

Pluralism and Unity

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This is a very interesting topic that evokes in mind the analogy of the ocean and its waves. The ocean remains in the background while the waves constantly rise and fall without disturbing the ocean. The waves find their unity in the ocean. If you are asked what an ocean is you have to say—oceans are the waves. Without waves there is no ocean—it could be a lake at the most. So the oceanness of the ocean is given by the waves.

Rabindranath Tagore as you know, the remarkable poet of this age, had made a wonderful statement in one of his poems which has been translated into English. There is the following dialogue between the ocean and the waves:

‘What language is thine, O Sea?’
 ‘The language of eternal question.’
 ‘What language is thy answer, O sky?’
 ‘The language of eternal silence.’

That is to say, the ocean is constantly throwing up the waves which roar questioning eternally and they are being answered at every point by silence which is very alive and active, and that is the sky.

Now, this question of pluralism and unity has several dimensions. It can be approached variously. So I will discuss the issue from four perspectives or aspects. The first is the philosophical dimension which is well described in the Hindu scriptures. The second is the scientific dimension which has become very popular—thanks to a large

number of books being published on this subject, especially the revolutionary discoveries in physics at the turn of the 19th century, namely the theory of Relativity and the Quantum theory. The third is the psychological dimension which is also extremely important because man does not live on philosophy or science alone, he has a mind which is constantly seeking meaning of life. Unless you find the meaning of life, life has no meaning at all. So we ask fundamental questions about life like why we are here? What we are? What is the goal and purpose of life? Where we come from, and finally where do we go? So, to seek meaning is a fundamental characteristic of human being. The fourth is the social dimension or the sociological dimension. We should remember that unless philosophy has a bearing on society, unless it transforms the thinking of the society and turns it into new channels to improve the quality of human life, it is no good. In other words, the highest truths of spirituality and philosophy have to become most practical in everyday life.

Swami Vivekananda was once asked at the Harvard Philosophical Club to explain the Vedantic idea of civilization. And Swamiji replied: ‘That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical. . . . and if society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so; and the sooner, the better.’¹ So you may have the highest thoughts possible, but they have to be

practicalized—made living and poetic and run through the lives of hundreds and thousands of people who constitute the society. No doubt, this is a very difficult task. All the same, Vivekananda said: The Vedanta which has been confined to the forests and the hills and in the caves of the Rishis and the munis, I want to bring it and broadcast it in the market place. ‘If the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit [Ātman], he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student. If the lawyer thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better lawyer, and so on. . . .’² In other words, what Vivekananda said was that the highest spiritual truths of Vedanta have to be made living, poetic, and practical in everyday life.

Swamiji himself defined his life’s work in a very remarkable letter written to his disciple Alasinga Perumal on 17 February, 1896. There he said:

. . . to put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life’s work.³

In a letter written to E. T. Sturdy on 13 February, 1896, Swamiji said, ‘I want to give them dry, hard reason, softened in the sweetest syrup of love and made spicy with intense work, and cooked in the kitchen of Yoga, so that even a baby can easily digest it.’⁴

The philosophical dimension

So, you see, these ideas have to come through society. That is the social dimension. Anyway, the philosophical dimension of the concept of pluralism and unity has been hammered out in the Indian scriptures called Vedanta or the Upanishads. The burden of the song and the bedrock of the entire Upanishadic philosophy is *ekatva vijnāna*, the science of oneness. That is, by knowing the *one* you can know the *many*. The famous dialogue between the great householder Mahāshāla Shaunaka and Rishi Angirasa as mentioned in the *Mundaka Upanishad* (I.i.3) highlights this truth. The Upanishad says,

*Shaunaka ha vai mahāshālo’ngirasam
vidhivat upasannah paprachha /
Kasminnu bhagavo vijnāte sarvamidam
vijnātam bhavatiti //*

