THE CONCEPT OF
SOCIAL SERVICE IN THE
PHILOSOPHY OF
SRI SVAMI NARAYANA

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Dr. (Smt.) Sarojini Varadappan
The Concept of Social Service
in the Philosophy of
Sri Svami Narayana

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THE CONCEPT OF
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SRI SVAMI NARAYANA

Dr. (Smt.) Sarojini Varadappan
Chennai
DEDICATION

This Book Is Dedicated To The Cherished Memory of My Illustrative Father Late Lamented Sri. M. Bakthavatsalam, Former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and My Beloved Mother.

Dr. (Smt.) Sarojini Varadappan
Chennai
Lord
Swaminarayana
The eighteenth century was one of the darkest periods of Indian history. India was ruptured and divided because of the presence of foreign invaders and internal warfare. People had abandoned every ethical code in pursuit of wine, women, and wealth. The religious structure had also crumbled because of the perverted preachings of demoralised preceptors. Gujarat was one of the most affected parts of India.

It was against this background that Lord Swaminarayana took birth in Chhapaiya, a village near Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, on 3rd April 1781, in a Brahmin family. From the very beginning, signs of his greatness were obvious. At 10, he displayed a phenomenal mastery of Hindu scriptures. At 11, he left home for a seven year pilgrimage on foot of the Indian sub-continent. During the pilgrimage he performed severe austerities in the Himalayas and mastered Ashtanga Yoga (Eight-fold Yoga). He moved from shrine, to ashram, to temple, sanctifying them, till finally he arrived at Loj, in Gujarat. Here he met Ramanand Swami, who initiated him into the ascetic order, naming him Sahajanand Swami. Ramanand Swami appointed him as his spiritual successor when the latter was just 21.

On that occasion Sahajanand Swami asked two boons of his Guru: “If your devotee is destined to suffer a single scorpion bite then let me, instead, suffer the pains of millions of scorpion bites on every pore of my body. And if your devotee is destined to have the begging-bowl then let it be my fate but your devotee should not suffer from want of food or clothing.”
Shortly thereafter, Ramanand Swami passed away and Sahajanand Svami became popular by the name of Swaminarayana.

Lord Swaminarayan began his mission with an energy which was nothing short of tremendous. His divine personality attracted masters of all fields to join his following that rapidly grew to hundreds of thousands of which 3000 were sadhus and among them 500 were *paramhansas* - sadhus of highest purity. During his very life-time they worshiped him as the Supreme God.

He not only subdued the obdurate and martial tribes of Gujarat but raised them to a high spiritual level. He put a halt to yagnas which involved killing of animals. He stopped female infanticide and the cruel practice of *Sati*, in which widows were forcibly burnt. He promoted education, especially among women-folk.

The perverted preachers, heads of muths and ashrams, who saw in this new Movement their death-knell, strongly opposed him and tried to crush this Movement. But He and his sadhus could not be subdued by their repressions. They exhibited by their lives that a sadhu should be above honour and insults, should bear malice towards none, should not be drawn towards wealth, women and tasty foods, should have no connections with relatives, and should have only minimal wants to fulfil his bare requirements. In fact, these were the vows given to them by Lord Swaminarayana. With these ideals they remained invincible.

The sadhus understood the dignity of labour and served society by digging wells and ponds, as water was scarce. They were asked to beg for food and distribute it to the needy from various alms-centres established by Him. They were also instructed to contact people and tell them about the glory of God, giving them the vows of abstaining from alcohol, meat-eating, stealing, adultery and to discharge the duties of their station in life.
He preached that real devotion could flourish only after one assumed *atmabhava*. He also said that to reach that lofty height one has to be founded in righteousness which rests upon chastity. He worked tirelessly in Gujarat for thirty years and effected a peaceful revolution. The Gujarat landscape, its horizon once dishevelled by the turbulence between 300 warring states and principalities, its soil gashed, bleeding with insecurity, its atmosphere corroded with black superstition and ignorance, slowly flowered under the Lord’s unique touch, tender yet firm. Where chaos and terror were a way of life, he firmly established morality and righteousness. Welcoming one and all he crowned them with ultimate liberation. He left this world at the age of 49, enriching humanity with a legacy of six lofty temples, several spiritual centres, and treasures of spiritual and moral wisdom in the two scriptures: *Vachanamritam* and *Shikshapatri*.

But most of all, He promised to remain ever-present on this earth through a succession of sadhus who are in constant rapport with God. His spiritual successors are Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, and presently, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

"I have incarnated upon this earth, not to kill demons, but to uproot the demonic elements from the human mind; not to liberate man temporarily from the poverty and pain of this life but to emancipate him forever from the transmigratory cycle which lies at the root of all pains and poverty.”

Lord Swaminarayana

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MESSAGE

I am very happy to note that you are releasing your book entitled "Concept of Social Services in Swami Narayana’s Philosophy" in memory of your parents. This topic is very unique and I am sure, it will give a fresh impetus to our nation building activities.

I am unable to attend this function, because of my other official engagements.

I appreciate your efforts and wish you all success. I hope this will inspire many more such research activities on our great tradition of selfless service to human kind.

(MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI)
FOREWORD

Prof. M. Narasimhachary

It gives me great pleasure in writing this Foreword to the Book *The Concept of Social Service in the Philosophy of Svami Narayana* being brought out by Dr. (Smt.) Sarojini Varadappan. This formed the Dissertation prepared under my guidance for which she was awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Vaishnavism by the University of Madras, recently.

Svami Narayana (1781-1830 A.D.) who trod this earth about 200 hundred years ago was a ‘revolutionary’ Samnyasin. He took up social work as a spiritual *sadhana* and changed the entire concept of Sanatana Dharma. The Gita (III.4) says: “It is not by merely giving up work that one attains perfection”. The door of Religion which Ramanuja opened to one and all without any distinction of caste, creed and colour, was kept more widely opened, if one may say so, by Svami Narayana through his down-to-earth, absolute pragmatism. He changed the convicts and culprits into useful members of society. He changed atheists into astute believers in God. He made asceticism respectable and meaningful by weeding out the element of sensuality in thought, word and deed in the minds of those who adopt it. He demonstrated by his superhuman powers that God-realization can be easily accomplished if the spiritual preceptor is really God-minded.

The philosophy of Svami Narayana is known as *Navya Visistadvaita*. The novelty (*navyatva*) he introduced is something ingenuous and inspiring. The concept of Aksara Brahman which was a ‘forgotten Empire’ was discovered, renovated and resurrected by him. He was admired not only by the natives but also by the British rulers. What guns and swords could not accomplish was accomplished by his rosary.

Though he was born in Gujarat, he travelled all over the country and through his love and compassion, selfless service and spiritual sweep carved out for himself a permanent *niche* in the hearts of all. As all
great men of vision, he also suffered in the initial stages, trials and tribulations. Although he did not believe in performing miracles, still they happened in the lives of those who loved and lived with him, admired and adored him. 'The Sun cannot, in spite of himself, conceal his rays for long. Svami Narayana was the Sun in the firmament of spirituality. His golden touch dispelled darkness, awakened the slumbering souls, opened their eyes to their own reservoirs of spiritual strength, made them worthy of human life and made their lives sagas of peace, love and compassion. That a single soul could accomplish this spiritual regeneration vouchsafes the belief that he was Purusottama Himself.

Knowing about him and his work is certainly a 'rebirth'; practicing what he preached about two hundreds ago is the reawakening of the inner spirit. By the same token, writing a doctoral dissertation about him and social service which was streamlined by spirituality is indeed, a rare distinction and blessing one can think of. I am happy that Dr (Smt) Sarojini Varadapan became the chosen instrument of the Svami in revealing an interesting aspect of His life -- the aspect of social service imbedded in his philosophy. Every school of thought has its own sampradaya (tradition). One should study the tradition well before attempting to analyze and comment on a particular philosophical school. I am delighted to state that Dr. Sarojini had a first-hand knowledge of the Svami Narayana tradition from the highest source itself. She went to the Svami Narayana centres in Allahabad and London, and saw for herself, the way the system lived there. This has put her in a very covetable position to take up the present topic and work upon it for the Doctorate Degree. She has already made a name for herself as a self-less social worker. In the Preface to this work, she has traced this spirit in her life to the spiritual 'Vaishnava' atmosphere in which she was born and brought up by her parents, especially by her beloved father, the late-lamented Hon'ble Sri M. Bhaktavatsaiam, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. All their blessings bore fruit in the fullness of time. The result is the present work, which I am sure, is the best tribute she can pay not
only to her parents but also to the noble spirit of social service which
moved, moulded and motivated many of our spiritual heads, thinkers,
statesmen, freedom fighters and social reformers.

I congratulate Dr. Sarojini Varadappan on this splendid publication,
which I am sure, will inspire all who read it. I am also sure that this
book will be welcomed by all seekers after truth and spirituality,
especially by the devout disciples, devotees and followers of Svami
Narayana all over the world. Undoubtedly this book is an excellent
and commendable addition to the literature that is already available
on the Great Master.
Dr. G. SUNDARAM, M.A., M.Litt., Ph.D., IAS (Retd).

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20th November 2001

IN APPRECIATION

Swaminarayan¹ is a household name in Gujarat. The people of Gujarat throng the Swaminarayan temples and listen to the learned discourses of Shri Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. The saffron-robed and turbaned Swamijis have done yeoman service. For instance, they were the first to be seen doing rescue work after the devastating earthquake in Kutch last year.

Although I had seen and heard of them in Gujarat, I had no intimate knowledge till I had to play a small but significant role in the construction of the Swaminarayan temple in London - the largest Hindu temple outside of India. The Swamijis undergo a rigorous training for four or five years at the feet of Shri Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj not only in matters religious, but also in social service. The Swamijis become a band of highly disciplined and dedicated workers, some of them highly educated and have given up lucrative careers. They have been admitted into the Swaminarayan fold irrespective of their caste or creed - some of them are from the scheduled or tribal communities. The other volunteers of the Swaminarayan Movement lead normal family life and render total free service.

In this context, I had read recently in a newspaper article that Shrimathi Sarojini Varadappan, daughter of a Chief Minister and herself a leading social worker, had obtained a Ph.D., degree from the University of Madras, at her age of 80, for her thesis on Swaminarayan. Since the subject itself was a rare choice in Tamil Nadu, I made it a point to read it.
I have no hesitation in stating that this difficult subject has been handled carefully. The book not only traces the origin and development of the Swaminarayan Movement, but also its current role in the religious, moral and social spheres.

I am confident that this book would be a useful addition to the literature on comparative religions and their role and relevance to the society.

DR. G. SUNDARAM
PREFACE

The Present Thesis incorporates the research work done by me as a full-time scholar in the Department of Vaishnavism, University of Madras, during the years 1996-1999. As a Social Worker, I am deeply interested in the amelioration of the living conditions of the people in society. This spirit was inculcated in me from early childhood by my illustrious father, late lamented Sri M. Bhaktavatsalam, former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. I had the opportunity of undergoing the Certificate and Diploma Courses in Vaishnavism in the Department of Vaishnavism, University of Madras. This came as a boon to me who was born as a Vaishnava. This opened up the gates of a new world as it were. I had the opportunity of studying the lives of the Alavars and the Acaryas who inspired people with their mystic songs and writings. I also had the opportunity of studying in detail about the life and work of Sri Ramanuja whose Philosophy is called Visistadvaita and whose large-heartedness was glorified by Swami Vivekananda in his lectures and writings. I knew that it was Sri Ramanuja who, after the Buddha, had a deep concern for the uplift of the downtrodden, lower classes of society. His efforts to admit the lowest strata into the temple of Lord Tirunarayana at Melkote in Karnataka, about 1000 years ago, speaks volumes about the great social reformative zeal of Sri Ramanuja.

After finishing the Diploma Course at the Department of Vaishnavism, I developed a deep urge to work for Ph.D. in Vaishnavism. When I approached Dr. M. Narasimhachary, Professor & Head, Department of Vaishnavism and expressed my desire to do research, he, knowing my background and interest in social work, suggested that I take up the topic “The Concept of social Service in the Philosophy of Sri Svami Narayana”. Svami Narayana was great religious leader and social reformer of Gujarat who flourished between A.D. 1781 and
1830. He favoured Sri Ramanuja’s Visistadvaita as the viable means of fulfilling the spiritual aspirations of a man. His Philosophy is called “Navya Visistadaita”. He introduced a few important changes also in the system to suit his own genius and the need of the times. My Professor told me that although some work had been done by scholars on the life and teachings of this modern Prophet of Gujarat, no serious and sustained work was done to trace the origin and development of the concept of Social Service as found in the teachings and philosophical writings of this School. I found the topic very much to my satisfaction and took up the work.

To achieve the objective, the Thesis has been divided into five chapters. Chapter One explains the salient features of the Visistadvaita Philosophy of Ramanuja after a general introduction. Attempt has also been to highlight the novelty found in Svami Narayana’s Philosophy. The Second Chapter traces the origin of the concept of service from early times, going back to the Itihasas and the puranas. The Mahabharata in particular, is a storehouse of many an anecdote highlighting the importance of “service” done to those in distress -- be it a man, beast, or bird. Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the basic principles of the Navya Visistadvaita Philosofhy from the viewpoint of social service. Chapter Four gives a detailed account of various incidents and happenings in the life of Swami Narayana which bring out his deep concern for the welfare of all the living beings in society. How he inspired the people, taught them and helped them with profound sympathy and love for them, have been dealt with at length in this chapter. Chapter Five provides the conclusion for the Study. The special importance and relevance of this Philosophy to the modern times have been highlighted in this chapter.

Now it is my pleasant duty to thank all those who inspired me and helped me in preparing this Thesis. I wish to thank at the outset the
authourities of the University of Madras for according me permission to join the Department of Vaishnavism as a full-time Research scholar in January 1996.

I am highly thankful to my Supervisor, Prof. M. Narasimhachary who not only suggested the topic for my research but also helped me in preparing the Thesis at every step. He taught the methodology of research and gave me the material to read. He read the entire Thesis and offered valuable suggestions for improvement at every stage. But for his kind help, I could not have completed my research in this fashion. For this, and for the personal interest he took in my work, I am always grateful to him.

I also wish to thank Dr. V.K.S.N. Raghavan and Dr. M.A. Venkatakrishnan, Professors in the Department of Vaishnavism, for their cooperation and encouragement in the course of my study.

I wish to place on record my sense of deep indebtedness to my husband, late-lamented Sri C.N. Varadappan who was a constant source of encouragement to me in all my activities, be they social or Academic. I am deeply sensible to the fact that he is not alive to see this work of mine; but I am sure he is blessing my endeavour from his heavenly abode.

