

## Chapter VII

### Concluding Remarks

From Rammohun Roy to Radhakrishnan we have traversed a long enough path in order to appreciate and understand how significant Vedānta has been in India's life and thought. In the earlier chapters our attempt has been primarily expository, to let the thinkers speak for themselves, to situate them in the intellectual landscape of the country, to delineate their linkages, affinities as well as tensions with occasional critical remarks and attempts at evaluation. Our study has been selective, many significant thinkers have been left out of consideration of our focus of attention. There have been significant thinkers who are no less important in so far as Vedantic orientation is concerned, for example, Rabindranath Tagore, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and Jiddu Krishnamurti. Even Gandhi had appealed to the concept of advaita in the context of his idea of Truth and Non-violence. P. T. Raju also deserves a mention and hearing from a philosophical point of view. The literature of Vedānta is vast, and there is much that is living in the Vedantic ideology and keeps animating the mind and imagination of the people. Historically, Mahāyāna has been in kinship with the development of Vedānta, and if one cares to look around, one would find the Dalai-Lama explaining Mahāyāna texts in a manner that touches the Vedānta thesis. And among the people, Vivekananda still remains a *living* presence.

## I

To begin with Rammohun Roy one should be fair in acknowledging the historical fact that he awakened a new interest in Vedānta and the *Upaniṣads* in our times.

A case has been made about Rammohun's break with the past, and to an extent, it is indeed valid. But one must not forget that even when Rammohun broke away with the past, he did so with an eye both on the change and continuity of Indian culture. He did not break away with the *Upaniṣads* and Vedānta. He translated the *Upaniṣads* and Samkara's *bhāṣya* on the *Brahma Sūtra*. As a result of his grooming at Varanasi, he inclined more towards Samkara's line of interpretation of the texts. There is a sense in which Rammohun enthroned Samkara in Bengal, which had been a land made for Caitanya's *bhakti* on the one hand and *Tāntrik* worship on the other. Tantra is said to be *Gaudapras'itā vidyā*. Rammohun's denigrators said that he passed off his own works as *Upaniṣads*, so ignorant were they of the ancient texts. And Isvarchandra Vidyasagar's opposition to Vedānta is well-known. He considered it "false philosophy". However Rammohun was primarily interested in expounding Hindu monotheism in the teeth of the vilification of Hindu custom and manners by the Christian missionaries. He was more of a scholar, possessing knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Hebrew, Sanskrit besides, and less a philosopher, though he possessed dialectical skill of the *Naiyākika*. His familiarity with the scriptures of Islam and Christianity that helped him write both *Tuhfat-ul-*

*Muwahhiddin* as well as *Precepts of Jesus*. B. N. Seal, the philosopher, said that Rammohun was a pioneer in comparative studies in religions and account of his work for the propagation of the thoughts in the *Upanisads* and *Vedānta* he can rightly be said “the Renovator of National Scriptures and Revelations”<sup>1</sup>. This is a true description. Even Tagore has remarked that Rammohun’s greatest achievement was the publication of *Vedānta-grantha*, while otherwise he was a universal man in religious matters. As for Rammohun’s reformist role Vivekananda had great respect, and said, “Only once was a modern reformer mostly constructive, and that one was Raja Rammohun Roy. The progress of the Hindu race has been towards the realisation of the Vedantic ideals”<sup>2</sup>.

The idea of reform is quite disquieting and puts the orthodox on the edge. We have noticed Krishnachandra Bhattacharya defending orthodoxy under such polite phrases as ‘institutional spiritual life which represents a *yajña* or the sacrificial concert of gods.’<sup>3</sup> He goes on to say that social life and tradition are sacred, a *yajña* being performed through the ages, and its sacredness is the shine of the one self, the shadow of eternity<sup>4</sup>. All this is nice, but reading between lines one comes to realize that Bhattacharya is averse to social change. His description of society as the shadow of eternity is either an echo of Hegel or a looking back to Vivekananda (tomār samāj se mahāmāyār chāyā mātra )<sup>5</sup>. But Vivekananda was a stormy soul and would uproot any tree however ancient it were if it hindered social progress. He had little reverence for roots which are dead

thus endangering the health of the tree. For him a living tree assured of vital growth was what mattered. He was no less a critic of his own society as its most ardent defender. This is Vedānta or Advaita at another level.

