the results of practicing Karma Yoga is to free others so that they also get ennobled.

Q5: What are the indicators of Karma Yoga?

Some of the behavioral indicators of Karma Yoga are: doing actions with care, diligence, efficiency, and promptness; inclusiveness; and openness to receiving feedback (so that the practitioner can modify his behavior if necessary). The attitudinal indicators of Karma Yoga include: warmth, love, sharing, sense of belonging to the whole community, etc.

In conclusion, the practice of Karma Yoga enhances both the person who is acting and the person or community that is affected by the action. Karma Yoga practice leads to an understanding of what life is and what the goal of life is. Each person will have to make their own decision as to how and at what pace they accept the flow of life to reach that goal.

II.5. Bhakti Yoga

This article is based on a talk given in Okemos, MI on February 27, 2005.

Q1: What is Bhakti Yoga?

The terms Bhakti and Yoga have evolved out of practices which answer questions regarding the identity of human beings: questions of who I am, where I come from, where I go to, etc. Such identity questions have always been important in religious practices and philosophical enquiries. Answers to these questions depend on the discipline one is in and on one's worldview. Bhakti Yoga has become one way to cope with the question: Are we simply a product of Nature, and if so, what happens to us when the natural laws end their functioning? Bhakti Yoga, while it recognizes the totality of life as an expression of Nature, also recognizes that life is something that cannot be captured by natural laws alone. Thus Bhakti Yoga draws our attention to the presence of a principle that is not bound by natural laws. To communicate the presence of that principle, it uses terms like the Spirit, or God, "something beyond natural laws," or "nothingness." These are the various ways in which people have attempted to look at the nature of identity. When we talk of Bhakti Yoga, then, we are answering these questions of identity, sense of belonging, sense of relationship with the other.

"Yoga" means "putting together" in a cohesive way, which we do on the basis of certain faith principles. The faith principles involved in the development of Bhakti Yoga in the theistic tradition are: there is one creator, we are all created by that creator, and we belong to that creator. Bhakti Yoga then develops the terms and conditions under which we would like to belong to that creator. By developing in this way, the Bhakti Yoga tradition has become a very useful and powerful means of community building. It has given rise to hopeful, helpful, strength-giving messages such as: we are all together; we are all children of God; all of us belong to God; and God will take care of us even when we are suffering or helpless.

We see this *bhakti* tradition in most religions. The *bhakti* may be centered around a human being or around a particular notion of what the great creator is, and the notion of how we are related to that great being may vary. But independent of these variations, Bhakti Yoga is a way of communicating to human beings a sense of belonging and the terms and conditions of that belonging.

Q2: How does one practice Bhakti Yoga?

In Bhakti Yoga practice, emotion is used as the main medium of communication for establishing and cultivating our relationships to the creator and to one another. Emotions of both love and fear are used, to encourage the cultivation of desirable behavior and to discourage undesirable behavior. These two emotions, which are naturally present in almost all humans in their relationships with others, when transferred to a Supreme Being, a provider, a controller, a dispenser, define the practice of Bhakti Yoga. The role of logic and reason to foster desirable behavior is relegated to

minor importance in Bhakti Yoga. We note that, since emotions are present in everyone while enquiring minds are not as common, Bhakti Yoga is suited to the mass of humanity.

Recognizing how our family relationships, embedded in affection, take the form of different kinds of love – the love between a parent and a child, between siblings, between a husband and wife, etc. – Bhakti Yoga practice fosters the same types of love between people who are not legally recognized as having these familial relationships. It also uses these family notions to relate human beings to the creator. That is how such notions as Father God, Mother Goddess, “we are all children of God,” “we are all brothers,” have come about. The practice of Bhakti Yoga then starts with this basic concept of family – there is another family in the world, where we are all together under conditions of absolute love, acceptance, and non-differentiation.

At the same time, recognizing that there are relationships based on fear in various areas of life (e.g., the relationship between an individual and an institution that has the power of life and death over him), Bhakti Yoga uses the emotion of fear as a second motivating force to make our conduct acceptable and conform to certain standards. This happens, for example, when we are told: “God will not be pleased with your conduct.” The notion of Yama (the one who judges our actions) is also brought in for this purpose.

For a Bhakti Yoga practitioner, at the center of the natural laws, there is One that controls those laws. The practitioner – the *bhakta* – attributes all natural phenomena to that One, whom he calls God. Everything has come from God, everything goes to God, and whatever happens is by the will of God. If the *bhakta* prays to God, the rains will come; and if he does not, the natural laws are affected because of his fault and there will be no rains. Similarly, all natural and man-made calamities (earthquakes, diseases, outbreak of war) are operative through God. So then the *bhakta* feels that he can overcome the calamities by invoking God.

Thus the notion of God has been used in Bhakti Yoga to deal with natural laws. When everything fails, we pray. The best example of this is at the time of imminent death of a loved one. Relying on God to take care of the dying person, we pray to Him. Whether the dying person is then healed or dies, we are comforted (the comfort coming in the case of death from the thought that the dead person is with God).

The fine arts have been one of the chief media for, and chief beneficiaries of, the expression of Bhakti Yoga. Either as a cry for help or as an acknowledgement of the grace or kindness of the Supreme Being that caused something good to come about, people have expressed through writing or music or dancing or painting or any of the other fine arts their joy or sorrow.

Q3: What are the benefits of practicing Bhakti Yoga?

Practitioners of Bhakti Yoga have complete faith that nothing happens unless God wills it. This gives them a strong sense of hopefulness and fearlessness. Even when destruction

and deprivation are all around them, they wait patiently for their condition to ameliorate, for justice to prevail, and for just rewards to be bestowed. Moreover, at the individual level, the power of Bhakti Yoga may give the practitioner the capacity to transform, reform, or even revolutionize the situation.

Let me now speak in broad terms across religious traditions. Humans have developed religion as one of the ways to deal with the complexities of the world and the uncertainties of life. They have developed their practices around the notion of God and institutionalized those practices by establishing the concept of sacredness and building holy places. Investing sacredness in an object – whether it is a man-made structure, a natural object (a tree or a stone or a river), or a human being – means that we attribute the presence of God to that object, turning it into something beyond what it appears to be. In other words, the object is considered to have super-natural powers. The benefit of this practice to humans is that, when something goes wrong in society or nature, we can take sanctuary in the sacred place or object. We are then able to hold on to our faith and our positive values.

Thus Bhakti Yoga gives staying power to the individuals who practice it. It gives them a sense of belonging even when most of the links in their life (family, market system, rule of law) are broken. Even when everything fails, there is one unfailing source of strength for them. It gives them the capacity to carry on, to withstand any type of pressure that is brought to bear on them, to be hopeful. Our tradition is full of narratives that illustrate, through stories, legends, and mythology – many of them involving what may be called miracles – this benefit of practicing Bhakti Yoga.

Bhakti Yoga denotes not merely the particular beliefs one subscribes to but also the kinds of emotions and values that one carries. Even in political revolutions, where people subscribe to values such as democracy, human rights, and freedom from oppression, they often develop their values using Bhakti Yoga as one of the basic mechanisms. Elements of Bhakti Yoga can be seen in various spheres of human activity, such as the political and the economic. Capitalism and the spread of democracy around the world can be considered as expressions of Bhakti Yoga.

The benefits of Bhakti Yoga are universal. They are not confined to the practicing individual or to his lifetime or his locality; they are for the whole of humanity till the end of time. Even when an individual does not live to enjoy the freedom or security he has worked for, those benefits will be enjoyed by the generations that come after him, in all parts of the world.

The universal value generated by the practice of Bhakti Yoga is unconditioned love, the Sānskrit term for which is *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is that state of loving that is not bound by any condition and is prepared to give up personal interest for the sake of the larger interest. Cultivating the trait of unconditioned love is the highest achievement possible for a human being.

Q4: What are the results of practicing Bhakti Yoga?

The result of practicing Bhakti Yoga is to empower people who in certain situations feel either weak or conditioned. The practice of Bhakti Yoga gives them the strength to grow so that they become assertive, achieve their goals, and feel fulfilled. They acquire the capacity to renew their strength and their resources.

It is important also to recognize the possibility of misuse of the practice of Bhakti Yoga. In the name of Bhakti Yoga, a lot of degenerative practices have taken place in human development – superstition, fanaticism, etc. At some point, Bhakti Yoga becomes destructive by making other values subservient to it, as for example when the state uses its power to propagate Bhakti Yoga.

Q5: What are the indicators of Bhakti Yoga?

- a) Loyalty: the practitioner becomes loyal to a value or a symbol and then holds on to it, no matter what the consequences of doing so.
- b) A sense of unshakeable stability.
- c) One can count on the practitioner's honesty, sense of sharing, sense of sacrifice, availability, and accessibility, even when it involves inconvenience and discomfort to him.
- d) Sharing of wealth, knowledge, and whatever facilities the practitioner has.
- e) Aspirations and hopeful outlook for the future.

The above list shows that the indicators of Bhakti Yoga are the same as the indicators of the love of parents for their children. We can also see the touch of Bhakti Yoga in the fine arts and other human activities.

Question from the audience: How does non-theistic or Advaitic bhakti work?