The great householder Shaunaka goes to the great sage Angirasa and asks the very interesting question: ‘Sir, what is that by knowing which everything can be known?’ Angirasa smiles and says that two types of knowledge are to be known. One is called *parāvidyā* (higher knowledge) and the other is *aparāvidyā* (lower knowledge). The terms—*parā* and *aparā*—do not exactly mean superior and inferior. The first denotes *aparoksha jnāna*; one that gives you direct knowledge, and the second refers to *paroksha jnāna* or indirect knowledge of the supreme Reality. Angirasa says, ‘*Dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yadbrahmavidyo vadanti parā caivāparā ca*’ (I.i.4). Interestingly, *aparā vidyā* consists of all the Vedas and the Upanishads and all the spiritual texts.

And what about *parā vidyā*? It is that by which the undecaying, the immutable Supreme Being, the eternal substance,

Ātman or Brahman is known. Everything else which indirectly indicates the nature of Ātman or Brahman belongs to the category of *aparā vidyā*.

Now, the crux of the whole thing is: How is it that you can get the knowledge of everything by just knowing one thing? Science is now almost coming to it. It is struggling, knocking at the door which is known as the TOE or the Theory of Everything. Many of you have possibly read the famous book, *The History of Time*, by Hawkins. There he says that the Theory of Everything is a single theory by which you will be able to explain all theories. So this is the eternal question—What is that by knowing which everything can be known?

Vedantic solution

Vedanta solved the problem by exhorting us to go to the root of everything. When you have a pot made of clay, when you have a clay image of Durgā, when you have thousands of objects made of clay—all of them are made of clay essentially, although they have different forms and names. They call it *nāma* and *rupa*. *Nāma* is name and *rupa* is form. Eliminate the names and forms. Then what you have is the clay.

I'll give you a simple example. All of you know that on the Dashami day, the image of Durgā and her entourage—Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesha, Kārtika etc are all mercilessly thrown into the Ganga. A drunkard once said jocularly: Mother, be aware! They will worship you today, treat you to all kinds of delicacies. But tomorrow they are going to throw you into the water.

The boozier was right. That is the dynamics of life. Mahapurush Swami Shivananda beautifully said a few poignant lines at the 1926 Convention of the

Ramakrishna Order which underline this truth. He remarked that there is a joy in being chosen, used and broken, there is an equal joy in being set aside.

Now suppose the Durgā image as well as the other images are immersed into the Ganges and somebody says, 'Oh! you have thrown them into the Ganges! Bring me some mud from the Durgā image.' What happens then? Because there is no Durgā image there, no Ganesha image there; everything has become mud. You can at best bring some mud but you can't bring the mud of Durgā, the mud of Ganesha, the mud of Kārtika. Why? Because everything has dissolved into its cause, which is called *kāraṇa*. Hence, in this illustration, the cause is the clay and the names and forms which it assumed have vanished. Therefore the *Chāndogya Upanishad* very famously says, '*Yathā soṃyaikena mṛtipindena sarvaṃ mṛinmayam vijnātam syāvācārambhanam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva satyam*'. (6.1.4)—'O Somya, it is like this: By knowing a single lump of earth you know all objects made of earth. All changes are mere words, in name only. But earth is the reality.'

The only *satya* which we handle is *mṛttikā* or earth; *nāmadheyam*, the names and forms are only *vikāra*, only transformations of this *kāraṇa*. The entire world, therefore, the Vedanta says, is only different manifestations of *nāma* and *rupa*. One essential substance is called Consciousness, the Brahman, or the Ātman. Brahman plus *nāma* and *rupa* give you the variety.

In the famous non-dualistic scripture, *Pancadashi* by Vidyāranya, there is a famous *shloka* which declares that there are only five things you need to learn in the world—*asti*, *bhāti*, *priyam* and *nāma-rupa*.

The first three—*asti*, *bhāti* and *priya* or *sat*, *chit* and *ānanda*—relate to the Ātman and the last two, *nāma* and *rupa* constitute the *jagat*. So Consciousness mixed with *nāma* and *rupa*, as it were, conjures up this visible world which is full of variety.

