

## TO WHICH GOD SHALL WE OFFER OUR OBLATION ?

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**T**he three *Rs* of Vedic Tradition : What is in a name ? But, for us, the Vedic people, the name precedes the creation of a thing. The name of my paper today is 'To which God shall we offer our oblation ? 'which most of you will recognise to be a rather simple translation of 'कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम' (*kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema*) Words beginning with the letter 'ṛ' ('ऋ') appears to be of unique importance for understanding the philosophical outlook of the Vedic people. Not only is the pinnacle of sacred knowledge authorlessly recorded in a text called *Rgveda* but also the Vedic metaphysics, epistemology and ethics all revolve around three pivotal words, each of them starting with 'ṛ'. 'Thus the Vedic metaphysics, their theory of reality, cosmic causal order and truth is based upon the concept of *ṛta*.

According to the Vedic epistemology, knowledge gained from the words of a *ṛṣi* or a seer of a *mantra* (*mantradraṣṭā*) is the highest kind of knowledge. Neither our own feeble perception nor our logical reasoning by themselves can reach the vistas of knowledge and wisdom which a *Parāśara* or a *Kutsa*, a *Dīrghatamas* or a *Gṛtsamada*, a *Viśvāmitra* or a *Vāmadeva* opens up to us.

Finally, Vedic ethical thought is founded upon the concept of *ṛṇa*, the three or more debts with which a human being is born. The question - 'How ideally should we live?' is answered in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* in terms of how we should pay back the debts to ancestors, debts to teachers and debts to the gods. You could make a pun

and say that just as the English used to say that in order to be a literate person you have to know the three *Rs* (reading, writing, & arithmetic). You have to know the three '*rs*', if you have to know the essence of the Rgvedic world-view. You have to know not just about the *Rgveda* but what is in it which is *ṛta*, *ṛṣi* and *ṛṇa*. Don't attach too much importance to this if you think that there are letters which are equally important like 'a', 'ka'; It doesn't matter. This is just an easy *Viṣkambhaka* or prelude to my talk. It is easy to explain to a modern Indian and, let us face it, a modern Indian is a westernised Indian. There is no other definition of modernity for a post-colonial people. It is easy to explain to a modern Indian how every human child owes an existential debt to his or her ancestors or parents. But for their procreative and nurturing activities, we would not have been born or sustained. The West has taught us the individualistic concepts of our birthrights. Legally, I can claim my father's property or part of it, but when it comes to acknowledging our birth-debts, I have heard western or westernised Indian children shruggingly say, 'I never asked them to sleep together and bring me into existence; Why should I be grateful to them?' Still it is possible to convince even modern shrugging Indian youngsters that if life is not a burden but a great opportunity, a great chance, a lucky opening, then precisely because without my asking them, my parents gave me this chance, this window of opportunity, I should be, indeed, indebted and grateful and dutiful towards them and their forefathers for bringing me into this 'What a wonderful world!' (to quote Louis Armstrong, the jazz singer).

So it is possible to convey or get across the meaning of the three *ṛṇas*. Similarly, it is possible to explain in spite of the epistemological vanity of modern enlightened people who think that by their own individual perception, inference and imagination, they can crack all the mysteries of the universe just because they have invented the Internet, it is still possible to convince such people that knowledge is impossible without a pre-supposed background of a tradition. A tradition consists of a line of teachers who have successively enriched the basic data-bank, the think-tank as

they say now, which we unthinkingly inherit as we are born in a language, a culture and a society. Indeed, the burden of debts owed to teachers, *ṛṣi-ṛṇas* of English educated Indians is all the heavier. We are indebted to Plato as well as *Parāśara*, to Kaint as well as to *Kutsa*, to Galileo as well as to *Gṛtsamada*, to Descartes as well as to *Dirghatamasa*, to Kepler as well as to *Kaṇāda* and we cannot deny either of the *ṛṇas*. But it is extremely hard to explain why we are or should think we are indebted to the gods. Since we think we know the metereology of rainfall and all about soil-science, the biology of plants, the technology of agricultural products and the physiology of digestive organs, it sounds utterly nonsensical if we are told that it is the gods who give us food and help us digest. So we should then give them back something. Taken literally, तैर्दत्तान् अप्रदायैभ्यो यो भुङ्क्ते-स्तेन एव सः ' (*tairdattān apradāyaibhyo yo bhun̄kte-stena eva saḥ*) sounds nothing but children 's stories to a scientifically trained modern Indian. He might pay cultural respect to it but he doesn 't really believe in it because he doesn 't believe that food is given by the gods. And it is not his fault. He is not being faithless. He is just not being able to understand. Unless you understand you don 't even know how to disbelieve. The idea of rain-god or a grain-god, a fertiliser-god or a sun-god can appeal to us as archaic mythology or poetic metaphor, but it simply does not ring true anymore. The real reason why the idea of debt to a god is so dim, inaccessible and obsolete to us is that we don 't know what is god. What kind of creature is a *devatā*. And that 's what I wanted to discuss today, the concept of a *devatā*. That 's the main purpose and I admit that it is one of the most central concepts which has been, sort of, neglected by the neo-Hindu revivalism which has started, as you know, form the 19th century, the late 19th century, and is continuing even now in both society and politics.

