

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA AND INSTITUTION OF RENUNCIATION IN VEDĀNTA

Introduction

A long controversy, which still persists, concerns the origin and development of the idea and institution of Renunciation in India. The present paper is an attempt to the Understanding of Renunciation as a unique expression of the Indian spiritual consciousness. It is my contention here that *Samnyāsa*, which is linked with asceticism and monastic organization, is the most fundamental trait of the Indian religious spirit which Indian philosophy and religion as a whole developed and hence is part of the whole of Indian culture. Asceticism was largely concerned with the man who sought spiritual realization, the *Sādḥaka* (also described as *muni* or *yati* in the *Rgveda*), as he is called in the later technical language, his undertaking being directed to the quest for a direct contact with Reality or *anubhava* (spiritual experience). Monastic organization, on the other hand, was an aspect of institutional life of society. Bearing this in mind, it can be asserted here that Renunciation belongs to the common spirit of all Indian religions, including Buddhism and Jainism. Sureśvara, the foremost disciple of Śaṅkara, remarks that, though systems of thought including Buddhism may differ in their metaphysical orientations, they are all unanimous on teaching Renunciation.¹

The phenomenon of Renunciation in the whole of Indian tradition, is not based on the positivistic, anti-religious or anti-metaphysical outlook as might be the case with some of the ethical or humanistic traditions but it is an inseparable part of the *eschaton* of *Mokṣa* (Freedom) itself.² Since the Understanding of the Ultimate reality and Freedom differs from system to system, the rationale of Renunciation is bound to differ and it would be a grave injustice not to take into account the multi-dimensional nature of Renunciation. In fact, some scholars have interpreted this phenomenon without proper regard to this point. Indian

philosophy, therefore, has resulted in simplifications, which are, moreover, inferred from a limited body of data. Conclusions based on such study need further revision and construction. Eleanor Roosevelt's following impressions of India state a widespread view:

... Prime Minister Nehru is trying to develop a democracy that, though perhaps not exactly like ours, will ensure all the people personal freedom. But if an accompanying material prosperity is also to be achieved — and the government will not be successful unless it can demonstrate certain progress on the material side — considerable education and re-education of the people will be necessary. For a belief in the virtue of renunciation is not an incentive to hard work for material gain; but only hard work by all the people is going to bring any real betterment of their living conditions. Somehow a spiritual incentive, a substitute for renunciation, will have to be found... My own feeling is that with their religious and cultural background something different will be required to spark in them the conviction that the modern struggle of a highly technologically developed state is worthwhile.³

Leaving the details of this remark to be considered in the following pages we may add here that the present survey of the growth and development of Renunciation throughout the Indian tradition and its various motifs shows some of the peculiarities of the idea and the institution of Renunciation which refuse to be dogmatically classified into a rigid category of life-world negation.⁴

Nature of Renunciation

It should be pointed out that the term 'Renunciation' (*Saṁnyāsa*) has different shades of meaning emphasized by different writers. Most of them have understood the term to mean isolation from, and indifference to the world. Commenting on the genesis of the Roman Catholic asceticism, J. L. Mackenzie points out: "The flight from the world was religiously motivated; it was an effort to achieve a closer communion with God by abandoning human society and

human comforts.”⁵ A. J. Toynbee’s observation on the Desert Hermits is as follows: “Turning their back on the wickedness of the world, they sought redemption by the infliction of suffering on themselves”.⁶ Hence Renunciation has been taken to mean “the form of religious life led by those, who having separated themselves entirely from the world, live in solitude.”⁷

In the Indian (*Vedānta*) tradition Renunciation has also been similarly defined. Thus while explaining the meaning of *Samyāsa* according to Vidyāraṇya, the author of the great manual on Renunciation, the *Jivan-Mukti-Viveka*, Pandit S. S. Śāstri observes as follows:

The path of liberation, according to Vidyāraṇya, is indicated in one word — Renunciation... Vidyāraṇya would not understand it in any but the formal orthodox sense in which he *Rṣis* of yore (Hindu Seers) principally employed it. Have no concern bodily or mental, direct or indirect, with the world, live in entire isolation, so to speak, and wear the orthodox insignia of the order — this is *Samyāsa*, according to Vidyāraṇya.⁸

The question, however, remains, how a life of entire isolation and indifference can ever be the end of existence, not to talk of Freedom? How can such a long tradition of Renunciation gain as much ground as it did throughout the Indian religious tradition on the basis of isolation? How can a Vedic religion, which Śaṅkara re-established, be possible on the sheer principle of indifference? Professor J. G. Arapura anticipates these while making the following statement: “Actually, the real reason for Śaṅkara’s criticism of two systems, viz., the Sāṅkhya dualistic realism and Buddhistic subjective idealism (*Yogācāra*) is their inability to account for liberation. These may be singled out precisely because they are diametrically opposite and because their views, if adhered to, will destroy rational grounds of experience as well as the possibility of the world.”⁹ B. G. Tilak also refutes this theory of isolation as the central theme of the Vedānta of Śaṅkara.¹⁰

In the light of the above observations, I am inclined to suggest that the pattern of Renunciation in the *Vedānta* has a different implication from what has been suggested by various scholars in terms of isolation or indifference.