There is another theory in Hinduism which is called the *lilā* theory. How did the One become many is the question which has been asked in philosophy, science, and psychology and answered in diverse ways. Hundreds of theories have been offered to explain why the One becomes many. However, staunch Vedantins such as Gaudapādāchārya, the grand guru of Shankarāchārya, exclaims—one becoming the many! Where is the many? I do not see manifoldness at all. The One never becomes many.

This is called *Ajātavāda* which holds that One has remained the One always. Shankara was slightly more compromising. According to him, the One became the many only apparently, not actually. It is called *Vivartavāda*. So many *vādas* are there, so many kinds of theories. All the same, there is one Reality called Brahman or Ātman. Then, how come we see the many? The actual answer is, there is no many at all. But being ignorant or *ajñāni* we ask constantly why and how do we see the many? The answer is, it is due to a peculiar power of Brahman called *avidyā* or ignorance. A number of questions arise immediately: What is *avidyā*? What is the nature of *avidyā*? What is the locus of *avidyā*? So *avidyā* becomes a great headache.

Rāmānuja was more practical. He said, the One transforms Itself into many. What is the One? It is the Brahman, the Ātman, the immutable, the undecaying, the One Absolute. How can the undecaying, immutable change? Rāmānuja says, I don't

know how It transforms Itself. There is a peculiar power of Brahman by which It can transform Itself into the many without losing Its oneness. As to the question, 'How is it possible?' Rāmānuja says: Do not bring here your silly logic that pertains to the material world. I am talking about the Consciousness which can perform this trick.

Is there any practical example to prove this point? Yes, the simplest example is what we experience is everyday life. That is dream. In dream you do not have anything except consciousness *per se*. The *Māndukya Upanishad* says, it is *antah-prajnam*. The whole of Consciousness is inward-focused and Consciousness from Itself through *manas spandana* throws up so many hundreds of objects—elephants, chariots, carts, televisions, mobile phones and so on. How does Consciousness do it? Consciousness does it because it has a peculiar power of throwing up variety without losing Its immutability and undecaying nature. So Rāmānuja professes *parināmavāda* and asserts God has that power.

So many different theories are being thrown up. The Advaita was attacked by the Dvaitins and a huge debate has been going on in India for hundreds of years triggered by the best of minds. Unfortunately some of them degenerated into some kind of tremendous vituperation, as Swami Vivekananda points out. A huge vituperative literature had thus grown in India. You say something and that is being opposed by someone. It is called *khandana*. Again, somebody supports you, and is called *mandana*. So it is *khandana-mandana*. And then somebody wrote a book. Sri Harsha says, *khandana*, opposing, cutting the opponents apiece is so delicious that it is called *khandakhādya*. But think of the

richness of the human mind! How the best minds in India have been focusing on this fundamental question of how this Consciousness could manifest as many. For hundreds of years thousands of books had been written on this.

The Dvaitavādins attacked the Advaitins mainly on the question of the existence of *avidyā* or ignorance. You say the One became many because of *avidyā*? The Advaitin says, yes, of course and gives the famous example of the snake and the rope. At times you see a snake in the rope. You see that it is a real snake, but actually it is not. So they found out two categories—one is real and the other unreal which they call *sat* and *asat*. The opposite of *sat* is *asat*. Absolutely real is *sat*, absolutely unreal is *asat*. What is the absolute unreality? They give the examples of ‘horns of the hare’, or ‘the son of a barren woman’. These are concepts which do not even exist. So they are absolutely unreal. It is called *alikapadārtha*. So between the absolutely real and the absolutely unreal there is another category which is neither absolutely real, nor absolutely unreal.

Think of the snake-and-rope analogy. Is the snake on the rope absolutely unreal? No, because I see it. But the truth is that it is not a real snake. Nevertheless I saw it and got a *real* heart attack. The snake is unreal but the heart trouble is real.