In the non-theistic (i.e. Advaitic) tradition, the notions of "I," "you," and "the other" are viewed differently than in the theistic tradition, by freeing all three notions from conditioning. When the "I" is freed from all conditions and the "you" is not seen as a role-performing individual with certain skills and demographic traits, "the other" is recognized not as God but as the unconditioned nature of the being that cannot be separated as "I," "you," and "the other." This is the principle that is succinctly stated in the Mahāvākya *tat tvam asi*. Recognizing this principle and ordering one's life according to it is called Parābhakti, and that is Bhakti in the Advaitic tradition. It is Bhakti with all the conditionings removed. Even for one who does not believe in a creator, the acceptance of "the other" as the source of everything is possible. To progress towards the state of Parābhakti, people have to start from the particular teaching or book or symbol that they are accustomed to and gradually give up their loyalty to it. The enlightenment comes when the relationships between "I," "you," and "the other" are dissolved, as it were. There is no longer any distinction between the three notions. There is no knower and the known, seer and the seen, subject and object, nor anything that can be described. It is a state of illumination. And that state is Parābhakti.

II.6 Jñāna Yoga

This article is based on a talk given in Okemos, MI on January 23, 2005.

Q.1: What is Jñāna Yoga?

Jñāna is a Sanskrit word meaning “knowledge.” *Yoga* means joining together, making things harmonious. There is the implication of plurality, of different pieces or processes, which *yoga* brings together and unifies into a coordinated idea or system. In Jñāna Yoga, the object – thing or process or abstract concept – with reference to which the knowledge is being sought is the nature of Reality. Jñāna Yoga, then, consists in getting an insight into the nature of Reality by unifying the various modes of gaining an understanding of aspects of that Reality.

There are various ways in which people have approached Jñāna Yoga. There is a whole tradition of looking at various statements made about the nature of Reality, the nature of life, the nature of the being, and an attempt to pull together the meanings of those different statements to make coherent sense. Jñāna Yoga means talking about three things into which Reality is seemingly divided: (i) the observer, thinker, enquirer, or knowledge generator; (ii) the object with reference to which the knowledge is generated, viz. the nature of Reality; and (iii) the process of knowledge generation, i.e. the investigative process.

Differences in the various schools that discuss Jñāna Yoga arise because of differences in their understanding of the nature of the above three things. There are texts in different traditions relating to Jñāna Yoga. I shall discuss my understanding of Jñāna Yoga using the Bhagavad Gītā. In the Gītā, there are two important chapters that focus on concepts of Jñāna Yoga – chapter II, where it is called Sāmkhya yoga, and chapter XIII, which talks of the field of experience (Kṣetra), the one who understands the nature of that field (Kṣetrajña), and the different ways in which a human being can gain the knowledge about the two in their distinctiveness and thereby overcome his state of ignorance. In talking about these things, the 13th chapter of the Gītā brings in many aspects of human behavior and develops the theme that our behavior, our attitudes towards other people and objects, and our knowledge have to be made harmonious.

As described in verses 7-11 of chapter XIII, knowledge grows by the cultivation of the following disciplines: Absence of pride and vanity, non-injury, patience, perseverance, service to the teacher, self-control, revulsion to objects that tempt the senses, reflection on the ephemeral nature of life, non-attachment, non-entanglement with family, imperturbability, intense devotion to the Supreme Being, frequenting solitude, steady pursuit of spiritual enquiry, and strong aspiration for the Truth. A practitioner of Jñāna Yoga, once he has attained his goal, will automatically express the above qualities in his conduct and feelings. They are observable indicators of the practice of Jñāna Yoga.

Q2: How does one practice Jñāna Yoga?

One way to do this is to develop a keen interest in understanding the nature of one's own being. If we focus on this, we get continual opportunities to remove the distortions and misunderstandings we have of who we are. Specifically, the practice of Jñāna Yoga consists in:

- Separating the distortions that occur;
- Removing the misunderstandings we have developed about the nature of things;
- Understanding the nature of things and their limits;
- Realizing how things are related to and dependent on one another;
- Realizing how those relationships and dependencies themselves become obstacles for the right understanding of one's own self; and
- Becoming aware of the presence of something that is outside the network of relationships and processes.

This is the way in which Jñāna Yoga is practiced. It is essentially a process of contemplation, continuous enquiry, continuous revision of one's earlier understandings and the capacity to see that they were the result of one's conditionings and circumstances, becoming aware of the framework that each of us carries in life, and preparing ourselves to do away with these frames so that our knowledge of the nature of Reality is frameless.

To reach this ultimate goal, the seeker must prepare himself by constantly undertaking intellectual, psychological, and even behavioral exercises and experiments in the environment in which he lives. In so doing, there will be consequences; and it is important that the seeker organizes his life in such a way that the consequences are primarily on him alone and not on his family or on the society of which he is a part. Thus preparation for Jñāna Yoga requires very careful understanding of one's obligations and liabilities. Only the select few who are in a position to free themselves of familial and societal obligations can effectively pursue Jñāna Yoga. For those who are not in that position, there are other ways to pursue the understanding of Reality, viz., through Bhakti Yoga or Karma Yoga. Anyone who undertakes Jñāna Yoga without this kind of focused, responsible approach is on the wrong track.

Q3: What are the benefits of practicing Jñāna Yoga?

The benefits of practicing Jñāna Yoga are universal, in that both the practitioner and the community in which he lives benefit. The benefits to the practitioner are that he gets clarity and a sense of awareness through the right understanding of his own nature and the nature of other beings. Having gained clarity into the nature of being, his confusion and his sense of fear and injustice disappear. He then exhibits in his life the good and desirable values enumerated earlier. And because he becomes a channel for the flow of those values – fearlessness, compassion, a sense of giving, etc. – these values are also reflected in the life of the community.

The principles of Jñāna Yoga are universal and its practice is not confined to any one culture. But the practice mechanisms and institutional characteristics are influenced by

the conditions in which it is practiced – the prevailing technology, sociology, and political organization. To illustrate both these aspects of Jñāna Yoga, we note that Mahātmā Gāndhī credits his ideas of nonviolent resistance that he employed during India’s freedom struggle to the 19th century American philosopher Henry David Thoreau’s text “On Civil Disobedience.” (And to complete the circle, the 20th century American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was greatly inspired by Gāndhian ideas on nonviolent resistance and he visited India to learn and to pay tribute at Gāndhī’s shrine.) Gāndhī experimented with the idea of Satyāgraha (“the force of Truth”), which is based on the twin principles of *ahimsā* and *satyam*. He reasoned that his opponents would try to understand the notions of justice and fair play animating the followers of Satyāgraha and would then change their behavior accordingly. In his early experiments, Gāndhī made Satyāgraha a mass movement. But soon he realized that Satyāgraha was not for the masses, for most of his followers did not understand its basis and resorted to large-scale violence. So then he said that practitioners of Satyāgraha had to first prepare themselves. He nominated a chosen few for the movement. This shows that Jñāna Yoga is to be practiced not by the masses but by a select few.

II.7. Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad

This article is based on a talk given in Okemos, MI on December 23, 2005.

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad (MU) is the shortest among the Upaniṣads, consisting of just 12 *mantras* (brief passages). Yet, despite its brevity, it has been said that the study of MU alone is sufficient for obtaining self-knowledge if one cannot study all the Upaniṣads. In it occurs one of the four famous Mahāvākyas (great sayings or aphorisms) of the Vedas stating the identity of the Ātman and the Brahman.

MU focuses on the meaning, interpretation, and sound of the sacred syllable OM to explore the nature of reality at different levels. It identifies OM, also called Praṇava or Omkāra, with the whole world, with Brahman, and with the Self. The three constituent sounds in OM – the elemental A + U + M sounds (called respectively the *akāra*, *ukāra*, and *makāra* sounds) – are further identified with the three states of the Self: the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states. Without explicitly mentioning the matter, it validates the practice of *omkāra upāsana* as a spiritual practice (*sādhana*) for clarifying one's Consciousness and obtaining an empirical, personalized experience of Reality. This is the practice of spending all of one's waking hours, day in and day out, continuously uttering the OM sound and attuning oneself to it in a disciplined way, preferably under the guidance of someone who has already undergone that discipline.

The MU uses this aspect of *omkāra upāsana* – the use of personalized, empirical experience as a data set – to enquire into the nature of Reality. It analyzes the three states of experience to reveal the Self as free and limitless in nature. The three states or *avasthās* are: (a) Jāgrata Avasthā or waking state, where all the five senses, the mind, and the life-energy (*prāṇa*) are alert and participating; where one is interacting with the environment of plurality, possibly with some utilitarian interests or as a way to define oneself by a process of approach and avoidance; where all of one's psychological processes are active. (b) Svapna Avasthā or dream state, where the five senses, the mind, and the *prāṇa* are functioning in a limited way; where one is creating one's own world based on one's memories, past experiences, and pent-up feelings of aspirations, fulfillments, and frustrations. (c) Suṣupta Avasthā or deep-sleep (dreamless) state, where one is not aware of what is going on; where interactions, perceptions, and even subjective feelings are completely absent.

All three of the above states are conditioned experiences – the conditioning coming from the whole empirical world around us, from one's personal experiences and memories, and from the complete absence of “the other,” respectively. In the waking state, one's experiences can be independently verified with reference to any other individual. In the dream state, the experiences are real only to the one dreaming; reality is so subjective that it is real only with respect to the dreamer's own experience. In the waking state we may feel that we are poor; in the dream state, that we are powerful; and in our deep sleep state, we have neither of these feelings. Again, in deep sleep, we do not know what is going on and who we are; it is only when we wake up do we know who we are. In short, our characterization of our own status becomes variable in the three states.