Two quite different conceptions mingle in the history of asceticism. One of these preserves the original meaning of discipline of the body for some ultimate purpose, as when William James urges sacrifice to God and duty as the means of training the will. The other conception distrusts the body altogether. Asceticism has then as its function not the training but the destroying of the body or the negation of its importance.¹¹

What is especially noteworthy here is that the *Vedānta*, while agreeing with other systems pertaining to the significance of Renunciation, assigns a different reason for it. Early Buddhism might have succumbed to the temptation of unconditional and absolute Renunciation because of its different metaphysical outlook but the *Vedānta* would go against its nature if it sets up a doctrine of Renunciation independently of the *Brāhmanical* society and ethos from which it evolved. The objective of Renunciation is to provide opportunity for the progressive development of the various aspects of human personality with reference to which alone the social ideal can be attained. As M. Winternitz remarks: "It is in their opinion to be approached only from the point of view of the *āśrama* theory, according to which the *Āryan* has first to pass the state of *brahmacārin*, the student of the Veda, and of the householder (*gṛhapati*) who founds family, offers sacrifices and honours the *Brāhmanas*, before he is allowed to retire as a hermit or an ascetic".¹²

Here one might argue that the *āśrama* discipline was relaxed in later times as is the case with the Advaita *Vedānta* but it is to be remembered that even the *Vedānta* could not dispose of the importance of *brahmacarya* (student life) and perhaps the early Renunciation was a theoretical exception and not a general practice. A recent

article of E. Skorpen in the *Philosophy East and West* states:

But in Hinduism from greater antiquity another pattern of worldly withdrawal has also existed, quite different from the predominant Western or the Buddhist approach. This sprang from the Hindu conception of the four natural stages of life which after early childhood are those of student (*brahmacārin*), householder (*gṛhastha*), forest hermit (*vānaprastha*) and homeless mendicant (*Samnyāsīn*). On this pattern renunciation is the act not of people in religious communities who have not undergone secular experience and responsibility but of individuals who have—a difference of some note.¹³

Neither the West nor Buddhism offered the kind of scheme of life on the pattern of Hinduism as reflected in the *Brāhmanical āśramas* or in the *Paḍimās* of Jainism.

Taking into account the different emphasis we have laid on the nature of Renunciation, a working definition should be such that it includes the motifs of various traditions and yet be relevant to the Indian context in general. In its most characteristic sense, Renunciation would indicate a spiritual attitude having no superficial concern, direct or indirect, with the world as it forces itself mechanically and blindly upon us, for what characterizes the superficial structure of the world is its wrongness embodied in its relative and dependent status, too finite and too imperfect, to help achieve the tranquillity of mind, which once realized, transforms the nature of universe so radically (to the extent of its disappearance, as if) that the world becomes an arena for the discharge of motiveless activity at the religious plane, free from all anxieties born of egotism and self-aggrandizement. The present definition implies three elements: (a) Renunciation aims at the denial and transcendence of the universe and the obligations associated with it only when the latter is approached independently of any Reality behind it. This is the world at its surface and therefore it does not attract the Indian spiritual thought which

is based on reflection and self-culture. Hence the importance of *brahmacarya*. (b) The superficial structure of the universe is not denied dogmatically. Behind it is the strong support of *śruti* (revelation), based on the understanding of each and every school which has its own cosmology, and (c) Renunciation unfolds the meaning of existence by eliminating egoism (*ahankāra*) which constitutes human conditioning and keeps oneself divided from the rest of the universe. It aims at the complete eradication of all obstacles, stemming from the gulf between the object and subject as if they were independent and autonomous.

These characteristics differ slightly in various traditions but the underlying theme of Renunciation remains the same. It stands primarily for the self-culture which is essential for the social culture, finally culminating in the realization of the harmonious whole where all the conflicts completely disappear and the man becomes virtuous by nature.¹⁴ But in order to justify the present standpoint with regard to the nature of Renunciation, let us turn to the Brāhmanical schools to ascertain as to what extent, this approach is plausible.