The analogy shows that the snake therefore cannot be *absolutely* unreal because you see it and react with fear. But is it absolutely real? No, it is not absolutely real. When you bring a torch it goes away. So this is a category which is in between absolute reality and absolute unreality. The term *asat* has been described by a peculiar word *mithyā*—which is most misunderstood. Advaita says, *mithyā* is not absolute

unreality, it is rather a category which is in between reality and unreality—*sat* and *asat*. In this sense, the *jagat* is not absolutely unreal because I perceive it and it is not absolutely real because it vanishes when we attain *brahmajnāna*.

The world also disappears in deep sleep. You experience it everyday. Everyday you experience a state of consciousness in which the world vanishes. You may say that it comes back again. But in the state of *sushupti* or deep sleep you do not see it. So the world is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal and therefore the *jagat* is *mithyā*.

Madhusudana Saraswati, the last among the greatest Advaitic scholars, in his *Advaitasiddhi* says, the *jagat* is *mithyā*. But what are the characteristics of this *mithyātva*? He says, the first characteristic is that the world is *jada*. It is insentient. The second, it is *paricchinna* or limited. And the most important argument is that it is *drishya*—it is seen or perceived. *Drishyatva* is *mithyātva*. Why? Because something which is to be seen has to be an object. I see this table. I am the seer and the table is seen. Anything which is seen is seen in space and time. Anything which is in space and time has to change. So *jagat* is full of changes. Anything which changes cannot be real. That is the Advaitic argument. *Unreality* means change. Therefore *drishyatva* is *mithyātva*. The world is changing, therefore it is *mithyā*.

The Advaitins now say, let me repeat again, I see, therefore the *jagat* is *mithyā*. You see it, therefore *mithyātva* is also seen as a *drishya*; therefore *mithyātva* is also *mithyā*. Is it then that *mithyātva* of *mithyātva* becomes *satya* or true? They say, no. These two categories of *satya* and *mithyā* are contraries, but not contradictions. They have

to be separate. They are of *viruddha svabhāva*, but they can exist and inhere in the same object—like the rope manifesting as the snake. Madhusudana Saraswati has a wonderful idea. He says, you cannot say anything about this; Reality and unreality both of them become *mithyā*. *Mithyā* becomes *mithyā* and *satya* also becomes *mithyā* in that sense, and therefore you cannot say anything about this universe at all. Can you say anything about Brahman? No. So, both the Brahman and the *jagat* are *anirvacaniya*—inexpressible. This was later on pursued by Sri Harsha and Chitsukhāchārya and others who say that nothing can be said about anything. You cannot make any positive, definitive, clear statement about anything in the universe.

This stand comes very close to post-modernism. Post-modernism says, you cannot posit anything which is tangible, real, clear, and say—‘This is it’. You can only say tentatively this *could be* it. That is an extreme position.

From there Madhusudana Saraswati raises a very important idea. What is that? All the theories of the universe can be accepted. You say, the world is real—you are right. You say, the world is unreal—you are also right. You say, the world is both real and unreal—you are also right. So nothing in particular can be said. Anything which can be said is acceptable.

Swami Swahananda used to tell us this beautiful joke. There was a professor who used to agree with everybody. One student came and said, ‘Sir, I think this is right’. He said, ‘Yes, you are right’. Next day another student came and said, ‘Sir, I think this way’. ‘You are also right,’ he said. His wife was looking on and said, ‘You have no consistency’. Then he said, ‘You are also right’. That means, the rightness of

everything is a fundamental quality of pluralism. Pluralism says, everything is right, but everything is not absolutely and only right.

In this connection, we may recall Sri Ramakrishna’s beautiful idea of blind men seeing the elephant. One blind man touched the tusk and said it is like a pipe. Somebody touched the ear and said it is like a fan. The third man touched the tail and said it is like a brush. A big quarrel ensued. Then a person with normal eyes came and asked, ‘Why are you quarrelling?’ ‘Sir, I said it is like a pipe. Am I not right?’ He said, ‘You are right’. ‘Sir, I say it is like a pipe. Am I not right?’ ‘You are also right.’ ‘No Sir, I say, it is like a fan.’ ‘You are also right. All of you are right, but none of you is totally right.’ So this is the idea of pluralism. You cannot really say each one of the perceptions about the universe, about reality, about God, about anything in this world is absolutely right because it is only your point of view.