Everybody talks about *Īśvara*, God. But God is one whereas *devatās* are many. We have to believe in them otherwise you are not a Vedic person. It is enough to believe in *Brahman*, it is not enough to believe just in *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Īśvara*. You have to believe in *lokas* and *devatās* and take it

metaphorically, spiritually but also **literally** in order to be an heir to the Vedic tradition. You have to believe that there are gods. My approach to this pertinent question- 'What is a Vedic deity?' - today will be through a philosophical analysis of the famous repeated ending line of the nine verses of the *Hiranyagarbha* hymn- 'कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम' (*kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema*) to which god shall we offer our oblations. 'If I am not wrong it is X.121.1 of *Rgveda* and I will do it as I am trained to do, word for word, like a British analytic philosopher. I know the approach sounds Western but it is actually very Indian. Because to take every word apart as far as you can go is very Indian. So 'कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम' (*kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema*)

### KASMAI (कस्मै)

First, a section on 'कस्मै' (*kasmai*). On the face of it, this line looks like an open question. To which god shall we offer our oblations? Deep philosophical questions have been as central to the Vedic psyche as deep mystical answers. The Vedic faith unlike Semitic faith is not a dogmatic cult. A little cultural aside here. Neither the post-Enlightenment modernity nor the pre-Enlightenment scholastic Christian dark ages have direct comparative relevance for understanding the ancient Indian traditions. We have tended to copy the Western historic template (in computer language) to understand our history as well. So we have to have a golden Vedic Classical period like the Greeks and then we have the middle dark period of ritualism, and then we have to have a renaissance and everything. But it doesn't work out that way. For one thing, our middle period, if there was one, is not a period of blind faith. It could never be so because there is no one faith, there were hundreds of faiths. And there was constant debate among them. And questioning is not renaissance for us. Questioning has always been the heart of Vedic religion and I will try to give evidence. The Vedic culture or cultures, it invites questions and discussions just as much as it encourages sacrificial rituals. Indeed, in an tell-tale prayer of *Rgveda* VIII. 101, the enemy (*śatru*) is identified as one who does not take delight

in discussion, who does not take pleasure in asking good questions and does not make repeated sacrificial offering –

न यः संपृच्छ न पुनर्हवीतवे न यः संवादाय रमते '  
(*na yaḥ sampr̥ccha na punarhavitave na yaḥ samvādāya ramate*)

*Mitrāvaruṇa*, please save us from such enemies who do not question who do not like discussions, who think एतावद् इति निश्चिताः '(*etāvad iti niścītāḥ*) Save us from those people who think they have known the mystery of the world and that is that, no more सम्पृच्छा (*sampr̥cchā*) The model of a knowledge-seeker in the *Upaniṣad* is someone who is not *ciketā* (knower) but a *naciketā* (Non Knower). For *sampr̥cchā* enquiry, you need the pronoun 'who' or 'which' or 'what' and its case-transformations like 'to whom', 'by whom', 'for whom', 'from whom', 'of whom', 'in whom', etc. It is interesting to note that in some of the spiritually and philosophically central texts of the Vedic religion, we find use of this questioning pronoun. Witness *Nāsadīya-sūkta*, *Rgveda* X.1.29 - किम् आवरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन् कुह '(*kim āvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarman kuha*) is Vedic alternative form of 'कुत्र' (*kuṭra*) What was to be concealed? Where? For whose benefit? These are some of the questions asked in the *nāsadīya hymn*. Again in the same hymn-को अद्धा वेद क इह प्रवोचत '(*ko addhā veda ka iha pravocata*) कुत आजाता कुत इयं विसृष्टिः (*kuta ājātā kuta iyaṁ visṛṣṭiḥ*) who knows, who in this world can tell, where from this multifarious creation came कः, किं, कुतः, कस्य, कस्मिन् (*kaḥ, kim, kuṭaḥ, kasya, kasmin*) - all of these forms are available right in this one verse which reveals the limits of human knowledge. At one point, *Śaṅkarācārya* says in his commentaries on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* that the *durvijñayatva*, the unknowability by human intellect of the universe, of the reality behind appearance is the greatest knowledge that one can have. The truth that the mystery of the cosmic beginning of time is impenetrable by finite minds and even by superhuman gods who came after the beginning 'Arvādevā'. That is the truth which is preached by, if any truth is preached, by this great document

called the *Nāsadīya - sūkta*. The instrumental case which is left out so we have got कः, किं, कुतः, कस्य and कस्मिन् (*kaḥ, kim, kutaḥ, kasya, and kasmin*) in the *Nāsadīya - sūkta* itself. The instrumental case which was left out- 'by whom' - केन (*kena*), becomes so important that an entire *Upaniṣad* is named after it. By who was life given its first momentum? केनेषितं पतति प्रेषितं मनः? केन प्राणः प्रथमः प्रैति युक्तः? (*keneṣitaṁ patati preṣitaṁ manaḥ? kena prāṇaḥ prathamāḥ praiti yukataḥ?*) and then you have the best more possible even by the Greek criterion of philosophizing which is philosophizing about philosophizing, a self-reflectiveness because after these two lines you have a third line which is asking about itself- केनेषितां वाचमिमां वदन्ति? (*keneṣitāṁ vācamimāṁ vadanti?*) These words which I am uttering while asking these questions, who is making me speak **these very** words. Prompted by what are these words uttered? [Thus, somebody was asking me 'Aren't you stretching the interpretation of *Bharṭṛhari* when you say सर्वं मिथ्या ब्रवीमि (*sarvaṁ mithyā bravīmi*) is actually an anticipation of the liar paradox?' My answer was- 'It is not stretching at all because the germs of the liar paradox of self-reflexibility of language talking about itself is already there in the *Kena Upaniṣad*.']

Thus begins the unparalleled testament of human questioning. The only remaining के (*ke*) word, किम् (*kim*) word, who कम (*kam*) word-we have covered कः(*kaḥ*), किम् (*kim*), कुतः (*kutaḥ*), कस्य (*kasya*) कस्मिन् (*kasmin*) and केन (*kena*)-was कस्मै (*kasmai*), 'for whom', which forms the main identifying description of the god to whom the *Hiraṇyagarbha sūkta* is addressed -

कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ? (*kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema?*)

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।  
स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥

*hiraṇyagarbhaḥ samavartatāgre bhūtasya jātaḥ patireka āsīt ।  
sa dādihā pṛthivīm dyāmutemām kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ॥*

What does *kasmai* (कस्मै) mean here? Is the text, the unwaivering authoritative *veda* itself unsure as to who is the addressee of this relevant ritual of offering clarified butter? Unknownness of *Parjāpati* is, no doubt, one meaning of this interrogative dative *kasmai* (कस्मै)