I also wish to thank and bless all my family members, especially my niece, Smt. Jayanti Natarajan, Who, in spite of her busy schedule, used to encourage me in my research activities.

SAROJINI VARADAPPAN
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The System of Vedanta that was established on a sound foundation by Sri Ramanuja (A.D.1017-1137) is now popularly known as Visistadvaita. He was not its founder. He is regarded as the first theologian whose doctrines were accepted by almost all the Vaisnava thinkers who came after him chronologically such as Nimbarka, Madhva, Vallabha, Sriksrsna Caitanya and last but not the least, Svami Narayana. For instance, the importance of Bhakti and Prapatti as the alternative means of liberation, the reality of the universe at all levels of experience, the concept of liberation as marked by service done to the Lord in His highest abode, etc., are the points that are common among various theological systems. But for a few minor differences in the technical terminology, one may say that there is virtually no difference between Ramanuja and other Vaisnava Philosophers.

Of all such Vaisnava schools which were profoundly influenced by Ramanuja, mention must be made of the “Navya Visistadvaita” school founded by Svami Narayana. The philosophical position of this system has of course its own speciality and individuality although it openly adopts the term “Visistadvaita”, with the prefix “Navya”. In fact, in his Siksapatri, Svami Narayana proclaims himself to be essentially a Visistadvaitin though he introduces innovations here and there, some of which are highly significant. He says: “The four Veda, the Vedanta Sutras by Vyasa, Srimad Bhagavatam, Srvinsusahasranama, Sri Bhagavadgita, the code of ethics enunciated by Sri Vidura, Sri Vasudeva Mahatmya from the Visnukhandha of Skanda Purana and the Yajnavalkya Smrti are the primary scriptures. The Sribhasya on the Sarirakasutra, and the Bhasya on the Bhagavadgita, both by Ramanujacarya are accepted by me as authoritative for acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of philosophy.”

It is therefore necessary that we understand the basic concepts of Visistadvaita Philosophy first which has been the source of inspiration for Svami Narayana, whose concept of social service in terms of philosophy is the theme of the present Thesis.

1 See Siksapatri, vv. 99-100.
Ramanuja’s Visistadvaita offers a superior alternative to both radical dualism/pluralism and radical monism, the two extremes with which Vedantic schools have aligned themselves. It is of course true that Reality does not admit of differentiation as well as unity at the same time. But the apparent paradox in Vedanta can be easily solved if we maintain that relative truth is not defective in priniciple, although the whole cannot be represented by the part. The apparent differences between mind and matter or soul and non-soul, between one soul and another, or between one thing and another, or between God and man have seemed to many to be of an absolute character. It was also believed that if the gap could be bridged, important differences would be obliterated into a bland uniformity. The Sankhya concept of unqualified dualism between Prakrti and Purusa, and its pluralism with regard to the Purusas (souls) was to some extent, an attempt to provide an alternative to a Monism which would absorb all souls into one universal Soul or Brahman. Dualists maintain that no interaction would imply something in common and therefore, some degree of similarity between the entities. They point out that key differences are real but only at the very high risk of making difference absolute. In their anxiety to treat as radically different that which they wanted to keep distinct and separate, they failed to allow for the coherence necessary for any plausible account of the world-phenomenon, Samkhya, for instance, argues that the Purusa cannot possibly arise from or take part in the affairs of Prakrti, being so radically different from it; but then finds itself unable to give any reasonable account of how it is that the Purusa can be deceived by Prakrti or mistake itself with the phenomenal self in Prakrti.

The point to be realised is that there is some sort of unity in reality, perhaps more unity than pluralism can adequately be accounted for by philosophers. If the pluralist philosophies have not succeeded in doing justice to unity, then, monistic schools have also failed to do justice to difference. The unqualified monism of Sankara has failed in

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rendering justice to diversity. Sankara's claim that the universe is undifferentiatedly one, arguing that the concept of difference, is indeed, inconsistent. If there could be interaction between two things, or even if they are conceived of as being together, then there must be something in their nature which admits of this kind of interconnection or interaction. Total interconnection is taken by Sankara as the meaning of absolute identity. The universe, to be fully conceivable, should be fully inter-related and therefore, undifferentiatedly one. This is really an argument for oneness. But Sankara has over- concluded to the undifferentiated oneness his theory of demands, as if our choice were between absolute separation and absolute identity.

Strictly speaking, the appearance of diversity in reality can only be adequately explained on the basis of the principle that there is diversity in reality. Sankara, however, maintains that the one undifferentiated universe appears differentiated when reflected in our ignorance. Yet if the appearance of diversity arises from our ignorance, then the differentiating principle must lie in reality, if our ignorance is real. If our ignorance is not real, then diversity is not real either, being only a type of ignorance due to our ignorance. According to the Advaitins, the uniform one is obscured by a kind of ignorance arising from ignorance in a perpetual cycle. So as to give an account of reality, therefore, we should have a place for diversity also.

Ramanuja's asrayanupapatti argument against Advaita is on these lines. He argues that avidya (ignorance) cannot be adequately accounted for by the Advaitins. Ignorance cannot really be in Brahman, for then it would be incompatible with unqualified Brahman. Ignorance cannot even be in the jiva, for the soul itself is a figment of ignorance. Nor is there any other place where ignorance can exist. So Ramanuja concludes that Sankara's account of ignorance is defective and that there is more diversity to the universe than Advaita could comprehend and account for. Instead of rejecting diversity in favour of unity and instead of committing the opposite fault, Ramanuja finds unity in diversity, the one in the many, as the only plausible solution.
As explained by Ramanuja, our finite selves and nature in general are to God, as His body, having the same being, the lesser and the greater. We are dependent on God but He is independent. This concept of the relation between the one and the many, and between God and man, avoids the extremes of both undifferentiated monism and radical pluralism. From Vedanta Desika to Svami Narayana, many leading thinkers of India have in some form or other, expounded such views reconciling identity and diversity. Undoubtedly such reconciliation represents a significant advance in the world of Upanisadic interpretation.  

Against this background, the fundamental concepts of Ramanuja’s Philosophy are taken and explained below.

TATTVATRAYA:

According to Ramanuja, there are three important categories to be known viz., Cit, Acit and Isvara. Cit stands for the multitudes of living beings that are characterised by Caitanya or Knowledge. Knowledge, according to Ramanuja, is the invariable adjective of the living beings including the Lord. It qualifies the living beings at all levels of their existence and experience: the state of Wakefulness (jagradavastha), dream state (svapnavastha), state of deep sleep (sussupti) and state of liberation which is the fourth and final one (turiyavastha). This is called technically, Dharmabhutajnana. There is never a moment in the life of an individual soul when it is devoid of knowledge. Further, different feelings or experiences of the mind such as sukha, dukkha, ehrti, adhrti, hri, dhi, bhi etc., are all different aspects and dimensions of this Dharmabhutajnana itself.

According to Ramanuja, there are three categories of living being: badhha (bound souls), mukta (the liberated ones) and the nitya-muktas (the ever-liberated ones). All these are always subservient to the Lord. The Nityas are those who never were subject to the worldly

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3 Ibid., pp. 84-85
existence. Ananta, Garuda, Visvakṣena and others are called Nityas. They carry out different kinds of services to the Lord in the highest abode called Vaikuntha.

There is then the category called Acit, which stands for the insentient Prakṛti and its evolutes. According to Ramanuja, Acit forms the object of enjoyment (bhoga), the abode or place of enjoyment (bhogasthana) and the means of enjoyment (bhogopakaraṇa) for the Lord in His manifestations and also for the individual souls. Acit or Prakṛti is also known in scriptures as Maya and Triguna. The word Maya should not be understood in the sense of Mithya or Illusion in which the Advaitins use it. It is a positive wonderful power of the Lord, which is real but not illusory. The word Triguna is self-explanatory. It consists of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Prakṛti has the power to conceal the truth from the individual souls. The only way to overcome its influence is surrendering to the Lord.⁴

The entire universe with its Cit and Acit components, i.e., the material, insentient Nature and the non-material sentient living beings, forms the body of the Lord. The Lord, in turn, becomes the soul thereof. This is what is technically known as “Sarira-sariri-bhava (Sambandha)” (body-soul relation) between the world and the Lord. This is the most important tenet of Ramanuja’s Philosophy (pradhana-pratītantra - siddhanta). Even as the physical body forms the inseparable attribute of the soul (aprthaksiddha-visesana), so is the universe to the all-soul, the Supreme Being, this concept has to be understood in a metaphorical sense. Of all the relationships that are possible between the Lord and the universe which are enumerated as nine by Śrī Pillai Lokacarya in his work called Navavidha-sambandha, the relation between the body and the soul is the most important and indispensable one. Sri Ramanuja in his Vedārthasaṅgraha and the Sribhasya defines body as that which is

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⁴ Vide Gita VII. 14b: “mameva ye prapadyante mayam etanti taranti te”
invariably supported, controlled and made use of by a sentient being for his own exclusive benefit.\(^5\)

The third but the most important category of this Tattvatraya is Isvara the Supreme Lord. The word Isvara is derived from the root “is” which means, “to rule”. In the Srivaisnava system, Sriman-Narayana constitutes the Supreme Godhead. Even when the Lord is referred to merely as Narayana or Brahma without the prefix Sri, His association with Laksmi or Sri is always implied. In the Purusasukta, Laksmi is referred to as one of the two Consorts of the Cosmic Purusa who is described as having a thousand heads, thousand eyes and thousand feet.\(^6\) According to the Visnu Purana the relationship between Sri and Visnu is eternal and the one cannot be conceived of without the other. It declares further that Sri will accompany Visnu in all His manifestations, assuming a suitable form as for instances, as Sita and Rukmini.\(^7\)

Another important dimension of Laksmi’s character is her role as the mediator between the erring human and the strict disciplinarian father, viz., God. God, in spite of his natural compassion and love for his children, will not fail to punish them if they go by unrighteous paths. At such times, Sri will intervene with love and save the souls from the wrath of the Lord. For this specific role She is technically called “Purusakara”. She renders the “Purusa” a Purusa by her benign presence and helpful influence. The word Purusa has two meanings: the Lord and the individual soul. In the first interpretation, the derivation of the word Purusakara is “the One who makes the Lord a Purusa”, i.e., as one who confers (sa) blessings in abundance (puru). She also makes the individual soul a Purusa by inducing him to face (pura) the Lord. She thus brings about a rapport between the two and hence She is called “Purusakara”.\(^8\) There are of course different views

\(^5\) Vide Sribhasya, Li. I: yad dravyam cetanam prati sarvatmana niyamam, adheyam, sesabhatam ca, tat tasya sariram.

\(^6\) Cf: Hrisca te Laksmisca patnyau

\(^7\) Vide l.x. 144

\(^8\) For a detailed explanation of the term Purusakara, see Dr M. Narasimhachary’s article published in Dr S.S. Janaki Felicitation Volume, pp. 174-178.
regarding the exact role of Laksmi in effecting Liberation (moksa) among the two sects of Srivaisnavas viz., the Tengalais and the Vadagalais.⁹ But both these sects are one in holding that She is the Purusakara between man and God.

THEVYUHAS:

According to the Pancaratras Agamas which are believed to be the "word of the mouth" of Lord Visnu, the Lord has five aspects: Para, Vyuha, Vibhava, Area and Antaryamin. The Para aspect is to be realised only in Vaikuntha. This is called "Para Vasudeva". This aspect is full of the six auspicious attributes viz., Jnana (Knowledge), Bala (Strength), Aisvarya (Lordship), Virya (Virility), Sakti (Power) and Tejas (Splendour). These are known as "Bhaga". The Lord who possesses them to a superlatively high degree of perfection is called "Bhagavan". This is two fold as "Suksma" and Sthula". The first form is subtle and the next one, gross. From the Suksma comes the Sthula form. The Sthula form then emanates as the four Vyuhas called again Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The Vyua Vasudeva and the remaining three forms are also having all the six perfections mentioned above to a full measure; still a subtle distinction is drawn among them. While the Vyuha Vasudeva is full of the auspicious six qualities, he forms the source for the next emanation (Vyuha) called Sankarsana. Sankarsana, though a repository of the six qualities, has only two qualities viz., Jnana (Knowledge) and Bala (Strength) in an abounding degree. From him emanates Pradyumna who has two qualities in the highest degree of perfection viz., Aisvarya (Lordship) and Virya (Virility). He becomes the source of Aniruddha in whom the two qualities of Sakti and Tejas attain their fullest culmination. The three emanations viz., Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha have three upakaras to do, three abhimanas to display and three lilas to enact, according to Vedanta Desika. Sankarsana propagates the scriptures, presides over the jiva-tattva

⁹ For details about the difference between these two sects, see Dr. M. Narasimhachary's Basic Concepts of Srivaisnavism, pp.26-29.
and destroys the universe sportively. Pradyumna makes people follow the path of virtue, presides over the manas-tattva and is in charge of creation. Aniruddha makes people realise the ultimate reality, presides over ahankara-tattva and carries the sport of protection.10

The next aspect of the Lord is Vibhava (popular manifestation) which is known as Avatara. The Lord can take any number of incarnations for the purpose of establishing Dharma in the world. To achieve this objective, he has to offer protection to the good people. To accomplish this task, he has to remove the evil-mongers. This is what the Lord has declared in the Gita:

“paritrana ya sadhunam vinasay ca duskrta/ dharmasamsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge”/(IV 8)

Although ten are the popularly mentioned Avatars (Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Yamana, Parasu Rama, Srirama, Balarama, Srikrshna (Buddha) and Kalkin), still the Puranas mention many more such as Hayagriva, Hamsa and Dattatreya. Since the Lord said in the Gita that He would create Himself from time to time depending upon the need of the hour (Cf.IV.7: yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavati Bharata) there can be no limit to the number of incarnations He may take. According to the popular list of ten incarnations, the last one is that of Kalkin which is yet to manifest itself.

The next aspect of the Lord is called “Antaryamin” (One who controls from within). This is the subtlest form of the Lord living inside the human heart, which is itself very subtle. The Lord abides in that “ether” (hrdayakasa or daharakasa) out of great love and concern for the human beings. The Gita says:

“bhoktaram yajnatapasam sarvalokamahesvaram/ suhrdam sarvabhutanam jnata mam santim rcchati”//(V.29)

(I am the recipient of the fruit of sacrifices and austerities. I am the

10 Cf. Tattvamuktakalapa. Sara 3 verse 70.
supreme lord of all the worlds and the friend of all the living beings. Knowing me thus, one attains peace of mind).