Scientific dimension

Now I come to the scientific position which says ‘this’ and ‘that’ can exist simultaneously because they are contrary and not contradictory. The world is *satya* and *mithyā* at the same time because *satya* and *mithyā* are combined in a package and something appears there and is called *avidyā*.

At the turn of the 19th century, Max Planck came up with the quantum theory. The question, ‘What is the nature of light?’ has been discussed and debated since the time of Newton. Newton came up with the corpuscular theory that is studied in the school physics—light travels in a straight line as it consists of corpuscles. Later on came the wave theory of Huygens who said, no, light consists of waves. Max Planck

came and said light consists of corpuscles' particles which are not simple particles but wave packets. This is a wave packet, energy packet, and the quantum of energy contained in a packet which is called photon or a quantum is proportional to the frequency of radiation. So frequency is a fundamentally wave concept and a packet; photon is fundamentally a particle concept. These two have been brought together, blended together in the idea of the quantum.

Then came another scientist called de Broglie who is a French physicist and who says that Nature has to be symmetric. This is a fundamental idea in philosophy as well as in science. Why should Nature be symmetric? Because symmetry is beauty. We say, 'Oh, you have a beautiful figure!' Why? My two hands have the same length. Suppose, my one hand is not the same like the other, then you say it is very ugly. Why ugly? Because it is asymmetric. An axis of symmetry is what gives beauty. At the time of Saraswati puja or Kāli puja, what the children do? They take a piece of paper and fold it and then cut it randomly. And when they open it, it is a beautiful pattern. Pattern is not beautiful. They create an axis of symmetry. Symmetry is beauty and Nature has to be beautiful—*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*. That is the fundamental characteristic of Nature. Nature has to be symmetric—radiation and matter are two fundamental offsprings of mother Nature. If radiation has particle characteristics—particles should have wave characteristics; otherwise it is not symmetric. Broglie came out with the fantastic idea of wave-particle dualism which was revolutionary in thought and people called him almost mad. When it is a particle, how can it be a wave?

Later on came the electron experiments. Much later, when Electromicroscope came,

it was observed that beam of electrons exactly exhibited wave characteristics into refraction, polarization and so on. So there was a revolution.

Then somebody asked—'What is matter? Is it a particle?' Of course, it is a particle. You are right. Is it a wave? You are right. How can wave and particle be right at the same time? Exactly, pluralism comes in here. They are contrary qualities but they are not contradictory.

Satya and *mithyā* are contrary qualities but they are not contradictory because both can inhere in the substance, as you see snake in a rope. So the *jagat* in a sense is *satya* because it has as its substratum, Brahman, which is holding it. Again, it is *mithyā* in the sense that change is constantly happening there. Remember the wave and the ocean analogy. There is an ocean which is constant over which the waves are playing.

So in science, apart from change, we talk about invariance. This also is a very important principle in fundamental science where the idea of symmetry is joined with the idea of invariance. There is a famous theorem called the Noether theorem. Noether is a female scientist, very rare to find in physics, who came up with a fantastic theorem in which it is said that every principle of invariance, conservation principle, is related to a particular symmetry of Nature. Symmetry and invariance always exist together. They lead to one another. Therefore the principle of invariance gives changelessness to objects and the change is because of the perception which you have. The particle and the wave, both are contrary entities, but they are not contradictory entities in the sense they can inhere in the same substratum, called—'you do not know what'. Don't call it matter, don't call it wave. There is a substratum which cannot be

defined, which cannot be explained. It is *anirvacaniya* (inexpressible) which manifests sometimes as a particle, sometimes as a wave. A. S. Eddington wrote a beautiful book called 'The Nature of the Physical World' where it is humorously stated what an electron actually does. On Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays it behaves like a particle and on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, it behaves like a wave. And on Sundays, it sits on the fence! They simply pray. That means you can call it either a particle or a wave. You call it a *wavicle*. A *wavicle* means the nature of the object itself is indefinable. It could be either a particle or a wave.

