

THE INSIGHTS AND RAPTURES OF THE MYSTIC

BY RADHAKAMAL MUKERJIE

IT has been a long and historic tradition in the East to focus the meditation beyond a personal God to something above and beyond existence and being. From very ancient times the Indian mystic's endeavour to introduce harmony among his conflicting impulses and desires led him beyond heaven and hell, Gods and angels to a state achieved by introspection where all desires resolve themselves into nothingness. Thus along with a strong current of theistic thought India also showed strong pan-theistic and acosmic tendencies. These tendencies were early encouraged by the doctrine of kinship and similarity of the subjective soul with the Brahman, the unknown and Absolute supreme. In the verse Upanisads where this doctrine received a mystical expression we find that the methods of discipline and control of mind are commended strongly in the search for Brahman. The word Yoga occurs in the Taittiriya Upanisad and it seems that sometimes it was theistic, sometimes it contained no theistic element at all. The Maitreya Upanisad, a text of the Yoga philosophy, remarks: "a man being possessed of will, imagination and belief is a slave; but he who is the opposite is free. For this reason let a man stand free from will, imagination and belief; this is the sign of liberty, this is the path that leads to Brahman, this is the opening of the door, and through it he will go to the other shore of darkness. All desires are there fulfilled. And for this the sages quote a verse: "When the five instruments of knowledge stand still together with the mind and when the intellect does not move, that is called the highest state'." From the time of the Upanisads Yoga practices have formed an indispensable part of most philosophical and religious systems in India. Buddhism borrowed from the Yoga the stages of meditation. Indologists are of

opinion that exercises of contemplation for the attainment of higher states of consciousness were of great influence at the foundation of Buddhism.¹ The Yoga has its theory as well as its practice. The latter has been adopted not merely by Buddhism and Jainism but by all later schools of asceticism. Orthodox Hinduism does not recognise any restrictions for the Yogis, who receive highest honour irrespective of their caste, tradition or sect; while house-holders also initiate themselves in Yoga practice either from family teachers or from saints and ascetics. The Bhagavad Gita long ago pointed out the necessity of Yoga in addition to dialectic or analytical reasoning as a method of self-realization. The hold which the Yoga practice has upon the Indian mind depends chiefly upon the most tenacious tendency of man's nature to resolve conflict of desires and obtain sanity. The foundation of the Yoga psychology as formulated by Patanjali in the 2nd century B. C. is the elimination of hindrances which are five misconceptions, viz., ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion and desire. Man's ignorance is the propagative soil of the above hindrances. Now such hindrances are unconscious or potential as well as conscious or manifest; they are described as being "asleep, attenuated, dominant, intercepted or sustained." "In the case of those who have been resolved into entities, the hindrances are dormant; for *yogins*, attenuated; and in the case of those attached to objects hindrances are intercepted or sustained." Dormant desires remain potential in the mind towards the condition of seed, and become manifest as they come face to face with the desired object. Desires are over-powered when man ponders deliberately their opposites. For instance, when the desire to steal emerges, man should deliberate upon the consideration of giving protection to every living creature. A desire is said to be intercepted by love. When one is in love, no anger is felt in as much, when one is in love, anger does not actively move forth, and love when felt in one direction is by no means unfelt towards another object. Thus even when a desire is particularised or sustained in a given direction, it remains yet strong and dormant, the root of man's pain and *karma*. "Pain either in visible or invisible life then follows." "The roots lying there will bear fruit in the forms of pleasure and pain. All this goes on well with the psychology of the unconscious.