अत्र किंशब्दो अनिर्ज्ञातस्वरूपत्वात् प्रजापतौ वर्तते ।

(*atra kiṁśabdo anirjñātasvarūpatvāt prajāpatau vartate*!) says *Sāyaṇa*. But like Vedic culture itself, Vedic word is seldom exhausted by a single interpretation. The file of Vedic interpretation is never closed, it is open. There must exist alternatives. I have heard enthusiastic Śāṅkarites ie *Śāṅkarācārya* 's followers saying - There might be doubt in *sāyaṇa* but there is no doubt ever in *Śāṅkara*. *Śāṅkara* gives a definitive interpretation. 'The first verse of the first *Upaniṣad*, *Īśopaniṣad*, the first verse, *Śāṅkara* 's interpretation, please look into it - मा गृधः कस्य स्विद् धनम् (*mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam*) *Śāṅkara* says - 'Do not covet anybody 's wealth. He gives this interpretation and then says 'अथवा (*athavā*) ' ' or ', do not covet stock because कस्य स्विद् धनम् (*kasya svid dhanam*) who after all is wealth? Nobody. Totally different interpretation. He does not say which one is better. Just leaves it open. We don 't need a Jacques Derrida to tell us the texts are open.

So we have alternatives. कः(*kaḥ*), can also be derived from कामयत (*kāmayate*), desires. There is no creation without the urge to multiply, a *sisṛkṣā*, a desire to make or become many. So *kasmai* (कस्मै) could mean 'for the desirous god. '

Now there is a third alternative. Instead of the agnostic किम् (*kim*) or the wishful कः(*kaḥ*), कस्मै (*kasmai*) could have been derived from कम् [*kam*], a word which means 'bliss ', 'pleasure ' or 'happiness! ' This is why अक (*aka*) means the opposite of pleasure ie. pain and where there is no pain, such a place is called नाक (*nākaḥ*) which is a synonym of 'heaven ', *svarga*. Since *Prajāpati*, Lord of creatures, the first-born golden womb is blissful in nature, he is called कं (*kaṁ*). A meaning even deeper than that is alluded

to by *Sāyaṇa*, in terms of an *ākhyāyikā*, a kind of Vedic parable. When *Indra*, after having killed *Vṛtra*, asks *Prajāpati*- 'Now, you give me your glory back.' *Prajāpati*, almost nervously, is supposed to have replied- 'If I give you all my greatness, who or what shall I be? To this *Indra* responded by saying, 'since you asked who shall I be, you will be called 'who'.'

[It's uncanny, it's very uncanny how great spiritual heights, when they are achieved by people, even without reading the *Vedas*, what they say, automatically fall in the same rhythm as the *Veda*. I don't think Sri Aurobindo was thinking about this story or the name कं (*kaṁ*) when he wrote that beautiful poem which many of us have heard Karan Singhji recite called 'who'. Some of its couplets are still ringing in my ears-

'Whose is the hand that sends Jupiter spinning into space,  
and also spends all its crafts to shape a single curl of a baby's hair.'  
Now this poem is called 'who' and it is about *Hiranyagarbha*.]

The deeper reason for this is found in a part of *Yāska's Nirūkta* where he says that the *devatās* and especially *Parjāpati* are by nature best described by a pronoun and not by a noun-

जा शोनो एइ कर्णपुटे सब ई माएर मन्त्र बटे ।  
तारा पञ्चाशद्वर्णमयी वर्णे वर्णे नाम धरे ॥

(*jā śono ei karṇapute sabai māyera mantra bate ।  
tārā pañcāśad varṇamayī varṇe varṇe nāma dhare ॥*)

Their *Prakṛti* is *sarvanāma*. Any name can describe it.

There is a *Rāmaprasāda Bengālī Kālīsāṅgīta* where it says-  
प्रकृतिसार्वनाम्याच्च नैता अदेवताः, किन्तु महानयम् आत्मा विश्वरूपः स्तूयते,  
प्रकृतेः सार्वनाम्यम् । प्रकृतिर्वै सर्वनाम ।

(*prakṛtisārvanāmyācca naitā adevatāḥ, kintu mahānayam ātmā viśvarūpaḥ  
stūyate, prakṛteḥ sārvanāmyam । prakṛtirvai sravanāma*)

कस्मै (*kasmai*) thus refers to the Lord of all creatures, that Blissful God called 'who', 'कम्' (*kam*). So, there is uncertainty but there is serenity as well. It is *Prajāpati*. His name is 'क' (*ka*) A *devatā* is by her very nature, named by a pronoun, an 'all-name', *sarvanāma*. I have nothing more to say about कस्मै (*kasmai*).

Now *DEVĀYA* (देवाय)

Where does the word 'Deva' come from? Grammarians don't like *Yāska* because he was, really not only creative but playful about derivations. You give him some phonetic similarity and he will make a derivative out of it. So he says-

देवो दानाद् वा दीपनाद् वा द्योतनाद् वा द्युस्थानो भवतीति वा ।

(*devo dānād vā dīpanād vā dyotanād vā dyusthāno bhavatīti vā*)

So, the interpretations go some what like this. Etymologically, from the word 'div' which can mean 'effulgence' or 'illumination.' So it is also connected to the Latin 'deus' and divine and derivable according to the *Niruktakāra*, also, from 'dā', 'to give' and *dyauh*, the sky or heaven because they live in heaven. In high heaven, they are *devatā* because they are the entities to whom you ought to **give**. They exist just to receive sacrificial offerings, that's their job from their point of view. Unless there were *devtās*, who would we give to? Now, that's a very strange concept. Whenever you give something to somebody, you make a god out of that. If you are giving service to your father, you are becoming a *pitṛdeva*. If you are giving service to your guests, you are becoming an *atithideva*. So, anybody who receives gifts and thereby facilitates the slackening of the grip of the ego on our possessive self is a god. And we are grateful to that entity because it is giving us an opportunity to make a better life by loosening our grip on possessions because to possess more is to die more. There are some extremely deep-rooted concepts in order to understand, which we have to go into the concept of food, owner of food, giver of

food, eater of food and who is it, who eats without being eaten. When you eat, consume something, according to the Vedas, thinking this is my rightful thing, I have every right to eat this, I have earned this and nobody can take it away from me, this is my share, with that hogging kind of *gr̥dhnūtā* (this word comes from गृध्र (*gr̥dhra*) a vulture-like attitude. Then you think you are eating out actually you are being eaten. Hence, the *Mahābhārata* derivation, again playful derivation of the word मांसः (*māṁsaḥ*). I think I eat it but it eats me. But vegetarians have no reason to relax. If they treat their food as their birthright and not as something that has been gracefully showered on them forgetting that they have a duty to share and if they eat alone, sitting in the privacy of their hotel room, breakfast served on bed, then as a *kevalādi*, lonely eater, they will be only sinners and will be eaten by that very breakfast. So, *dānādvā*.