(a) *The Vedas:*

Without going into the controversy whether the Vedas represent a philosophy, system of philosophy, mythology or cosmogony, our aim is to see the elements of Renunciation which the Vedic thinkers supplied for subsequent thought so that Indian philosophy could never cut itself off from the general structure of Renunciation, tacitly implied or imperfectly conceived by the Vedas.

If the argument presented above is valid, it follows that in the R̥gvedic times, the doctrine of renunciation was not unknown. There are also some evidences which prove that the Vedic thinkers also knew and promulgated the institutional aspect of Renunciation, refusing the claims of those scholars who think that Buddhism actually introduced Renunciation into Indian religions as it was absent in the Vedic thought.¹⁵ It should be noted here that when the Buddha himself renounced the world, there are evidences to

provide the existence of the renunciants as is seen in the "Legend of the Four Signs".¹⁶ The legendary status of these signs might be disputed but the renunciation on the part of *Siddhārtha* cannot be regarded as original or without precedent.¹⁷

But the renunciation doctrine as we find in the *Rgveda* is markedly different from the one we find in the Buddhism in the sense that the former also incorporates such ideas as those of *brahmacārīn*,¹⁸ *gṛhaatī*,¹⁹ *muni* (ascetic)²⁰ and *Yati*²¹ (*saṁnyāsīn*).²² The ascetics are called '*vātaraśanā*'²³ (it stands for nakedness, "one having only the wind of air for one's waist-girdle.) The word '*śramaṇa*' which became very favourite with Buddhism has been used in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*²⁴ which belongs to the *Yajurveda*. The following remark of Professor G. S. Ghurye is very significant:

The fact that in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (II, 7) *Ṛṣis* are said to have existed in former times, who were not described, as a little later they came to be, as either '*Samnyāsins*' or '*Parivrājakas*' but as '*śramaṇas*' that is those who were 'endeavouring', is significant. It should be noted that even in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, which cannot be much later than the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, at one place (IV, 3,22), occur the terms '*śramaṇa*' and '*Tāpasā*'. The passage in question describes the nature of the high stage of perfection... Sāyanācārya explains the word *śramaṇa* in this passage to mean *Parivrājaka*, ascetic, that is one 'who has entered the fourth of the four regular '*āśramas*'. He takes the term '*tāpas*' to stand for '*vānaprastha*', the third of the four '*āśramas*'.²⁵

In the light of the above observation, the *śramaṇa-Brāhmaṇa* controversy which denotes the two different systems of Buddhism and Brāhmanism loses its significance. The remark of Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar that *śramaṇas* are non-Brāhmanic or non-Vedic also falls to the ground.²⁶ In the *Pātika Sutta*, the Buddha himself has mentioned

Śramaṇas and *Brāhmaṇas* belonging to the Brāhmanical period. If *Śramaṇas* belonged to the pre-Buddhistic period including the Vedic period, it cannot be said that the ascetic order was the creation of Buddhism and references to the effect can be found in Buddhism itself.²⁷ Apart from '*Śramaṇas*, even the '*yatis*' (meaning to control) constituted a separate class of ascetics who cherished independent views and did not believe in the Vedic ritualism. They belonged to the fourth *āśrama* of the *saṁnyāsa*.²⁸ Professor H. D. Sharma establishes the same fact:

The *vātaraśana* of the *Ṛgveda*, who by the time of *Āraṇyakas* took the title of *Śramaṇa* were the earliest dissenters from the orthodox Vedic religion. They are the same as the *yatis* ... This *Śramaṇa* is the *atyāśramin* of the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* (vi.21). Most probably it was before the rise of Buddhism that the old three *āśramas* were expanded into four...²⁹

It is certainly true that a systematic exposition of either the theoretical structure of Renunciation or the practical aspect of it, viz., *āśrama* theory could not be legitimately expected in the Vedas, but in the background of the above discussion, it is clear that the Vedas themselves had some incipient ideas about the renunciation both in its individual setting as well as social or institutional.

Renunciation was introduced in the Vedas, unlike Buddhism, with reference to an *āśrama* theory. Besides these references, we have clear indication of religious mendicancy as an institution of the Brāhmanical society in the *Bṛahadāraṇyaka*.³⁰ The view of S. Dutt that the institution of religious mendicancy was quite foreign to the Vedic *Āryan* society, signifying that it came from outside, namely, Buddhism, does not seem to be tenable.³¹ The chief reason assigned by Dutt is that the '*yatis*' were not accepted as *āryans* after discarding the sacrifices and Vedic rituals. But in our opinion, the *saṁnyāsa* as reflected in the lives of *yatis* is beyond all these superficial considerations and represents the peak of the spiritual life. Paul Deussen's following remark is very helpful: "Henceforth meditation

alone is to serve as sacrificial cord and knowledge as the lock of hair, the timeless *Ātman* is to be both sacred thread and lock of hair for him who has renounced the world.”³² On account of this it is difficult to agree with Dutt who thinks that: “the Vedas contemplate man’s life in one stage only, that of the pious and dutiful householder. The Vedas look to no beyond”.³³ Professor B. Barua agreeing with the view of Rhys Davids remarks that:

The Bhiksu order of homeless persons evolved originally from the *brahmacārins* (mentioned in the *Rgveda* once in x.109) who did not enter upon the stage of householders ... the *śramaṇas* ... broke away from past traditions, revolted against the older Vedic system of sacrifice and self-mortification or dissented from the later form of Brāhmanic religion ... The revolt showed itself in every possible manner. For example, the *śramaṇas* ... listened to nothing except their own conscience.³⁴

The following conclusions may be arrived at regarding the position of Renunciation in the Vedas:

(a) Contrary to the common belief that the Vedas do not entail the doctrine of Renunciation, we have found that the Vedas provided incentives to the later development of Indian thought pertaining to the phenomenon of Renunciation. In this sense the Vedas constitute the unbroken continuity of the tradition of Renunciation.

(b) We also discovered that the renunciation as an institution is not the creation of Buddhism. It is an ideal which has a long history and can be discovered in the Vedas themselves.

(c) We also noted that Renunciation does not take place in a socio-religious vacuum but it originates from life and centres around life. Only the perspective into which it views life is different from that of the common morality.

(d) Another point which we indicated as a very important one was the prevalence of the four *āśramas* in the vedic times. It gave rise to the two streams of thought, one re-

presented by the *smṛtis* dealing with the gradual progression towards the *Samñnyāsa* and the other represented by the Advaita Vedānta that one may proceed from the state of *brahmacārin* to that of the *Samñnyāsin*, and finally,

(e) By introducing the concepts of renunciation and *Jñāna* without systematically unfolding them, the Vedas provided guidelines for the future development of thought about Reality and Renunciation for which alternative solutions were provided within and outside the tradition.

The evidences, however meagre, brought out so far from the Vedas show where the seeds of Renunciation lay which eventually blossomed out in the *Upaniṣads*.

Although the Vedas are more oriented to this worldliness than the *upaniṣads* and the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, it is a fact that the general outlook of the Veda was accommodated with the Vedāntic spirit on the basis of the positive ideal of the former in which the Indian philosophy and religion were predominantly rooted. In this sense only the Vedas can be regarded as the source of all later thinking.

(b) *The Upaniṣads*³⁵

In the previous section we noticed the implicit tendency of the Vedas towards linking Renunciation with *Jñāna* and providing an institutional basis to Renunciation. Because of a prominent place assigned to sacrifices and rituals in the Vedic scheme of life, the philosophy of Renunciation which appeared strongly in the tradition could not be carried further. Because of the denial of ritualism and the Vedic sacrifices by the *Yatis* who constituted a group of renunciants, it would be correct to hold that exclusive emphasis laid on ritualism caused some confusions between religious and ritualistic values, giving rise to a trend in philosophy which shifted from the external and formal characteristics of ritualism to the inwardness of religious experience.³⁶ In my judgment, this constitutes the real significance of the upaniṣadic thought on the subject. They assign a somewhat different status to Renunciation by

relating it more closely with *Jñāna*, i.e. *Brahma-Jñāna* and yet without divorcing themselves from the tradition.³⁷

There is a view of Renunciation according to which it is a meditative act where contemplation plays a very vital role. Here the emphasis is purely inward rather than outward. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* gives a clear example of this. It attaches a different significance to the principle of the *Aśvamedhayaજ્ઞા* (the horse-sacrifice) and transforms it into a contemplative form of Renunciation, according to which everything is to be sacrificed for spiritual autonomy.³⁸ Here the universe takes the place of horse to be offered for spiritual progress and realization. The same *upaniṣad* attaches a very positively interior orientation to what has been described as outward in the Veda: "Having become calm, subdued, quiet, patiently enduring and collected, one should see the Self in Self".³⁹ Commenting on the above passage Paul Deussen remarks that the Vedic study, sacrifice, alms, penance, fasting are the more outward (*bāhya*) but tranquillity, self-restraint, renunciation, patience, concentration are the inward means to knowledge,⁴⁰ while emphasizing the role of renunciation as linked with *Jñāna*, the *Br. Up.* further asserts: "Men knowing *Brahman*, give up the desire for sons and wealth and prosperity and become almsmen".⁴¹

The above passages regard Renunciation as a consequence of the *Brahma-Jñāna* as also a means of attaining it. These two positions brought out together in the *Upaniṣads* show the continuity of the Vedic tradition. As we would see that Śaṅkara's theory of *Karma-Saṁnyāsa* (action-renunciation), brought into line with *Jñāna* for its culmination in Self-knowledge has its basis in the Vedas. Renunciation, therefore, is not a negative act but the real culmination of the spiritual progress. There is no sense, therefore, in interpreting Renunciation as something of a negative character.