It is by analysis and meditation that both desires as well as the

¹ For a discussion see Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, Chapter VII.

finer forms of *samaskaras* or subliminal desires can be eliminated. It is clearly recognised that the subliminal desires are most difficult to eradicate. The active desires may be attenuated by the consideration of opposite desires. Their fluctuations can be escaped by Elevated Contemplation until subtilized and made like burned seeds. An interesting simile is used in this connection. Coarse stains are removed by shaking; minute stains by washing; more minute by alkali. Hindrances which are sustained are attenuated by joga of action; the attenuated are reduced to burned seed by Elevated Contemplation; the burned seed is destroyed by inverse propagation. When the mind-stuff which is an effect, is resolved into its cause, then and then only the subliminal consciousness is eliminated. It is with the eradication of the subliminal consciousness that the Yogin perceives his true Self (Atman) which is above and beyond any fluctuations of the mental processes, conscious or unconscious.² Various devices are recommended. Apart from ethical conduct, reading, and the cultivation of a habit of cheerfulness, the novice is asked to acquire noble thoughts and ideals and to practise meditation with the help of breath-regulation. All the yoga texts describe how the senses may be withdrawn from the objects of sense and reduced to inactivity so that their natural tendency is reversed, and they assume altogether the character of the inner central organ, whose emanations they are; how, in the next place, the activity of the organ of thought, in which all the functions that are dependent upon the influence of the external world are suppressed, is wholly centred upon the *atman* (the self, the soul); and how, finally thought and its object completely coincide.³ In the last stage of absorption the understanding rests on the secondless reality whose shape it has assumed, with concern as to the merging of the distinction of knower and knowledge, etc., so as to be completely identified with Him. The, just as, owing to the disappearance of salt after it has (melted and so) assumed the shape of the water (into which it was thrown), nothing appears but the water, so by the disappearance of the modification of the internal organ after it has assumed the shape of the secondless Reality, nothing appears but the latter.⁴ It must not be supposed that this state and sound sleep are identical; for, though

² *The Yoga System*. Translated and edited by Woods.

³ R. Garbe, Article on Yoga, *Encyclopaedia on Religion and for The Psychology of the Yoga*, see S. N. Das Gupta's *Hindu Mysticism*, Lecture III.

⁴ Compare Chhandogya Upanisad, VI. 13.

in both alike the modification of the internal organ is not perceived, there is nevertheless this one distinction between them, that it is present in the former (though unperceived), but not in the latter.⁵

According to the Vedantasara there are four obstacles to the meditation with recognition of subject and object:

1. Mental inactivity (*laya*)
2. Distraction (*vikshepa*)
3. Passion (*kashaya*), and
4. The tasting of enjoyment (*rasaswada*).

1. 'Mental inactivity' is the drowsiness of the modification of the internal organ while not resting on the Secondless Reality.

2. 'Distraction' is the resting of the modification of the internal organ on something else, instead of its abiding on the Secondless Reality.

3. 'Passion' is the not resting on the secondless Reality by reason of the impeding of the modification of the internal organ by lust or other desire, even though there be no mental inactivity or distraction.

4. 'The tasting of enjoyment' is the experience of pleasure on the part of the modification of the internal organ, in the recognition of subject and object, while it is not resting on the secondless Reality; or it is the experiencing of such pleasure when about to commence meditation without the recognition of subject and object.

When the internal organ, free from these four hindrances, and motionless as a lamp sheltered from the wind, exists as the invisible intelligence only, then is realised that which is called meditation without recognition of subject and object.

It has been said, "When the internal organ has fallen into a state of inactivity, one should arouse it—when it is distracted, one should render it quiescent (by turning away from the objects of sense, etc.)—when it is affected by passion, one should realise the fact—when quiescent one should not disturb it. One should experience no pleasure (during discriminative meditation), but become free from attachment by means of discriminative intelligence." As the Bhagavad Gita says, "As (the flame of) a lamp standing in a sheltered spot flickers not, this is regarded as an illustration of a mind—restrained yogi, who is practising concentration of mind."

⁵ *The Vedantasara*, XII.