But then the most important interpretation is 'luminous', द्योतनात्, दीपनात् (*dyotanāt, dīpanāt*) and that is why nowadays, in politics, a *devatā* is called a luminary. Any luminary is a *devatā* very consonant with the Vedic image. In some place, the *niruktakāra* says that even a man who is very great and famous, if he has *yaśaḥ* and if he has a luminousness about him, he can be called a *devatā*. A *devatā* can become *devatā* just by being luminous. Of course, luminousness is interpreted in a very wide sense. But then there are deeper spiritual meanings and anybody who is acquainted with the work of *Śrīmat Anirmāṇa* knows that he gave a spiritual interpretation in the body, a certain kind of brightness happens, a certain kind of heat happens when you have the *āveśa* or the induction by a divine spirit. So that is the interpretation of luminosity.

But I want to go towards some different interpretation which is not in *Yāska* directly but which I find in *Abhinavagupta*. Not in his *Tāntric* works but in his commentary to *Bhagavadgītā* and this, I hope, will stir up some controversy. Since I am someone who संवादाय रमते (*saṁvādāya ramate*). I would like to have a *saṁvāda* on this. We all know the famous *Gītā* passage

where the ecological cycle is described that we have to, perform Sacrifice because we get food from god given rainfall. From that food the first part we have to give to other people or beings. A very good thing to study about this is the सप्तान्नविद्या (*saptānnavidyā*) in बृहदारण्यकोपनिषत् (*bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat*) - seven kinds of food. The first is *sādhāraṇa*. Up to an ant every living being has right over the first part of my food. That is why the first part of the food has to be set aside. Now having done that by means of *yajña*, towards the gods giving up of *dravya*, whatever we possess-द्रव्यत्यागः (*dravyatyāgaḥ*). Having done that, that will promote clouds and from the clouds will come rain and from rain again food and so on - एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रम् नानुवर्तयतीहयः (*evaṁ pravartitaṁ cakaram nānuvartayatīhayaḥ*) This is a cycle and one who doesn't follow that, his whole life is full of sin, अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीविता (*aghāyurindriyārāmo moghaṁ pārtha sa jīvitā*) We all know that, but what is the interpretation? Everybody else, *Madhusūdan*, *Śrīdhara*, *Śaṅkarācārya*, *Rāmānujācārya*, everybody has interpreted this in terms of the gods and our duty towards gods in terms of our debts towards gods and so on because it almost says so काठतः (*kāthataḥ*)

देवान् भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः ।  
परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥ '

(*devān bhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ ।  
parasparaṁ bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ paramavāpsyatha ॥*)

Now, if you see the *nijanta bhū dhātu* here, the *bhāvayanta* means *vardhayantaḥ*, *āpyāyantaḥ*, that we help the *devatās* to grow. Now that creates the first suspicion. We thought the *devatās* are unchangeable, *ajara*, *amara*. How can we help them grow? Do they need nourishment from us? Are they dependent on us? If we take this passage of the *Gītā* seriously, they are - We have to. Unless we give offerings, unless we do our duties, our *devatās* will get emaciated. They are हविर्भुजः (*havirbhujah*) The person who doesn't give he not only does not nourish his friend but he also does not nourish the sun- न सखायं न अर्यमाणम् ' (*na sakhāyaṁ na aryamāṇam*).

This is from the *Dāna-sūkta*. So how can you promote the sun. You help the sun to rise by giving gifts. If you don't then the seasons go bad. Unprecedented summers come to a city which is not used to that kind of thing. The cycle changes, so we help them flourish. What are they? *Abhinavagupta* gives a very *Abhinava* interpretation- 'देवान् भावयत इति' (*devān bhāvayata iti*). We have to remember, the verb is 'div'. One form is *Divyati* which means 'blaze', sports देवाः क्रीडनशीलाः इन्द्रियवृत्तयः । (*devāḥ krīḍanaśīlāḥ indriyavṛttayāḥ*).

Here gods mean 'Sense organs'. Or if you have to say the *devatās* are the *īśvarīs* of *karaṇas*- करणेश्वर्यः (*karṇeśvaryāḥ*), the goddesses presiding over *indriyas*. Now this notion of *Abhimānini devatā* or *adhiṣṭhātri devatā* is also important in *Tantra*. I dare not say anything about this because there is at least one, sort of, internationally renowned specialist of *Tantra* sitting in the audience who will catch me, so I don't want to talk about it. - देवताः = रहस्यशास्त्रप्रसिद्धाः क्रीडाशीला इन्द्रियवृत्तयः । ताः देवताः अवश्यकर्तव्येन मुक्तसङ्गत्वेन कृतेन यज्ञार्थेन कर्मणा तर्पयत । (*devatāḥ = rahasyaśāstraprasiddhāḥ krīḍāśīlā indriyavṛttayāḥ | tāḥ devatāḥ avaśyakartavyena muktasaṅgatvena kṛtena yajñārthyena karmaṇā tarpayata* |). You should satisfy the sense organs because they are gods. What a sacrilegious thing to say! We are supposed to control our sense organs. Apparently the *Gītā* is saying that you should satisfy your sense organs, that is your duty. And that is called sacrifice - यथासम्भवान् विषयान् भक्षयथ । (*yathāsambhavān viṣayān bhakṣayatha*). If having fed objects of consumption to the sense organs we can satisfy basically the *indriyas* without getting attached, performing our obligatory duties in a craving-free-manner -