It, therefore, becomes obviously an urgent matter to examine the question of Renunciation as a religious attitude towards *vyāvahārika satya* (empirical truth) where the

latter does not stand cancelled or negated but is transformed and transcended. This question can be examined theoretically from the standpoint of the Vedāntic analysis of Reality on the one hand, and by considering the role of the *āśramas* (stages of life) at the institutional level, on the other. I submit that these questions are predominantly rooted in the Vedic tradition itself.

The fundamental doctrine of all the principal *Upaniṣads* is hard to discuss and decide here, but in the light of Śaṅkara's commentaries on the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedānta-Sūtras*, there seems to be ground for believing that a diversity of opinion on this subject could not possibly arise.⁴² This becomes more so because of the revealed nature of the *Upaniṣads* as a part of the Vedas in a literal sense. "Verily, this whole world is *Brahman*" "... this my *Ātman* in my inmost heart is this *Brahman*".⁴³

The understanding of this ultimate principle called *Brahman* and *Ātman* as the substratum or ground of Self and no-Self is based on the principle of Unity which Renunciation unveils in terms of Jñāna. The *Mahāvākyas* "I am *Brahman*", "That thou art" can only be understood in key of Renunciation which takes a very positive turn by isolating itself from everything other than the Ground which is *Brahman*. But the isolation from everything else should not be taken in a negative sense as everything is *Brahman*. Only in this context, *neti neti* (not this not this) which describes the nature of *Brahman* helps the *Sādhaka* to reach the realms of *Īśvara*, known as *Saprapanča Brahman* (Cosmic *Brahman*) by transcending the limitations of the diversity of the Universe. This we have called the Cosmic Renunciation. If it is the ideal of God that is the central point of attention, the world of varieties and limitations will be transcended as the existence of the world independently of God is inconceivable at the religious level of existence. The *Chāndogya* beautifully states: "Verily, this whole world is *Brahman*, from which he comes forth, without which he will be dissolved and in which he breathes. Tranquil one should meditate on it. Now verily,

a person consists of purpose. According to the purpose a person has in this world, so does he become on departing hence. So let him frame for himself a purpose".⁴⁴ That is precisely the acosmic Renunciation where God is replaced by the philosophic realization of God in terms of one's identity with the whole. The views as presented here are the same and if there is any difference, it is because of the differences in the standpoint from which the Absolute has been looked at. One of the *Upaniṣads* supports this contention: "To him he said: that which is the sound *Aum*, O Satyakāma, is verily the higher and the lower *Brahman*. Therefore, with this support alone does the wise man reach the one or the other."⁴⁵ Professor Haripad Chakraborti of Calcutta says:

Śaṅkara draws our attention to the importance of *Samnyāsa* which may be said to be of two classes. One class is meant to be the means of true knowledge which every seeker aims at and the second class is resorted to by the man who has already had the vision of Truth and who desires to relish the blissful state of liberation even while living (*Jivan-Mukti*).⁴⁶

These two types of Renunciation are nothing but the cosmic and acosmic along with the cosmic and acosmic nature of Reality. The *advaitin's* insistence on Renunciation stems from his metaphysics but his efforts to accommodate Vedic philosophy of action in its cosmic form is certainly of no mean significance. The discipline of *Karma-yoga*⁴⁷ is a step towards the acosmic renunciation. J. C. Oman observes:

By the Hindu speculative theologians asceticism with a view to the repression of animal passions is regarded as means to the purification of mind, such purgation being an essential condition for the attainment of a complete knowledge of Brahman with its attendant freedom from *Samśāra*, i.e., embodied existence.⁴⁸

The knowledge of the Supreme Reality, called *Brahman* and *Ātman* is conceived as the highest spiritual attainment and *Samnyāsa* is the key to unlock the door.⁴⁹ These *Samnyāsins* are known in the *Upaniṣads* as 'knowers of *Brahman*'.