To come back to Rammohun, He seems to have appraised the worth of a religion by its effect on society. He took his stand on *advaita*, and exposed the fallacy of dogmatism common to all religions. He concludes his *Tuhfat* by quoting Hafiz wherein the great poet entreats his fellowmen not to injure one another. The lesson and the message is still relevant, when dogmatism in the guise of religious fundamentalism is plaguing the country. Rammohun always followed Samkara's commentaries in his translation of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahma Sūtra*. It should also be noted that he did not expound any new religion. The *Ātmiya Sabhā* and *Brāhma Sabhā* that he founded were discussion or prayer groups without aiming to invest its members with a separate religious identity. He intended to propagate religion as a particular metaphysical idea, and which was never meant to be the substitute for religion. Another feature of Rammohun's thinking was his incorporation of passages from *Mahānirvāna Tantra* and *Visnupurāṇa* as texts for prayer and meditation. For him worship meant contemplation of attributes of the Supreme Being.

Rammohun was more a reformer on the plane of society, religious platform was never his. And it was society (*sabhā*) that he used for restoring the texts of Vedānta. He approached the phenomenon of

religion as if it were a matter of intellect alone, nothing to do with the heart in devotion. This is one of his shortcomings as a religious thinker.

## II

Vivekananda, as I said earlier, is still a living presence among the people. His magnetic personality and charisma, his spiritual evaluation by his Master, Ramakrishnadeva, his total commitment to the cause of his life, his impassioned speeches and writings had an electrifying effect on the people, whoever heard or met him, whoever goes through *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* will be aroused from many a slumber,

Vivekananda is distinguished as a Vedantin on various grounds. He did not write any commentary on the Vedantic texts in the conventional manner, but expounded the central concepts of Vedānta imparting a new life to them. He wanted to say and do something by propounding the advaita view of Vedānta. He wanted to rouse and manifest the divinity dormant in man and also had the conviction that advaita Vedānta is most invigorating, most rational, and totally in conformity with modern science. He did write a trilogy on the *smrtiprasthana* of Vedānta, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the three of his most well-known books, *Jñāna Yoga*, *Karma Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*, besides one on *Raja Yoga*. It could be that he found the synthetic method of presenting the Vedānta which is an original contribution of the *Bhagavad Gītā* to be the most appropriate way for his purpose and intention. But he

followed the traditional method of discussing Vedānta also on other occasions. His lecture to the Harvard University and in London are examples of following the traditional method of exposition<sup>6</sup>. We may note a few of Vivekananda's conclusions :

1. Advaita generalises the whole universe into one – that something which is really the whole of this universe. It is one being manifesting itself in all these various forms. In substance this universe is one.
2. The Brahman appears to be manifold by the superimposition of name and form. “Look at the waves of the sea. Not one wave is really different from the sea, but what makes the wave apparently different? Name and form : the form of the wave and name which we give to it, “wave”. This is what makes it different from the sea. When name and form go, it is the same sea. This name and form is the outcome of what is called *Māyā*. It is this *Māyā* that is making individuals, making one appear different from another. Yet it has no existence. *Māyā* cannot be said to exist ... . It cannot be said as not to exist, seeing that it makes all this difference”<sup>7</sup>.

The analogy of the sea and its waves goes back to Samkara's

*Visnusatpadī* 3:

:*satyapibhedapagama nātha tavāham na māmaki'stvam ,  
Sāmuḍro hi tarangah kvacana samuḍro na tarangah.*

But whatever that may be, it remains to be admitted that Vivekananda's use of the analogy is very insightful in the context of *adhyāsa*.

3. It is only *advaita* Vedānta that can provide a sound, reasonable, universal basis for all ethical rules. You should not hurt others, because they are not different from you. And so on for other acts like stealing, etc. In body, mind and soul you are interlinked with others. The oneness of existence is the basis of all ethics and morality. This proclamation of monism as the rational basis of ethics is a great contribution of Vivekananda. It has been hinted at in the *Īs'a Upaniṣad* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, but none before Vivekananda had ever declared or made the point in so categorical terms as he did.
4. Advaiṭa is not only perennial philosophy but also the highest Religion. From the very beginning of his career as the ambassador of *advaita* Vedānta, Vivekananda struck upon this note. In the celebrated Chicago lectures the point is made openly. Nothing can be religion properly so-called if it does not make good of a man. Further, all historical religions are reflexes of one Religion. "Unity in variety" is not only a philosophical, but a religious truth as well. His own Master was a living embodiment of the truth.
5. Another singular feature of Vivekananda's Vedantism is its applicability in education, society, nation building, even art and

culture. His theory of education is modelled on the Vedantic thesis, that all men are potentially divine as was his ideas about morality. Education fulfils itself in bringing about the potentiality. If it fails on that count it is all sham. Vivekananda's ideas on sociology and social reconstruction are instances of applied advaitism.