We are thus led to recognize the presence of an underlying substratum of the three states, something that goes through all the three experiences and yet is not subject to any of the three environments. This ever-present “something” has no name, no form, no role, no interest, but is present everywhere and in all beings. It appears to be amenable for understanding and interacting in the three conditioned states but actually transcends them all and is not exhausted by any of them. This independent, unconditioned, free presence is called *Turīya*, literally “four” or “fourth state.” But it is not a state at all, it is the nature of the being, the Reality of the Self, the Consciousness or awareness present in every sentient being. Because it is the nature of the being, it is called *Ātman*. Because it is a witness of what is going on but is not really affected by the triple stream of experience, it is called *Sākṣi*. Because it is Consciousness, it is called *Prajñānam*.

As is common in the Upaniṣads, MU uses a poetical expression to describe the three states of wakefulness, dreaming, and deep sleep and the fourth, transcendental “state” that witnesses the other three. It calls them the four quarters.

Having thus surveyed the plurality of experiences in the different states, MU concludes that that One which goes through all the three stages and yet is not limited by any of them, is freedom which is spirit which is *Ātman* which is *Brahmaṇ*. This is succinctly expressed in the second *mantra* of MU by the *Mahāvākya* *ayam ātmā brahma* – This Self is *Brahmaṇ*. The activating principle in the individual and in the universe is the same.

On this concise Upaniṣad, elaborate commentaries have been written. Two famous ones are Gauḍapāda’s *Kārikā*, a composition in verse form explaining the original text, and Śankara’s *Bhāṣya* on the *Kārikā*. We have to go through all three of these texts to obtain a coherent understanding of Reality. We will then understand Reality as a plurality and as a unity and as neither – i.e. as something beyond such analytical schemes. The truth is that the words “plurality” and “unity” are terms we impose on Reality to describe our own interests and concepts; Reality itself is free from such things. An affirmation of that Reality which is free from these types of impositions is our own being. That is why, when a person says OM after having understood all this, the OM itself is the Reality as well as his own being. That is why the *omkāra upāsana* is an important way to experience the nature of Reality instantly as pure Consciousness, without the medium of the senses and without the dichotomy of observer and observed: Reality is nothing other than itself, that is the nature of OM, that is the nature of the being, and that being I am. The *omkāra upāsana* is thus a process for practicing the principle of *Ātman*. Eventually, even conscious participation drops away: it is simply being that way, and that is the Reality, and that I am. Whatever I am doing, that is *Omkāra*. This type of eventual absorption into the nature of Reality is fulfillment. Afterwards there is nothing left to do. There is no need to say OM. OM is there, and I am that. Anything that happens here is simply an expression of that being. This is the ultimate message of *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*.

This is the spiritual path of unconditional love and ultimate freedom (*mokṣa*).

Proper mental attitude is very important in determining the outcome. It is rightly said: “*mana eva manuṣyāṇām kāraṇam bandha mokṣayoḥ* – The mind alone is the cause of both bondage and liberation in human beings.” In the following, we discuss several facets of this statement.

No Running Away: One cannot escape the Kārmic process since the Kārmic process (the cause and consequence chain) goes on independent of or in spite of the individual. That does not give one the excuse to become reclusive or play the victim (my karma/my fate!!!), since inaction also has consequences. One is required to make conscious moral choices (*dhārmic* intentions/legitimate desires) and perform one’s duties (employing one’s unique personality/*guṇas*, talents/gifts). One is required to be engaged (with detachment) and the consequences will eventually visit the intender/doer. “He who sows the wind, reaps a whirlwind.”

Creating Your Own Destiny: If you want to lead a happy life, you must do the deeds today that will create happy experiences in the future. Because the future depends on what you do today, you create your own destiny. It is your responsibility to gain right knowledge (*ātma jñāna* – knowledge of Self) and follow the path of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) and create your own destiny.

Opportunity in Calamity: Like the beautiful saying “O Lord, give me the strength to accept what I cannot change, the power to change what I can, and the wisdom to know the difference,” it depends upon us how we choose to respond to various (seemingly unfavorable) situations. Gandhi and Nehru saw being jailed as opportunities to reflect. Nehru wrote some of his best books while being held in jail. Instead of blaming our fate, when we choose the appropriate response, this action is promptly supported by the natural eight forces/supporting environments.

Freedom, Unconditional Love, and Bliss: The objective is not to disengage from daily life. On the contrary, through ongoing inquiry (with enlightened guidance) and acquisition of right knowledge (*ātma jñāna*) [1], the individual should develop a sense of sustained detachment (non-reaction to success and failure, pain and pleasure, likes and dislikes, pro-active pursuits and detached engagement). In other words, the doer should recognize oneself as a mere serving instrument of God, offer each and every action to God, and accept the fruits of the actions as *prasāda* [2] from God. This allows for disassociation from the ongoing Kārmic chain and bondage (*samsāra*) and becomes a pure-play (*līlā/ a cid-vilāsa*) of unconditional love, joy, and ultimate bliss.

[1] Please refer to the ‘*Śrī Rāma-hṛdaya*’ passage in chapter 1 of the book *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* by Swāmi Tapasyānanda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 1994).

[2] *Prasāda* is anything that comes from the Lord—both the tangible results and the intangibles. It includes an attitude, a way of looking at an object, which itself is born out of the understanding that everything comes from the Lord.

III.1. Guru-Śiṣya Parampara: The Lineage of Learning

Article written for the souvenir volume published by the Bharatiya Temple of Lansing on the occasion of the Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha ceremony at the Temple in June 1998.

I. Introduction

Literally, the Sānskrit term *guru* indicates something or someone that is weighty, worthy, and valuable. In common parlance, the master who knows is the *guru*. The seeker or the student is the *śiṣya*. All arenas of human learning and wisdom are governed by the *guru-śiṣya* model of learning. When this relationship and its contents are passed on successively to the next in line of learning, we refer to those successions as *Param-Para* – the linkage of the earlier with the later in a successive mode. If the chain of linkage refers to the *guru-śiṣya* transactions, we call it *guru-śiṣya parampara* – the Lineage of Learning. In the *guru-śiṣya parampara*, something very valuable and worthy in terms of understanding the complexity of life, the insights and their practical aspects, is passed on from someone who knows what it is, how it is, why it is, where and when, in a masterly way, to someone who has a need and value for it. This dynamic descriptive model of cultural learning is universal across all disciplines: folk traditions, arts, and sciences. The subject matter and the methodology of practical instructions define the nature of the tradition (*sampradāya*). In this article, I focus on the *guru-śiṣya sampradāya* in the Hindu tradition.

The processing of human experience in the Hindu tradition is conceptualized into four kinds of interest and achievable goals: 1) *Dharma* or sustaining of values; 2) *Artha* or adoption of technology, skills, and market mechanisms for economic welfare; 3) *Kāma* or development of personal and societal needs and desires for freedom, liberty, rights, security, enjoyment, and growth; and 4) *Mokṣa* or enlightened understanding that makes the human mind abide in freedom, love, fearlessness, and peace. There are *guru-śiṣya paramparas* pertaining to each of these four domains. The *guru-śiṣya parampara* that I consider in this article is oriented to the *Mokṣa*-driven domain of life. In this *parampara*, keeping *Mokṣa* as the dominant goal, the other three are pursued to enable the human being to organize life experiences and their appropriate linkages and sequences.

As a person cultivates his or her loyalty to a *guru-śiṣya parampara*, an awareness of the variety of *paramparas* enhances the positive grandeur of life and promotes harmony, while lack of that awareness contributes to confusion, negativity, and sectarian conflicts.

2. The Nature of the *Guru* Principle

The *Guru Gītā* of *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* celebrates the value and glory of the *guru* principle (*guru tattva*). The meaning of the term *guru* is derived in many interesting ways. For example, the syllable *gu* indicates darkness and *ru* indicates the removal of that darkness; thus *guru* refers to the process of removing the inadequate or improper understanding of the nature of Truth, that is Life. The darkness is generalized as

ignorance of the Truth or Reality. This ignorance is multi-dimensional: improper, inadequate, distorted, conditioned, or prejudiced understanding. The term *guru* then refers to a person who gives right understanding of the Truth (*samyak jñāna*) and removes ignorance (*ajñāna*).

The well-known *śloka* from the Guru Gītā, “*gurur-brahmā, gurur-viṣṇuḥ, gurur-devo maheśvaraḥ; gurussākṣāt param brahma tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ*” gives a good and deep insight into the nature of *guru tattva*. Let us comment and elaborate on this *śloka*. *Brahmā* is the principle of *sṛṣṭi* or creation, the manifestation of power in a structural-functional form. The *Brahmā* principle has the potentiality of drawing our attention to the great principle of life; that is valuable, that is precious, and that is *guru*. The *Viṣṇu* principle of maintenance sustains the order of life in a functional way; that is valuable, that is precious, and that too is *guru*. The *Maheśa* principle of *laya* (merger) or *tirodhāna* (disappearance) transforms the order of things to be fed back into the great system of life, recycling and disposing the structures of life for another round of creation; that also is valuable, precious, and wonderful, and that too is *guru*. Read and understood in this way, we can see the *guru* principle as the very dynamics of life. This insight and this attitude towards life must dawn on the person and deepen the understanding that the *guru* is *jñāna rūpa* as well as *bodha rūpa* (personification of knowledge and understanding, respectively), which again emphasizes the notion of right knowledge (*samvit*).