Renunciation in its Institutional Setting

Later *Upaniṣads*, referred to earlier, view the life of *Samnyāsa* as a kind of consummation to which man should progress. This position assigns a status to Renunciation in the scheme of life (called *āśramas*). It is a continuation of the implicitly conceived Vedic norm of life and therefore rooted in the Vedas. The *Chāndogya* mentions the first two stages, namely, the *brahmacārīn* and *Gṛhastha* and also speaks of *tāpaś* as the third branch of duty and contrasts these three branches with the position of man who stands established in *Brahman*.⁵⁰ 'The passage names', says Paul Deussen, 'only three *āśramas*, recognizes their values, but contrasts with all three the "abiding steadfast in *Brahman*"; and this last is subsequently developed into the fourth *āśrama*.⁵¹ The fourth stage was exalted above the three *āśramas*, *atyāśramīn*, as it is said in the *Śvetāśvatara*: "By the power of austerity and grace of God, the wise *Śvetāśvatara* in proper manner spoke about *Brahman*, the Supreme, the pure, to the advanced ascetics what is pleasing to the company of seers".⁵² It is important to remember here that generally the stage of the *Paramahansa* (the highest stage of the spiritual person, known as *Jīvan-mukta*) is not represented by men who may not have undergone the *Karmayoga* and its duties and responsibilities imposed by the Vedic culture. The *Dharmaśāstras* to which we come later highlight this development to which even the *Vedānta* is not an exception. The *Vedānta* with *Jñāna* carried its own social implications. The *Samnyāsa* is not formal or an external mode of living but an enlightened outlook. In fact, the several passages of the *Upaniṣads* confirm this. We hear of king Bṛhadratha who surrendered his kingdom, retires to the forest and gives himself up to the most painful mortification, gazing pointedly at the sun and standing with arms erect and yet he is obliged to confess — 'I am not acquainted with the *Ātman*'.⁵³

Considered accordingly, the *Vedāntic* renunciation does not demand what is impossible and therefore the ascetic life was made an essential part of the brāhmanical religious

system.⁶⁴ The dominant tendency of Indian religious thought still lies in the principle of *Jñāna-Karma-Samuccaya* (Union of Knowledge-Action theory)⁵⁵ and in my judgment even the Advaita Vedānta and the *Upaniṣads* do not appear to take an extreme view of denying the *Sādhanā* as instrumental to not only the socio-religious life but also for self-realization. Swami Madhavananda remarks:

According to the *Vedānta*, there is no actual change in the Self, which is by nature pure and perfect. It is ignorance or *avidyā* that has covered its vision, so to say and it appears as limited and subject to change. Now this ignorance is embedded in the mind, and when the mind is thoroughly purified through *Sādhanā* or discipline the glory of the *Ātman* manifests itself.⁵⁶

And here it must be noted the *āśrama* life embodies a system of vital social values, ethical principles, ends of life and ideals of conduct for structuring the life of society, founded on the *Āryan* tradition. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka asserts it: "On that path goes whoever knows *Brahman* and who has done holy works, as prescribed for the *āśramas* and obtained splendour."⁵⁷ While commenting on the *śruti*, Śaṅkara makes it clear that the duties of *āśramas* are useful for the realization of Self.⁵⁸ The *Bhagavad-Gītā* characterizes the ideal of Renunciation by exhortation to inculcate:

humility, sincerity, non-violence, forbearance, simplicity, devotion to the teacher, cleanliness, perseverance, self-conquest, aversion to sense objects, freedom from egotism... equanimity in happiness and misery, devotion to God, love of solitude, pursuit of self-knowledge and the vigilant awareness of the final end.⁵⁹

The *āśrama* like *dharma*, according to the *Vedānta* has a cosmic and a metacosmic aspect and these two aspects are closely interlinked as we shall see more fully later.⁶⁰ N. K. Brahma's following remark is very pertinent to this point:

Instead of denying that the *Vedānta* really describes a stage beyond the sphere of morality, we have to point out that as the Vedāntic experience, implying a transcendence of moral distinctions, comes after the severest

moral discipline, which can, in no case be excused, but is regarded as essential and compulsory, it cannot justly be charged with ignoring or neglecting the development of moral side of our nature. The *Vedānta* only points out that there is something to be achieved even beyond the highest moral progress and reveals to us the nature of transcendent spiritual experience.⁶⁰

Saṁnyāsa culminates in the transcendent spiritual experience according to which the world becomes a sacred world and the ideal of righteousness to which the *Saṁnyāsīn* willingly corresponds is the ideal of God-man. *Saṁnyāsa* therefore is a sanctifying principle at the cosmic level and a sanctified principle at the metacosmic.⁶¹

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NOTES

1. Sureśvara, *Vārtika on Śaṅkara's Bṛhadāraṇyako-paniṣadbhāṣya*, ed., K. S. Agashe with Ānandagiri's *Śāstra-prakāśikā* (Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, 16, 1892-94), pp. 513-15.

2. See, B. G. Tilak, *Gītā Rahasya*, trans. Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar (2nd ed.; Poona: Lokmanya Tilak Mandir, 1965), pp. 665-714.

