



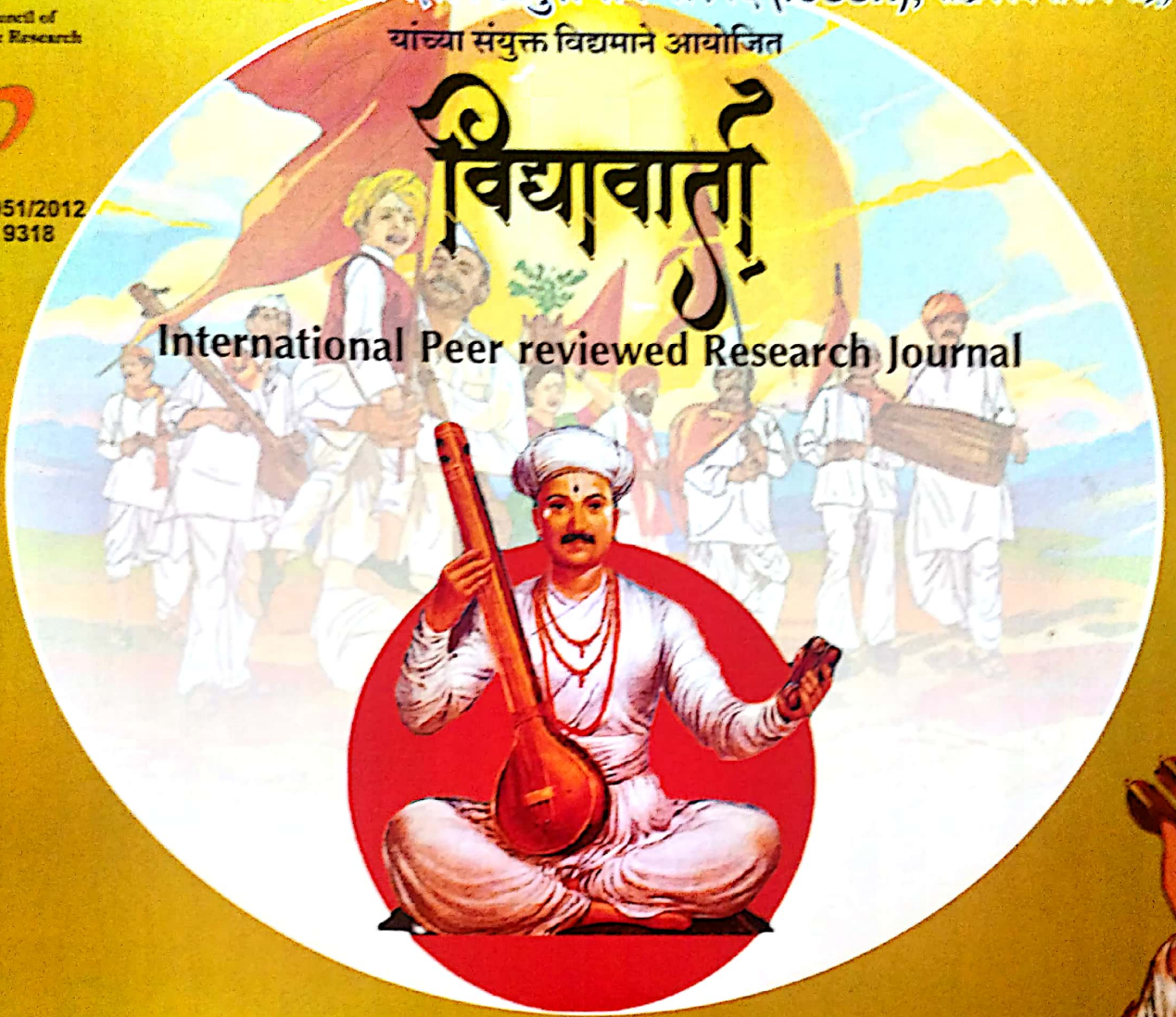
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The Two-sided Journey of the Self: Teachings of Shrimat Sadyojât Shankârâshram Swâmîjî

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the writings of a contemporary sanyâsi, who is the Mathâdipati of the Chitrâpur Math, Shirali, Karnataka, ShrimatSadyojâtShankarâshramSwâmîjî. It takes into consideration one book and two blogs written by Him.

Swâmîjî gives primary importance to meditation which will help keep us steady and focused in a demanding world of the twenty-first century. According to Him, there are two forms of meditation that are easily possible for the common man today and explains how this can be done. He answers all queries that anyone could have on meditation through His writings. His is a practical approach to a seemingly complex experience. To learn anything, one needs humility, discipline and hard work. The same is true for meditation. For Swâmîjî, this means that one requires sevâ and sharaGÂgati. For proper sevâ to happen, sevana or absorption of what the task entails is necessary. Then, whatever service you render will be from within – this is sevâ. SharaGÂgati is surrendering to the Guru, believing that they will take you on the right path and bring out the best in you. Unlike the popular meaning of the word, Swâmîjî says that, to be able to take sharaGÂ, the seeker has to be strong, only then true learning is possible as it requires effort and dedication.