The next form of the Lord is called "arca (Icon/Image) which is the replica of the Lord that is properly consecrated and installed in temples. The Agama texts lay down the details regarding the construction of temples, consecration of images, the method of worshipping the Lord and so on. Once consecrated, the image, although made of metal, wood etc., becomes metamorphosed into something divine, according to these texts. They become "suddhasattva" according to tradition. This image will be as powerful and as efficacious as the Lord Himself, according to these Agama texts. Of all these five aspects of the Lord, the last mentioned one, i.e., the Arca form is the most easily accessible (atyanta-sulabha). The Para-form of the Lord is impossible to be reached by ordinary mortals because of the enormous distance between our world and the divine abode (duraviprakarsa). The Vyuha forms are also far away from our reach because the places where they exist are far removed from us (desaviprakarsa). The Vibhava forms are not accessible because they lived in a different period of time (kalaviprakarsa). Antaryamin also is not easily accessible to us because of the difficulty in visualising its real form, which is infinitesimally small (svarupa-viprakarsa). Thus the remaining form, viz., the Arca form alone becomes the most easily accessible aspect of God. The Srivacanabhusana of Sri Pillai Lokacarya makes a beautiful assessment of the relative ease with which we can worship the image form of the Lord:

"avaranjalampole paratvam; parkkadalpole vyuhangal;

bhugatam jalam pole antaryamitvam; perukkaru pole vibhavangal;

atle tengiya madukkal pole arcavataram." 11

11 Vide Prakarana I, sutra 39

37
THE MEANS OF LIBERATION:

According to Ramanuja, Bhakti (loving devotion) or Prapatti (or Saranagati) (whole-hearted surrender) is the means of liberation which consists of rendering motiveless service to the Lord in His highest abode, viz., Vaikuntha. By Bhakti no emotion is meant. It is a discipline in which the mind is tuned towards God by rigourous and constant practice. Bhakti is same as Upasana, Dhyana, Nididhyasana, Vedana and Dhruvanusmrti. According to Ramanuja it steady recolletction of “dhreva smrtis” compared by Ramanuja flow of oil, which does not admit any break in its flow. This steady recollection about God’s svarupa (essential nature), svabhava (qualities) and the like, will become possible only when the mind is pure and free from evil impressions. Purity of mind can be accomplished by taking sattvic food, says the scripture.

Cf.Chandogya Upanisad (VII.26.2):

“aharasuddhou sattvasuddhih sattvasuddhau dhruva smritih”

(When the food is pure, the mind becomes pure; when the mind is pure, recollection of God becomes steady).

The control of mind according to Patanjali’s Yogasutra is a long-drawn process. Yoga of the eight limbs (astanga) is essential for that purpose. Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dhyana, Dharana and Samadhi are the eight limbs of the Yoga. But according to Vakyakara (Brahmanandin) who is quoted by Ramanuja in his Sribhasya, Bhakti can be accomplished through a discipline involving seven steps. They are: Viveka, Vimoka, Abhyasa, Kriya, Kalyana, Anavasada and Anudaharsa. Of these, Viveka consists in discrimination regarding the right kind of food. The reason for choosing the right kind of sattvic food is already explained before as it is conductive to acquire purity of mind. Vimoka is explained as “freedom from material desires”. Abhyasa is interpreted as repeated practice which in the present context, means thinking of the Lord again and again till the thoughts get stronger and well-established in
mind. Kriya is explained as performance of the “five great sacrifices” (panca-maha-yajnas) according to one’s capacity. These five great sacrifices are: (a) Brahmayajna: This is Adhyapanam or teaching sacred literature which includes their study also; (b) Pitryajna: This includes Tarpanam, i.e., pleasing one’s manes or departed souls; (c) Daivayajna: This consists of performing homas or fire-offerings to please gods; (d) Bhatayajna: This comprises offering food to other living beings and (e) Narayajna: This is interpreted as hospitality to guests. Kalyana consists of cultivating auspicious qualities like speaking truth, straightforwardness, and the like. Anavasada is interpreted as not losing one’s cheerfulness even in the face of severe calamities and challenges of life. Anudharsa consists in non-exultation or absence of over-happiness. Even over-happiness may sometimes block the path of devotion.

Once Devotion is generated it can express itself in nine different forms, says the Bhagavata Purana (Sk. VII.5.23):

sravanam kirtanam Visnoh smaranam padasevanam
arcanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atmanivedanam

(Listening to the episodes of the Lord, singing aloud His names, remembering Him, serving His feet i.e., going on a pilgrimage to all the holy spots and places; worshipping Him, saluting Him, rendering different services to Him, becoming His friend and ultimately offering one’s own body and soul to Him).

Obviously, Bhakti is difficult to practise because of the severe rigours involved in its actual implementation. For example, the auxiliary of Bhakti called Kriya consists in the performance of the Five Great Sacrifices. Of these, Brahmayajna is not open to all. It consists of studying one’s sacred text - the Sanskrit Veda. All are not eligible to chant it. Likewise, Vimoka or cessation of all material desires is also something difficult to accomplish. Abhyasa or repeated contemplation on the Lord is also not easy. For such reasons, Bhaktimarga is not
suitable to one and all to adopt. Therefore, the other alternative to liberation, the more easier path open to one and all, is proclaimed by the Acaryas as Prapatti or Saranagati.

Prapatti or whole-hearted surrender to the Lord is easier to adopt. It need not be done repeatedly like Bhakti. It can be done just once (sakrt kartavya prapattih). It consists of five auxiliaries: (a) Anukulya-sanakalpa: (making up a firm resolve to do only those things that are liked by God); (b) Pratikulya-varjana: (avoiding things disliked by Him); (c) Mahavisvasa: (unassailable faith that he will certainly save); (d) Goptrtva-varanan: (formally requesting the Lord to be one’s saviour) and (e) Atmaniksepa-karpanya: (placing one’s burden at the feet of the Lord in utter humility and helplessness).

As can be seen clearly from the above, Prapatti is easier than Bhakti. In Prapatti one has of course to develop a strong faith in the saviourship of God. Otherwise, it becomes ineffective. This is no doubt difficult to develop but once this is accomplished, Prapatti is decidedly easier than Bhakti to adopt.

To put it in a simpler way, if Bhakti consists in man’s loving God, Prapatti consists in God Himself loving man. When God loves man, the responsibility of the latter lies merely in opening himself up to the divine inflow of God’s love. Everybody is eligible to practise Prapatti-marga unlike the Bhakti-marga which is open only to a few. But one thing to be kept in mind is that both Bhakti and Prapatti are different attitudes of mind. A Bhakta may turn out as a Prapanna once he realises that he can no longer please God by his own efforts. The illustration is the King Elephant in the Bhagavata Purana (Skandha VIII) who fought with the crocodile for a number of years thinking that he could overpower him by his own strength. But when he realised that he could no longer do it, he sought divine intervention by making an ardent appeal to the Supreme Lord. Then he became a Prapanna and the Lord readily came to his rescue.
The later Srivaisnava Acaryas found out another means of liberation, called “Acaryanistha” or “Caramaparvanistha”. Here the aspirant trusts wholeheartedly his own spiritual preceptor for protection. He dispenses with the so-called Prapatti to the Lord because in his firm conviction, his Acarya can deliver the goods without necessitating the devotee’s making Prapatti to God. The Acarya has already done Prapatti to the Lord not only on his own behalf, but also on behalf of his disciples. This is enough to save the devotees. We can cite the illustration of Madhurakavi Alvar in this context. He had such a great faith in his own Guru Nammalvar that he declares in his work, the Kanninum Siruttambu that his own Guru is more important to him than Lord Krsna who allowed himself to be tied to a mortar by his mother Yasoda with a slender thread.

So Acaryabhimana is also a powerful means of liberation according to the Srivaisnava tradition. But actually it can be included in the Sadhana called Prapatti or Saranagati itself with the difference that here the Prapatti is done to one’s own Acarya rather than to God.

THE NAVYA-VISISTADVAITA OF SVAMI NARAYANA

Having thus explained the salient features of Ramanuja’s Visistadvaita Philosophy it remains for us to see where lies the “novelty” in Svami Narayana’s Philosophy which is called “Navya-Visistadvaita”. Although Svami Narayana accepted the basic doctrines of the Visistadvaita, yet he introduced subtle differences which indicate his originality and divinity. It was not necessary to follow the traditional pattern of polemical discussion to refute other systems of thought, for in his own person, Sri Svami Narayana amply demonstrated the basic principles of his teaching that God manifests on earth either Himself or through His fully Brahmanised saint. Divine power is also inherent in the idols of God and His saints installed in temples. Such forms of God should be meditated upon with devotion in order to attain salvation. This may briefly be explained as follows: According to Svami Narayana, there are five categories: Jiva, Isvara, Maya, Brahman and Parabrahman. But their relationship varies during
various phases of cosmic evolution and devolution. Jivas are many and atomic in size. They are sentient and pervade the body through their attributive consciousness. They are bound by their individual karmans which are performed with attachment and this leads to repeated births and deaths. Isvara is the Cosmic God who creates, sustains and dissolves the universe. The universe is His body. He is also bound by ignorance since he is involved in the cosmic activities. Isvaras are many but the whole category is called “Isvara” collectively.

Maya is the divine power which is behind the creation etc. of the universe. Maya has three qualities of matter viz., Sattva, Rajas and Tamas which permeate the world of Prakrti (material nature) in which the individual souls live and because of this, Maya becomes difficult to overcome. Maya depends upon God for our activities and it is also treated as an adjunct of God.

The next category accepted by Svami Narayana is Brahman which is also called Aksara. This forms the divine abode of Lord Parabrahman (Purusottama). It serves Him in two ways: As the divine abode of the Lord, Aksara supports Him and the numberless liberated souls. Aksara also forms the Lord’s choicest devotee and thus reveals His infinite greatness and glory to mankind. This Aksara-Brahman plays an important role in the redemption of jivas by removing the veil of Maya. Like ice which is water frozen, and which resumes its form through heat, Aksara also, through spiritual alchemy, transforms the individual soul and makes him attain a divine (aprakrt) body. Without contact with aksara, no seeker can attain liberation.

Purusottama is the Supreme Brahman. He has a divine body and he lives in his divine abode which is called Aksaradhama. His powerful Will helps him in manifesting on earth without leaving His divine abode. But when the Lord manifests Himself through His Maya, many people may not be able to realise His divinity. It is significant to note that Svami Narayana is believed by his followers as Purusottarma Himself whose form is to be realised and whose bliss is to be enjoyed
by all seekers. While the jivas, Isvaras and Maya constitute the body of Aksara, Aksara forms the body of God. According to Svami Narayana, Aksara and Purusottama are the primordial forms of Upasana (devotion and worship), spiritually joined but also distinct. Like the dual form of Laksmi-Narayana, or Sriyahpati of Sri Ramanuja’s Philosophy, they appear as two separate entities but are one in essence. They are “one in two and two in one”. Their corporate identity is indispensable to the seeker after liberation. The revival of this Upasana of the eternal forms of Aksara and Purusottama, or Brahman-Parabrahman, brought about a renaissance in the interpretation of the Vedic lore. Sri Svami Narayana initiated this philosophy and method of meditation in the early part of the 19th century. Indeed, Aksara was a forgotten chapter in the history of Indian Philosophy.

Purusottama was conceived by Ramanuja as the Supreme Lord abiding in His Parama Pada (Aksara), served by Nityas and Muktas. With the advent of Svami Narayana, the divine forms of Aksara and Purusottama manifested on the earth in human form. Light dawned on the earth with the revelation of the divine forms of Aksara and Purusottama which had so far remained undiscovered.

Though a single entity, Aksara has two aspects - one without form (nirakara) which is in the form of an unfathomable homogenous mass of pure consciousness called cidakasa, and the other, with form (sakara). This second aspect is the nearest devotee and is in the eternal service of Purusottama in His highest Abode. It is also described as Satyasvarupa, Jnanasvarupa, pure and immutable. It is also the inspirer of jivas, Isvaras and Maya and is their s’ustainer (sarvadhara). Everything in the universe shines by its effulgence. So says the Mundaka Upanisad (11.2.10): “tasya bhasa sarvamidam vibhati” (All this is illumined by its brilliance). In comparison with the Aksara,

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12 See H.T. Dave, Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, pp. 32-33
13 See P.N. Srinivasachari, The Philosophy of Visistadvaita, p. 167
14 See Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, p.31
15 Ibid, p.31
the whole cosmos appears quite insignificant and small. The Abode called Aksara Dham has a divine form but because of its infinite greatness it cannot be conceived of by the human mind. The Gita (VIII.11) statement: “yad aksaram vedvad vaddanti”, according to Svami Narayana, refers to this Aksara only. Here it is called the abode of the Supreme Brahman wherein only the celibates can enter. The Kathopanisad (1.2.17) speaks of it as the “highest” (etaddhi eva aksaram param) and the best refuge or support (etadalambanam param). It is only by resorting to Aksara or assuming what is called Aksarabhava that the Parama Purusa can be meditated upon. In his Vacanamrta (Gadhaha, sec.1-63) Svami Narayana makes the following observations on the nature of Aksara:

“It is the cause of all causes. One which is greater than the other is the cause of the other, and is subtler than that. Water is greater than Earth and is the cause of the Earth; it is also subtler than Earth. Similarly, Fire is greater than Water; Air is greater than Fire and Ether is greater than Air. Again, Egotism, Intelligence, Purusa and Prakrti are progressively greater than one another. Above all of them is Aksara, the abode of Purusottama which is greater, subtler than the rest and which forms the cause of the evolution or generation of all of them”.

The Bhagavata Purana (111.11.41) also refers to the great causal character of Aksara thus: “tad ahur aksaram Brahmas sarvakarana-karanam”. It is the place where the gods reside with their abodes. It is fully divine, devoid of all impurities of Maya. It is described thus: “apahatapapma hyesa brahmalokah” (Chandogya VIII.4.1). It has its hands, feet, eyes and heads spread in all directions: “sarvatah-panipadam tat sarvato’ ksi-siro-mukham” (Gita, XIII.13).

The Aksara, inspired by Purusottama who is its Antaryamin (Inner Controller), pervades the Cit and Acit. It is called both as the Jnana (Knowledge) and the Jneya (the object to be known) and is accessible to those who are devoid of ego. Aksara is the highest category beyond

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16 Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, pp.53-54
which there is only Purusottama. It is the goal to be attained for
deserving the Bhakti of Purusottama. It has to be clearly noted that
Aksara and Parabrahman (or Purusottama) are two separate entitites.
Aksara is the body and Purusottama is its soul. It is through meditation
(dhyana) on Aksara that one attains Purusottama.