6. And lastly, in discussing philosophical and religious ideas of India, Vivekananda always had an eye on their historical development. The relationship between Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta receives a remarkable treatment from him. Even in the Chicago lectures He spoke about the complementing mutuality of Buddhism and Hinduism. Samkara's intellect and Buddha's heart have been his most cherished ideal. His admiration for Buddha was immense and only next to his own Master.

Vivekananda looked upon the Islam with the eye of a realist. Both Rammohun and Vivekananda had friendly terms with Islam. Both of them admired the monotheism of Islam, and its great democratic social ideals, and thought that this could be achieved for Hinduism through Advaita Vedānta . We are yet to learn the lesson.



Radhakrishnan came under the spell of Vivekananda's writings, and had taken Samkara's vision of Vedānta to his heart. Radhakrishnan's first work in this direction was *The Ethics of the Vedanta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions*, published in 1908. His last work has been *The Brahma Sutra*, published in 1961. This was a long life devoted to an exposition and explication of Vedānta in Samkara's terms, adjusting it with Buddhism on the one hand and the challenges of modern time. Of course Radhakrishnan's *tour de force* is his *An Idealist View of Life*, which takes up the empirical notions *aparokṣānubhūti*, with a defence with evidences from various areas of human endeavour and interest as art and science, philosophy and mysticism. In point of fact Radhakrishnan has written on all the three *prasthānas* of Vedānta, the *Upaniṣad*, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Brahma Sūtra*. The *India Philosophy* has a valued assessment and comparative statement of Samkara's position along with other schools of Vedānta. But *An Idealist View of Life* is a personal statement. The great truths of philosophy are not proved but seen. No one could be a philosopher whose non-logical sides were not well developed. The form in which analytical philosophy comprehends reality is less adequate to the true nature of reality than is the form under which religious intuition grasps it. All that dialectic and philosophy do is to clarify our intuitions. He also contends that all creative work in science, philosophy and art was inspired by intuitive experience. Great intuitions arise out of a matrix of rationality and have to be set forth as a rational analysis. Mere intuitions are blind while intellectual work by itself is empty. To Radhakrishnan intuitive insight was

essential also for the highest reaches of ethical life. The art of living was not the mechanical observance of rules or the barren rehearsal of stale roles. The moral hero follows his deeper nature to fulfil his self. There is intuitive apprehension of the path of duty. But greater are those who are of religious genius, the prophet of creative spirit.

Radhakrishnan takes up the issue of reconciling religion with his philosophy. If God is the whole reality which intuitive knowledge affirms, this has to be fitted in with monism and the Ultimate Reality as the ground of all Being. Spiritual idealism requires an explanation of the relation between God and the Absolute. For him, God is organic with the world. Life beyond time may take us to the Absolute, but God is essentially bound up with the life in time. God is immanent in the process of the world but not identical with the world. While the absolute is pure consciousness and pure freedom and infinite possibility, it appears to be God from the point of view of specific possibility which has become actualised. The motionless Absolute and the enterprising God are complementary and inseparable. The Absolute is the pre cosmic nature of God, and God is the Absolute from the human end, the cosmic point of view. The Absolute with its playful freedom, as envisaged by Radhakrishnan is midway between the Brahman of Samkara and the concrete Absolute Spirit of Hegel. Radhakrishnan has boldly confronted the problem which had haunted Bradley and come forward with a solution which fused Indian and Western thoughts.

As for ethics in the system of Vedānta Radhakrishnan holds that Vedānta does not put forward an articulate code of morality, yet the possibility of ethics is inherent in its metaphysics which repudiates separateness, and thus leads to an ideal of love and brotherhood.

Social concern and nationalism has never been alienated from, like and after Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan's Vedantic inspiration. In the long and rich introduction to his *The Brahma Sūtra* Radhakrishnan has important things to say about man's empirical life. He has resolutely ever argued against the charge of world denial in the Vedantic system of thought propounded by Samkara. In the second volume of *Indian Philosophy* Radhakrishnan pointed to Samkara's "idea of unifying the people of the country"<sup>8</sup>. He called Samkara "a social idealist on the grand scale."<sup>9</sup> Radhakrishnan is well-known for his interpretation of Samkara's account of *Māyā*.