The experience of rapture is frankly recognised in the East as a stage which has to be transcended. The Sufis, the mystic sect of Islam, draw a distinction between sobriety and intoxication. Agitation and intoxication are considered by them as marks of inexperience, while elevated agitation is transmuted into composure. The contrasted states are described as *Wajd* (rapture) and *Wujud* (existence) and the former is described as the preface to the latter. The end of the rapture is the beginning of the existence. The *wujud* of *wajd* is the cause of the *wajid's* being deprived of existence, which is the condition of the *wujud* of *maujud* (the existence of the existence of God).⁶ Amongst the stages in Sufism which must be passed before man's corporeal veil can be finally removed are (1) the *murid* (disciple), through ardency of desire rendeth the heart's veil, and considereth the revealing of the mystery of love for God—infidelity, save under the mastery of *wajd* (ecstasy), (2) the *murid* maketh himself the slave of love and joineth himself to *tajrid* (outward separation) and to *tafrid* (inward solitude); (3) the *murid* keepeth the heart's mirror before God's glory, and becomes intoxicated with its wine, (4) the *murid* keepeth so engaged the tongue in *zikh* (meditation of God), the heart in *fikh* (contemplation of God) and the soul in *mushahida* (viewing God's glory) that he considereth himself non-existent.⁷ In no religion, however, there has been more strenuous attempt to reach a state of serene composure than in Buddhism, which has sought the banishment of self so that no sense of union with the divine One or any one may be aimed at or felt. "Alone the Buddhist *jhayin* sat, but he did not "flee alone to the Alone" exactly as did Plotinus" writes Mrs. Rhys Davids. Nor did the Buddhist *jhayin* announce "I have known Him who is the Supreme Person," as did the Hindu *muni*. He calls himself *swambhu*; he attains the new life alone, and in his nirvanik tranquility he is alone, has neither teacher, nor God, absolute or Anything Else. This is well brought out in the Buddha's memorable reply to Upaka Ajivika's query, "Who is your Master?" "I have conquered all. I have known all. I am above all relativities. I have abjured everything. I am freed from thirst. Knowing everything who can be my reference? There is no teacher of mine. None is my equal. I have no competing being in the world of gods

⁶ *The Awarifu-l-Ma'arif*, translated by Clarke, p. 83.

⁷ *The Awarifu-l-Ma'arif*, translated by Clarke, p. 4.

and men. I am, indeed, the Free Man. I have no second as a teacher. I am the only Supremely Enlightened One. My mind is tranquil. I have extinguished everything." In the Buddhist scriptures also the insight rather than the feeling of rapture in mystical meditation is clearly stressed. The standing definition in the *Dhamma Sangani of Samma-Samadhi* is as follows: "Stability, insistence, persistence of thought, absence of wavering or perplexity of intellectual distraction, serenity, the faculty of rapt composure, right rapture." The Buddha discouraged the feeling of rapture among the Bhikkhus, and emphasised the emancipation of both thought and feeling. In *Majjhima*, six chief disciples of the Buddha ask one another one beautiful night what is their mental quality which might add a fresh charm to the beauty of the environment. One replies, "When a Bhikkhu fights out for himself internal peace, and devoted to solitude, resisting not the feeling of rapture, becomes endowed with insight. Another says: "When a Bhikkhu has the divine eye." Others also give suitable replies. Finally Sariputta says "When a Bhikkhu rules his heart and does not let his heart rule him." The Buddha gives preference to Sariputta's answer and adds: "But hear from me what sort of Bhikkhu could on such a night add glory to the wood. It is one who sitting calm, collected, self-possessed, makes resolve "I rise not from this seat until my heart is set free from the asavas."⁸

