CONCLUSION
CHAPTER FIVE

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We have noted in the course of our thesis that Indian Philosophers, including the Vīraśaiva saints and mystics, have discovered that man suffers perennially because of his unbridled desires generated by beginningless ignorance, and that the permanent cure for the malady is knowledge. We have also noted that for them knowledge that redeems man from the bondage is not scientific knowledge derivable from sense experience, but a supra-sensory and supra-intellectual knowledge derivable from mystic experience. In fact, knowledge (Jñāna or Arivu) is synonymous with mystic experience.

In this connection we have raised some important problems in the course of our philosophical study of mysticism in general and Vīraśaiva mysticism in particular. These problems may be classified as follows:

1. What are the chief characteristics of mystic experience in general and Vīraśaiva mysticism in particular?

2. What is the Vīraśaiva conception of God and his relationship to man and the world?

3. What are ways to achieve mystic experience which constitutes the essential part of liberation from the perennial sufferings? Or, put in other words, What are the ways and means to attain the redeeming knowledge?

Our answers to these questions, which constitute the different parts of this Thesis, involved certain doctrines and
presuppositions and these required justification. Since no attempt was then made to justify them the present Chapter makes an attempt to justify them. Not all of these answers require justification. Of these three are more important.

1. In the course of the explanation of the characteristics of the Vīraśaiva mysticism we mentioned that the content of the mystic intuition is infinite consciousness or Parasiva. It is a consciousness which is indivisible and having no characteristic whatsoever. It is not even distinguished from the mystic’s consciousness (ātman). We have also mentioned in the second chapter that Parasiva is not merely Sat-cit-ānanda, but a self-conscious person who, being characterized by śakti, is able to create, maintain and destroy the world. He is also occasionally described as an impartial judge of human actions, i.e., as one who binds men to the cycle of births and deaths and punishes them according to their demerits, and rewards them with grace and releases them from bondage in accordance with their spiritual merits. Now this gives rise to an important question. While the Vīraśaiva mystic perceives only a featureless infinite consciousness in his mystic intuition, what makes him conclude that that infinite consciousness is identical to Parasiva? This may force us to conclude that he has read a great deal of his own metaphysics into mystic experience, and that, perhaps, unjustifiably.
If the objection includes the examples of mysticism of Cidadvaita of Śaṅkara, that of Śūnyavāda of the Buddhists, it becomes difficult for the Vīraśaiva mystics to answer the objection. The Cidadvaitins claim that Brahma-jñāna consists in becoming Nirguṇa Brahman, and since Śaṅkara claims Nirguṇa Brahman is the only reality – the reality without a second – he implicitly advocates that all that is not Brahman, the world and the limited empirical selves, are not realities. For Śaṅkara the treatment of the world as unreal as against Nirguṇa Brahman, the only reality, is not a matter of philosophical speculation, but a fact perceived in mystic experience. Many mystics, including the Christian and Muslim, regard the world as unreal. Śaṅkara, Śūnyavādins and Vijñānavādins also endorse the view that the world is just mind externalised and there is nothing called world corresponding to our concept of world.

Similarly, the Śāṅkhya mystic may argue that the mystic realises himself as pure soul – puruṣa and not as Brahman or Paraśiva. His position is that the realization of his soul as a pure consciousness is not a perception of Paraśiva, nor a perception of union of soul with Paraśiva. At best it implies that there is consciousness (puruṣa) as distinguished from body or Prakṛti and that there are many puruṣas. So to say that the pure soul is Paraśiva or that it unites with Paraśiva is to go outside the boundary of mysticism. If mystic experience is an unquestionable
means of valid knowledge then it does not offer us knowledge of God.

Perhaps, there is some truth in this objection. The objection was unknown to the Vīraśaiva mystics and saints, because they were not philosophers. But we can make an attempt on their behalf to answer this objection.