The two types of meditation as explained by Swâmîjî are the inward and the outward, that lead to the realisation of the Shuddha Chaitanya or Pure Awareness of the individual and Ishwara or the Supreme Consciousness being the same. One way of meditation is dhyâna or sitting in one place and concentrating on a mantra. The other is AshmâamurtiUpâsanâ or open-eyed meditation in which one goes to a natural surroundings, sits quietly with eyes open, absorbing the world around them and then being absorbed in the surroundings, and finally, coming to the experience of the merging of the Inner and Outer/ Supreme Consciousness.

Key words: Shrimat Sadyojât Shankarâshram Swâmîjî, the inward and outward forms of meditation, dhyâna, AshmâamurtiUpâsanâ, sevâ, sharaGÂgati.

There are sants (saintly figures) and there are sanyâsis (renunciates). They are the warp and weft of the fabric of spirituality that unites India. They are connected by their distinctive connection with the formless Supreme Consciousness, the Parabrahma. As Dr. M. D. Thomas puts it,

“The word ‘saint’ derives from the linguistic roots sat, san and shaant, which mean ‘true’, ‘calm’, ‘still’, ‘serene’ ‘quiet’, ‘peaceful’, ‘silent’, etc. Accordingly, the inherent features of a saint would be being devout, wise, truthful, gentle, pure, noble, generous, and serviceable as well as having faith, good conduct, and the like.” (p. 2)

However, there are some differences between sants and sanyâsis. Many among the former are householders and worship some form like Râma, Krishna or Vitthal. The latter are renunciates and focus on meditation, the study of scriptures and ritual worship. Then there are Swâmîjîs who are sanyâsis anointed as heads of Maths, religious institutions of different sects of Hindus. These holy men thus play multiple roles in one – being heads of institutions, they have administrative responsibilities along with

ment with their eyes open. There comes a point where they become part of the surroundings and the difference between them and other objects blurs. This is how Swāmiji lets the sādhak experience Advaita rather than lecture about it. This also paves the way for understanding any discourse on Advaita from now on.

The experience of every element of the Ashmāmurtis described in great detail and in first person resulting in the feeling of oneness not just with the Ashmāmurti but between the writer and the reader too. The realization of the ShuddhaChaitanya or "Pure Awareness which witnesses every thought, every feeling, every move, as well as everything in the outside world that crosses my path or mind" and Ishwara or the Supreme Consciousness as the "I" within me is the culmination of this upāsana. (p. 68) Here too, there is an emphasis on repeating this experience again and again.

Swāmiji elaborates on the two forms of meditation thus –

"...these two forms of meditation are complementary to each other. ... While the one teaches you to maintain a deliberate focus on a particular form, the other guides you to expand your consciousness step-by-step, without any forced visualization... A slow, but steady growth in poise is generated within the seeker who practices both these forms of meditation. Although on the face of it, the two forms appear to be different from one another...there is absolutely no contradiction between the two..." (p 84)

The third part of the book, "Please Tell Me, Swāmiji" is a question-answer section in which all queries that a layman may have on meditation are answered in a gentle and soothing tone. As always, illustrations from experiences as every-day as "the whiff of the tempering of a curry from some kitchen nearby" distracting one trying to meditate are found in this section. Swāmiji shows the way to tackle negative disturbances in a practical, logical way – "first accept these interruptions, deal with them

intelligently and then return calmly to what you were trying to do in the first place" (p 79). There is firmness when Swāmiji states – "When I speak of meditation, I mean dhāranā – achieving total focus, oneness with the Force meditated upon." There is a clear warning – "Never say everything is predetermined... Ranting about, lamenting about negative prārabdha and about suffering the fruits of past sins is little more than intellectual gymnastics." Inner strength is all you require to achieve your goal. (pp. 80-81) And finally, "Moderation in everything is, of course, the key to the fitness of body and thereby, of the mind as well." (p. 85) It is this pragmatic approach that appeals to the modern mind.

A tech-savvy person Himself, Swāmiji has written two blogs with more than 11,000 views and 5000 followers. These describe the Joy of Giving (2012) and An Inward Journey (2012). The Joy of Giving is a guide on how to awaken the divine within us. It begins with the necessity "to tame and then eliminate this ego" to be able to surrender to the Guru's grace. To Swāmiji, the ego is not something that has to be discarded, "As if it is some possession you can just discard saying, "I have no use for you anymore!" The simple practical advice is,

"... just as you understand why the doctor asks you to wash your hands before you eat, remember to guard against the psychic contamination you inflict upon yourself by dwelling on the negative aspects of other people. Instead, enrich yourself constantly with positive thoughts about the blessings you have received and feel your heart expanding, as if each breath is filling you with strength, peace, love, gratitude."