In a conventional sense, *guru* refers to a human being. This is not a correct perception. In practice, it is considered a blasphemy to think of a *guru* as a mere human being, for two reasons: a) the *guru* may fall short of the ideal standard of conduct; b) because human beings are culturally conditioned by human values, very quickly we might mistake the notion of *guru* with cultish human authority. For these reasons, a very careful scanning and weeding procedure is insisted upon in the Upaniṣadic injunctions for selecting a *guru*. The Upaniṣads say that one should approach a person who has mastered and modeled life according to the sacred scriptures (*śrotriya*) and is anchored in the principle that is expansive and inclusive (*brahma niṣṭha*). In fact, *Jagat*, the world of names and forms, activities and relations, is itself the *guru*, as it is the aid and revealer of the Truth.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Arjuna asks Śrī Kṛṣṇa again and again to describe the character of *Sthitaprajña* (second chapter), the *Yogi* (sixth chapter), the *Bhakta* (twelfth chapter), and the *Triguṇātīta* (fourteenth chapter). (The last term refers to one who transcends the *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* natures.) Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, “*vāsudevaḥ sarvamiti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ*” (VII.19): rare indeed is that great soul who realizes that everything is Vāsudeva. It is rightly said by Ādi Śankarācārya (Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, verse 3) “*durlabham mahāpuruṣa-samśrayaḥ*”: the capacity and opportunity to be around a person of great understanding is very rare indeed.

3. The Emphasis on *Guru* in our Traditions

To be in linkage with a *guru* valuing freedom, liberty, love, and a sense of dialogue and open communication with trust, confidence, and initiative is a special gift one can give oneself in life. It is so natural and spontaneous in occurrence, many Ācāryas and saints have eloquently sung about it. Śankarācārya has a line in his *Gurvāṣṭakam* which challenges the accomplishments and achievements of talented people: Life is futile and empty, however rich and well endowed, if a person's mind does not focus on the feet of the revered *guru* (*gurorāṅghri-padme manaścenna lagnam tataḥ kim tataḥ kim tataḥ kim tataḥ kim*). Purandaradāsa, Mīrābāi, and Kabīr Dās have sung with great authenticity of their feelings flowing musically in their words emphasizing the *guru* connection. The Śiva Śaraṇas of Karṇāṭaka – Basava, Allama, Akkā Mahādevi – have made their spiritual life and songs flow from the grace of *guru, linga, jangama*. The Veerashaiva approach to life and spirituality also has an abiding acceptance of the lineage of *guru*. The Guru Nānak tradition of Sikhism is equally strong on submission to the service of *guru* and living an upright life according to Guru Bāni (the orally-transmitted teachings of the Sikh Gurus). Thus, almost every tradition of faith and piety cultivates their followers by presenting persons who provide inspiration and prophetic vision for humankind. The *guru śakti* (power) is important in all these traditions.

4. Conclusion

The *guru-śiṣya parampara* is spoken of as *anādi-avicchinna parampara*, meaning that it is beginningless (*anādi*) and unbroken (*avicchinna*). The relevance and glory of this *parampara* is seen in the easy blending and reflective harmonizing of the human experience to enhance the quality of life rooted in *bhakti* (devotion), *jñāna* (understanding), and dispassionate detachment (*vairāgya*) from issues that do not matter while we keep the final goal of life (understanding Truth) as the alpha and omega of pursuits.

Salutations to *gurus* of the past, present, and future.

III.2. Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha: Temple Becomes Alive with Divine Energy

Article written for the souvenir volume published by the Bharatiya Temple of Lansing on the occasion of the Hindu and Jain Pratiṣṭha anniversaries in June 2003

In every religious tradition, there are ideas and procedures for sanctifying the presence of the Divine; these are referred to in Sānskrit as *āgamas* or *traditional wisdom*. Establishing the live presence of Divinity by such means helps us to gain inspiration and renew our commitment to good and ennobling life.

In this short article, I focus on the significance of Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha at our Temple. Hindu and Jaina *āgamic* traditions are followed here. In the Hindu tradition, Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha means energizing (*Pratiṣṭha*) the sacred primeval energy (*Prāṇa*), which is the source of all creation, sustenance, and dissolution. Therefore, the purpose of Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha is to consciously establish a natural environment to enhance the well-being of all the devotees. During these ceremonies, the principles and our cherished values get embodied for special focus, attention, and absorption, to bring us closer to the Divine.

A whole body of practice manuals (*āgamas*) describes the procedural details, materials to be used, and the organization of contemplative and ritualistic procedures. We follow a course of intensive contemplation, meditation, internalization and externalization of worshipful feelings, gestures, and celebrations over a period of several days with participation by all the members of the devotional community. Practicing theologians and scholars guide these proceedings of the Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha ceremony.

The anniversaries of Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha give opportunities to us as devotees to evaluate our commitment to the devotional principles and practices at the temple. Many Hindu texts, e.g. Nārada Bhakti Sūtras and Sāṅḍilya Bhakti Sūtras, expound the nature of devotion to God and the development of good conduct and character of the devotee. Attainment of perfection through reflections and corrections brings peace and harmony in the community.

I conclude with the very instructive conversation between Sage Vālmīkī and Śrī Rāma at the time of the latter's exile to the forest, as narrated by Tulasīdās in Rāmcaritamānas. When asked by Śrī Rāma as to where he should reside, Vālmīkī replied: *"You should reside in the heart of those who, having performed all devotional services, ask only one boon as their reward: 'Let me have devotion to the lotus feet of Śrī Rāma'...Those who have no lust, anger, arrogance, or pride...it is in their heart that you should abide."*

Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha is the installation of these values, knowledge, and feelings to rekindle these as flames in our life so that they remain in our mind. Formalities, congregational worship, and devotional acts are only the means and indicators to actualize these values fully in our lives as *samyak darśana* (right view), *samyak jñāna* (right knowledge), and *samyak caritra* (right conduct).

III.3. Navagraha Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha and Worship

Article written for the souvenir volume published by the Bharatiya Temple of Lansing on the occasion of the Navagraha Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha ceremony, June 30 – July 2, 2006

Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha of Navagraha *devatās* (the nine planetary deities), viz. Sūrya, Candra, Angāraka or Mangala, Budha, Guru, Śukra, Śani, Rāhu, and Ketu is a set of formal ritual procedures to consecrate the *mūrtis* of Navagraha *devatās*. Each Navagraha *devatā* is governed and surrounded by its Adhi *devatā* (representing deity) and Prati-adhi *devatā* (subsidiary deity). The ritual procedures provide the necessary religious sanction to practice religious activities by devotees. The rituals and ceremonies are conducted by Ritviks (priests) according to Vedic and *āgamic* traditions. (*Āgamas* are sectarian scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God and prescribing detailed courses of discipline for the worshipper.) The rituals consist of Navagraha Japa (repeating the mantras that affirm their powers), adhivāsa pūjās (worship of life support materials), homa (worship through sacred fire), invoking and inviting the presence and grace of Navagraha *devatās*, kumbha abhiṣeka (sacred water ceremonies), installation, investiture, anointment, eye opening, inaugural worship of Navagraha *devatās*, dedication and pledges of worship services by the devotees, and sharing the prasād (sanctified food), all under the guidance and direction of qualified priests.

In Vedic and other sacred literature, we have elaborate references to Navagrahas. Principles of astronomy and theology have come to be so systematically integrated that a series of descriptive typologies – predictive models based on deductive causal relations implicating the influence of planetary movements on human behavior and cognitions – have developed into a variety of astrological fields. Conceptually, a *graha* means any force-field that captures or holds in its domain of influence. That hold may be beneficial or maleficial to the aspiring embodied entity. By our meditations, prayers, and acts of devotion, we are enabled to minimize the influence of the malefatory aspects and maximize the beneficial aspects of the Navagraha *devatā* influences on the incumbent – that is the basic idea underlying the worship of Navagraha *devatās*. That is one practical way of understanding the patterns of cosmic influence on human life cycles and developing the proper attitude to cope with the dynamic situations arising from the cosmic forces. At the same time, Hindu religious tradition clearly recognizes the overriding all-pervading force presence called by different names (such as Śiva or Viṣṇu or Brahmā) that overrules the effects of Navagraha *devatās*. In short, Navagraha *devatā* worship simultaneously recognizes the workings of the relative and absolute forces at work: the limits of human capacity in a given context, the potential capacity of humans to harmonize the forces around them, and the existence of an overriding infinite force that is freedom and love.

Professional discussions on methods of science and religion and deep disagreements on the predictive implications and personality profiles based on Navagraha *devatā* influences notwithstanding, prescriptive religious therapies based on worship of Navagraha *devatās* optionally are of importance for some believers in Hindu-Jain

traditions. Astrology professionals of varied specialties draw upon the concepts and theories of planetary dispositions in their helping and consulting work.

The famous 16th-century poet-composer Purandaradāsa says in one of his songs: *sakala graha bala nīne sarasijākṣa*, meaning “You are the lotus-eyed God, you are the only power working through all the planets.” If we keep this message in mind, we will develop the appropriate temper and attitude to deal with personal, community, and global problems and eventually free ourselves from all the corruptive push and pull of *samsāra*. The purpose behind observing occasions such as National Day of Prayer, World Peace Day of Prayer, and other human solidarities is to empower our capacities for transforming the adversities to common good through coping with difficult situations. The horrors of wars, conflicts, terrorism disasters, and calamities and the dividends of peace, harmony, love, and prosperity are the twins of our human history. We seek peaceful methods to deal with them. Navagraha Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha Pūjā is one mode of religious initiative and response.