It is noteworthy that the Sāṁkhya philosopher does not say that the mystic does not perceive consciousness - he only says that the consciousness perceived in the mystic experience is not Paraśiva (nor God of any other sort). By the same logic, however, we can retort that Sāṁkhya mystic has no basis (has no mystical basis, at least) to speak of plurality of selves. Moreover, the Sāṁkhya philosopher's view that Prakṛti is real, that it evolves for the sake of puruṣa, etc. does not have a mystical basis. These claims are based on speculation. If the Sāṁkhya mystic regards the Vīraśaiva mystic's perception of pure self as Paraśiva as unjustified, then he should, for the same reason, regard the claim for the plurality of selves, evolution of Prakṛti, etc also as unjustified. Because, he does not mystically experience plurality of selves, evolution of Prakṛti, etc. So, if he speaks of plurality of selves, etc. he is speaking as a philosopher rather than as a mystic. Perhaps, it is difficult for any mystic to report his mystic experience without colouring it by his philosophical prejudice.
Similarly, the Vijnānavādin experiences Visuddha-vijñāna (or Ālaya-vijñāna) in his mystic intuition and holds that the world is not a reality, but an appearance. But for claiming that the world is not real he does not advance any convincing argument.

The Śūnyavādins refuse to characterize the reality, because they adhere strictly to the mystic data. Since according to them, mystic perception is a negative perception, that is, not a perception of anything, they conclude that reality is Śūnya (Void). They say that it is catuskotiṃvinimmukta – free from the four categories of (a) existence (b) non-existence (c) both existence and non-existence and (d) neither existence nor non-existence. When the mystic, having perceived such Śūnya in his mystic intuition, returns to the waking state, he encounters empirically the material world. But he instead of regarding the perception of material world as true and mystic experience as false, arrives at the conclusion that mystic experience is valid and sense experience is invalid. He, like the Vijnānavādin and the Advaitin, treats the contents of sense experience as creation of the mind, having no correspondence with reality.

Then why should the Vīraśaiva mystic regard the content of his mystic experience as Paraśiva? Is his mystic experience different from that of the Advaitins, Śūnyavādins, Vijnānavādins and Śāmkhyas? Or, are these reports coloured by the respective philosophical disciplines in which they are trained?
Before answering this question, we have to consider two things: (1) different mystical states experienced and reported by the mystics; and (2) the employment of reason or inference (anumāna) as a valid means of knowledge.

We have noted on an earlier occasion that mystic experience involves the following stages:

(a) The aspirant gazes at an object intensely (or imagines a mental content); sometimes, this is coupled with regulated breathing.

(b) Then he slowly slips into a psychic state in which he becomes unaware of the external object; but he still retains self-consciousness. It is also a state in which he experiences the feeling that he does not have body, mind, senses, etc and that his consciousness alone exists. It is in such a state that he becomes aware of the purity or contentlessness of his self. In this state of freedom from the attachment (relationship) to the body-mind-sense complex he may experience ānanda (bliss).

(c) In the next stage he experiences the expansion of his consciousness.

A Vedāntin may term the expansion 'becoming infinite'. For him 'consciousness loses its boundary and expands' means 'consciousness becomes Brahman' (because 'Brahman' deriving from 'bṛhat', to swell, to grow, means growing infinitely). If consciousness expands infinitely it must be Brahman.
In this stage a mystic trained in Vedānta philosophy may experience his soul as merging in the universal consciousness and liken it to a river merging in a sea. This is normally called vision of unity.

(d) Once the experience of union takes place, the mystic becomes unaware of himself. This loss of self-consciousness, is also loss of external awareness. He becomes unaware of external events and also of what happens to himself. There is no awareness of any sort, not even the awareness of the union. We have also noted that when the mystic returns to waking state, he begins to see the world as pervaded by consciousness (or God). Some mystics regard Brahman perceived as real, and the world perceived as illusory.

Now, let us suppose that the mystic attaches a great deal of epistemological value to his mystic experience; that is, that for the mystic the mystical experience is the true experience, and sense experience is an illusion. In such a case, the mystic who reaches the state described under (b) above is a Vijñānavādin; the mystic who goes up to the state described under (c) is an Advaitin if he perceives consciousness as Brahman and perceives the world in the waking state as illusory. If, on the contrary, he values the state of no-awareness as supreme and regards the perception of world as unreal then he is a Śūnyavādin.