Cf. “ye tvaksaram anirdesyam avyaktam paryupasate
sarvatragam acintyam ca kutastham acalam dhruvam
sanniyamya indriyagramam sarvatra samabuddhayah
te prapnuvanti mameva sarvabhutahite ratah”

(Gita,X11,3-4)

(Those who control all their senses and with equanimity meditate
upon the Aksara which is indefinable, unmanifest, all-pervasive,
inscrutable, immutable, immobile and steady, they too, who are keen
on helping all the living beings, reach me.)

This Aksara is related to Purusottama as Drsya-drasta (the object
seen and its perceiver), Sarira-saririn (the body and its soul), and the
Niyamya-niyamaka (the controlled and the controller). The
Vacanamrta points out that the Paramatman pervades, controls and
subdues both Aksara and the Atman. The light issuing forth separately
from Isvara, Purusa, Aksara and Purusottama may look similar but
there is a great difference in the depth or profundity of that light.
None can visualise this distinction without the grace of God. One
blessed by God alone will be able to visualise the mutual distinction
between these categories.17

Reference has already been to the Sakara and Nirakara aspects of
Aksara.18 They can also be called the Saguna and the Nirguna aspects.
With its Saguna aspect it supports Purusottama; the Nityas and
Muktas; Kala, Maya and Mahavisnu; Virat, Sutratanman and Avyakrta,
the three bodies of Isvaras; and the sthula (gross), suksma (subtle)

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17 See Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, pp. 55-56.
18 See p. 18 above.
and karana (casual) bodies of the jiva. It is also the nearest devotee of Purusottama, being His eternal servant (kinkara.) Aksara owes its infinite power and greatness to Purusottama since the former is the body of the latter. If Purusottama so desires, He may absorb the Aksara by His power.¹⁹ The jivas who know this Aksara or Brahman and identify themselves with the Brahman will attain Para Bhakti and they will then be accepted by Prussottama as His Kinkaras (servants).

Having thus attempted a brief account of the “novelty” in the concepts of Svami Narayana’s Philosophy, it is proposed to trace in the next chapter, the concept of social service from early literature such as the Itihasas and Puranas which forms the bedrock of Svami Narayana’s Philosophy.

¹⁹ Vide Brahmasutra, 1.3.9-10: “aksaram ambarantadhrteh,” “sa ca prasasanat”
CHAPTER TWO
CONCEPT OF SERVICE FROM EARLIEST TIMES

The concept of service which is the bedrock of the Religious Philosophy of Svami Narayana is not something new since it was there already laid down in our ancient scriptures. Though every system of thought has to, as a rule, have a basis in society, and though every thinker has to keep the welfare of the common man uppermost in his mind, still we find that the common man, the down-trodden and the illiterate, have not received due justice at the hands of the thinkers in terms of social equality. The caste-system had its own rigid rules and when implemented, they became all the more fierce and rough. The present chapter tries to point out that social equality and the solidarity of man had been clearly enunciated and emphasised in our ancient scriptures such as the Vedas, Itihasas and Puranas rather in the theoretical sense. But when the question of practicality arose, then there seem to have been few takers. What was written down in the scriptures remained in writing alone and it did not come up for implementation. This was the situation obtaining in a majority of cases. Exceptions were there when great men tried to show in practice that all are equal and every one deserved good attention and care.

But they were far and in between. Men who pay lip-sympathy to the downtrodden are aplenty and those who actually treated all alike, were looked down upon and humiliated by the fundamentalists. Still the spirit did not die. As times rolled on, sheer mental courage and dogged determination came up and great men gradually began to act in a way that was expected of them. Social service is one such noble concept which has become more and more pronounced down the ages than it was a thousand years ago. Thanks to the spirit of Ramanuja who, theoretical statements apart, did lend a helping hand to those having a lower social status, many Acaryas who came later laid great stress on this particular aspect and developed their philosophical writings also in the light of this new awakening. In this connection, it will be interesting to study the concept of social work or social service in greater detail and see how it is rooted in our ancient scriptures, viz., the Upanisads.
SOCIAL WORK: TRADITIONAL AND MODERN

"Social work in general, means work done by man in the service of society. It becomes restricted when confined to the rearing of a family, but becomes wider and unrestricted when extended to society at large outside the immediate biological group. All this is the result of an ethical impulse, expressing itself as charity and philanthropy. That was the scope of social work until the onset of the modern industrial age. This is true not only of India but of all human society including the Western till about the 18th century. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the scope of "social service" thus:

"The term social service is a comparatively new one in Great Britain. If it has been used previous to the twentieth century, it would have meant philanthropy and charity in the ordinary sense." Whether understood in general terms as in the traditional society, or in special terms, as in the industrial society, all social work involves the raising of certain fundamental problems as to the nature of and destiny of man and the meaning and significance of his social milieu, which a philosophy of social work is called upon to solve.

The family as the unit of society has ever been the nursery of the society's culture and morals. The family is a small, intimate group held together by bonds, biological and spiritual. When this group expands into society in forming a clan or tribe or nation, the biological bond becomes less and less deterministic, while the spiritual bond becomes stronger and more dominant. The spiritual bond expresses itself as the ethical awareness and social feeling. It is this awareness and feeling that are the stimuli behind all the efforts of man to achieve civilization, culture and the higher life. This discloses the presence of the spiritual man behind the physical man, a higher self behind the sense-bound lower self. The latter makes him essentially self-centred while the former makes him more and more seeking ethical and other higher values. This betokens the first stages of the manifestation of the ever-present spiritual dimension of the human personality. Apart
from society, man does not evolve his truly human personality. All work including the social work done under the inspiration of religion attains an intensity and depth rarely found in work done with purely secular motives. The significance of this fact of motivation for any philosophy of social work is great.

Man's life is cast in two environments - natural and social. Social work has primarily to deal with man and his social environment and their interaction. Unlike the natural environment which consists of impersonal things and forces, the social environment consists of persons. This, for the first time in the history of evolution, introduces the concept of value into this objective world. Each person recognizes this value in himself, but often fails to recognize its focus in others. In the social setting of his life, he is always confronted with these other centres of value in the persons around him. The recognition of the subject (self) in a social object is ethical sense. Once this recognition comes, exploitation gives place to service as the valid form of inter-human relationship. Once ethical impulse is recognized and felt, then all kinds of exploitation of man by man will be eliminated.20

It is of course a matter of possibility for many and of practicality for a few. But once this is understood by man, the first stages of the manifestation of the essential spirituality of the human personality are ushered in. It points to a profound focus of value within man, his essential divine nature, the manifestation of which constitutes the goal of human life. This leads us to the recognition of a third environment, over and above the natural and the social one. There is constant interaction between this inner spiritual environment and the outer social environment. The handling of this interaction by man, individually and collectively, is the one determinant of all social health or ill-health on one hand and all human well-being or unfulfilment, on the other.

With this recognition, all the work a man does in society attains a new light and force. Every work produces a change in the ratio of forces in its social and natural environments. To this we have to add a third environment viz., the inner world of man. The knowledge and discipline of the forces of this inner world constitute the scope of the science and technique of spirituality. This is the true of meaning of Religion according to Indian thought. All social feeling and awareness is the product of an expansion of the human personality. This expansion is by no means physical or biological, but spiritual. So, for India, Religion is the Science of inner life. This Science is found in the ancient scriptures, the Upanisads.

Then comes the question of motivation. History reveals that social work done under the best of religious motivations exhibits greater qualitative excellence than that done under the best of secular motivations. The capacity to give one’s best to a cause is a spiritual capacity. That capacity manifests itself when the motivations of profit, pleasure and power, which proceed from the lower self of man, become weakened by spiritual knowledge and spiritual resolve proceeding from the awakening of his higher Self. The unfoldment of this spiritual man in the context of the work that man does for the good society is the one goal of all work and of all society, according to Indian spiritual thought. The criterion of social work, from the secular point of view, is quantity; from the religious point of view, it is quality. The Philosophy of Vedanta accepts the importance of both the criteria and harmonizes them in the light of a comprehensive spirituality. This is the immortal contribution of the Gita to the philosophy of social work, nay, indeed, of all work.

It is only when we are confronted with the problem of quality that the subject of motivation becomes significant. Motivation involves moral choice and moral judgement. This brings up the reality of the inner man and his growth. To a certain level, human life and action can stand the test of quantity. But when pushed beyond a point, man becomes de-humanized. He shines in his truly “divine” form when
he stands the test of quality. Stressing the importance of this concept of quality in the assessment of human evolution, Sir Julian Huxley says:

"Man is therefore of immense significance... He is a reminder of the existence, here and there, in the quantitative vastness of cosmic matter and its energy equivalents, of a trend towards mind, with its accompaniment of quality and richness of existence - and what is more, a proof of the importance of mind and the quality in the all-embracing evolutionary process."\(^{21}\) "Once we believe that man’s destiny is to make possible greater fulfilment for more human beings and fuller achievement by human societies, utility in the customary sense becomes subordinate. Quantity of material production is of course necessary as the basis for the satisfaction of elementary human needs, but only up to a certain degree. More than a certain number of calories or cocktails or TV sets or washing machines per person is not merely necessary, but bad. Quantity of material production is a means to a further end, not an end in itself. The evolutionary vision shows our destiny and our duty. It shows us mind enthroned above matter, quantity subordinate to quality.\(^{22}\)

**INDIA’S VISION OF HUMAN EXCELLENCE**

The Upanisads represent the highest watermark of Indian spiritual striving and realization. Our sages of the Upanisads sought truth in experience freely and fearlessly, unperturbed by the dogmas of religions, the compulsions of society and the political state, or the predilections of personality. Their greatest discovery was the truth of the divinity and the infinitude of man and the spiritual unity of all existence. They called the divine in man as “Atman” and discovered its essential nature to be ever pure, ever awakened and ever free. The glorious vision of the spiritual solidarity of all existence, which alone can become the basis of a rational ethics and of all progressive inter-

\(^{22}\) *ibid.*, pp. 259-260.
human relationship, finds expression in the opening mantra of the very first of the Upanisads, viz., the Isavasya Upanisad:

"Isavasyam idam sarvam yatkinca jagatyam jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma grdhah kasya svid dhanam"

(All this - whatever is ephemeral in this changeful universe, is encompassed and pervaded by the Lord. As such, enjoy the things in this world with a sense of renunciation and detachment. Do not, ever, covet the wealth of others).

All the Upanisads announce that the awakening to this eternal truth is the aim of human existence and the fullest fruition of the spiritual life. But it is concealed from man due to his finitude, because of his encagement in the body which is a product of Matter. Man, the knower, is essentially self-centred and is the focus of all tension and sorrow. The highest he can achieve in the field of inter-human relations is the ethics of enlightened self-interest, which often tends to less and less enlightenment and more and more selfishness. The vision of man as the Atman provided the inspiration for Indian thought to develop a social ethics charged with a man-ward passion, and a religious discipline filled with a God-ward love and devotion.

THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA ON COMPREHENSIVE SPIRITUALITY

The implications and their significance for human life, its conduct and destiny are beautifully brought out by Lord Krsna in the Gita. He rejects heaven and the hedonistic philosophy behind it as unworthy of man's true spiritual personality.23 He offers in its place, the realization of the divinity already within man as the highest objective of life. By ethical and spiritual discipline involving the practice of self-regarding and other-regarding virtues and inward

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23 Vide II. 42-44: "yamimam puspitam vacam pravadanti avipascitah vedavadaratah Partha! nanyad astiti vadinah kamatmanah svargaparah Janmakarmaphalapradam ' kriyavisesahulam bhogaisvaryaagatim prati bhogaisvaryaaprasaktanam tayapahracetasam vyavasayatmika buddhih samadhau na vidhiyate"
meditation, man can overcome his biological and other limitations and realize the truth of his inborn divine nature. This is mukti or spiritual freedom. Vedantas uphold that this freedom is as much the stimulus behind, as the goal in front, of every human action. Every human being will realise it sooner or later and none is barred because it is the birthright of one and all, the saint and the sinner, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, man and woman. The method and means of this attainment is what the Upanisads call Dharma which in its twin aspects of abhyudaya (preyas) (ethics of social welfare) and the nissreyas (ethics of spiritual emancipation), constitutes the comprehensive spiritual education of man leading to his total fulfilment. The one condition of this total fulfilment is purity of the inner life, which involves man’s conquest of his lower self.

Cf. “na avirato duscaritat nasanto nasamahitah nasantamanasaso vapi prajnanenainam apnuyat”\(^{24}\)

(Unless one has stopped his wicked conduct, unless one has restrained himself, unless one has become meditative and unless one has pacified his (vagrant) mind, none can attain the Truth with his mere intellect.)

The Gita points out that action is inevitable. None can remain even for a moment, without doing some work or other. Nature compels him to act.\(^{25}\) But the work done under the prompting of man’s lower nature leads to more and more bondage and eventual unfulfilment. This is the tragedy of man enacted every day, everywhere, and vividly presented to us in the world’s great literary heritage.

But according to the Gita, all actions can be converted into spiritual education. Work done in a spirit of detachment helps man to develop his unlimited spiritual personality. Being unattached, man receives “intimations of immortality”. Then man becomes qualified to experience the infinite dimensions of his personality. His vision enlarges and sympathies broaden. He discovers a vast reservoir of

\(^{24}\) Kathopanisad 11.24
\(^{25}\) Cf.III.5: na hi kasctic ksanamapi jatu tisthatyakarmakrit karyate hyavasah karma sarvah prakrtijaih gunaih
spiritual energy within himself, which makes him achieve double efficiency in his life, viz., outer social efficiency and inner spiritual life and gives two important definitions of this term: “yogah karmasu kausalam” (11.50) (Yoga is efficiency in action); and “samatvam yoga ucyate” (11.48) (Yoga is called even-mindedness). Calm, silent, steady, efficient work sustained by deep social feeling is the mark of true spirituality.

Indian Philosophy views every one in society as a social worker: be it the simple housewife or the Prime Minister of the land, the rickshaw puller or the Pilot of an aircraft, the fisherman or the factory labourer, the roadside cobbler or the Unviersity Professor, each and everyone is a worker in the vast vineyard of society. They are social workers; but viewed from within, they are working at different levels of quality, revealing different degrees of spiritual integration and enrichment, or disintegration and impoverishment. A great pre-Kalidasa Dramatist, Bhasa observes:

“Prajnasya murkhasya ca karyayoge samatvam abhyetina tanur’na buddhih”26

(When actions are performed by the wise and the foolish, there is equality between them only with respect to the body but not with the buddhi or reason).