You come to religion and spirituality which deal with the nature of God. Is God with form or without form? Sri Ramakrishna asked 'M.' this fundamental question. 'M.' immediately got flabbergasted. How can that object which has a form be formless at the same time? he wondered. How can both be real at the same time? How can a white liquid like milk be black at the same time? He was completely confused.

This is the idea of pluralism in which the contraries exist without contradiction. That is to say, two things can exist at the same time. As electron cannot be detected, its nature cannot be found out. And when you try to find it out, detect it, it immediately manifests either as a particle or a wave. It is only your measuring apparatus which reveals it in the way you would like to see it. So what is the nature of God is not known and the human mind can't grasp It. Speech can't reach It. When you try to reach It, you reach It either as form or formless. Therefore, in the 'Shivamahimnastotra' the poet Pushpadanta says, '*tava tattvam na jānāmi kidrisho'si maheshvara / yādrisho'si mahādeva tādrishāya namo namah //*' 'O, Lord! I do not know Your real nature. So I

bow down to You. Whatever Your nature, I bow down to That.'

So in science, in physics, we say scientifically that these are two manifestations which could exist in the same reality which really cannot be perceived. What is an electron? Schrodinger, the father of wave mechanics, came and said: We don't know what it is. It is a complex wave function. So this is from the scientific point of view.

Psychological point of view

Now look at the issue from the psychological point of view. The most important thing from this viewpoint is to live a life of peace, harmony and blessedness. Whatever physics or mathematics you may talk about, according to this view, it is better to be a fool and intensely happy than becoming a great physicist who is extremely unhappy. So psychologically you need a changeless entity to give meaning to life. This is a very important point to recognize. Many people laugh and say 'I don't believe in God'. What do you believe in? 'I don't believe anything.' If this be your state, you will become mad. So you have to believe in something. That means you have to emphasize something which is unchanging so that change can have meaning. Change does not have meaning unless there is an unchanging entity, which is the substratum of all changes. If everything is changing what is the meaning of life? I will tell you a simple joke. There was a Prof. Wiener in MIT. He was a great mathematician who always used to forget very common things. One day his wife told him: See, Professor, we are moving to a new place. This is the new address and this is the new telephone number. Please don't drive back to the old home. Got it?

The Professor said, Ok, I'll remember,

and he put the small piece of paper in his pocket. But the moment he went to the university, some bright idea struck him. He took out the piece of paper from his pocket to write down the idea and scribbled something. But in no time he found that the idea wouldn't work and in frustration threw away the paper.

In the evening, as he drove back to the old home, he realized 'Oh! this is not my new house! But where is the paper that contained the new address my wife gave?' It's gone! Then, suddenly a bright idea came to him. He reasoned: Everybody knows me and there is a small girl sitting there. I will take her help. So he moved forward and asked the girl: 'My dear, can you tell me where Prof. Weiner has moved?' The child smiled and said, 'Dad! Mum knew you would invariably forget the new address. That is why she put me here.'

Of course, that was a joke. The daughter was interviewed later by a television channel and she blushfully said, 'No, dad was not that forgetful'.

If everything is changing, life will have no meaning. So, you need to have something which is unchanging, undecaying, immutable, absolute so that the relative will have meaning. It's all philosophy and complicated. So I will give a simple example from Sri Ramakrishna—the example of one and zero. Suppose somebody says, 'Swami, I want to give a huge donation for the Vivekananda University. Please come.' With great hope I go there and the gentleman starts signing a cheque. I get curious to see the amount he is writing. I find he goes on putting zero, zero, zero, zero. After four zeroes I become impatient and ask 'Are you kidding with me?' He smiles and then puts one before the zeroes!