Now, a Vīraśaiva mystic is one who perceives Paraśiva as featureless; but when he returns to the waking state he perceives
Paraśiva in the world. But the world so perceived is not illusory. If this perception which makes plausible the mystic’s claim that Paraśiva is indivisible (akhaṇḍa or avirāla) consciousness qualified by śakti or māyā, which is the substance out of which the world is made.

In addition to his mystic data he also makes use of anumāna (inference or speculation). Thus, by means of speculation he argues that if the world, the product of śakti, is pervaded by infinite and undivided consciousness, the world could not have come out of itself. In other words, it must have been created by Paraśiva who is sometimes inactive, as in the pralaya state, and the rest of the times, continuously active. While the perception of Paraśiva both in the mystic intuition and in the waking state is supported by mystic experience, his thought that he is creator, maintainer, destroyer, etc are the outcome of speculation. However, his inference to Paraśiva as creator is not contrary to mystic experience.

Considered in this manner, that mysticism which is coherent with sense experience and inference or speculation is more acceptable than that mysticism which regards the mystic data alone as trustworthy and all else as untrustworthy. One feels that such mysticism is complete rather than the one which does not take the contents of sense experience into consideration.

2. As a result of mystic experience the mystics readily identify the world with Paraśiva. They perceive infinite
consciousness not only during the mystic experience but after as well. They perceive Parasiva not only everywhere, but also as everything. For example, the mystic vacanas like

By entering into your vast expanse
I saw you in mountains and caves
In valleys and plains ...¹

All that is there in the world is you, O Lord,
All that has filled the world is you, O Lord! ...²

Śiva can transform himself into the world
And also can remain without so transforming ...³

taken together suggest that the vacanakāras are pantheists; that is, hold that Parasiva is world and world is Parasiva.

Some mystics who have a little philosophical bent of mind, in order to make this point clear and acceptable use analogies, of which two are important for our purpose. Some say that just as the sea and its waves, tides and foam are one⁴, or just as golden ornaments and the gold out of which they are made are one⁵, essentially, so also things of the universe (or, the universe itself) and God, out of whom they are made, are essentially one.

This pantheism (if it can be so called), however, if carried to its logical extreme, will create more problems than either solving the problem or making the issue clearer and more acceptable. That this leads to problems can be shown as follows:
There are vacanas which declare (1) that Paraśiva alone is free and omnipotent and all else is dependent on, and controlled by, Paraśiva (2) that Paraśiva is spaceless and eternal, while all else is in space and time; and (3) Paraśiva in the strict philosophical sense, is infinite consciousness qualified by śakti, while all else is either matter without consciousness or consciousness without matter. Now, does the vacana “Śiva can transform himself into the world and can remain without becoming the world” (or “the whole forest is you ...”6) mean that the world can become Śiva? Not so. Because consciousness and freedom that are the essence of Paraśiva are totally absent from the material world. In other words, while Paraśiva has freedom to become or not to become the world, the world has no such freedom. While Paraśiva is spaceless and eternal (timeless), the world is not so, because it comes into being at a particular point of time and while all else is in space, only undivided consciousness is spaceless.

It is not that the vacuumāras were unaware of the problem that such a pantheism would give rise to. Thus one of them asks, if Paraśiva is aṣṭa-tanu (eightfold-bodied), is his body hard like the earth?7 Another asks, if Māyā (śakti), kārma, etc are eternal, is it false to say that Paraśiva is eternal, creator8, etc? What does then this pantheism mean?

As long as we regard the Vīraśaiva mystic utterances as pantheistic utterances, we are bound to face these problems. These
problems seen in this way have no answer. So let us see whether Viraśaiva mysticism is pantheism at all.