From the viewpoint of the spiritual person, no work is high or low in itself. It is the attitude of the worker that makes the difference. Even small work becomes great when done by a great man; and conversely, a great work becomes small when done by a small man. Kabir weaving cloth on a loom or Mahatma Gandhi spinning thread on a charka helped to raise the status of the humble loom and the charka. On the other hand, a greedy priest or a corrupt politician lowers the status of the high calling of priesthood or politics. Life without quality is life lived in vain; and quality is a value-concept. Values are not mechanical, but spiritual. But behind the small and the big, there is

26 Avimara, V.5
the infinite Atman assuring the spiritual solidarity of man, proclaims the Gita:

"ihaiva tair jitah sargah yesam samye sthitam manah
nirdosam hi samam Brahma, tasmad Brahmani testhitah" V.19

(Relative existence has been overcome by them even in this very life, whose minds rest in sameness because Brahman is the same in all, and is without imperfections. Only such people are really established in Brahman.)

The Gita also points out that the nature of “action” is difficult to penetrate. Action and inaction, labour and leisure appear mutually opposed to ordinary understanding. But scientifically speaking, they are basically identical. Says L.P. Jacks (The Education of the Whole Man, p.102):

“If you begin with labour, it begins to turn into leisure from the moment when art is applied to it. If you begin with leisure, it will turn into labour when science traces it to its roots.”

The Astavakra Samhira says:

"nivruttirapi mudhasya pravṛttirupajayate
pravṛttirapi dhirasya nivruttiphalabhagini“ (XVIII. 61)

("For the fool, even leisure becomes labour; for the wise however, even labour results in leisure.")

When the flood of spiritual knowledge begins to flow in. sharp distinctions between labour and leisure, between the sacred and secular, between contemplation and action become gradually obliterated and eventually abolished. So declares the Gita:

“karmanyakarma yah pasyet, akarmani ca karma yah
sa buddhiman manusyesu sa yuktah krtsnakarmakrt” (IV. 18)

(He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is the yogin; he is the one who has accomplished all his actions.)
By widening the Vedic concepts of Dharma and Yajna, the mundane motivations of pleasure and worldly glory have been gradually changed into the human values of social ethics until they reached their highest expression in the Gita in the ethical motivation of Loka-sangraha, which means universal human welfare.

Cf. “saktah karmanyavidvamso yatha kurvanti Bharata! kuryad vidvan tathasaktah cikirsur lokasangraham” (111.25)

Keeping the universal human welfare in view, a wise man should do his work without any attachment even as ignorant men perform works with attachment.

The Gita also uses the word “sarvabhumahita” in the following verse:

cf.”samniyamyendriyagramam sarvatra samabuddhayah te prapnuyanti mameva sarvabhumahite ratah” (XII. 4)

(Those who control their senses, have equanimity everywhere and are keen on the welfare of all the living beings will reach me alone.)

It is this lofty ethical passion to work for the welfare of all the living beings that is called Dharma by a merchant called Tuladhara whom an ascetic Jajali approached for instruction in righteousness.

Cf. “sarvesam yah suhrt nityam, sarvesam ca hite ratah karmana manasa vaca, sa dharmam veda Jajale”...

(Mahabharata, Santi Parvan, 254.9)

(O Jajali! He who is always the friend of all, and who, through his thought, word and deed is bent on bringing out the welfare of all, knows Dharma.)

Vedanta thus has transformed the “other world” and the “beyond” etc. of the theology into the perfection of character and vision here and now. Man’s work in society and for society becomes more efficient when that work is supported by social awareness. At the same time, it becomes most efficient when his social awareness is suffused also with spiritual knowledge and awareness. This alone will ensure that
our work in society will enhance the dignity and stature of the men and women we serve. Any social work that fails to ensure this becomes a force against the emergence of quality in human evolution, however quantitatively great it may otherwise sound. It is only by striving to be spiritual himself or herself that a social worker is able to rouse the dignity and worth of the person served, by treating that person, as an end in itself and not as a means.27

We have to find out the way how inter-human relationship can bring in happiness and welfare of all the living beings. History is replete with instances of man exploiting his own fellow beings. Exploitation can be of several types Economic exploitation is of course the major type which has been highlighted by Marx and others who subscribed to his line of thinking whatever surplus resources a man may possess, he can use them to exploit others who do not have them. The other alternative is to utilize one’s surplus energy, intelligence, wealth and power to serve others to enhance the quality of their life. But how is it that our nation chose the first alternative rather than the second? Svami Viekananda answered this question about a century ago:

“Renunciation and service are the twin ideals of India. Intensify her in those channels and the rest will take care of itself.” (Complete Works, Vol.V.p.228)

Selfishness and indifference to others’ welfare are the two banes of the modern world which have brought untold suffering to nations throughout history. When every one seeks his or her own happiness, no one is really happy today. So renunciation of one’s small self for the larger society alone can be the real source of happiness. So sang Samuel Daniel:

“Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!”

Ethics comes to us with a great message viz., the message of interdependence, and the message of mutual service. If one wants to

achieve his own welfare, he must strive to ensure the welfare of other human beings also. The Gita has already given the secret of individual welfare thus:

“Parasparam bhavayantah sreyah param avapsyatha” (111.11)

(Cherishing each other and serving each other, may you attain the highest welfare).

Each one is an end in himself. Each one is also a means with respect to his fellowmen. When man exploited woman in feudal society, he treated her not as a human being with ends. The same treatment was meted out by him to his servants, labourers and other sections of society. But today in the context of our democracy, we are required to reverse this process and practise and treat every human as an end in itself. Thus interhuman relationships become transformed, revealing the growth of man in a new dimension, viz, his spiritual dimension. The husband or wife, parents or children, every member of society, by being engaged in enhancing the happiness and welfare of others, enhance not only his or her own happiness and welfare, but ensure his or her own spiritual growth as well.28

The spirit of service raises all work, high or low in worldly estimate, into high work in the ethical and spiritual estimate, because that spirit raises the worker to the high level of spirituality, to that level where man achieves a qualitative improvement of his life. It will be interesting in this connection to consider the classification of the human beings living in society, made by poet-king Bhartrhari in his Nitisataka (v.64):

“èke satpurusah pararthaghatakah svartham parityajya ye samanyastu paratham udyamabhrtah svarthavirodhena ye te ‘mi manusaraksasah parahitam svarthaya nighnanti ye ye tu ghnanti nirarthakam parahitam te ke na janimaha”

(There are some good people who engage themselves in doing good to others sacrificing their own self-interest. Then there are ordinary people who do good to others in such a way that their own 'self-interest is not left out altogether. Then there are demoniac people who destroy the good of others to gain their own selfish ends. But there are those who just destroy the good of others just for the sake of destruction, even though they do not gain any benefit for themselves thereby. We do not know how to call them!)

Every society contains a few such morally demented people. Our nation has a more than healthy share of this type of people today. But it has to be pointed out at the same time that self-criticism is also evident in our nation today which is a sure sign of the basic health of the society. This will slowly genereate the necessary moral forces to cure the nation of its present ailments. The ailment is a moral ailment and the remedy has to be moral remedy. Cynicism, self-centredness and total non-concern for others are more deadly than the most terrible diseases and viruses that cause them, for they corrode the nation’s resolve to be free, to be united, and to march towards progress.29

It will be in the fitness of things to refer in this context to the stories of great men of this land who sacrificed their very lives for the sake of helping others in distress. The Vana Parvan (ch.197) of the Mahabharata narrates the tale of Rajarsi Sibi who was the son of Usinara and Madhavi, the daughter of King Yayati.

Sibi’s fame as a man of great compassion for all the living beings and his readiness to redress their grievances spread far and wide. His name spread to heaven also and the gods wanted to test the genuineness of this. Agni became a dove and Indra came chasing him in the form of a kite. The dove came to Sibi’s place and sat on his lap. By then the king was sitting in a “divya” posture.30 His priest told him that it was his duty to protect the dove which sought refuge with

29 See ibid. pp. 330-334
30 This posture indicates that the King was prepared to undertake any ordeal to keep his word for the sake of others. See Yajnavalkyasmitri, 11.22, 95 which mentions ten varieties of divya.
him. The dove told the king that he was actually a sage who entered the body of a dove and that it sought refuge with him. In the meantime the kite also flew to Sibi and asked him to return the dove. The King wanted to give the kite any other flesh in lieu of the dove. Then the kite insisted that the King should give him the flesh cut from his right thigh equal in weight to that of the dove. The king went on cutting his own body and weighing it each time against the dove. But the dove showed more weight each time and ultimately the king sat in the pan. The kite flew away. The dove appeared as Agni and the kite as Indra. They blessed him with several boons including the birth of a son.\textsuperscript{31}

The Adi Parvan (Canto 93, v.3) points out that when Yayati fell down on the earth from heaven, Sibi promised to transfer to him his own punya so that he may go back to heaven. The Santi Parvan notes that he gifted away even his son to the brahmanas and thus attained heaven.\textsuperscript{32} The Anusasanika Parvan points out that Sibi was a very pious king who did not eat flesh.\textsuperscript{33}

The Mahabharata also narrates the episode of Dadhica whose self sacrifice helped the celestials in their war against the demons. All the demons headed by Vrtra fought with Indra, Indra could not kill the demon. He then approached Brahma and requested him to help. Brahma said that only a weapon made with the bone of Dadhica could kill the demon. Indra then went to Badarikasrama, taking sages Nara and Narayana also along with him. He went to the bank of the river Sarasvati, bowed down to sage Dadhica living there and told him about his tale of woes. The sage gladly gave up his life, enabling Indra to use his backbone which became the Vajrayudha which ultimately killed the demon.\textsuperscript{34}

Then we have the inspiring story of Karna who is described as the “head” of the Great Epic, the Mahabharata. According to the Adi

\textsuperscript{31} See also Vettam Mani, The Puranic Encyclopaedia, p. 715
\textsuperscript{32} Ch. 234, v. 19
\textsuperscript{33} See ch. 115, v. 61
\textsuperscript{34} See Parvan III, Ch. v. See also Puranic Encyclopaedia, p. 191
parvan (Ch. 99) he was born along with an armour and ear-rings which gave him protection from any power from any source. His is the tragic saga of utter self-sacrifice. Born to Kunti through the grace of the Sun God, he was abandoned as soon as he was born by his mother who was afraid of public calumny. He was nursed by Radha the wife of a charioteer (Suta) and he was therefore known as Radheya and Sutaputra. He joined hands with Duryodhana who tried to uphold his dignity by giving him the Angadesa and thus gave him the status of a king as a result of which he could join the test of archery conducted for the Kaurava and Pandava princes, and thus prove his mettle.

Just before the Great War broke out between the Kaurava and Pandava princes, Karna was warned by his father, the sun-God, not to part with his armour and rings and that Indra was going to approach him in the guise of a brahmana. But Karna out of his magnanimity said that if the King of gods were to approach him as a beggar, he would only be glad to oblige him. Indra came as scheduled and Karna off his armour and earrings. He gave them with a request that no wound should be formed on his body as a result of this gift. Accordingly no wound was formed on his body as he gladly tore off his armour and plucked the earrings. He gave them away to Indra with no remorse which surprised the donee. Karna, on the advice of his father Sun, asked Indra, in turn, for the best weapon he had under his control. Indra gave him the powerful Sakti (also called Vaijayanti). Karna wanted to use it against his arch-enemy Arjuna. But circumstances developed in such a crucial way that he had to use it against Ghatotkaca (son of Bhima through a demoness Hidimba) and thus could not use it against Arjuna. After his death, Karna went to heaven for his qualities of head and heart and merged with his father, the Sun.

We then have the interesting story of a Gandharva Prince Jimutavahana by name. This word means “cloud”, the “carrier of

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35 See Drona Parvan, Ch. 180
36 Vide the Svaragrohana Parvan, Ch. 5, v.20
water”. This story is narrated in Somadeva’s *Kathasaritsagara* (Sasankavati Lambaka, Taranga 23). Jimutavahana was the son of Jimutaketu. He got Jimutavahana by the grace of the celestial desire-yielding tree Kalpavrksa which was in his garden. Jimutavahana gave away the Kalpavrksa to the poor although his family possessed it for several generations. Jimutavahana fell in love with Malayavati (daughter of Visvavasu and sister of Mitravasu) after he saw her in a Devi temple on the Malaya mountain and married her.

Once Jimutavahana went along with his friend Visvavasu for a walk. They entered a seashore forest. Jimutavahana saw there some bones and asked his friend about it. Visvavasu told him the story of Garuda eating up a large number of snakes every day which drastically reduced their number and endangered their species. Vasuki the king of Nagas entered into an agreement with Garuda according to which he would send one serpent a day to him as food. After hearing this pathetic story of the serpents, Jimutavahana was deeply moved. He wanted to save at least one snake by offering himself in its place. It so happened that it was the turn of one Sankhacuda, the only son of an old she-serpent. Jimutavahana laid himself on the stone on which normally Garuda would wait for his kill. Garuda came at the usual time, took him away in his beak and flew to the top of the Malaya mountain. On the way the blood-soaked crest-jewel (Cūdaratna) of Imutavahana fell down in front of Malayavati. She identified it as that of her husband. A grief-sticken Malayavati ran to her father for help. In the meantime, Jimutaketu also knew about his son’s adventure and went to the Malaya mountain. In the meantime, Sankhacuda who was scheduled to become the food for Garuda that day, prayed to Lord Gokarananatha and came to the “rock of death.” He saw a fresh pool of blood. He wanted to save Imutavahana at any cost and came up to the top of the mountain. In the meantime, Garuda began to pick at Jimutavahana. The latter was very happy that he could save a poor serpent. Garuda then knew that he was not a Naga and that he must be a Gandharva. When this thought crossed his mind he stopped for a while. In the meantime, Sankhacuda came to that spot. But alas,
Jimutavahana died. Everyone started weeping. Garuda felt repentant at his act. Devi sprinkled nectar and brought the hero back to life. Garuda was very much touched by the sacrificing nature of Jimutavahana and offered him a boon. Jimutavahana promptly requested Garuda to stop eating up the serpents. Garuda did accordingly stop devouring the serpents.

King Sriharsa (of the 6th century A.D.) immortalised the saga of Jimutavahana in his Nagananda, which is a drama in five Acts. The hero is depicted here as an embodiment of the spirit of self-sacrifice. The following verse which incorporates the words of the hero to Garuda brings out his great courage:

"siramukhaih syandata eva raktam
adyapi dehe mama mamsam asti
trptim na pasyami ca te mahatman!
kim bhaksanat tvam virato Garutman! " (V. 15)

(Still some blood is flowing out of the openings in my veins. There is still some flesh left in my body. O noble one! I do not see that you are still satisfied. Why then, O Garuda. have you stopped eating me up?)

This heroism is attested to by Garuda also who said:

"avarjitam maya caneva hrdayat tava sonitam
dhairyananena ca hrtam tvaya hrdayameva me " (V. 16)

(Blood from your heart has of course been taken out by me with the beak. But my heart itself has been captivated by you with this fortitude!)