III.4. People's Power

Message dated January 12, 2008 to participants at 11th Annual Nayi Azādi Abhiyān Shibir

I am very hopeful that the activities at the Shibir will result in renewing the efforts to spread the values and practices of *Nayi Azādi Abhiyān* (New Global Freedom Movement) in dealing with contemporary challenges. The issues we face range from natural disasters to the successes and failures in human history: war, peace, violence, affluence, poverty, slavery, freedom, injustice, charity, darkness, and light. We see these problems operating at difference levels of human organizations: planetary, global, international, national, regional, local communities, and individual beings. The *Nayi Azādi Abhiyān* provides a value framework to guide us in formulating programs and activities for achieving world peace, social harmony, ecological balance, and economic justice.

As we examine the state of the world and the actors across different levels of the world, two basic questions confront us:

- How do we enable and empower people with low skills (in many areas, e.g. literacy, communication, thinking, knowledge, and occupational craft), weak resources (e.g. social networking, education and training, and natural, social, and financial capital), and low energy levels (due to lack of nutritious food, physical and mental health, financial capacity to own or get access to animal, mechanical, or electricity-based power, motivational hope-building, optimistic mentoring, counseling, and advisory services), to productively perform in complex market economy to achieve their goals in life guided by values of truth and nonviolence?
- How do we protect and promote people's creative and productive efforts amidst dynamic forces of greed, aggression, unjust exploitations, and abuses of power?

The history of India shows that strong foundations for moral, ethical, political, economic, social, and spiritual progress have been laid by the lives and works of great thinkers, for example, from Rājā Rām Mohan Roy (1772-1833) to Jayprakāsh Nārāyan (1902-1979). These foundations will help the people to deal with the above two questions.

These leaders drew on the ideas and struggles of innumerable earlier generations. They mobilized people's power to reform, revolutionize, and reconstruct progressive ethical, moral, religious, humanist, social, political, and economic institutions and practices calling for freedom and justice in society. When Mahātma Gāndhi came on the national scene he pulled together the people's power in Satyāgraha and constructive programs. They developed further under the leadership of Āchārya Vinobā Bhāve into Sarvodaya and Grām Svarāj movement. Jayprakāsh Nārāyan further developed the youth, student, and people's power into *Lok Sangharsh*, *Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vāhini*, *Janmukti Sangharsh Vāhini*, and *Total Revolution* movements.

Other social, cultural, economic, religious, and political movements influenced the involvement of the people, who thereby changed the national fabric after India's Independence. For example, we may notice several Marxian-based communist and

socialist movements. Additionally, there are other movements based on Gāndhian principles of truth and nonviolence that have raised the consciousness of the people for the principles of sustainable development, social and environmental justice, and women-led movements. Examples include 'Chipko,' 'Appiko,' 'Save Western Ghats,' 'Save Eastern Ghats,' 'Palani Hill Conservation Council,' 'Save Nīlgiris,' 'Narmada Bachāo Andolan,' 'Azādi Bachāo Andolan,' and 'Beej Bachāo Andolan.'

The political parties leading the governments at local, state, and central levels have used decades of national planning methods using the political power of the government and state to initiate and intervene in the workings of society, economy, and governance. Development of education and research in the areas of science, technology, humanities, and the arts have strengthened the infrastructure of society. At the same time, assertion of People's Power to hold the government accountable and transparent is very important.

In the history of moral and political thoughts and action, Mahātma Gāndhi-Vinobā-Jayprakāsh Nārāyan's ideas of self-respect and Gora's ideas of positive atheism are a gold mine to build a golden age. Those leaders did not hold the power of coercive government or corporate governance or theological authority. But they got engaged in a relentless struggle to release the People's Power to build capacities in self-governance of life for harmony, peace, love, and justice. They not only saw dreams in their horizons but also left a legacy of means and methods for the succeeding generations to pick up the threads and weave those dreams into actualities.

Nayi Azādi Abhiyān renews those efforts in order to accomplish their goals in dealing with issues such as terror attacks, global economic collapse, preserving human unity, maintaining ecological balance, and policies of multinational corporations. The papers to be presented at the meeting, reviewing the works of great thinkers and activists in the political, economic, social, ethical, moral, religious, spiritual, ecological science and technology, and bearing on issues of environment, health, humanist values, religious harmony, multinational corporation impacts, global economic collapse, peace and war, terrorism and human development, are varied and rich.

At the Shibir, when you are with persons who have worked in the area of their special interest, you have access to their insights and expertise as also to their inspirational words, wisdom, and practical lessons.

A continued challenge for us is to fill the gaps between our feelings, thoughts, understandings, sayings, and doings. In each one of us there is potentiality for developing our capacities and skills towards fullness and fulfillment of our life mission. While the initiative has to be with the individual, cohesive and coordinated group action is also needed and that requires discipline.

I am confident that the purpose of *Nayi Azādi Abhiyān* will be served by your participation and contributions.

IV. Spiritual Autobiography – Childhood and Youth

The following spiritual autobiography of Dr. Sripada Raju was narrated by him at his home in Okemos during three sessions – Christmas Day 2006; January 2, 2007; and February 2, 2007 – and recorded by Eric Ederer. The narrations cover the period up to 1955 and are filled with fascinating details. Unfortunately, no recording has been made for the years since then. To fill this gap, however inadequately, a brief conversation with Dr. Raju on February 1, 2009 is included in the Appendix.

Exact dates are not important in a spiritual biography, but for purposes of orientation we give here a brief chronology of Dr. Raju's early years.

Born on February 24, 1929 in the village of Miyāpūr in the central part of what is now the state of Karṇāṭaka but was then the princely state of Mysore.

Four years of elementary school (1937-1941) in Miyāpūr and Thyāvanagi.

Four years of middle school (1941-45) in Kundūr.

Three years of high school (1945-48) in Harihar.

A. Introduction

I am happy to have this opportunity to review my life experiences in the context of tracing my spiritual development. When we talk about the spirit and spirituality, we are talking about things that are not governed by any law. The spirit is freedom itself. Nobody has any control over it, nobody can create it or terminate it – it is the very being, which is open, is always there, and is not a thing to be understood in the framework of time or place or any type of relationship. Getting a clear understanding of how our life is lived, rooted in the spirit on the one hand and connected to the web of relationships that is an inseparable part of life on the other hand, is what I consider spiritual biography. Every being has a condition where it is bound by certain situations and yet that being at its ultimate substratum is freedom itself. The conjunction of this bondage and freedom is life. Spiritual biography means the understanding of the influence of environment, endowment, and other factors on our intrinsic nature in the course of the development of our life and interests. In this article, therefore, I shall discuss how my understanding of the nature of the spirit evolved within the constraints of my own limitations and circumstances.

We are embedded in our life where we are given an environment, consisting of parents and the community and so on, to develop our identity and interests; and as we begin to live our life, we are also led to pay attention to the nature of life and Reality which is the opposite of a fragmented or narrow way of experiencing ourselves as individuals separate from others. In order to communicate that Reality, every society and culture provides an opportunity to accept something that transcends our limitations. But while everyone is provided with the opportunity, to pursue it in a consistent and clear manner becomes a distraction for some. Others are able to pursue it consistently. Fortunately for me, my life events have been such that I belong in the second group.

B. From Birth Through Elementary School

Parents are extremely important for every one of us. In my case, the piety and spiritual habits of my parents provided the basic environment for my childhood growth. I should thank my parents, siblings (2 brothers and 5 sisters), and extended family members, who had subscribed to a style of life and an attitude towards the environment and their dealings with each other that was imbued with spirituality. They had a steadfast faith that whatever circumstances came their way – whether joy or difficulty or suffering or death or destruction or economic collapse or indebtedness or even problems of community peace – there is always one force that would protect them and that they had to be devoted to that force. This basic idea of faith was one of the important sources for the development of my spirituality.

I was not doing anything special – I was just growing up, eating, playing, and getting elementary education in a village in Karnāṭaka – but the environment in which I was growing up was of this type. So slowly I was introduced to spirituality in real terms, not by reading books or listening to fancy stories. It was the reality going on around me. Even now, when I seek to understand something, my living reference is that early experience – I have seen people living like that.

Ours was a joint family. It was composed of three nuclear families – my father’s family, his younger brother’s family, and my paternal grandmother’s parents’ family. In all, there were some 20 family members. The head of the family, and its guiding force, was my grandfather’s younger brother, Govinda Bhaṭṭa. Well versed in Vedic practices, he had great influence on me. The family’s occupations spread over three areas: farming (cattle rearing, agriculture, and horticulture), teaching, and village administration (tax collection, law and order, and the justice system). So I grew up in an atmosphere where I was exposed to various economic, social, political, and educational activities.

Let me give one example of the living spirituality I grew up in. In my village there was no Christian environment. I was not exposed to the Bible, did not know anything about Jesus Christ, and had never seen a church. But the educational institutions, under the influence of the British legal system, used to declare Christmas holidays for two weeks at the time of Christmas. So the meaning of Christmas to us was – it was holiday time! During those holidays, my father, who was a school teacher, used to take the whole family on a visit to a great saint who was living in a neighboring village some 36 miles away. Not only my father but also all the family members were deeply involved in following the teachings of this saint. He was invited to our house whenever he came to our village. It was a routine for us to visit him in his village every year and attend a 7-day retreat he used to conduct. Many families from different villages and towns used to come to these retreats. So for one week each year we used to stay in that camp.