If pantheism is the doctrine that God is all and all is God, then Viraśaivism is certainly not pantheism. For example, the utterances just quoted above state that God can become the world and has spread himself everywhere (or exists in everything). But the phrase 'Śiva can become the world' ('and can remain without becoming the world') implicitly states that Paraśiva is free, which the world is not. Therefore, one cannot identify Paraśiva who is free with the world which is not free. Secondly, Paraśiva is something more than the world, as the world does not exhaust him. It is true that the world is part (aṅga or tanu) of Paraśiva but the world is not all that is there.

Perhaps, an improper understanding the position of Viraśaivism also may give impetus to this objection. Even when the sentences like the ones quoted above, are cited, they do not mean that just as a seed after becoming tree ceases to exist as seed, Paraśiva also after becoming the world ceases to exist as Paraśiva. Perfect pantheism expects Paraśiva to cease to be above the world. But the fact that Paraśiva after becoming the world, not only entered it, but also ruled it from within shows that Paraśiva is something not equal to world, but something more than the world. Moreover, if Paraśiva is said to be everywhere, he should be both inside and outside the world; and the world cannot be equated with
the omnipresent and eternal Paraśiva in this sense. Seen from this angle, Viṣṇuism is not pantheism, but panentheism, the doctrine that God includes the world. The panentheistic mystic sees Paraśiva in the world as well as outside the world. Therefore, ascribing pantheism to Viṣṇu mysticism and subjecting it to criticism is like kicking the dust and then complaining poor visibility.

We can try to solve this problem by expounding the Viṣṇu metaphysics in its proper form. Paraśiva, according to Viṣṇuism is not just featureless Sat-Cit-Ānanda or Nirguṇa Brahman of Advaita. He is qualified by śakti. The word ‘śakti’ in Viṣṇuism denotes not only capacity to perform certain functions, but also to produce a result. In the first sense, a potter has śakti to operate on the clay; in the second sense, a seed has śakti to produce a tree out of itself (even the clay which becomes pots, jugs, etc., when the potter operates on it can be rightly said to possess the śakti). In other words, the śakti in the former sense makes a person an efficient cause, and in the latter sense makes a thing a material (substantial) cause. In Viṣṇuism all creation is a transformation of śakti, and all transformation takes place in accordance with Paraśiva’s will. To say Paraśiva is qualified by śakti is to say that he is both efficient cause and material cause of everything that is. This means that Paraśiva is not merely a self-conscious being, but also one who has śakti. Actually Paraśiva and śakti are not two
ontologically distinct entities, related like potter and the clay (or the pots), but like, to use the familiar analogy, gold and golden ornaments. Just as gold can exist without being transformed into an ornament, so also Paramāśiva can exist without transforming himself into the world. But the world cannot exist apart from Paramāśiva, just as golden ornaments cannot exist without gold.

Now, to say that Paramāśiva becomes the world or that all are his arms, all are his eyes etc., is only to say that sakti of Paramāśiva becomes the word. Perhaps this means that according to the Vacanakāras, Paramāśiva’s consciousness does not undergo similar transformation. So what is transformed is sakti and what transforms it is Paramāśiva (consciousness). But since the sakti is his own part (or body), any transformation in sakti must be regarded as self-transformation in Paramāśiva. However, we cannot forget the warning of the Vacanakāras: after self-transformation Paramāśiva entered the world.

Thus when ordinary people look at the world they may not see Paramāśiva there, but when the mystic looks at the world, he does not merely see the sakti, but the sakti wholly permeated by Paramāśiva. In his state of meditation (mystic trance), he may merge in the infinite consciousness that is Paramāśiva, but when he returns to waking he does not miss Paramāśiva - he sees him everywhere. Therefore, for him, the proposition ‘Paramāśiva exists in the world’ is
not the result of philosophical speculation, but just the outcome of mystic intuition.

Taking this metaphysical point into consideration, therefore, to read pantheism into Vīraśaiva mysticism, is not merely unjustified but to introduce contradiction where there is no scope for contradiction, and, in fact, to distort the whole of Vīraśaivism.