So the changing entities of the entire world are like zeroes. But what gives

meaning to these changing entities is that unchanging entity called the One. The One enhances the value of this world. The zeroes without the One are meaningless and the One without zeroes is only One. All the zeroes, as it were, got subsumed and fused into the One. The glory of the One is that It manifests Itself in the many if It likes or simply remain as the One if It doesn't like to become the many. People commonly ask—Why the God manifests as many? Why does He make us suffer? The *lilā* theory of Vedanta says, God does all this out of fun. It is His *lilā*. Swami Vivekananda said this to Sister Nivedita: You Westerners! You have all sorts of plans, plans and plans. In India, as you see, we don't have plans about anything and we are very happy about it.

Not that everybody is unhappy. People sometimes grumble, yet we are still going because, we say, all is His will, because we have a theory of fun. Why did the One become many? The One thought, as it were, that I am very lonely. Let Me for a change, for fun, become many—'*eko'ham bahusyām*'.

Sociological aspect

Lastly, let us look into the sociological aspect of this problem of pluralism. It says, every theory in its own right is true, but partially true. None is absolutely true. There can't be any absolute theory about anything in this universe which can be articulated by the human mind and known by the human mind. Now, if you have this idea in mind, you will immediately find all quarrels have ceased to exist. Maybe you have one perception; that is good. You may have some other perception; that is also good.

I'll end by referring to an illustration given by Sri Ramakrishna. According to this parable, someone was passing by a tree and

saw a small creature there. He said, 'I saw a creature, it's so red'. Another person said, 'Oh! I saw the same creature. But it's yellow'. 'No, I saw it's green', said another. A big quarrel thus ensued. Then a person sitting under the tree said: 'I am sitting under the tree and I have seen it. Sometimes it is yellow, sometimes red, and yet at some other times green—sometimes even colourless.'

Thus we cannot, however we may try, catch the Infinite, the Absolute, by our stupid little mind. Mathematical and all other logic simply fail. There is a theorem called the Godel's theorem that says, consistency and completeness cannot inhere in the same theory. A theory which is complete cannot be consistent and vice versa. That is, there are certain fundamental true statements which are neither provable nor disprovable within the framework of fundamental logic. This is the limitation of logic itself. This is the limitation of the human mind. Once you understand that, you will not claim that you know everything. The *Kena Upanishad* (II.3) therefore declares:

*Yasyāmatam tasya matam matam yasya na veda sah;
Avijnātam vijānatām vijnātamavijānatām*

—'He who says he does not know [Brahman], knows It; he who says he knows, does not know It. It is known to those who say they do not know It; It is not known to those who say they know It.'

Therefore, all the theories about the

world put forward by scientists, philosophers, are just an effort by the best of human minds to grasp the Infinite Reality. Some people challenge us and say: O, you have so many theories about God; everybody is quarrelling. But what about science? The scientists also hold so many theories and, as they say, the corridor of science is littered with the skeletons of discarded theories—Newton's theory, Einstein's theory and so on. All these theories are only attempts to grasp the reality of God. Each person has his own perception, his own frame of reference, and each frame of reference is equally right as the other frame of reference. Einstein in his Theory of Relativity said, there is no preferential frame of reference. So every mind perceives the reality of the world, of God, of universe, of mind in its own unique way and appreciates it. It is like a supermarket. Earlier, there used to be separate shops for varieties of things. Now we have supermarkets. Suppose, you want to purchase cloth from a supermarket which is available on the third floor. What do you do? Do you set fire to the floors down below? You don't, because others will like to buy something else. So, the conclusion is—rejoice and be exceedingly glad and celebrate this variety and realize that the Absolute or the Infinite can throw up varieties of manifestations in this relative world and each one of them is equally real from the point of view which you perceive it but none of them is absolutely real. ■

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- 3 Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 104-5.
- 4 Ibid., p. 104.

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