In those days, travel was by bullock carts and it would take us some 12 hours to cover the 36 miles. We would get up early in the morning. Our mothers, aunts, and sisters would prepare the food for the journey and pack our lunches, and then we would set off. We had to pass through several villages and cross several streams. At the lunch hour, we

would stop at a stream called Nimbāpurahalla (meaning “stream near Nimbāpura village”) and eat our lunches. For drinking water, we used to make an ad-hoc filter by making some pits in the sand so that the water that was around would seep into the pit and form a pool of fresh water, which we would scoop up and drink. We would reach Nulenūr, our destination, in the evening. We would all go straightaway to the residence of the saint, Śrī Shankaralinga Bhagavat Saraswati, where he would be waiting for us. He would welcome each one of us, young and old, individually and with great affection. That was a wonderful experience. He was not related to us in any way (by blood or business ties) and yet there he was, warmly greeting us in a very natural way. It demonstrated a type of relationship that was independent of any strings attached in terms of the ordinary business of life. It was something extraordinary. Being provided the opportunity to be in that type of relationship that is acceptable and enjoyable is what I consider a spiritual experience. The notion of spirituality – the nature of our being and relationships that is not conditioned by anything that can be defined in terms of our everyday understanding of what goes on around us – thus became a living experience for me. Even now, when I read about various concepts in the spiritual domain, that living experience remains an important reference point for me.

Śrī Shankaralinga was a householder named Rangappa when we first knew him. But gradually he detached himself from his role as family man and eventually took to *sannyās* (renunciation). Even while he was a householder, he would help people in their spiritual quest, giving them advice and encouragement in their worldly life, as they faced crises of health, finances, or relationships within the family or with neighbors. Contemplative and devotional by temperament, he was also a good singer. When teaching, he did not use textbooks or notes; his teaching style was conversational, for he had incorporated into his every-day life the understanding he had acquired from his earlier spiritual quest and readings. Listening to him, people were soothed, comforted, and encouraged. That was how spirituality was working through him, though at that time we children did not know what spirituality was. All we knew was that, when we went to him, either out of curiosity or because of some stress in our life, we got relief and enthusiasm and renewed hope. It was practical spirituality that we experienced, and I was a beneficiary of it.

After some years, Śrī Shankaralinga left Nulenūr and for a period of time set up his residence – called Ānanda Āshram (“abode of bliss”) – in a place called Lokikere, some three miles from our house. This made it possible for us to visit him on a daily basis. Every day, two or three members of our house would go to see him, taking with us some product from our farm: dairy products (milk, butter, yogurt) from our cattle, fruits and flowers from our garden, etc. His Āshram was on the banks of a stream called Shāgalehalla. Crossing the stream and walking on sandy beaches, which we had to do to get to the house, was fun. Through these daily visits, our family life got to be connected with this spiritual master in a continuing way. Out of affection, we used to call him “Appa,” which means “father.”

At home, I had to follow a set of spiritual disciplines, mainly because of the insistence of my brother-in-law Govinda Rao. He was the village accountant, very good at painting

and calligraphy. He was a grown person while I was a child, and he was a strict disciplinarian. He used to do yoga exercises each day and sing bhajans in the home each evening, and he used to insist forcibly that I participate in both. Even though these things had no meaning for me at the time, I had no choice but to do as he said, for fear that he would tell my parents if I did not obey. Thus, through fear of disapproval, I was oriented to the disciplines of yoga and bhajan singing in childhood.

There were also important influences on me from the community at large where I was living, which I shall now narrate. Some of the laborers who worked on our farm belonged to the community of “displaced people.” Their ancestors had traveled with the armies of kings and nobles, carrying supplies of food, clothing, fighting equipment, etc. from place to place. But when the wars ended, these “supply chain” people no longer had a sustained connection with any organized group – they were an abandoned or displaced group. They then settled in various places, living on the outskirts of villages and not integrated with the local communities. They took to several occupations – cattle rearing, sheep farming, agricultural work, and domestic work. Some of them worked on our farm. Others worked in our orchard, which had to be planted and watered properly.

There was one Chatriya Nāik who worked in the orchard. He was a pious man but unlettered. I used to visit him in that orchard. Whenever he had a break – the break was either to smoke a *bīḍi* (the locally-made cigarette) or chew *pān* (betel leaf mixed with some lime, tobacco, and some other ingredients) – he would sit down and we would talk. Reflecting on his philosophy of life, he would say: “There are two attitudes to doing work that are productive: Either I look upon everything as mine while doing the work; or I consider that everything belongs to the master and nothing to me. Either of these attitudes will allow me to work at high efficiency and be at peace with myself, but any in-between attitude will not.” This outlook of his impressed me as I began to understand the way we have to organize in life. Here was a person who had never read a book and yet had developed a profound insight into life. Even now, after some 70 years, the spiritual quality of his observation stands out very clearly in my mind. Many problems in our life arise because we do not know where to draw the line between mine and thine. But if we do not draw the line and instead accept that everything or nothing belongs to us, we are better off. When I think about issues of work, justice, and responsibility (attitudes towards work, outcome, and expectations), this worker’s long-ago remarks about the two styles of operating are very helpful to me. I also value the fact that a person without book knowledge, purely on the basis of his observations of life and simple thinking, was able to contribute to my understanding of spirituality.

My spiritual biography, then, starts with this embeddedness of my life in the biological, sociological, and cultural circumstances of my childhood, conditioned by the professional, educational, and rural setting in which I grew up, and yet linked to a style of life and an environment of life that was freedom and love itself. I had the live experience of growing up in an atmosphere of spirituality. And from there, year by year, my spiritual awareness slowly grew. This first phase of my spiritual life ended when I completed my elementary schooling in 1941 and moved to my maternal uncle’s house in Kundūr, some 8 miles away, for entering middle school.

C. Middle School (1941-45)

The second phase of my spiritual life, in middle school in Kundūr, was different. My maternal uncle with whom I lived was a teacher. He provided me food and clothing and instruction but I did not have the spiritual connections and the discipline of spiritual practices that I used to have in my father's house. But there was a framework of religious routines: *pūjā* at home, Sandhyā prayers, activities centered around a Hanumān temple, festivals, and so on. And so my spirituality developed in a different way.

There were two other boys in my uncle's household and the three of us were soon good friends. One of them, Vāsudeva, was senior to me, while the other, Narasimha, was my classmate. The three of us lived together, studied and played together, and took care of household chores under the guidance of my uncle. One of our chores was to bring our cow Kāveri back to the house after the day's grazing. (A cowherd would collect all the cattle from the village each morning, take them for grazing, and bring them back to the villagers' homes in the evening. But Kāveri was an independent soul and often escaped from the herd. And it was left to us boys to go find her and bring her home.) On the occasions when we could not find Kāveri and bring her home, my uncle would take us to task. This was a source of great anxiety for us, for our uncle would threaten us with strong disapproval. The way we eventually got free of the anxiety was as follows.

My uncle used to read a few *ślokas* (verses) of the Bhagavad Gītā every day as part of his spiritual discipline. We boys did not know what that book was. But seeing its effect on my uncle, one of us had the thought that there must be something valuable in the book that would help us deal with our anxiety about the cow. So we read a translation of the book in Kannaḍa (the local language). One of the verses of the *Gītā Māhātmyam* composition with which the book started said: "If you read even one verse from this book, all your fears and anxieties will be taken care of." That was great news for us! From that day on, the three of us decided that the best cure for us was to read at least one verse from the book. One day, even with all our reading of the Gītā, we could not find Kāveri. When we shared this news amongst the three of us boys, one boy who was not on Kāveri-duty asked: Did you not read the Gītā? We replied: Yes, we did, but it was of no use. He then said: No, you must not have read it properly. Faith in that book is never denied.

And that is how we became serious about reading the Gītā and developed an interest in that wonderful book. Looking back on this, I can say that it was not the requirements of learning or the passing of examinations but the necessity to manage a crisis situation that developed my interest in the Gītā. Occasions where we have to take care of something entrusted to us, for which we are accountable but which is sometimes beyond our control, however much we may do our best – such occasions lead us to seek help from somewhere. In other words, the spiritual quest is often triggered by the fears and anxieties in our life. They become the stimuli for us to search for something to hold on to, to give us a sense of collectedness, calmness, and courage.

Let me mention two other people who were significant in the development of my spirituality during my middle school years. The Bhagavad Gītā was involved in my interactions with both of them.

- The headmaster of my middle school in Kundūr, Venkatesa Bhaṭṭa, was a great reader and admirer of the Gītā. It was from him that I learned that the Gītā has a birthday. He used to celebrate this birthday, called Gītā Jayanti, every year. He would collect all of us together, recite from the Gītā, and talk about it, with food and recreational activities thrown in.
- My maternal uncle's son, Subba Bhaṭṭa, who was much senior to me, was always encouraging in our work. He was a good student, a favorite of the Kundūr Middle School headmaster, and had won a silver medal for his merit. He once took the trouble to procure three copies of the Gītā for Vāsudeva, Narasimha, and me. Before presenting the books to us, he wrote our names on the first page of the book along with a brief message advising us to read the book every day. This, in a sense, was a way to for him to publicly commend our efforts, and it reinforced our attachment to the book.

In middle school, I began to be exposed to the Indian independence struggle. In those days in the rural areas, not much news came to us from the far-off politically dominant metropolitan centers like Delhi, Bombay, Madras, and Bangalore, which were the centers of action. But then Mahātma Gāndhi started his life transformation movement, based on his conviction that, unless the economic and social issues in the villages are addressed, we will be unable to build the social and human relations structure necessary for independence. His programs to remove untouchability, empower women, and encourage village-based economic activity (spinning, weaving, handicrafts) had a big impact on our village. They were the only way we could understand what was going on elsewhere in the independence struggle. As students, at times we had teachers who had been exposed to Gāndhi's approach and they used to show their new social and political awareness by telling us what the people involved in the struggle were doing all over India.