3. One of the questions that usually haunts all Indian philosophers is, what does the mystic utterance “I become Paraśiva in the mystic state” mean? There are many vacanas which declare that mystic and God are one. What does this mean? (1) Does this mean that man and Paraśiva are one having two different names, just as “Rāma” and “Raghupati” are two different names of one and the same person? (2) Or, does oneness mean essential oneness? Does it mean that Paraśiva and the mystic are essentially one in the manner in which gold and golden ornaments are essentially one? (3) Or, does it mean that man becomes Paraśiva in the manner in which a larva becomes a butterfly?

Now, if the third question implies the possibility of the mystic becoming Paraśiva, that is, creator, maintainer, etc., then such a possibility is ruled out at the outset, not only for the simple reason that there cannot be more than one infinite consciousness, who is creator, maintainer, etc., but also for the reason that the mystic does not actually become Paraśiva in the mystic state or thereafter.
Similarly, the first alternative has to be ruled out, because if 'mystic' and 'Paraśiva' are two different names of one and the same person, then nothing is as absurd as identifying the finite mystic with the infinite Paraśiva.

• Thus we are left with the second alternative. The mystic loses his self-awareness in the mystic state and his own ego after the mystic experience, thus indicating that his essence (aṅga) and the essence of the world (Liṅga) 'merge' into each other indistinguishably. Just as a line separates two objects or two countries, so also the ego of the individual separates that individual from other individuals, from Paraśiva and from the world. All Indian mystics, including the Vīraśaiva mystics regard the ego as a separating wall between individual and Paraśiva and, therefore, if the goal of the individual is to merge in Paraśiva, he should first destroy his ego.

• Now, to destroy the ego is to destroy something made of śakti and this cannot be done. So, the individual has to destroy his ignorance which deludes the ego into thinking that it is a separate individual, while in fact, it is not. If everything is in Paraśiva and is related to every other thing by means of consciousness (Paraśiva), to consider any one thing as separate is an illusion. We can distinguish between A and B, which are two links of a chain, but A and B, or any other two parts of the chain are not separate from each other and from the chain. The chain is one. So if the ego
makes man think that he is an individual existing separately from, and independently of, Paraśiva, it is only due to ignorance.

Once the individual attains Jñāna by means of mystic experience, he unites with Paraśiva. This state is called in the Vīraśaiva terminology 'liṅga-aṅga-sāmarasya' ('harmony between Liṅga and aṅga'). The phrase is pregnant with meaning. (1) Sāmarasya or harmony is said to exist between two human beings if there is agreement between them in most of the matters. Sāmarasya is said to exist between aṅga and Liṅga when aṅga becomes pure like Liṅga. Though the Vīraśaiva mystics say that ego is lost or destroyed in mystic experience, what they mean to say is different: they should have said that they exist, but as inseparable part of Paraśiva. Before mystic experience the individual used to say “I eat what remains after Paraśiva eats (i.e., prasāda)” but, after mystic experience he says “I and He eat from the same plate”, meaning that his body, sense, mind are all completely occupied by Paraśiva, leaving no scope for him to think of himself in the earlier manner. He regards all his acts as acts of Paraśiva. This idea is reflected in the analogy of a pregnant woman. The pregnant woman does not eat separately for herself and for the infant in her womb, as what is eaten by her ultimately reaches the infant. So also what is seen, smelt, eaten, etc, by the devotee reaches Paraśiva. It is as if he eats, sees, etc. for Paraśiva. This means not only that the mystic
has stopped thinking and acting in a selfish manner, but also that he has stopped referring to himself as a separate individual.

Sāmarasya taken in this sense, does not mean that the individual has ceased to exist, but that he regards himself as an anga of Paraśiva. The very fact that he refers to himself in some manner ought to mean that he has some notion of himself. But that notion of himself is certainly not a notion of Paraśiva. Nor does it mean what he meant by himself by himself before he had mystic experience. He is in Paraśiva, much as a part is in a whole. But he is not himself Paraśiva, as some wish to think, for that would mean that the part is whole.

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[p stands for page and v for vacana]

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