3. Eleanor Roosevelt, *India and the Awakening East* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), pp. 196-202.

4. The bulk of research done by Milton Singer happily supports some of my convictions. See "Cultural Values in India's Economic Development", — *The Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol. 305, (Agrarian Societies in Transition, 1956), pp. 81-91; "Review of Max Weber's Religion of India", *American Anthropology*, LXIII, 1961 and "Religion and Social Change in India: The Max Weber's Thesis, Phase Three", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 14, 1965-66, pp. 497-505. Also see, Thomas R. Metcalf, *Modern India: An Inter-*

pretative Anthology (London: The MacMillan Company, 1971), pp. 588-607.

5. J. L. Mackenzie, *The Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 89.

6. Arnold J. Toynbee, "The Desert Hermits", *Horizon*, 12, 2 (Spring, 1970), p. 24.

7. F. Carnoy, "Monasticism", in James Hastings, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), VIII, 781.

8. Sri Vidyāranya, *Jivan-Mukti Viveka* or *The Path to Liberation-in-This-Life*, eds. and trans. Pandit S. Subrahmanya Sastri and T. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar (Adyar, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1935), p. X.

9. J. G. Arapura, "Māyā and the Discourse About Brahman", in M. Sprung, ed., *Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta* (Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1973), p. 110.

10. "Buddhistic and Sāmkhya asceticism is outside the purview of the Vedas and false; and as the path of Renunciation enunciated by me is consistent, with the Vedic religion it is true." (*Chān. Sām. Bhā.*, 2, 23, 1) *Tilak Gītā Rahasya*, p. 764.)

11. T. C. Hall, "Asceticism", in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1909), II, 63.

12. M. Winternitz, 'Ascetic Literature in Ancient India', *Calcutta University Review*, October (1923), p. 3.

13. Erling Skorpen, 'The Philosophy of Renunciation East and West', *Philosophy East and West*, July (1971), p. 284.

14. *Utpannātmaprabodhasya tvādveṣṭtatvādyo Guṇaḥ, a yatnato bhavatyasya na tu sādhanarūpiṇaḥ, Naiṣkarmya-siddhi*, IV.69.

"In a person of Self-Knowledge virtues like non-hatred are established themselves without any effort on his part. They are not of the nature of means to him." See Sri Sureśvarācārya, *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, Trans. S. S. Raghavachar, (Mysore: University of Mysore, 1965), p. 172.

15. E. J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1927), pp. 58-59.

16. The four signs (*Nimitte*) are conceived in the Buddhist legends as guiding signs for the Renunciation of the Buddha. These are the sight of an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a wandering monk (*Bhikkhu*). The fourth one is significant in this connection although its scientific status has been doubted. However, the legends clearly show the presence of monk even before Buddhism was originated. See S. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), p. 36.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

18. *R̥gveda*, X.109.5. The word 'brahmacārin' occurs only once in the *R̥gveda*.

19. A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Dass, 1970), pp. 358-63.

20. 'Muni' means one who meditates or reflects. In the *R̥gveda* (X, 136, 2.) these 'munis' are described as *vātaraśana keśin* (long haired, *Keśin*) and naked (*vātaraśana*), a sign of total renunciation. Indra is said "to be the friend of *munis*" *Ibid.*, VIII.3.5.

Munayo vātaraśanāḥ bisangā vaste malā

Vatasyānudhrājim yanti yad devāso avikṣataḥ *Ibid.*, X.135.2.

21. *Ibid.*, VIII.3.9 and 6.18.

22. X.72.7 "Yad devā Yatayo yathā bhuvanānyabina-vata" (when, O ye gods, like *yatis*, ye caused all existing things to grow.) *Yati* has been explained in terms of the *saṁnyāsin*.

23. *Ibid.*, X.136.2.

24. *Tai. Āra.*, 11.7.

25. G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sādhus* (2nd ed.; Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964), p. 12.

26. D. R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture* (Bombay, 1940), p. 53.

27. *Dīgha-nikāya*, III.23. "Santi Bhaggava ek Samana-Brahmaṇa Issarakuttaṁ Brahma-Kuttaṁ ācariyakam ag-gannam pannapenti".

28. Ghurye, *Indian, Sādhus*, p. 17.

29. H. D. Sharma, "History of Brahmanical Asceticism", *Poona Orientalist*, Vol. III, No. 4, (January, 1939), p. 43.

30. IV.3.22.

31. S. Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1960), pp. 60-63.

32. Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1966), p. 124 ff.

33. Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism*, pp. 376-377.

34. B. M. Barua, *A History of Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy* (1st ed.; Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1921), p. 242.