It was in 1942 that Mahātma Gāndhi told the British to quit India after granting the Indian people the right to manage their own affairs. He asked the people to take to the streets and demonstrate for this right. That became known as the "Quit India" movement. Some of our teachers, inspired by this, resigned their jobs and called upon us students to not attend classes and to stop reading English textbooks. Since mastering the English language was in any case difficult for us, we gladly responded to this call by writing "British, quit India" on our textbooks. We felt that Independence had already come for us! It was freedom from the burden of learning a language we did not use in our every-day life. It was a convenient way for us to understand the protest movement going on in the country.

But while we were given this type of behavioral instructions regarding the Freedom Movement, we had no understanding of the spiritual aspects of what Gāndhi was advocating. But later on, this experience helped develop my understanding of how spirituality can be related to political, economic, social, and cultural movements.

D. High School (1945-48)

Up to now, I have narrated how in my elementary and middle school years, I was in a learning situation where messages of spirituality and spiritual practices were available to me on a continuing basis so that I was able to sustain my interest in those topics. This process continued in high school.

For the three years of high school, I had to move to a bigger town, Harihar. It was a military town where the British had set up a training camp to train soldiers for World War II operations. The war was coming to an end as I started high school in mid-1945, but the presence of the military continued. The military camp was used for recruiting and training army personnel. I had to pass the town impacted by the camp every day on my way to school. On certain days each week, the soldiers were allowed to go outside the camp. They would then go to the town to make purchases or attend civic functions.

This was my first glimpse of the nature of army life and the effect of the army on the economic life of civic society. The army personnel came from different parts of India and spoke different languages. They were all sports-minded. My particular interaction with them came as follows. Harihar, located on the banks of the river Tungabhadra, had a pure sandy beach. We boys used to go to the beach to play games. The army personnel, observing this, trained us in competitions. They applauded and rewarded us when we reached a certain achievement standard. Thus I experienced at first hand the great human qualities of recognition and emotional connection in the army personnel. These people were no longer a source of fear or strangeness for me, even though they had been trained to fight and their job involved violence. This experience too contributed to my right understanding of the nature of the spirit: the spirit is not bound by any institution.

National and international news came to us fairly slowly. My own access to news was through the Kannada newspaper. First the English media had to send the news to the town, then they had to be translated into Kannada, and then printed. When I read the momentous news of the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, I had the thought that Harihar would also be attacked with a bomb, especially because of the presence of the army camp in the town. This thought developed anxiety and fear in me, so that during my vacations I would retreat to my village some 20 miles away and watch the horizon of Harihar town for any sign of bombing – some smoke or red/crimson color in the sky. Along with the anxiety came thoughts of how to be rid of it and regain a sense of security. Religious practices, belief in God, the thought that everything would be all right, became an important way to hold on to strength.

In Harihar, I stayed with a family that was related to mine. It was a family of great Vedic scholars and it ran a Vedic school in the house. Every day there would be a discourse and teaching to students of different levels. As I was staying there, I would listen to the talks and observe the disciplined way of learning that is a feature of the Vedic tradition. And then I had to go to my high school, with its English-oriented way of teaching, and learn about science, history, literature, and other academic subjects. So it was a multicultural atmosphere for me – academic subjects at school and a dense environment of Vedic

learning and spiritual practices at home. That is how I kept up my exposure to spirituality as traditionally cultivated and taught in the Vedic way of life.

One of the people I should mention here is Śivānanda Tīrtha, who was a *sannyāsin*. He had established his own institution called Omkāra Muṭṭ, where he used to have sessions of Gītā discussion, singing, and bhajans. Simply because my home was close to this Muṭṭ, I used to attend these sessions after school. Śivānanda Tīrtha was very old and his eyesight was failing, so he used to call upon me to read the Gītā to him. I would read and he would simply listen without saying anything. This was an interesting way for me to see the value of this type of spiritual literature.

Śivānanda Tīrtha's son, Yogeshwara Dattamūrti, was one of the great influences on my thinking and living. A great devotee of Mahātma Gāndhi, he was a radical and an active participant in India's freedom struggle. He used to attend demonstration marches. If the government passed an order banning processions, he would disobey and get arrested. In response to Mahātma Gāndhi's "Constructive Program" that asked people to forego intoxicating drinks, he would picket the shops selling liquor. When the shop owners complained to the police and the police came and ordered the picketers to disperse, they would not obey the order and would get arrested. During the times he spent in jail, Yogeshwara would read Gāndhi's writings, and whenever he was released, he would come to Harihar and talk to us of the nature of the social and political environment in which we lived. He also used to give frequent talks on Vedānta. A great singer and composer of songs, he would invite some boys and girls and teach them to sing and pray. I was one of them. He wrote many pamphlets and was also a publisher. Later on, he took *sannyāsa* and went by the name Abhinava Padmanābha Tīrtha.

It is through my association with Yogeshwara Dattamūrti that I began to feel the interconnection between the Vedāntic understanding of the nature of Reality and the societal and other aspects of life as lived from day to day. These are not divorced from each other. A blending of Vedāntic ideas with the activism that Gāndhi practiced was possible. The spiritual exercises that we do and the social interactions that we have to establish have to be combined in a harmonious way. That was the first time I came to know that. I was also starting to read Kannaḍa translations of the writings of Swāmi Vivekānanda at that time, and in them I found a confirmation of the need to combine spirituality with social engagement. This contrasted with the seminary-type Vedic mode of life taught in the house of my relative, a mode that was not at all concerned with political or social issues.

A special period during my time in Harihar was the fortnight following Mahātma Gāndhi's assassination on January 30, 1948. Harihar, located on the banks of the river Tungabhadra, was one of the places where the ashes of the Mahātma were to be immersed. When he was cremated, people all over India began to claim his ashes and it was decided to distribute them to major river areas so that people everywhere would get the satisfaction of acknowledging and commemorating the Mahātma's work and life. I was one of the student volunteers assigned to manage the crowds and receive the people

bringing the Mahātma's ashes to nearby rail stations and air connections. The ashes were taken to the river and immersed in a very ceremonial way.

That was also the time of the mass migration of refugees from the western part of Punjab and the eastern part of Bengāl to India. We were told that people in all parts of India had a responsibility to provide support for the refugees. So fund-raising efforts were started. One of my teachers, K. Sītārāma Rāo – a very inspiring teacher of biology – took the initiative to raise funds for the refugees and work in the refugee rehabilitation program. Young and unmarried, he made that his important goal. When he came to class to teach, he would dress differently than he did earlier and he started growing a beard – these were the ways by which he communicated to us the importance of paying attention to the needs of the refugees. This social and political environment around me and my fellow students was a very important early influence in my life. Incidentally, if at all I have any interest in science, it is due to K. Sītārāma Rāo.

To summarize my experiences in Harihar: Several factors – my interactions with the army personnel, the social workers, and the people working for Hindu-Muslim harmony; the teachings on Vedānta by Yogeshwara Dattamūrti and his exposition of spirituality as understood and practiced by Mahātma Gāndhi; my exposure through my teachers to psychological and other ways of looking at problems of people and society; my exposure through several people to social responsibility; connections between what we learned in school and spirituality; a sense of nationalism; my readings from Swāmi Vivekānanda – shaped my thinking and drew my attention to the practical implications of Vedānta. This is what Swāmi Vivekānanda has called Practical Vedānta. Though I did not know that term then, I can now (looking back) appreciate the notion of practical Vedānta, which means realizing our own true nature which is free from any type of connections and yet expressing that nature in a world that is a network of various types of connections while maintaining harmony in the environment. These types of important spiritual and social values began to take shape in me there.

I completed my high schooling in Harihar in 1948. In the terminology then in use, I matriculated and obtained my secondary school leaving certificate (SSLC). My main interest then was in history, and I had opted for history as my special subject in school. That was because, very early on, I had been exposed to a great teacher of history, Veena Rāma Sāstry. Even though later on in school I was exposed to the afore-mentioned biology teacher, I had already selected my optional subject by then. How a great teacher encountered in the early years of a student can have a lasting influence on the life of the student is an important aspect of education.

E. College (1948-53)

Having completed high school in Harihar, I moved to a neighboring, bigger city called Dāvanagere for 2 years (mid-1948 to mid-1950) for “intermediate college” studies in a newly established college. In those days, high schools and colleges were available only in the bigger cities, and students from villages and rural areas had difficulty in getting access to them. But philanthropists were coming forward and providing money to match

government funds so that the educational facilities could be expanded. My learning has been very much influenced by the charitable work of some of these philanthropists. Both the high school and the intermediate college where I studied had been established in part with funds from Rājanahalli Maddu Rāyappa, a businessman who I think was in the jewelry business. His munificence made my education possible.

For me, college was a big shift from high school. We were suddenly called upon to take courses in English literature, the humanities, logic, economics, and history, all presented in English. Even though the medium of instruction in high school was also English, its usage had not been heavy. And at home and in the market place, Kannaḍa was the language I spoke. Now, suddenly, I and the other students were in a difficult linguistic environment. We had to master the English language and express our ideas in that language. Even to read a book in English, decode it, and understand it using our own translated forms was a very difficult experience. I suffered in this situation.