The result is the blossoming of true sevā, "the first step towards a joyful and positive surrender." In other words, to experience the joy of giving, one needs two things – overcoming the ego and surrendering to the Guru or God with full faith and optimism. What follows is a connection with the divine, with the divine within him taking over. "The sādhak begins to feel as if

he has been relieved of a huge burden, he begins to enjoy even routine activities, he begins to consciously lessen the clutter in his life."

The second blog, An Inward Journey, is the next step, tracing the transformation of a young aspirant discovering the divine within him. It is the delineation of how this student is transformed by walks into the forest, first with his Master, then alone. How he learns to eliminate his ego, totally surrender to the Guru and finally realize that the divine within him and the divine in all objects around him are the same is seen here. This blog is a summation of the first part of Ashtamurti Upâsanâ. It is obvious that the youth here is Swâmiji Himself. This blog is thus an illustration of how Swâmiji teaches by personal example.

The graphic description of the vibrant surroundings seen through the eyes of a young exuberant, over-enthusiastic student is contrasted with the blissful silence of the Master or Guru. The number of terms used to describe the student – "a young sâdhak", "a new initiate", "this raw spiritual aspirant", "the sensitive student", "the disciple", "the excited youngster", "the shishya", "the watchful sâdhak" – alight of them are found in the first three paragraphs thereby exhibiting the egoistic youngster. As the article moves on, the attention of the writer moves on to the majesty and the wonder of nature speaking less and less of the youngster and more on the experience he has, ultimately realizing the Consciousness within and outside. The eagerness and excitement of the sâdhak when he is alone in the forest turns to fear and then to courage and confidence. He learns to sharpen his focus and respond to outer phenomena as his inner silence deepens. It is not long before the shishya is able to comprehend the power of the calmness and profound silence of the Guru.

The Master here is an example of what one needs to be as a guide – a good listener, a stern guide, the letting go of the student once

he has reached a certain point. Self-learning happens when the Master is silent at crucial moments. Thus, there are lessons to be learned for the young as well as those who guide them, be they parents or teachers.

Parama Pujya Sadyojât Shankarâshram Swâmiji's writings are, perhaps, Advaita at its best, a philosophy that "is a means to leading a better life... There is nothing... that is inconsistent with the scientific approach to life..." It regards man "as simultaneously a body obeying physical and biological laws... and a soul identical in nature with the Creator Himself." (Menon) Bringing Adi Shankarâchârya's complex Advaita philosophy in His unique style of speaking and writing and showing its application in our chaotic world, Sadyojât Shankarâshram Swâmiji is the right guide in today's world. Here is a saint who reaches out to sâdhaks because He understands their trials and tribulations in this rapidly changing post-humanist world of advanced technology. Here is someone who provides succour, direction and focus that helps develop self-confidence, courage and fortitude through the two forms of meditation He advocates. A number of Swâmiji's lectures have been transcribed and published by the Chitrâpur Math, Shirali. During the pandemic, He reached out to His followers through Samparka, "contacting" online, thus boosting people's morale during difficult times. Snippets – Navaspandana (new pulsations or vibrations) – of His discourses with durations of a minute or a little more were sent to the laity on a regular basis. These continue till date and motivate the laity and keep them connected with the Math and the Guru. Swâmiji is, as Shailaja Ganguly puts it succinctly, in her article in Hinduism Today, "Chitrapur's Innovative Leader". (Ganguly, 2013)

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Medieval Bhakti Movement and Saints in India

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Introduction :- The Bhakti movement has wide significance and its influence extends to all fields the sociological, philosophical, cultural. Its devotional aspect gave it a wide circumference. The most widespread religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam consider Bhakti to be the central part of their religion. The Bhakti movement is one of the most beautiful personal religious movements. Bhakti literature played a crucial role in the popularization of the Bhakti cult through the means (Sadhana) and the end (Moksha). There is no end to its activities and it has passed the stage of Mukti (salvation). Bhakti is at its highest end when it is prema. For this reason, the Bhakti movement calls it Apratihata and Ahaituk. It is uninterrupted and causeless. In other words, its sole aim is the attainment of God without any reference to that which is God, otherwise it would have been a distinction to prema, which is the summum bonum of bhakti. It is different from prema as "utterance of the brightest sun". One is iron and the other is gold. The Bhakti tradition in India is a part of the popular culture from the 4th century A.D.

The Bhakti cult originated in South India during the 9th century. An emotional wave of Bhakti spread during the 12th century A.D. The Alvars and Nayanars played a