Thus the great qualify of self-sacrifice for helping people in distress as found in these three great personalities referred to above has been succinctly brought out in the following verse of the Nitisakata of Bhartrhari (II. 34):

37 Published with English Translation of Sri. P.V. Ramanujaswami by Vavilla Ramaswamy Sastrulu and Sons, Chennai, 1950.
Karnah tvacam, Sibir mamsam, jivan Jimutavahana dadau Dadhicir asthini, nastyadeyam mahatmanam

(Karna gave away his skin [armour which was indistinguishable from his skin]. Sibi gave away his own flesh. Dadhichi gave away his bones. For the noble ones, there is nothing that cannot be given away [to fulfill the desire of others])

In the Mahabharata (Anusasanika Parvan, Ch. 90) we have the story of another illustrious person Saktuprastha by name. Though starved for several days along with his family, he gave away, with the least hesitation and with tremendous compassion, the small quantity of food which he got by chance, to a hungry supplicant. Janamejaya asks the narrator Vaisampayana if there was anything remarkable with the Asvamedha sacrifice performed by his great grandfather Yudhisthira. It is in reply to his question that Vaisampayana narrated the story.

"Saktuprastha “ means ‘one who had (i.e.,could gather) only one measure of flour’ the episode is narrated under the title “Nakulopakhayana”. After the Great War was over, Yudhisthira who became the Emperor, performed an Asvamedha Sacrifice with great pomp and eclat. Innumerable people came, ate and left with satisfaction. Everybody praised Yudhisthira that the Sacrifice was a great success.

A mongoose, with its head and half of its back golden in colour, came out of a hole and told the people that in its perfection and righteousness, the Sacrifice cannot stand comparison with the Dharma practised by Saktuprastha. On being requested to clarify, the mongoose narrated the story of Saktuprastha. He was a pious brahmana of Kurukestra living by unchavrtti (gathering the grains that fell in the fields of their own accord ) along with his wife, son and daughter-in-law. A terrible famine hit the land and on certain days, unable to procure anything to eat, the entire family used to starve. Once it so happened that after a full day’s search, Saktuprastha and his family could gather a very small quantity of grains. They converted the grains
into flour which measured about one prastha(measure). They shared that flour equally among themselves. As they were about to eat it, Yama the Deity of Dharma came disguised as a brahmana and begged Saktuprastha of food. Saktuprastha being the head of the family, gladly offered his own share of flour to him first. But the guest was still hungry. Then Saktuprastha’s wife offered her share also and the guest was still hungry. Then saktuprastha’s son gave him his share. On noticing the guest still not satisfied, Saktuprastha’s daughter-in-law also gave her own share of food. Only then the strange guest appeared to be satisfied! The guest later appeared before Saktuprastha as God of Dharma (Yama) and admired him for his hospitality which was devoid of even the slightest tinge of selfishness. He told him that all the gods gathered over the sky to watch his act of hospitality, and also showed all of them to him. He also told him that Brahma the Creator God would send a celestial vimana for him and his family by which they could go to heaven. No sooner did he complete his speech than came the aerial car. A joyous Saktuprastha sat in it along with his family members and went to heaven. Then the mongoose came out of his hideout and watched the wonderful spectacle. The fragrance of the flour offered by Saktuprastha to his strange guest wafted over the body of the mongoose. The animal’s body came into contact with the water with which Saktuprastha washed the feet of his guest. As a result, his head and one side of his body turned golden in colour. Since then the mongoose used to visit various sacrifices and great events with the hope of having the remaining part of his body also turned into gold. But the animal drew a blank wherever he went. Ultimately, the mongoose came to the sacrifice of Yudhisthira with the fond hope of having his desire fulfilled. But here also he felt disappointed.

Janamejaya asked Vaisampayana as to what was wrong with the sacrifice performed by Yudhisthira who was himself an embodiment of Dharma. Vaisampayana told him that after all, the Pasuyajna performed by Yudhisthira involved injury to animals whereas the
Tapoyajna of Saktuprastha was free from all kinds of injury. This naturally excelled the Asvamedha of Yudhisthira. The turning of the colour of mongoose's body was itself a visible demonstration of this truth, concluded Vaisampayana.

Vaisampayana narrated another story also in this connection. Once Indra, the king of gods, planned an animal sacrifice in heaven. All the sages conveyed their displeasure over this. Indra ignored their suggestion and wanted to go ahead with his plan. He asked his friend Uparicaravasu (meaning, one who was moving [flying] above) for his opinion in this regard. Uparicaravasu was a human being. He was a meritorious King and because of his great powers, he was very often invited by Indra to Heaven, to help him in his intermittent wars with demons. The gods gave him an aerial car by which he was flying at will to different places. Now he, for pleasing his friend Indra, told him that animal sacrifice was superior to a sacrifice which was lacking in it. As a result of making this unjust statement, Uparicara fell from heaven.

Then we come across a more or less similar story of King Rantideva who was a great and generous soul. His moving story is given in the Bhagavata purana (Sk X, Sarga 38 Chapter 21,vv. 2-16). Sage suka narrated this story to Pariksit. King Sankrta had two sons: Garga and Rantideva. The fame of Rantideva spread both in this world and in the world of gods. He was absolutely penniless. Apart from what came to him by chance, he ate nothing else. He had a family to support consisting of his wife, son and daughter-in-law. It so happened once that for forty-eight days he did not even have water to drink. Next day by providence he got a little ghee, sweet gruel and some barley as food, along with some water. Rantideva who was starving for several days was actually shivering all over due to weakness. As he was about to eat, a brahmana came there as a guest. Rantideva in all humility and with love38, gave him a part of that food, considering all living beings as being ensouled by Lord Hari. The guest took the

38 Cf. the Taitiriya Siksavalli. “sraddhya deyam.....hriya deyam.. bhiya deyam” etc.
food and went away. Then as the family was trying to share the remaining food among themselves, there arrived another guest. This time it was a vrsala (i.e., person of the fourth caste). Rantideva remembered Lord Hari and gladly gave that person a portion of the remaining food. The guest ate it and went hfs way. As the hungry family-members settled down to share among themselves what little food was left over, there arrived another hungry guest. He brought along with him a pack of four dogs also and asked for food. Rantideva gave him the remaining food with due respect and then paid obeisance to the guest and his dogs too. With all the food thus given away to guests, what was left for the family was a small quantity of water. As the family was about to share that water among themselves, there came a Pulkasa (an outcaste). Hearing his piteous appeal, the noble-souled Rantideva spoke the following words which are full of nectar as it were:

“na kamaye ‘ham gatim isvaranam, astarddhuyukam apunmarbhavam va artim prapatsye ‘khila-duhkhabhajam antassthrito yena bhavantyaduhkhah “(IX.21.12)

(I do not desire the position of power [such as that of Brahma] characterised by eight kinds of perfections. I do not even aspire for liberation marked by absence of rebirth. I wish to abide in the bodies of all the living beings and have all their miseries myself, so that they would be free from sufferings.)

“ksut-trt-sramo gatra-paribhramascar dainyam klamah sokavisadamohah sarve nivrttah kr.panasya jantoh jijivisoh jivajalarpanena” (Ibid.v.13)

(The person who offers the life-giving water to a miserable creature which wants to survive, will, in turn, be free from all sufferings and affictions such as the pangs of hunger and thirst, weakness and instability of the body, dejection, fatigue, misery, grief and swoon.)

Vide Sk. IX. ch 21, v. 11: “kṛpaya bhṛsasantaptah idamaha amṛtam vacah”
Indeed these words of Rantideva deserve to be written in letters of gold. He is described as “nisargakarunah” (v. 14) i.e., one who is compassionate by nature. Compassion with him is not something feigned and demonstrated for publicity. He himself was about to die due to thirst (“mriyamanah”- v. 14).

And for the remaining part of the story, it is stated that the Trinity of Gods who came earlier disguised as suppliants appeared before Rantideva and showered their choicest blessings and laurels on Rantideva. Indeed it was the “mysterious and wonderful” power of Visnu (cf. v. 15: “mayam Visnumirmitam) that cast a spell on him. Rantideva with total detachment saluted them and devoted his mind totally to the Supreme Bhagavan Vasudeva. As he was thus solely devoted to the Supreme Lord, the so-called Maya (viz., Prakrti with its three constituent qualities) dissolved in his case like a dream. All the kings who followed Rantideva were deeply influenced by his exemplary life. All of them became ascetics and totally dedicated to Lord Narayana.  

It may be stated in conclusion that the ideals of renunciation and service, love and cooperation, equanimity and amity which have been the guiding principles of our Nation are already enshrined in our ancient literature like the Vedas, the Gita and the works of great poets. For instance the Rgveda points out that one who gathers food grains for his own self is as good as a dead person. “The lonely eater is the lonely sinner” is the powerful observation of this Veda:

“mogham annam vindate apracetah
satyam bravimi vadha it sa tasya
na armanam pusyati no sakhayam
kevalagho bhavati kevaladi (X.117.6)

(The unwise one obtains food grains to little purpose. I tell you the truth -- it is as good as his death. (Because) He feeds neither a friend nor a comrade. One who feeds all by himself sins all by himself.)

40 See Bhagavata Parana, Sk. IX. ch. 21, vv. 16-19
The Gita interprets this ancient outlook on life in a telling way:

“bhunjate to tvagham papa ye pacanti atmakaranat” (111.13)

(The evil ones who cook for themselves are actually partaking of sin.)

The bard of the Yajurveda (Va. 34.1) has a remarkable prayer to make: “tan me manah sivasankalpam astu” (May my mind will what is good and auspicious!)

It may be noted that it is the goodwill of the mind that forms the foundation of all good action.

The Yajurveda, in another memorable Mantra, speaks of universal friendship. The Vedic seer prays for that benign attitude by which one can become the true friend of all the living beings, not just of humans. The divine plan of creation is that all the creatures, being the children of God, should be friendly with one another and work out their own salvation. Real happiness and peace lie in helping one another. Those who ignore this golden truth can never and nowhere find happiness.

“mitrasya ma caksusa sarvani bhutani samiksantam
mitrasyaham caksusa sarvani bhutani samikse mitrasya
caksusa samiksamahe (36.18)

(May all the living beings look on me with the eye of a friend!
May I look upon all the beings with the eye of a friend!
May we look upon one another with the eye of a friend!)

Friendship which is universal in character will then lead to fearlessness. The Atharva Veda has a beautiful hymn which points out that real friendship contributes to universal peace and harmony.

“abhayam mitrad abhayam amitrad
abhayam jnatad abhayam puro yah
abhayam naktam abhayam diva nah
sarva asa mama mitram bhavantu” (XIX.15.6)

(May I be fearless of my friend, fearless of my foe!
Fearless of the known, and fearless of the unknown!

May our nights be free from fear, our days free from fear!
May all the directions be my friends!

Naturally it is these ideas that have become the mainstay for all the literary and philosophical writings of our ancient and modern writers. A work called the Vikramacarita has the following beautiful verse on the desirability of doing good to others.

“paropakaraya phalanti vriksah
paropakaraya vahanti nadyah
paropakaraya duhanti gavah
paropakararatham idam sariram” (66)

(Trees bear fruit for others. Rivers flow for the sake of others. Cows yield milk for others. This body is meant for helping others only)

The Sarngadharapaddhati, an anthology, has an interesting observation to make. It says that the life of a man who does not help others is fit for condemnation. Animals are better than such a person because even after death, their skin becomes useful for others!

paropakarasunyasya dhik manusyasya jivitam
jivantu pasavo yesam caṁmapyupakarisyati (V.1478)

This chapter may be concluded with a beautiful verse from a poem entitled “His Rule” composed by John Wesley.

“Do all the good you can; by all the means you can;
In all the ways you can; in all the places you can;
At all the times you can; to all the people you can;
As long as ever you can!”

All these noble ideals of love, self-sacrifice and motiveless service vividly portrayed in our Itihyas and Puranas through telling episodes and anecdotes, find an eloquent expression in the Navya-Visistadvaita Philosophy of Svami Narayana. The succeeding chapter gives a detailed account of the basic philosophy of Svami Narayana and attempts to show how social service has been made an important and integral component of his Philosophy.
CHAPTER THREE
BASIC CONCEPTS OF NAVYA-VISISTADVAITA

Before taking up the basic concepts of the Navya Visisadvaita Philosophy of Svami Narayana for a detailed study, it is worthwhile to trace briefly the biography of the great teacher. During the later part of the 18th century India, the celebrated land of origin of Bhagavata Dharma (Sanatana Dharma) witnessed a great upheaval in her spiritual character and touched the rock bottom of religious values and saintly glory. There was unrest everywhere. Political and social values were eroded. Perverse sects of the Vama Marga and the Sakta religion rocked the country, especially the north of India. People in general became addicts to wine and women, meat and material wealth. Veda and Upanisads, the Gita and the Puranas were misinterpreted by perverted pundits so as to justify the performance of “himsamaya-yajnas” (sacrifices involving the butchering of dumb animals in their thousands) They cheated the layman regarding the true meaning of Dharma and whatever they did or said became sacrosanct. There was utter recklessness in every walk of social life. Those who were genuinely interested in bringing about a revolution and correct the wrong-doers had to lose their social status. They even faced the threat to their life. There was internal warfare between one group and another gray of people and the social and religious structure had crumbled under the heavy burden of superstition and ignorance. There was utter chaos and confusion. High-handedness and lawlessness prevailed everywhere. It was against this background that Svami Narayana took his birth, true to the promise made by Lord Krsna some five thousand years ago:

“Yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavati Bharata
abhyutthanam adharmasya tada atmanam srjamyaham
paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya ca duskrtam
dharma-samsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge” (IV.7,8)

(Whenever Dharma wanes and Adharma raises its ugly head, then I shall create myself. I shall manifest myself from time to time so as to protect the virtuous, to punish the wicked and to resurrect Dharma.)
Svami Narayana was born as the second among three sons to a pious couple of Chappaiya, a village ten miles away from Ayodhya glorified as the birth place of Lord Sri Rama. Ghanasyama, as Svami Narayana was originally called, was born at 10.00 p.m. on the ninth night of the bright half of the month Caitra in the Vikrama Year 1837 which corresponds to the year 1781 A.D. His parents are known as (Hariprasada) Dharmadeva and Bhaktidevi. The two other brothers of Ghanasyama are Ramapratapa and Iccharama. Once a learned priest Markandeya by name came to the house of Dharmadeva, saw the child Ghanasyama and was struck with wonder by his unusual brahmanical lustre. He said: “This child will be like Brhaspati (the preceptor of gods) in intelligence and in austerities he will be like Lord Kumara (Kartikeya). He is going to redeem the miseries of thousands of people. For this reason he will be known as Hari (from the root “hr” to take away) i.e., ‘one who takes away the sufferings of people’. Since he is dark in complexion, and because he has attractive features, he will be known Ghanasyama and krsna. Since both Hari and Krsna are one he will also be known as Harikrsna”41. Ghanasyama was invested with the sacred thread in his eighth year. He learned Vedas at the feet of his father.