Many students in India have this linguistic problem. The inefficiency, the wastage of resources, and the burden put on the students in the process of learning, are important problems. Some students simply give up and drop out after high school. This was one of the causes that pushed the Indian states to introduce multiple languages in the colleges. That in turn has created other problems and led to further reformation.

A few things became very important for me in college. I was living in a dorm with some 15 to 20 other students. There was also an elderly blind person living there, who had been given that space by the philanthropist who had built the dorm. This blind resident, Channagiri Virūpākshappa, whom we respectfully called Swāmijī, was talented in singing and in talking about God and devotion, ethics, and moral values. It was a daily routine for one of us students to serve him, accompanying him on his day's needs and going out for walks with him holding his hands. He used to narrate stories and incidents, his ideas of what life is and how it should be lived, and what one should and should not do. Once in a while he also used to gather all the students together and give us talks and instructions. I was one of the recipients of all this informal education and was greatly benefited by it. The individualized conversations and interactions with him were one of the important sources for reinforcing whatever I had been exposed to earlier.

While in intermediate college, occasionally we had the opportunity to invite some speakers to our dorm. We did this especially on religious occasions and on days of national significance. I used to organize the talks. I remember one professor of English, V.A. Thyāgarājan, who specialized in Shakespearean plays and taught us *As You Like It* in class. As he was a philosophical type, we used to invite him to give talks. These talks also helped in widening our understanding and relating literature to spiritual ideas expounded in religious texts. So this connection was important for me. I learned later that Prof. Thyāgarājan had helped some Swāmis of the Rāmakrishna Āshram to translate and publish in English the ideas that they had expressed in their native languages.

In the college, I studied economics, logic, history, and literature, mainly Kannaḍa literature. I came across some people who were very well versed in the rich Kannaḍa

literature and who used to present the great literary works not only in the class room but also in informal settings. One of them was T.N. Srikanṭhaiah, professor of Kannaḍa. He had come to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor for his advanced studies in linguistics and he had written quite a few papers in that field. He introduced me to the work of Rabīndranāth Tāgore, not in the original Bengāli but through English and Kannaḍa translations. Another was a lecturer in Kannaḍa, G.S. Shivarudrappa. About once a week or once a fortnight, he would organize a study group. He would choose a book and encourage us to read it and discuss it. He was a good poet himself, and it was a great experience to have him present, interpret, and critique the poetry and compositions of other authors. It was a wonderful way to savor the fine things in literature. He was greatly influenced by the teachings of Śrī Rāmakrishna and Swāmi Vivekānanda. He was a student of another great Kannaḍa poet, K.V. Puṭṭappa (“Kuvempu”), who had written a work in Kannaḍa called *Rāmāyaṇadarśanam*. This was based on Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* but was presented in the framework of contemporary philosophical and humanistic ideas, with attention to issues of social justice and other modern sensitivities. This was not a religious work but an artistic work that sought to examine human values and struggles and relationships. I should acknowledge Dr. Shivarudrappa’s introducing me to that work, for it developed my interest in its theme.

Side by side with learning economics, logic, and history, the spiritual base whether from Vedānta or various informal sources was always there with me as an undercurrent (so to speak) during the college years. I am able to look back and see how from my family itself in the early years and later on during school and college from the great network of teachers and other connections, spiritual interests were slowly evolving in me amidst the study of various other disciplines.

After finishing my two years of college at Dāvanagere, I moved to the city of Mysore for the next level of college courses – B.A. (Honors), as it was called. Mysore was one of the famous centers for higher college education. It was the home of the king Jayachāmarāja Wodeyar (1919-1974). Because of the influence and patronage of the palace, the city was a great cultural center – a very refined, orderly, appealing place where the arts and literature and the sciences flourished. I stayed there for 3 years (1950-53).

Here again I had to depend on philanthropic help. As I have mentioned earlier, accessibility to higher education was always limited, and in general only a few people were monetarily well enough off to afford it. Fortunately for me, there was a philanthropic support system – people introduced me to various institutions where I could get adequate monetary and physical help to support myself. But for such support system, it would not have been possible for me to pursue higher studies.

My benefactor in Mysore was Loka Sevānirata Nārāyana Rāo, a prosperous businessman who had (I think) an oil-related distribution agency and had grown prosperous during the World War II years. He devoted his profits to the cause of education of young people. He established a dorm where he provided food as well as facilities for physical exercise. As his goal was to help human beings develop into all-round individuals, he used to organize debates in the dorm relating to issues of religion, philosophy, current events,

and so on. That environment attracted the best and brightest students from across Mysore state to live in the dorm. It was a multi-disciplinary atmosphere, with each student specializing in his own area of knowledge. As they were all accomplished, merit-ranking students, the atmosphere provided for me an additional source for developing an interconnected, interdisciplinary understanding of life.

My major field then was economics because I had been advised that among the social sciences that was the leading discipline, with the most marketability; for one who was not specializing in science, medicine, or engineering, economics and the study of business was the next best field. So for three years I took courses in economics, statistics, economic history, and political theory. For one or two years I had to study the liberal arts and allied subjects as well, but these were auxiliary subjects. Religion and philosophy were not in my academic curriculum but they were already in me because of my earlier exposure. I kept up my interest in these subjects in my own way by visiting the Rāmākṛishna Āshram in Mysore once a week and listening to the talks of Swāmi Somanāthānanda, a great teacher of Vedānta, and participating in prayer sessions. I also used to spend some time conversing with the Swāmi during these visits.

During the time I spent in Mysore, the political environment in the city was stable. Independence had come to India, the Congress party was in power, and Jawaharlāl Nehru was the great leader. Everything was quiet. The mood of the country was: Focus on your studies, which will prepare you for participation in national development. So there was less disruption in the social environment, and focused attention on study was the important thing.

As far as my economics study was concerned, in the early part of my 3-year program there were one or two good teachers who were helpful in introducing us to the classical texts and the thoughts of the great economists – Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Maynard Keynes, etc. The teachers simply introduced and explained the key concepts. That was all they could do, and I am grateful to them for doing at least that. What was missing then was direct exposure to original thinking. But this changed later when Prof. M.H. Gopāl, who had been trained at the London School of Economics, taught us. He was very inspirational for us youngsters. He explained to us how to organize our studies in such a way that new ideas are generated. From then onwards, it became clear to me that an economist should focus on original ways of looking at economic phenomena and prevailing economic conditions. In other words, I realized the importance of studying economics in an empirical way.

When I had completed my three years of study in Mysore and received the B.A. (Honors) degree, some problem arose in my family and I had to go back home. So for one year (1953-54) I did not go to college to continue with the Masters program. During that one year, I spent most of my time in my village working on my family's farm. Whenever I had some leisure, I used to read some of the books of Nehru, including his *Discovery of India* and *Glimpses of World History*. I also got back to studies of the Vedāntic literature. There was one Satchidānandendra Saraswati of Holenarsīpūr who had translated into Kannāḍa the commentaries of Śankara on quite a few Upaniṣads, and I was very focused

in reading them on my own. I still have some of those books with me. I also renewed my connections with the saint I knew in childhood, Śrī Shankaralinga Bhagavat Saraswati, who had taken *sannyās* and was living in Mālenahalli near Nulenūr.

Appendix: Brief Account of Life Since 1955

Following my one year on the farm, I returned to Mysore for the one-year M.A. course (1955-56). Then I again came back to the farm and spent a year there (1956-57). I spent most of that time in the Śrī Ranganātha Āshram of Śrī Shankaralinga Bhagavat Saraswati at Komaranahalli and met some great devotees there. During that period, I made trips within Karnāṭaka to meet a great yogi, Rāghavendra Swāmi of Mallāḍihalli; a great analytical thinker of Vedānta, N. Rāmaswāmi of Nulenūr; and a great thinker and writer, Srīnivāsa Mūrthy of Nulenūr.

In 1958 I went to Hyderabad. From 1958 to 1960, I did post-Masters work at the Indian Institute of Economics. In 1960, I worked in Hyderabad as a Government of India Census Investigator for socio-economic studies of villages. I remained in Hyderabad till 1967, working for the census office till about 1965 and then at the National Institute of Community Development. One of the things I was working on was a joint project sponsored by the Government of India and the U.S. Association for International Development on the diffusion of innovations in agriculture and health in three countries: Brazil, India, and Nigeria. In the course of this work, I met Prof. Everett M. Rogers of Michigan State University (one of the participating institutions) and he persuaded me to enroll in the graduate program in communication at MSU. I also met MSU graduate student Jim Bebermeyer, who was on the staff of the Diffusion Project. He recommended me for post-graduate studies at MSU. And so I came to East Lansing, Michigan in 1967. Jim and I have kept up our friendship as we have made the Lansing area our home.

From 1967 to 1973 I studied at MSU, earning a Ph.D. degree in Communication in 1973. During 1972-73, after completing my dissertation and before getting the degree, I worked as a Research Associate at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. After I got my degree, I worked at MSU with Dr. Viswa Mohan Mishra, doing research on mass media, public opinion, and marketing.

It was in East Lansing in 1969 that I first met Shrikumar Poddar. He had come to East Lansing much earlier, in March 1959, to study civil engineering at MSU, and had stayed on. It was our common interest in famine relief and development work in India that brought us together. We have remained friends ever since then, and Mayurika and Shrikumar have graciously accepted me as a member of their household since 1983.

In 1976, I left Michigan and joined the East West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. I was there till 1983, first as a Senior Fellow and then as a Research Associate in cultural learning.

In 1983, I returned to the Lansing area and I have remained here ever since.