The context, we compare two accounts *māyā* and *avidyā* given by two of our thinkers, Bhattacharya and Radhakrishnan. Bhattacharya alludes to the dual complexity involved in the occurrence and correction of illusion, one individual, and the other cosmic. Even while the former is corrected, the later persists. By comparison Radhakrishnan's statement is direct and less involved. He says that Samkara "steers clear of mentalism as well as materialism"<sup>10</sup> Explaining the two-fold nature of illusion, *māyā* and *avidyā* Radhakrishnan writes, "When we look at the problem from the objective side, we speak of *māyā*, and when from the subjective side, we

speak of *avidyā*. Even as Brahman and Ātman are one, so are māyā and *avidyā* one. The tendency of the human mind to see what is really one as if it were many, is *avidyā*, but this common to all individuals”. He continues to say : “For one when speaks of *avidyā*, he means neither yours nor mine. It is impersonal which imparts itself to our individual consciousness, though it transcends them. For our knowing mechanism operates on things already created which we perceive but do not make ... . *Māyā* is both subjective and objective, individual and universal, that out of which the conditioned forms of intelligence and of objective existence arise. If that by reason of which the unreal world presents itself as real is purely subjective, then it is mere fancy and cannot be treated as the material cause of the world. If, on the other hand, it is regarded as the material cause of the world, something like the prakṛti of the *Sāṃkhya*, then it is not mere individual ignorance. The, two, *avidyā* of the individual, and the prakṛti of the Brahman, arise together; neither of them is thinkable apart from the other, so that even *avidya* is dependent on the ultimate reality. The phenomenal self and the phenomenal world are mutually implicated facts. *Avidyā* and *prakṛti* are co-eternal and belong to the world of experience. The space-time-cause world is the view of reality given us through *avidyā* ... .

A phenomenon is not a phantasm, *Avidyā* and *Māyā* represent the subjective and the objective sides of the one fundamental fact of experience. It is called *avidyā*, since it is dissolvable by knowledge; but the

objective series is called *māyā*, since it is co-èternal with the supreme personality”<sup>11</sup>

We may note two points about the terminological difference between Bhattacharya and Radhakrishnan in their uses of the words “subjective”. For Bhattacharya the ‘subjective’ is *aviśaya* while the ‘objective’ is *viśaya*, while Radhakrishnan uses the terms in the senses they are used in epistemological discussions in English, namely the subjective is *public*, open to the inspection of others. And secondly, Radhakrishnan follows Vivekananda in using the Kantian space-time-causality matrix in order to understand *māyā* and *avidyā*. Consider for example this passage from Vivekananda : “This theory of Maya has been the most difficult thing to understand in all ages. Let me tell you in a few words that it is no theory, it is the combination of the three ideas *Desh – Kāla – Nimitta* —space, time and causation — and this time and space and cause have been further reduced into . . .” *Nāma – Rūpa* .”<sup>12</sup>

#### IV

When we turn to Sri Aurobindo, we find another aspect of Vedānta, not what goes by the name of illusionism, but the true and the original Vedānta, as he calls it. Sri Aurobindo refers to a category of knowledge as ‘Vedantic Knowledge’, which represents a hierarchy of mind’s operations and grades of awareness, much like Heidegger’s metaphor of ascending a hill, and viewing the planes below from the top.

The errors of the sense-mind (a significant phrase indeed!) by the use of reason is a valuable power, and with its help one arrives at metaphysical knowledge. “Our nature”, says Sri Aurobindo, “sees through two eyes always, for it views them doubly as idea and as fact, and therefore every concept is incomplete for us and to a part of nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience”<sup>13</sup>. The mind seeks to become aware of the external world, the object, but in the “pure” mental action, it seeks to become aware of itself (*jñānagata pratyakṣa*, as the *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* puts it), the subject. In the latter the mind acts in itself and is aware of things directly by a sort of identity with them. When we are aware of our own existence, the nature of experience as knowledge by identity becomes apparent. “In reality, all experience is in its secret nature knowledge by identity”<sup>14</sup>. But its true character is not easily apprehended, since we tend to separate ourselves from the rest of the world by exclusion, by the distinction of ourself as subject and everything else as object. “This limitation is a fundamental creation of the ego...” and “starting from an original falsehood and covering over the true truth of things by contingent falsehoods which become for us practical truth of relation”<sup>15</sup>. This is Sri Aurobindo’s account of the *Vyāvahārika* order of awareness. But he goes on to say “there is no inevitable necessity in our existing limitations. They are the results of an evolution”<sup>16</sup>. He asserts that it is possible that the mind could be persuaded to liberate itself from its consent to the domination of matter. Our waking consciousness is determined and limited by the balance between mind and matter worked out by life in its evolution. But by throwing the waking mind

into a state of sleep liberates the true or subliminal mind. Mind then asserts its true character.