From that tender age, Ghanasyama followed a strict code of conduct. He woke up early in the morning and went to the river Sarayu for ablutions. Then he went to every temple and shrine in Ayodhya. Of all these, his choicest temple was that of Hanuman. From that age onwards, there was an inner urge in him to leave the home, which became pronounced day after day.

Once several scholars of Benares invited Dharmadeva the father of Ghanasyama to be the mediator in a delate between the followers of Sri Sankara and the followers of Sri Ramanuja. With the permission of his father, Ghanasyama spoke in support of the school of Sri Ramanuja and the followers of Sri Sankara could not answer the objections of the young boy and accepted their defeat. Dharmadeva

41 Vide Life and Philosophy of Shree Swami Narayan, pp. 39-40
felt extremely happy at the brilliant eloquence of his son and came to believe that the predictions of Markandeya were coming true. The young Ghanasyama thus made a mark for himself among the scholars of the day as an able and successful exponent of the Visistadvaita school.

Within about a year thereafter, his mother passed away and about six months later, his father also passed away. Very likely these two events laid a deep impress on the sensitive mind of Ghanasyama and he left home on the tenth day of the bright half of the month of Asadha in the Samvat 1849 (i.e., 1791 A.D.) when he was eleven years, three months and one day old. Early in the morning that day he started for the river Sarayu. What he carried with him were a small book containing abstracts from the Gita, Srimad Bhagavata, Upansads and the Brahmasutra, a Salagrama, an image of Lord Visnu, one Kamandalu (water picher), a palasa-danda (stick of the Palasa tree) and a loin cloth. He left home with a burning desire of spreading the Bhagavata Dharma once again through the length and breadth of Aryavarta.

Emaciated by austerities and brilliant with spiritual glory, Ghanasyama looked like Lord Siva Himself. So people began to call him “Nilakantha” also. He travelled barefoot in the valleys and on the slopes of the Himalayas, in the rugged jungles and covered all the holy places, sometimes without food and water. All this was possible only because of his great yogic powers. During his peregrinations in Puri, Benares, Dvaraka, Ramesvaram, Madura! and other sacred places he noticed the great discrepancy in the life and preachings of many sadhus and the heads of various monasteries. He saw in the heads of the religious mathas and organizations avarice, carnal passion, lust for power, prestige and pelf. The holiness of holy rivers and the adjacent areas became defiled. Religion just became a mechanical and monotonous routine of visiting temples and feeding flocks of “naked beggars”. Philosophy lost the foundation of intrinsic

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42 See Manilal C. Parekh, Shri Swaminarayan, p.4

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knowledge and orientation in the love of God. In short, he noticed in the so-called religious heads all that is diametrically opposed to their status as saints and preceptors. The total ignorance of the people, their superstitions, fear of violating the vicious commands of the religious heads, bigotry and so on, only helped to further the tribe of hypocrites. Nilakantha knew the remedy for this total chaos, as the spread of the Bhagavata Dharma. By this is meant a meaningful blend of Knowledge with Karma and Bhakti. To spread this message among the laymen and scholars alike, he needed a dedicated band of ascetics who were totally free from material desires. A new band of pious people of the calibre of Paramahamsas was needed by him for his mission.

He spent nearly seven years journeying from North to East, East to South and South to West. To all the religious preceptors and pontiffs of monasteries he put five questions: *Who is Jiva? Who is Isvara? What is Maya? What is Brahma? What is Para Brahman?* Many heads of religious organizations could not answer these questions satisfactorily. But he did not leave at that. In search of answers to these questions, he toured several places and ultimately came to Lojpur, a village near Mangro Bunder. This was around the year 1800 A.D. There was an Asrama of Svami Ramananda there. As the news of a young and brilliant ascetic’s presence in the village spread, Svami Muktananda who was in charge of the above Asrama came to him and reverentially welcomed him to the Asrama as Svami Ramananda was out of station during that time. From Mutananda, Nilakantha came to know that his Guru Ramananda was a realized soul and that he acquired great siddhis. Ramananda was having a burning urge in him to have the darshan of Lord Sri Krsna. He visited Srirangam and stayed with the followers of Sri Ramanuja. He learnt the Gita Bhasya, Sribhasya etc. composed by Ramanuja. He was convinced that the great Ramanuja had the sakshtkara of Lord Krisna. He hoped to have that long cherished desire of his fulfilled by the grace of that great Acarya. So one night he meditated upon Sri Ramanuja. Much to his own amazement, Sri Ramanuja appeared to him in a vision and gave
him initiation into the Vaisnava Diksa and marked his body with the
twelve sacred marks indicating the presence of Lord Visnu. Ramananda entered into a trance and had the blissful sakshtkara of
Lord Krsna in the company of His Consort. Thus he had the ambition
of his life fulfilled. Immensely satisfied, Ramananda came to Lojpur
and founded an Asrama there. Nilakantha was immensely delighted
to hear this inspiring story of Svami Ramananda through his disciple
Muktananda. He then put the five questions which were uppermost
in his mind to Muktananda and he answered them satisfactorily. Still,
on being requested by Muktananda, Nilakantha answered the
questions himself in a thorough and comprehensive manner with an
amazing familiarity stemming from practical experience.

WHO IS JIVA?

Nilakantha answered the five questions one by one he posed earlier
to Muktananda. Jiva, he pointed out, is atomic in size and
imperceptible. He is as subtle as a thousandth part of the hundredth
part of a hair. He is distinct from the three bodies, viz., the apparent
or the gross body, the subtle body and the casual body by means of
his power in the form of knowledge (cidrupasakti). He is of the
nature of Consciousness, Bliss, etc. and he forms the locus of
knowledge. This knowledge of the individual self is illumined by
the witnessing Lord (saksri) who abides inside the Jiva (as
Antaryamin). As described in the second chapter of the Gita, the
Jiva is eternal. Weapons cannot cut him; fire cannot burn him; water
cannot wet him and wind cannot dry him. He is birthless and deathless.

Jivas are innumerable. They carry the impressions of good and bad
deeds performed in the previous lives. For liberation, they have to
perform the actions laid down in the Vedas. Jiva is by nature, blissful

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43 This corresponds to the “dharmabhuta-jnana” (Attributive Consciousness) of Sri
Ramanuja’s School.
44 Cf. Satananda’s commentary of the Siksapatri: “na kevalam jnanaasvarupah, kintu
jnanaasrayasa”
45 Vide Siksapatri, 107: “Hrdaye jivavad jive yah antaryamitaya sthitah” (Even as the
Jiva resides in the heart, so does the Paramatman reside in Jiva as the Inner Controller).
(svatah sukhi). At the time of Pralaya or cosmic dissolution, all the souls rest in Maya and at the time of creation, they take birth according to their past Karma.

**WHO IS (ARE) ISVARA(S)?**

Nilakantha then turned his attention to the next question “Who is Isvara?” and eloquently spoke in the following manner: “The body of Isvara is composed of the five Great Elements out of which the bodies of the Jivas are also composed. But they are in a meagre composition and as such, they cannot evolve any further. Jiva is “alpaajna” with very limited knowledge whereas Isvara is “sarvajna” or omniscient. Isvara has three bodies viz., virat, Sutrata and Avyakrta. He is involved in cosmic activities such as creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universel, Brahma, Visnu, Mahesa, Hiranyagarbha, Bhumapurusa, Mahavisnu, Rudra, Sankarasana, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Pradhana Purusa and Mahat Tattva are all called Isvaras. All these Isvaras are ever blissful because of the predominance of Sattvaguna in them. Mahavisnu rests in the womb of Mulamaya which is known as “Hiranmaya-kosa”. The Mulamaya is eternal and unitary. During creation, the Parabrahman through Mahapurusa who is of the nature of Aksara (to be explained later), joins Maya. Maya then conceives Pradhana and Purusa and through them is born the Vairajapurusa. This Vairajapurusa also has three bodies viz., Virat, Sutrata and Avyakrta. Like the Jiva he is also surrounded by eight spheres of maya. The body of the Vairajapurusa is composed of twenty-four categories including the Mahat. 46

Although Purusottama is the inspirer of Vairajapurusa, the latter is still bound by Maya. If at the time of cosmic Pralaya or dissolution, Vairajapurusa comes into contact with Mahapurusa, he becomes free from Maya and gets liberated. But if he is attached to Aniruddha, Pradyumna and Sankarsana, he remains involved in the acts of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world. Millions of such macrocosms are created through such Vairajapurusas who are as numerous as the macrocosms themselves.

46 See Vacanamrta, Gadhada, Sec.II.31
The Mulamaya mentioned earlier has the form of absolute darkness and is also referred to as "Mahat-tamas". The Veda refers to this thus: "tama asit tamasa gudham agre"47 (In the beginning there was darkness and it was concealed by darkness as it were). Beyond this lies the Brahmaloka and the Maya does not exist there. Mahapurusa although in contact with Maya does not have any desire for the enjoyment of the objects of the five senses. He is ever blissful because he draws his Ananda from the Paramatman Himself.48

WHAT IS MAYA?

Nilakantha then answered the third question raised by himself earlier concerning Maya. Maya is Prakrti and the one who induces Maya to action is Mahesvara.49 It is Maya which undergoes evolutionary modifications. It is of the nature of Avidya or ignorance and is nonsentient. It is also an eternal principle. It comprises three qualities viz., Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. It is also referred to as both vyakta (manifest during creation) and Avyakta (before creation). Maya is the field of activity for the Mahat unmanifest Tattvas, Jivas and Parabrahman as well. Mahamaya or Hiranmaya Kosa contains within her womb several worlds such as Viratpurusa Loka, Sivalingajyotir Loka, Visnu Loka, Mahavisnu Loka and also the Visnu abiding there, placed one over the above. The influence of Maya stops with this. Beyond this there is no further Maya50.

Maya is eternal and is inspired and induced by God. Maya cannot be overcome by anybody excepting the Parabrahman. It is in fact, another name for the power of the Lord which is responsible for the creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe.51 Maya alone is responsible for the identification of the bodies of the individual souls on one hand and those of the Isvaras on the other.

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47 Rgveda 129.10
48 Vacanamrta, Gadhada, Sec. 11.31
49 So says the Svetasvatara Up. IV.10: "mayam tu prakritim vidyayat mayinamtu Mahesvaram"
50 See Krishnavallabhacharya, Swaminarayan Vedanta Sara, p.20
51 Vide Bhagavata, V.11.26: "svasaktya mayaya yuktah, srjati, atti ca pati ca"
WHAT IS BRAHMAN?

Answering this question raised by himself, Nilakantha said to Muktananda and others assembled there, as follows: "Brahman is the Divine Abode of the Lord. It is also known as Aksara in the scriptures. It has two aspects -- Nirakara (without a specific form, being a mass of pure consciousness and Sakara with form). The Sakara aspect appears as the dearest and nearest devotee of the Lord always engaged in serving Him in His highest abode. 52 This inspires the Jivas, Isvaras and Maya, and is their supporter and sustainer (sarvadhara). All that is in the universe shines because of its light.53 The Aksara Dhama is so vast and expansive that infinite macrocosms appear as mere atoms before it. The entire universe appearing against the background of the Aksara can be compared to a tiny ant crawling on the body of an elephant.

The Aksara Abode has a divine form but it is beyond the ken of human vision and understanding. In fact the Gita (VIII.11) speaks of the Aksara thus: ‘yad aksaram vedavido vadanti’ (Those who know the Veda call it Aksara, the Abode of Paramatman where only the celibates enter).

The Aksara is the cause of all causes. The argument advanced by Nilakantha in support of this statement can be stated as follows: "Only that which is greater than the other can be the cause of the other. It should also be subtler than the other. For instance, Water is larger in extent than the Earth and so it forms the cause of the latter. Similarly Fire is larger than Water and forms the cause of Water. Air is greater than Fire and Space is greater than Air. Again, Ahankara, Mahat, Purusa and Prakrti are progressively greater than one another. Aksara is above all these. It forms the abode of Purusottama. It is greater, subtler and the cause of the evolution of all these categories."

52 Vide Vacanamrta, Gadhada, Sec. 1.21.
53 Cf. Mundaka Up. 11.2.10.
54 Vacanamrta, Gadhada, Sec. 1. 63, See p. 19 above.
There are several authoritative texts which support this concept of Aksara. The Bhagavata Purana (111.11.41) for instance describes Aksara thus: "Tad ahur Aksaram Brahma, sarvakarana-karanam" (That they call Aksara and / or Brahman, which is the cause of all causes). It is divine in its entirety, devoid of all the impurities of Maya. One who wants liberation should know about this Aksara principle. It is eternal and none but Purusottama is higher than it. It cannot be described as either Sat or Asat. It has its limbs spread out in all directions, as described in the Gita.55

This Aksara inspired by Purusottama its Antaryamin, pervades all the Cit and Acit entities. It is both jnana (Knowledge) and jneya (that which deserves to be known). Aksara is a step lower than Purusottama and forms the goal to be attained by those who want to attain Bhakti for Lord Purusottama. Aksara and Purusottama are related to each other like body and its soul. They are two different entities. By performing meditation on Aksara one attains Purusottama. The following verse of the Gita, according to Svami Narayana points out this truth:

"ye tvaksaram anirdesyam avyakt paryupasate te prapnuvanti mameva sarvabhattahite ratah"(XII.3)

(Those who worship the indefinable and unmanifest Aksara and who are keen on the welfare of all living beings, will reach me only.)

The Aksara which is the abode of Purusottama is unmanifest (avyakta) and eternal (sanatana). It is the highest point to be attained. Having gone there, one does not return to the world of transmigration.56 The relation between Aksara and Purusottama is the one between "dṛṣya and dṛṣṭa" (the object seen and the perceiver thereof),"sarīra and saririn"(the body and the self) and "niyamya and niyamaka" (the controlled and its controller). Paramatman pervades, controls and subdues both Aksara and the Jivas.57 If Purusottama so desires, He

55 Cf. XII. 14a:"sarvataḥ panipadāṃ . see tat sarvato ps. 19 above kṣis/romukham"
56 Cl. Gita XV.6: "yad gatva na nivartante lad dhama paramam mama"
57 Vācanamrta, Gadhada, Sec. I. 64.
may absorb Aksara by His prowess.\textsuperscript{58} Since the power of Purusottama is fully assigned to Aksara, it is also sometimes referred to as Purusottama. It is described as divine and devoid of impurities: "aphatāpapma hyesa brahmalokah" It is not correct to refer to Aksara as Prakrti since the latter is neither pure nor divine. Then comes a very striking statement: "Since there is co-existence of Aksara (anvayabhava) in Brahma, Visnu and Siva, these forms need not be meditated upon."\textsuperscript{59} Therefore Pradhana, even as Lower Brahman, is not fit to be meditated upon since it is not Brahman in its pure state.