अवश्यकर्तव्येन नित्यकर्मणा मुक्तसङ्गत्वेन कृतेन । (*avaśyakartavyena nityakarmaṇā muktasaṅgatvena kṛtena*) then such a life may lead even to final liberation. It has to be done without *āśakti*. Now that's the hard part. Many people appeal to tantric ideas and greedily satisfy their sense organs till the end of their lives and we know how they end. But this non-attached living of a

full life will give us *apavarga* and then those *indriyas*, the sense organs will give us back as their gifts *apavarga*. Both *abhyudaya* and *apavarga*. At this point I am not sure I have fully understood what *Abhinavgupta* is saying because he is referring to some lofty spiritual matters here. Let me just read out the text of the commentary on this line - देवान् भावयत इति । देवाः क्रीडनशीलाः इन्द्रियवृत्तयः करणेश्वर्यो देवताः रहस्यशास्त्रप्रसिद्धाः । ता अनेन कर्मणा तर्पयत, यथासम्भवं विषयान् भक्षयत इत्यर्थः । तृप्ताश्च सत्यस्ता वो युष्मान् आत्मन एव स्वरूपमात्रोचितान् अपवर्गान् भावयन्तु स्वात्मस्थितियोग्यत्वात् । एवम् अनवरतम्... (*devān bhāvayata iti / devāḥ kṛīḍanaśīlāḥ indriyavṛttayaḥ karaṇeśvāryo devatāḥ rahasyaśāstra-prasiddhāḥ / tā anena karmaṇā tarpayata, yathāsambhavaṁ viṣayān bhakṣayata ityārthaḥ / tṛptāśca satyastā vo yuṣmān ātmana eva svarūpamātrocitān apavargān bhāvayantu svātmasthitiyogyatvāt / evam anavaratam...*)

Now this is the part I am not sure about-

व्युत्थान - समाधिसमयपरम्परायाम् (*vyutthāna - samādhisamayaparamparāyām...*)

So there is a succession of *vyutthāna* and *samādhi* and *vyutthāna* and *samādhi*. As it were, during the time of *vyutthāna* when you are not *samāhita*, you feel the tendency, the little thirsts that the *indriyas* have, the *devatās*. Who are the *devatās*? These sense organs. They are having a little thirst and then when you give them *tripti*, then there is a little *samādhi*, little *viśrāntis*, may be a little *śānta rasa*, a restful trance. एवमनवरतव्युत्थानसमाधिसमयपरम्परायाम् इन्द्रियतर्पण तदात्मसाद् भावलक्षणे परस्पर भावने सति शीघ्रमेव परमं श्रेयः । (*evamanavaratavyutthānasamādhisamayaparamparāyām indriyatarpaṇa tadātmasād bhāvalakṣaṇe paraspara bhāvane sati śīghrameva paramaṁ śreyah*)

This आत्मसाद्भावलक्षणेन (*ātmasādbhāvalakṣaṇena*) I will come back to what I want to say here is that what he is meaning perhaps is this that there is a moment of intense bliss if you can stay as witness to the process of the satisfaction of your own sense urges. If you can have that attitude, then

you will notice that at one point the sense organ is no longer just a *grāha*, not just a taker and the object, a separate object from it. The light that shines in the eye is the same as the light that illuminates the visible object. The object and the sense organ get identified and in that unifying moment of mutual making, there is an *'ātmasāt bhāva lakṣaṇa-* तदात्मसाद्भावलक्षणे परस्पर भावने सति शीघ्रमेव परमं श्रेयः (*tadātmasādbhāvalakṣaṇe paraspara bhāvane sati śīghrameva paramaṁ śreyaḥ*) and in that unification of the objective world with the subjective, grasping sense organ, there is an intimation of that unity, of the *paramaṁśreyaḥ*. What is the *paramaṁśreya* ? *Abhinavagupta* says - परमं श्रेयः परस्पर भेद विगलन लक्षणं ब्रह्म प्राप्स्यथ । (*paramaṁ śreyaḥ paraspara bheda vigalana lakṣaṇaṁ brahma prāpsyatha*). The melting away of all mutual distinctions & differences is the ultimate good! *Anandamayee Mā* used to say - What is *Vedānta* ? It is *bhedānta*. He goes on - न केवलमित्थमपवर्गे यावत्सिद्धिलाभेऽपि अयं मार्गः इत्याह - इष्टान् भोगान् हि वो देवाः दास्यन्ते यज्ञभविताः तैर्दत्तान् अप्रदायैभ्यो यो भुङ्क्ते स्तेन एव सः etc यज्ञतर्पितानि हि इन्द्रियाणि स्थितं बध्नन्ति यत्र कुत्रापि ध्येयादौ इति । (*na kevalamitthamapavarge yāvatsiddhilābhe 'pi ayam mārgaḥ ityāha - iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devāḥ dāsyante yajñabhavitāḥ tairdattān apradāyaibhyo yo bhunṅkte stena eva saḥ etc. yajñatarpitāni hi indriyāṇi sthitam badhnanti yatra kutrāpi dhyeyādau iti*) If you are trying to have a *citta-vṛtti nirodha*, you cannot starve your sense organs. If you starve them, they will revolt and always be restless. You can hide the restlessness but you can never make them restful. So you have to give them their due; they are *devatās*. यज्ञतर्पितानि हि इन्द्रियाणि (*yajñatarpitāni hi indriyāṇi*) but you have to do it as a *yajña*, स्थितिं बध्नन्ति यत्र कापि धिया - (*sthitim badhnanti yatra kvāpi dhiyā*) Once they are *tarpita*, once they are satisfied, once they are pacified, once they get placated as it were, pleased, some of the gods in the Vedic theogomy are called *āprī devatā*. We all know this - *āprī devatā* and why *āprī* ? The *niruktakāra* says that because if they are *prīta*, if they are pleased, then they do आप्यायन (*āpyāyana*), they make us flourish. They nourish us if they are pleased. So from आप्यायन (*āpyāyana*) and प्रीति (*prīti*), they are called *āprī*. This is not grammar, this is *nirukta*.