The gradual emancipation of consciousness from both image and the feeling it arouses is characteristic of the sequence of the traditional Jhana-exercises in Buddhist monasticism. In the first *jhana* sloth and torpor is inhibited by *vitakka* (initial application). *Vicara* (sustained application) permits the continued exercise of thought and dispels doubt. At first the interest is dull and slight, but gradually it develops into an intense interest amounting to rapture (*ubbega-piti*). This diffused rapture is invariably followed by happiness (*sukha*) by which distraction and worry are removed. In the second jhanic thought, the services of *vitakka* are dispensed with; in the third, both *vitakka* and *vicara* are absent; in the fourth *piti* is got rid of; in the fifth *sukha* is replaced by *upakkha* or hedonic indifference to the pleasure derived from the five grades of interest. "This hedonic indifference or neutrality of emotion is brought about by the continued voluntary exercise of the mind on the after-image

⁸ See Rhys Davids: *The Yogavacara's Manual*, Introduction.

to which it has been directed. And by it ecstatic contemplation reaches its full development in the 5th stage of jhana. In attaining to it, apperception of the two great types, which are "accompanied by joy" is superseded by one of the types which are "accompanied by indifference."⁹ It is a well-known mystical experience that when the active self-conscious activity of the mind disappears, the mystic can gain new knowledge which he is not easily able to reach by deliberate reasoning. It is for this reason that "the hedonic indifference becomes in the Buddhist Jhanna the starting point for fresh concentration on concepts." This signifies the arahant's entry into the fifth *jhana*, which is now termed "Jhana as base for super-normal thought" (*abhinna-padaka jhana*), because it is used as a basis for *abhinna* (super-intellectual powers).¹⁰ The course of mental training at this stage consists of fourteen processes as described in the *Vissuddhi-magga* whereby the arahant's will can gain a complete ascendancy over intellect and feeling. Super-normal powers of will then develop and these are classified, for instance, in the Yoga system Patanjali or in the *Visuddhi-magga*. All abnormal powers of the intellect and will arise only when the mystic attains what in the Buddhist Jhana is characterised as a state of "purity, indifference and mental clarity." We shall later on attempt to account for the universality of such phenomena as those of telepathy, clairvoyance and clariaudience, etc., which are familiar experiences amongst the mystically minded. How the Buddha himself reached a state of consciousness in which there was concentrated attention, yet no feeling nor thought is described in a memorable conversation between the Master and one of his leading disciples, Aniruddha, who was well-known for his 'celestial vision.'

"Have you three, Anuruddha, leading this life, zealous, ardent and strenuous, experienced supernormal states, extraordinary Aryan knowledge and insight happiness?"

"We have perceived, Lord, both an aura and a vision of forms. But lately these have all vanished and we do not attain to the after-image."

"But this is what you three must attain to. I too indeed, before I became wholly enlightened and Buddha, perceived both aura and vision of forms. And then in my case too they vanished. So

⁹ See S. Z. Aung's *Introductory Essay to Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 58.

¹⁰ *Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 62.

I pondered over the cause of this and discerned that concentration had left me, and hence the vision. Also that my concentration had been dispersed through access of doubt, then by want of attention, then by sloth and torpor, then by dread, then by elation, then by slackness, then by trying too much, then by sluggishness of effort, then by longing, then by awareness of differences. And to me continuing zealous, ardent and strenuous, came perception of aura and vision of forms. But they soon vanished again, because I contemplated the forms too closely . . . then I beheld the aura, but not the forms . . . then the forms, not the aura . . . then I beheld the one as immense, the others as small and inversely. Finally I judged that my shortcomings in concentration were varieties of vitated consciousness, and that, these being all got rid of, I would practise threefold concentration, to with, applying attention and sustaining it, sustaining attention without applying it afresh, and concentration without attention in either way. And I concentrated with rapture, and without it, with delight and with indifference. And then in me, with concentration so practised, lo! there arose the knowledge and the insight that my emancipation was sure, that this was my last life, that now here was no more rebecoming."¹¹

¹¹ *Majjhima-Nikaya*, iii. 157 F. F. The text is condensed by Mrs. Rhys Davids; *Buddhist Psychology*, pp. 105-107.

(To be continued.)