Sri Aurobindo characterises Vedānta as seeking the knowledge of the self, and through it, the knowledge of the universe. And for this end in view, we have to go beyond the mind and the reason. “The reason active in our waking consciousness is only a mediator between the subconscious All that we come from in our evolution upwards and the superconscious All towards which we are impelled by that evolution. The subconscious and the superconscious are two different formulations of the same all<sup>17</sup>.” According to Sri Aurobindo, intuitional knowledge is that which is common between Life and the Light, and the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known. It is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge. Between these two modes of being Life and Light, reason and mind act as intermediaries, enabling the being to liberate knowledge out of its imprisonment. “When the self-awareness in the mind applies, both to content and content to own-self and other-self, exalts itself into the luminous self-manifest identity, the reason also converts itself into the form of the self –luminous intuitional knowledge. This is the highest possible state of our knowledge when mind fulfils itself in the supra-mental”<sup>18</sup>. Sri Aurobindo remarks that upon this scheme of human understanding “the most ancient Vedanta” was built.

There are certain novel features of Sri Aurobindo's account. First, he gives us an evolutionary tracing of development of knowledge from the empirical right up to the transcendent non-empirical. There is no talk of the abrupt cancellation of the obvious, no sudden coming to the magic show. What we have, instead, is a graded and steady process of liberation of mind, an opening up its own higher spiritual possibilities of awareness. There is much that comes from an experience of *yoga*, an application of the psychology of Sāmkhya. Vivekananda was right in pointing it out that Advaita incorporates the psychology of Sāmkhya. The lower categories of knowledge and awareness are not cancelled or distinguished, but contained in the higher as steps of an evolutionary ladder.

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo explains the *mahāvākyas* like "I am He" or "Thou art That", "All this is the Brahman, "This Self is the Brahman", etc. in the light of his concept of intuitional knowledge. He says :

Intuition brings to man those brilliant messages from the unknown which are the beginning of higher knowledge. Reason only comes in afterwards to see what profit it can have of the shining harvest.<sup>19</sup>

Intuitive thought is a message from the superconscient.



In a striking sentence Sri Aurobindo says, “what the intuition tells us of, is not so much Existence as the Existent”<sup>20</sup>.

The relation of reason to revolution, or reason to intuition had engaged Samkara, and in our times, has been one of the basic themes of Radhakrishnan’s own statement of philosophy in *An Idealist View of Life*. But the issue is more ancient than historical. Sri Aurobindo takes an integral view of the entire debate. The “early Vedantic thinking of the Upanishads”, he says harped on a “harmony of our parts of knowledge”<sup>21</sup> Reason is “only a sort of deputy and belongs to the middle heights of our being.”<sup>22</sup> (ibid). There is a succession of the grades and assimilation of the contents into the higher. Sri Aurobindo points to this succession in the *Upanisads* and the subsequent Indian philosophies. *Veda* relies entirely upon intuition and spiritual experience. Philosophy in India always wanted to have “the united consent of the two great authorities”<sup>23</sup>, Reason and intuition.

How did then the schools arise? There is a controversy concerning the primary of *pratyakṣa* and *āgama* in the *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, the *āgama* said to stand aloof from matters relating to the *vyāvaharika*. Sri Aurobindo would not go that way. He says that the philosophers adopted a double attitude towards the truth they sought. They recognised in the *S'ruti* the results of Intuition, an authority superior to Reason. But at the same time they started from Reason and tested the results it gave them, holding only those conclusions to be valid which were supported by the authority of Reason. In this way the “sin of metaphysics”, “the tendency to

battle in the clouds” could be avoided. But the natural trend of Reason to assert its own supremacy triumphed in course of time, and conflicting schools arose, “each of which founded itself in theory on the Veda and used its texts as a weapon against others”.<sup>24</sup> Reason proceeds by analysis and division and assembles its facts to form a whole. But in the assemblage so formed there remain opposites, anomalies, logical incompatibilities. Reason affirms some and negates others in order to form a flawlessly logical system. Thus the unity of the first intuitional knowledge was broken up, and the ingenuity of the logicians always discover devices, methods of interpretation by which inconvenient texts of the scripture could be practically annulled. On the other hand the highest intuitive knowledge sees things in the whole, in the large and details only as sides of the indivisible whole. It tends towards immediate synthesis and the unity of knowledge. Vedānta, properly so-called, projects the change of catholicity and unity of intuitional thought. It never ceased to engage and occupy the thought of India. This is a contributory analysis of the development of Indian thought given by Sri Aurobindo, and also a reminder that one must not lose sight of the goal.