अतएव तद्व्यापारे सति तेषां विषयाणां स्मृतिसंकल्प ध्यानादिना भावाः - विषया इन्द्रियैरेव दत्ताः (*ataeva tadvyāpāre sati teṣāṁ viṣayāṇāṁ smṛtisaṅkalpa dhyānādinā bhāvāḥ - viṣayā indriyaireva dattāḥ*) If somebody having attained a spiritual height ungratefully thinks- Oh! those lowly sense organs of mine, they were just disturbances, now I am frozen in suprasensory *samādhi* .

चेतश्चुम्बित चन्द्रचूडचरणो ध्यानामृतं वर्त्तते (*cetaścumbita candracūḍacaraṇo dhyānāmṛtaṁ varṭtate*) they are being ungrateful. It is thanks to the *indriyas* that they have achieved this state. If the *indriyas* didn 't help him flourish, so he is saying, and the ability to concentrate on any object, be it a *pratīka* like *praṇavadhvani*. How would you have heard the *praṇava* if you didn 't have hearing ? How would you have read the *śāstras* if you didn 't have the eyes?

These very windows, these 'kha '- okay, they are not *antarmukhāni*, they are *parānci* but unless they were there, our *citta* would not have gone towards the ultimate 'kha '- unless these little 'kha-s ' were here. So they are not just *duh*:- *kha* and *su-kha* but also connect to the ultimate 'kham ' . So *Abhinavagupta* says one who decries, starves and ungratefully denies the sense organs, he is doing this तैर्दत्तानप्रदायैभ्यो भुङ्क्ते, तेषां विषयाणां स्मृतिसंकल्पध्यानादिना भावा विषया इन्द्रियैरेव दत्ताः, यदि तेषामेव उपभोगाय न दीयन्ते तर्हि स्तेनत्वं चौर्यमेव स्यात् छद्मचारित्वात् । (*tairdattānapradāyaibhyo bhunṅkte, teṣāṁ viṣayāṇāṁ smṛtisaṅkalpadhyānādinā bhāvā viṣayā indriyaireva dattāḥ, yadi teṣāmeva upabhogāya na dīyante tarhi stenatvaṁ cauryameva syāt chadmacāritvāt*)

And now you can see an interpretation which, I think, the modern mind would really delight in because it says that any such self-denying, renouncing, *tyāgī*, is acting in 'bad faith '. Now, then *Abhinava* quotes the famous *Gītā* passage- उक्तं हि पूर्वमेव भगवता मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते । (*uktaṁ hi pūrvameva bhagavatā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate*). Now tell me one thing frankly. We have read this passage- one who eats without giving back the *yajñika* offerings to the *devatās*, okay, he is a thief. We have also read the

passage that just by externally stopping the doors of the *indriyas*, if somebody internally keeps thinking about them, he is a fraud a *mithyācārī*. But did you ever think of connecting these two ? I don 't think we did. At least I didn 't. That was a description of fraudulent *nirodha*.

कर्मन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसास्मरन् ।  
इन्द्रियार्थान् विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥

(*karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasāsmaran |*  
*indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācārah sa ucyate ||*)

But whenever we think of offering, we think of actually denying our self because our notion of *tyāgi* is a *tyāga* which hurts. And that 's all right, it should hurt in a way. But after a *tyāga* is fulfilled and after all, there is a *tyāga* we do, a subtler *tyāga* when the god to which we are giving, we don 't think of them as an external agent who will take our gifts and go away and *Indra* will rule in heaven with our food - offerings he will flourish. If we think of that *Indra* as my own sense organ, as my own *manas*, if we think of that sun to whom we are giving water, flower, offering food on a particular day of the year or every morning, if we think of that sun as the presiding deity of my own eyes:

यश्चासौ आदित्ये स एव चक्षुषि ।

(*yaścāsau āditye sa eva cakṣuṣi*)

If we think that way then, of course, *tyāga* doesn 't hurt because it is giving back.

However, there is a serious risk in our interpretation. There is a way in which it can be distorted. People might think that we have got a license to just satisfy our sense organs and just have a good time. Is that *yajña*? But remember it has to be done -

अवश्यकर्तव्यत्वेनमुक्तसङ्गत्वेन कृतेन...

(*avaśyakartavyatvenamuktasaṅgatvena kṛtena.....*)

And that 's the hard part अतो अयं वाक्यार्थः (*ato ayam vākyaṛthaḥ*)

He is now doing the summing up (*upasaṁhāra*) of this interpretation -

यः सुखोपायं सिद्धिम् अपवर्गं वा प्रेप्सति तेन इन्द्रिय कौतुकनिवृत्तिमात्रफलतया एव भोगा यथोपनतम् आसेव्याः ।

(*yaḥ sukhopāyaṁ siddhim apavargaṁ vā prepsati tena indriya kautukanivṛttimātraphalatayā eva bhogā yathopanatam āsevyā*)

One should not refuse *bhogas* but thinking of them that this is just a fun for the *indriyas* who are distinct. Okay, they are having their fun and I am watching. इन्द्रिय कौतुकनिवृत्तिमात्रफलतया एव भोगा यथोपनतम् आसेव्याः । (*indriya kautukanivṛttimātraphalatayā eva bhogā yathopanatam āsevyāḥ*) But still, even after this detachment thing added, it is a very radical interpretation and I submit to you.

I end by saying that this is not just *Abhinavagupta* 's fad, it is not a Kashmiri, sort of, from the border provinces, an interpretational violence. Why? Well *yājñavalkya* was not a Kashmiri. He was a little fond of cows, especially if they had golden horns and he was also fond of jokes just as *Abhinavagupta* was. He makes the otherwise dry *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* humorous by that famous line- नमो वयं ब्रह्मिष्ठाय कुर्मः । गोकामा हि वयम् (*namo vayaṁ brahmiṣṭhāya kurmaḥ । gokāmā hi vayam* )

This *Yājñavalkya* was asked by one *Vidagdha Śākalya*. (This man had a rather sad ending. *Gārgī* was only threatened that her head will fall off but *Śākalya* 's head actually fell off!) In any case, I don 't want to think of *Śākalya* as a *Kabandha* here but before that when he still had his pomp of learning -

शाकल्य पप्रच्छ कति देवाः ? (śākalyaḥ papraccha 'kati devāḥ' ? )

'How many gods are there? ' And this is a question that modern Indians feel very embarrassed about. This polytheism they don't know how to really tackle because thanks to all the reformative movements, we have been very proudly monotheistic and about these *devatās* we have said, 'Well, they are just like Christian's angels. So don't worry about that, they are not our god.' Actually, the concept of *devatā* and *parama devatā*, they are continuous and ultimately *Yāska* 's interpretation of *devatā* would be प्राण एव एकः देवः ( *prāṇa eva ekaḥ devaḥ* ) but we will see that this is just not *yāska*, this is also *Yājñavalkya*.