35. The word 'upaniṣad' etymologically means 'sitting (Sad) near by (Upa) devotedly (ni)'. The teachings of the upaniṣads are regarded as a mystery (rahasye) for which only deserving candidates are qualified. The number of the upaniṣads are over two hundred. However, those texts on which Śaṅkara has commented are accepted generally as genuinely older ones and ascribed to the pre-Buddhistic period of 700-550 B.C. These Upaniṣads are also called śrutis. See R. D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upaniṣadic Philosophy* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1926), pp. 179-180. The thirteen principal ones of the *Muktikā* Cannon have been arranged in the following chronological order by the above author: *Bṛ Up.*, *Chān. Up.*, *Īśa Up.*, *Kena Up.*, *Aita. Up.*, *Taitt. Up.*, *Kau. Up.*, *Katha Up.*; *Muṅ Up.*, *Śvet. Up.*, *Pra. Up.*, *Mai. Up.*, *Māṅ. Up.* *Ibid.*, p. 13,

36. S. N. Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism* (New York: Federick Udgar Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 41-42.

37. George Thibaut, trans., *The Vedānta-Sūtras* (with the commentary by Śaṅkarācārya) pt. I. (Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Dass, 1968), p. CIV "... most probably they are to be viewed not as creation of any individual mind, but as the gradual outcome of speculations carried by generations of Vedic theologians".

38. *Bṛ. Up.* 3,4,1.

39. *Ibid.*, IV.4.23. "Śānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvā ātmany evātmānaṁ paśyati". See S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (London: George

Allen and Unwin Ltd., New York: Humanities Press Inc. 1969), p. 280.

40. Deussen, *The System of the Vedānta*, p. 411.

41. Br. Up. III.5.1 "etam vai tam ātmānam viditvā, brāhmaṇaḥ putraīṣaṇāyās ca vittaīṣaṇāyās ca lokaiṣaṇāyās ca vyutthāya, atha bhikṣācāryam caranti."

42. Thibaut, *The Vedānta Sūtras*, 1.1.4, pp. 22-46. See *Cha. Up.* VI,2,1, *Ait. Ara.* II,4,1.1., *Br. Up.* II.5, 19 and *Mun. Up.*, II,2,11.

43. *Cha. Up.* VIII.1.2. "atha yad idam asmin brahma pure daharam puṇḍarīkam veśma... tad vā va vijjūṣitavyam". See Radhakrishnan's note, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, p. 49.

44. *Cha. Up.*, III.14.3. *Mai. Up.* IV.6: 'Sarvaṁ Khalv idam brahma'. *Maitri Up.* IV.6. says 'brahma khalv idam vāva Sarvaṁ: Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, p. 391.

45. *Pra. Up.* V.2: 'etad vai, satyakāma param cāparam ca brahma yad auṁkāraḥ tasmād vidvān etenaivāyatanaenaikartaram anveti'. See *Mun. Up.* I.1.6.

46. Haripada Chakraborti, *Asceticism in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1973), p. 19.

47. *Mun. Up.* 2.2.8., *Br. Up.* IV.4,5,

48. J. C. Oman, *The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1905), p. 9.

49. *Kaivalyopaniṣad*, 2 — na karmaṇā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaiken amṛtatvaṁ anaśuh. (trans. — Not by work, not by offspring or wealth; only by Renunciation does one see the life eternal), Radhakrishnan, p. 927.

50. *Cha. Up.*, II.23.1.

51. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, pp. 60-61.

52. *Sve. Up.* VI.21, Trans. — Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, p. 749.

53. *Mait. Up.*, I.2.

54. M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, trans. S. Ketkar (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927), I.233.

55. Tilak, *Gītā-Rahasya*, p. 500.

56. Swami Madhavananda, trans., *Vivekacūdāmaṇi of Śaṅkarācārya* (Calcutta: Advaita Āshram, 1970), *Śloka*, 169, p. 65.

57. IV.4.9. *eṣa panthā brahmaṇā hānuvittaḥ tenaiti brahmavit puṇyakṛt taijasaś ca.*

58. Thibaut, *The Vedānta Sūtras*, Pt. II, III.4.39, pp. 316-17. He quotes *Smṛti* 'Let a *Brāhmaṇa* stay not one day even outside the *āśrama*; having stayed outside for a year he goes to utter ruin'.

59. *Bhagvad-Gītā*, XIII.7-11. Cf Swami Jagedananda, trans., *Upadeśasūhasrī of Sri Śaṅkarācārya* (Mylanpore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Matha, 1961), 1-5.

60. N. K. Brahma, *Philosophy of Hindu Sādhanā* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1932), pp. 115-116.

61. *Chā. Up. Śāṅkara bhāṣya*. II.23.1. See G. N. Jha, trans., *The Chāndogya Upaniṣad: A Treatise on Vedānta Philosophy Translated into English with the commentary of Śaṅkara* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1942), pp. 103-114.