When he was thus asked he said, three thousand and three *devatās*. *Śākalya* asks still, 'How many?' He said - 'Three hundred and three.' Then he said 'Thirty-three.' Then he said six. Then he said three. Then he said two. Then he said one and a half and then he said one. Now what is this process? The process of reducing. Some kind of a mathematical reduction of the gods. Yet he has attached special importance on the number thirty-three. And now if you look at his list of thirty-three *devatās*, you will see that *Abhinavagupta* was right. The *devatās* are the *indriyas* and the environment and nothing besides because first he says eight *Vasus*, eleven *Rudras*, twelve *Ādityas*, one *Indra* and one *prajāpati*. That makes thirty-three. That 's your shopping-list for *devatās*.

Okay, what are the *Rudras* ? Now, later on in *Paurāṇic* thought, you have other descriptions of *Rudras*. I don't actually want to say this later on thing I don't like this chronologization. In *Purāṇas*, in the imagination of the *bhaktas*, eleven *Rudras* can mean a whole range of things. I will give you one example, how *Śiva* became the eleventh *Rudra*. This is a devoted person 's imagination. You cannot but admire the imagination. And a *devatā* is created right here at this moment of this great *bhakti*- washed imagination. And this is no less than *Madhusūdan Sarasvatī*. A little boy is

born in *Gokul*, a little dark baby and *Śiva* comes to see the boy. The boy has ten toes, very small, sweet toes. In each toe, there is a nail shining like mirror. *Śiva* goes to touch the feet of that little boy, sees his own mirror image in ten of them and as a result becomes the eleventh *Rudra*. This is *Madhusūdan Saraswatī*, in the beginning invocation *śloka* of the *Bhakti-Rasāyana*.

But what are the *Rudras* according to *Yājñavalkya* who is a *brahmiṣṭha*. *Rudras* are the eleven *indriyas* - the five *karmendriyas*, the five *jñānendriyas*, and *manas*. Why are they called *Rudras*? *Rudra* means one of makes you cry. रोदयति इति रुद्रः । (*rodhayati iti rudrah*). When these *indriyas* leave you, any one of them, they make you cry and then everybody cry when all of them leave together at death. But if you lose your eye, you cry, if you lose your hearing, you cry. यदा उत्क्रामन्ति तदा रोदयन्ति (*yadā utkrāmanti tadā rodayanti*). So this is the *Rudras*, the eleven organs. Imagine our procreative organ, or digestive and evacuative organ, the *devatā*, that is what we are made of. We are not just that but also the eight *Vasus*. You would expect them to be some divine being. Well, they are but what do they preside on ? And *Yājñavalkya* identifies them with what they preside on - fire, earth, air, middle region, sun, heaven, moon, stars, so are the *aṣṭa vasus*. And then you have *Indra* and *Prajāpati*. And *Indra* can be easily identified with environmental forces as well because of other reasons.

On the one hand you have elements - earth, water, air, fire which are to be received, objects. On the other hand, you have the receivers which act upon them. And at this point I will invoke the philosophical support of an obscure but great thinker called K.C. Bhattacharya who, in his little read book called 'Studies in Vedantism ', attempts, quite as novel as *Abhinava* 's interpretation of the concept of the *devatā*. And he says 'The experience of the object rouses desire in us. Desire again begets experience, restless whirl of relations. ' In the aesthetic consciousness, however, such as is roused in rapt contemplation of *upāsanā*, one rises to a universal standpoint

from which is witnessed the identity of the sentient elements of the body with the different aspects of the object which is sensed. The restless relations, the attractions and repulsions between the body and the object are then felt to be illusory differentiations of one 's unity. The eye and the visible aspect of thing, for example, contribute a unity and that is called the sun as god. And he says that the real problem of a philosopher is to understand why it is then if sun is the *indriya*, which is the unity of the visual organ as well as the visible *rūpa*, then why is it that your *indriya* and my *indriya* are different? Is it? And he says that if you look into *Sāṅkhya*, then seems as common evolutes of *prakṛti* - we actually share in the common *indriya tattvas*. And the differentiation between the *tanmātra* aspect of it or the *bhūta* aspect of it and the *grahitā* aspect of it as a later product. And even according to *vedānta* which distinguishes all the *indriyas* into separate *indriyas*, the *adhiṣṭhātri devatā* is the same. So there is a common hearing shared as it were, by all of us in the aspect of which there is no distinction between the object heard and the hearing sense organ. This is not in the plane of pure consciousness. Even in the plane of sensory intake, there is a non-distinction, a non-duality, an identity of the grasped and the grasper. And even for a flash of a second if one can concentrate and achieve that unity point of view then one is identified with the divinity of it.

The last comment. Have we ever reflected why the abstraction operator 'ता' (*tā*) in '*devatā*'? 'भावे त्वतलौ' (*bhāve tvatalau*) We all know *sādhutā* is not a *sādhu*, *vidvattā* is not a *vidvān*. There are many *vidvāns* here but one *vidvattā*, if there is *sāmānya* at all. I mean this is not for a *naiyāyika*. A *naiyāyika* will call it an *upādhi*, not a *jāti* and so on. So we take the 'ता' in *devatā* seriously. Should we take the 'ty' in deity and divinity seriously? Or should we say that this 'ता' is to stand for collective जनता (*janatā*) or simply स्वार्थे (*svārthe*) no *pratyaya* has ever happened. There is some difference of meaning and I want to submit that this unity is common. The

*adhiṣṭhātri devatā* of all our different *caḥṣus* is one and the same *sūrya* and that is why it is a *devatā* because it is *sāmānya*. And it is again, just as for *Abhinava* 's radical interpretation I gave *yājñavalkay* 's support, for my interpretation that the *devatā* is a *sāmānya* of all our *indriya śaktis*, I want to adduce the support of no less than *Śaṅkarācārya* because where he discusses the issue of *vigrahattva* of gods, whether gods have bodies or not, he admits that gods do have bodies as a result they are born and they die. Now have you ever heard that these *devatās* die? We want to become *devatās* because we want to become immortal. But the *Siddhānta* is that the *devatās* die. Then *Śaṅkara* places a problem. He places the problem that - his first problem was that would the *devatās* have *adhikāra* of *brahmavidyā*? Can they go through the rites of passage, the *upanayana* and all that and they said no, *devatās* are not like that although you have *śrutis* like *Indra* did *brahmacarya* for so long - वस ब्रह्मचर्यम् । (*vasa brahmacaryam*) *Indra* was told, and so no. But that is not the main problem. The main problem is - शब्दे तु विरोधः प्रसज्येत (*śabde tu virodhaḥ prasajyeta*). If *devatās* die then *Indra śabda* will lose its *vācya* and the *nitya śabda-ārtha* relation will go and that is a big problem - कथम् ? नित्यस्य शब्दस्य नित्येन अर्थेन नित्ये सम्बन्धे प्रलीयमाने वैदिकशब्दानामपि अनित्यता प्रसज्येत । (*katham ? nityasya śabdasya nityena arthena nitye sambandhe praliyamāne vaidikaśabdānā mapi anityatā prasajyeta*)

This is *Śaṅkara* 's problem and he answers that by saying the *Indra*, the *vyakti* dies, but *indrātā* dies. This is his interpretation. That *indrātā* lives and what I want to say in the discussion, I can give you more evidence of the death and even getting older and feebler of a god. This is from *Yukti-dīpikā*. He discusses this long in passage that *devatāḥ* have *jara* and *maraṇa* also.

So it is nothing very covetable in order to be literally a *devatā* but we have duties towards *devatās*. The last point is what we can do in the modern

age where *havi tave* is gone. We don't even get *havi*, how can we do *havi tave*? Forget about that. So what would we tell our children who are busy playing computer games and watching television serials, how would they pay back their debts to the gods? Now, already in the *Rgveda* someone like *Nema* had a doubt that does *Indra exist at all*? Who has seen him? And *Indra* had to appear in front of him and *devatās* periodically appear to people even now but very rarely. But there are other kinds of *Yajñas* which are sanctioned. You don't have to wait till the *Gītā* to know about *Jñāna-yajña* or *tapo-yajña* as opposed to *dravya-yajña*. I will end with a beautiful concept in *Kauṣītakī Upaniṣad* which opened my eyes towards how we can perform *yajñas* every moment. It is a matter of changing our attitude from the attitude of individual's rights to the attitude of indebtedness, from the attitude of consumption and feeding myself by the feeding of *indriyas* to the attitude of feeding the *indriyas* because they are *devatās*. It is my offering to my own *indriyas* and I share the *adhiṣṭhātrī devatā* with you. So to your *indriyas* also I have to offer as far as I can. And I cannot offer alone to my *indriyas*. I have to share it with others. I cannot be *kevalādi* with regard to all the ten *indriyas*. Not just about eating. I have to be giving and how is that? Logically, *Kauṣītakī* says we can divide our lives into the period when we are talking and into the period when we are not talking. Logically there is no third possibility. Every moment of my life I am either silent, which is what you are now or talking, which is what I am now. And I am looking forward to changing the roles. When I am talking, I have to use my breath, *prāṇa*, which is one *devatā*, the most important of all. But that *devatā* is also ready to make itself *haviḥ*. That *devatā*, *prāṇa*, becomes a *haviḥ* and *agni* becomes *vāk*. *vāk* is the *devatā* at whose service my *prāṇa* is being offered when I am talking. When I am not talking, every moment I am silent, I could have talked. I am not talking, I am offering my *vāk*, *Sarasvatī* herself, as an offering to my *prāṇa* so that I can breathe well. So

either I am offering *vāk* to *prāṇa* or I am offering *prāṇa* to *vāk* without *yajña*. न खलु काचन कालकलास्ति मे (यज्ञेन विना) [*na khalu kācana kālakalāsti me (yajñena vinā)*]

### Questions from the younger students and their answers :

*Question 1* : If our sacred duty is to worship our own sense-organs and their illuminating functions like seeing, bearing, talking, eye, ear and speech etc. - what would someone like Helen Keller do ? She would have no gods to worship because she had no eyes, hearing or speech !

*Answer* : Even such a person as long as she has a body would have a sense of touch, the *Indriya* called ' *tvak* ' and its presiding deity ' *vāyu* ' . Also as long as one feels alive one can inwardly worship *prāṇa* - vital force which would be felt in the form of breathing. There is after all a certain predominance of **touch** over other sense organs and *prāṇa* is the **chief** of all the **gods** since without vital energy all the other senses are dysfunctional!

*Question 2* : You have said that as gods the sense organs deserve to be 'satisfied' . But how can we know when to stop ? How to draw the line between a dutiful pacification of the sense-deity and a licentious riot of sensuality ?

*Answer* : This border line indeed is **hard** to draw as it is **crucial** to draw ! Scriptural 'regulations' according to social and 'stage-of-life' ( *āśrama* ) related norms can help ! But usually if one is internally watchful one can find out where appetite ends and gluttony begins. Consecrating and sublimating our cravings can also put a healthy check on sensory needs.

*'Yajñāya ācarataḥ karma samagram pravṛtīyate '.*

But the challenge of moral spiritual life is precisely this : to find a middle way between asceticism and hedonism, between overconsumption & selfdenial because -

न अत्यश्नतः तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तम् अनश्नतः '

*(na atyaśnataḥ tu yogo 'sti, na caikāntam anaśnataḥ)*

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Lecture delivered on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1998 at **Jñāna-Pravāha**  
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