This Aksara which is also known as Cidakasa, does not undergo any evolutionary changes. It is the support of all. Prakrti and Purusa which come within the purview of Aksara will however, expand and contract. So Prakrti and Purusa expand and contract at the time of creation and dissolution. But Aksara is Kutastha or unchanging.\textsuperscript{60}

The Kathopanisad refers to Aksara as the highest: "etaddhyeva aksaram param".\textsuperscript{61} It commends the Aksara as the best object for contemplation: "etādalamānānarm srestham".\textsuperscript{62} It is only by assuming the Aksara-bhava that one can meditate upon Paramapurusa. Those who know Aksara or Brahman and identify themselves with It will attain the highest form of Devotion (Para Bhakthi) for the Lord and will be accepted by the Lord as His servants.

**WHO IS PARABRAHMAN?**

Answering the last question concerning "Parabrahman", Nilakantha said that Purusottama or Parabrahman is the highest Tattva transcending even Brahman, i.e., Aksara. He is the soul of Brahman. One desirous of liberation wants to know this form of Parabrahman. He is the Isvāra of all Isvaras. He grants the fruits of all acts, and becomes the support of all the supporters (sarvadhara). He is the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., Loya, 13.
\textsuperscript{60} Cf. Gita XIV.16: "kutastho 'ksara ucyate"
\textsuperscript{61} 11.16
\textsuperscript{62} 11.17
cause of the creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe. He is infinitely great, is the highest goal to be reached by those who are liberated. He is the repository of all perfections and He leads all the living beings to ultimate salvation. He transcends the Ksara Purusa and Aksara Purusa and hence is known in the secular and the sacred literature as Uttama Purusa. He is full of Bliss and Bliss incarnate. He is subtler than jiva and abides in his heart as the Controller.

Purusottama is also vibhu (all-pervasive) by virtue of His antaryami-aspect. He abides in His Aksara-dhama but He can appear at various places simultaneously by His mysterious powers. This simultaneous appearance is to be known as sakara-form which illustrates His all-pervasive character. But the term "vibhutva" does not ever imply the abstract form of space. Apart from Purusottama the other liberated souls, Isvaras and others are not fit to be worshipped or meditated upon independently for liberation.

The Lord is the Parama (superlatively supreme and superior) to all because He is the highest form for purposes of meditation and worship. When Gargi asked Yajnavalkya: "What is the location of Prajapati Loka?", he replied: "It is wrapped up in the Brahmaloka". When she asked him further as to where the Brahmaloka is located, he became rather annoyed and replied: "Do not ask me any further. All the worlds are wrapped up in Aksara Brahman. Para Brahman abides in the Aksara Brahman which is pervaded by Himself." The reason why Yajnavalkya asked Gargi not to ask any further is because Parabrahman is not the subject matter of speech, nor is He to be conceived by mind. The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad where this dicussion takes place, firmly establishes that Parabrahman is beyond Aksara and is the highest entity. Parabrahman is known by several significant names such as Narayana, Paramesvara, Paramatama and Purusottama.

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63 Cf. Gita XV.18: "yasmat ksaram atito 'ham aksarakapi cóttamah... Purusottamah"
64 Cf. Taittiriya Aranyaka III.11.2: "antah praviśtah sasta jananam sarvatam"
65 Vide Vacanamrta, Gadhada, Sec. 1.45
66 Cf. Taittiriya IX.:"yato vaco nivartante aprapya manasa saha"
Parabrahman sits in the heart of the Jivas bound by their own karmans and also in the Muktas (liberated ones). Still He is free from the "attachment" of the bound souls and the "non-attachment" of the liberated ones. He is the Sakshi (witness) of the Isvaras and of Aksara and is still free from the adjuncts attached to Isvara. He is beyond all of them, i.e., Jivas, Isvaras and the Aksara.

In the Aksara Dhama, the Lord abides in the company of His blessed angels, possessing a "non-material" (aprakrt) celestial body. Those angels serve him in several capacities. That Para-form of the Lord, out of boundless compassion for the suffering humanity, has manifested itself in a human form and is before your very eyes. This visible form and the one abiding in the Aksara abode are one and the same (svarupaikya). This Para-aspect is the cause of all causes, and is supreme, being the cause of the Avatars. All the previous Avatars of the Lord are also to be prayed to and worshipped.

Parabrahman forms the material (upadana) as well as the efficient cause (nimitta) of the universe. His divine body is not the product of the Material Nature or Prakrti. He is beyond all Maya and beyond Mula Purusa. At the time of creation when the entire universe was in the state of merger (Pralaya) with no distinction of name and form, He awakened it as it were by His "iksana" (Will) and entered into it. The Chandogya Upanisad (VI.2.1) refers to this state of existence of the Supreme Brahman by the expression "ekameva advitiyam". This term however, does not imply that every thing other than Him was void.

Since the Lord induced Purusa one of the released souls (Nityas) abiding in the Aksara Dhama to carry out creation, sustenance and dissolution, the progeny of Purusa knows only Purusa from whom it

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67 The Srivaisnava Religion of Sri Ramanuja also has a similar concept.
68 Vide Vacnamrta, Gadhadha, Sec. III. 38.
69 Cf. Varaha Purana, ch. 75.44
70 Vide Taiitiriya III.13: "adiyavarnam tamasah parastat"
71 This is the position taken by Ramanuja and more particularly, by his grand teacher, Yamuna in his Samvitsiddhi.
had evolved. This Purusa is the controller of Prakrti and is still different in nature from Prakrti. He is indivisible, eternal, infinite, omniscient and possessing a divine body. He is the cause of evolution and is also a Ksetrajna. Therefore, scriptures sometimes describe this Purusa himself figuratively as Purusottama. The ultimate Purusottama living in the Aksara Dharma is beyond anybody’s comprehension and is beyond realisation. Therefore only Purusa who is in the form of Purusottama has become the object of comprehension, discussion and meditation. This Para-aspect of Purusottama was therefore not so far cognised by anybody for worship or for final realisation. He has not so far fully manifested Himself on earth.

Nilakantha (Sahajananda) then explained the difference between Purusa who is the Purusottama described in the scriptures, and the Para Svarupa of the real ultimate Purusottama. Well, the difference certainly exists and persists. Even as there is difference between Jiva and Isvara and between Isvara and Purusa, so there is a good deal of difference between Purusa and Purusottama (who is Bhagavan Vasudeva). Lord Vasudeva is the Svami of all. Purusas in the form of Aksara Muktas are innumerable and they worship His feet.

Purusottama is the ultimate Witness of one and all. He is the real witness, although Purusa has been described in the form of Purusottama in the scriptures. As already pointed out, Purusa is described as Purusottama in all the scriptures because of the invariable concomitance between Purusa and the indwelling Purusottama. One has to realize Purusottama in His original form as independent, and as the Lord of all. Sahajananda concluded his description of the Parabrahman with a reference to the Bhagavata Purana. The description found in this Purana that the Supreme Being is of the form of Jyotis, Knowledge, Tattva, Saksin, Niranjana, Ksetrajna,

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72 Vide Vacanamrta, Gadhada, Sec. 1.12.
73 Cf. Sri Krishnavallabhacharya, Siksapattri Kiranavali Bhasya, p.110
74 See Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, pp.62-63.
75 Vide Vacanamrta, Gadhada, Sec. 11.31.
76 Vide Siksapattri, v. 107.
Sarvkarana, Parabrahman, Purusottama, Vasudeva, Visnu, Narayana, Nirguna etc. actually pertain to the Highest Form of Vasudeva alone and to nobody else.  

Now this brings us to an end of the detailed replies given by Nilakantha to the five questions raised by himself earlier. It may be noted that his answers to these five questions have formed the basic concepts on which he built his philosophy of Navya Visistadvaita. A detailed discussion of this Philosophy will be presented in the succeeding chapter.

LITERATURE OF THE SCHOOL

Before closing this chapter it is worthwhile to take a look at the literature that has developed around the Master and his Neo Visistadvaita Philosophy. For the origin and the growth of this literature which is both in Gujarati and Sanskrit, Swami Narayana himself was the direct and indirect source of inspiration. He understood that the Movement which was started by him cannot be merely founded on the “spoken word” and that the exponents cannot merely preach his doctrines in their mothertongue viz, Gujarati. He felt the need for educating his disciple monks in Sanskrit. He asked all the Sadhus, young and old, to study Sanskrit and sent Svami Muktananada and Brahmananda to Surat for the study of this ancient language. Those who could not make much progress with the study of Sanskrit were asked to concentrate on penance. Those who became proficient in Sanskrit were enthusiastically honoured even if they were young in age. The result was that in course of time several Sadhus like Muktananda, Gopalananada, Nityananda, Sukhatmananda and others became highly proficient in Sanskrit and were a match for the traditional Sastrins and Pandits. At the same time Svami Narayana wanted to create a literature which, in his own words, could be understood by even old women who lived by spinning in the remote village.

77 Cf. Vacanamrita, Gad nada, Sec. 11.39
As a result we have now a large body of literature in the vernacular which incorporated the “word of the mouth of the great Master”

1. Vacanamrtam (Nectar of Discourses): This may be described as the best Biography of the Master. Written in Gujarati, it attained the status of a classic. It contains the Doctrine of the Movement. Here both the language and thought matched each other and provided a harmonious and inspiring blend. This work records the various talks of the Master which are mostly in the form of answers to questions of disciples in the general assembly of his followers in different places. There are on the whole, 262 talks. These Sayings (Vacanas) cover a period of about a decade at the end of the Great Master’s sojourn in this world. This is actually a fraction of his work as a teacher. The conversations of the Master were edited by a board of four scholars as it were, viz., Svamis Muktananda, Gopalananda, Nityananda and Sukhananda. It teaches the doctrines in such a simple and attractive manner that even the ordinary men and women can understand them. One specialty of this book is that every one of these talks is prefaced with a short pen-picture of the Master. This is to inform and inspire the readers that the teaching is not merely for the sake of it, but that it is oriented in the divinity of the personality of the Guru. The chief ideal of this book is to present the Master as an Ideal Teacher of the Sampradaya. It is no exaggeration to state that this work alone is sufficient to show the greatness of Svami Narayana as a teacher par excellence.

2. Siksapatri (Chart of Instructions): This was composed under the personal supervision of Svami Narayana and it bears the impression of his character and personality in every line of it. It is an Epistle of precepts containing 212 verses in Sanskrit and is meant to be a kind of law-book for the followers of the Sampradaya. The entire book is supposed to be repeated daily by the believers for it contains the essence of the doctrine and laws, the “do’s and don’ts” for those who follow this tradition. It is quite comprehensive and thorough in its approach. Sir Monier Williams in his book Religious Thought,
remarks that this book is a "collection of some too hundred and twelve precepts, some original and some extracted from Manu and other sacred sastras and many of them containing high moral sentiments worthy of Christianity itself. They are calculated to give a fair idea of the purer side of modern Vaisnavism."

Satanandamuni, explaining the purpose of this small epistle, writes thus: "The control over the congnitive and conative organs is necessary for performing purified actions. Karma yoga is better than renouncing of karmans. Purified actions lead to Bhakti. No other fruit is higher to the virtuous than the dedicated devotion to God. Bhakti should be coupled with Dharma for an ultimate realization. Bhakti should be practised by assuming one's own self as Brahman devoid of three bodies -- the gross, the subtle and the causal. The empirical self always thrives on the enjoyment of sense-objects which hinders meditational worship." 78 The implied idea is that unless these religious tenets are observed strictly, Upasana and Bhakti cannot be cultivated by anyone.

3. Bhakta Cintamani: This is one of the best books in this literature. It is a biography of the Master both in verse and prose, composed by Svami Niskulananda, who was originally a disciple of Svami Ramananda. Much of it was written during the lifetime of the Master himself. It is in 164 chapters containing about 8527 verses. It mixes biography with rhapsodies about His divine nature. The master is described as another incarnation of Lord Krisna.

4. Sri Hari Lilamrta (Nectar of the life story of the Lord Hari): This is a bigger biography in Gujarati composed by Kavi Dalpatram.

5. Sri Haricaritra Cintamani (The legendary precious stone viz., the life of the great master): This is in prose, published recently in three volumes. This is a large collection of stories and incidents relating to the life of the Master.

78 Vide Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, p. 235
6. Stories of Svami Adbhutananda, Prasadananda and others: These were composed by disciples who knew the Master personally. These are several biographical fragments as it were. In both their content and form they are like the Christian Gospels. These throw a lot of light on the life and work of the great Master and on the divine atmosphere which he created all around.

7. A large number of Songs: Svamis Muktananda, Brahmananda, Niskulananda and others created a vast body of songs in praise of the Master. They are meant to inspire devotion in the heart of his followers. It is said that Svamis Muktananda and Brahmananda took a vow that they should compose a certain number of song every day. There came into existence a large number of didactic and other kinds of poems. They exhorted men and women not to allow the terrible practice of Sati. Widows were advised to lead pure and pious lives and serve society in as best a manner as they can.

8. Epistles: They are about fifty in number, written by the Master. In fact many more of his Epistles are not preserved for posterity and one must be content with what has been preserved. Most of these letters are doctrinal as well as disciplinary. They contained truths and instructions that came fresh from the heart of the Master and are as such, of incomparable value.

9. Satsangi-Jivana (The life of the disciple in the midst of the Fellowship): This is the largest work that the Master got written under his personal and direct supervision. It was written by Svami Satananda in Sanskrit. It consists of five parts and has nearly 17000 verses. It has been translated into Gujarati also.

(a) Dharmamrtam (Nectar of Righteousness): This is an extract of the Satsangi Jivana mentioned above. It is a code of conduct for the Sadhus of the Order.

(b) Niskamasuddhi (Purification through desirelessness): This is also a part of the larger text Satsangi Jivana. It contains rules for penitential rites in case the sadhu violates the laws laid down.
It is these basic works that formed the source material for many a modern work written in English, Gujarati and other languages by eminent scholars such as *Shri Swaminarayan* by Manilal C. Parekh, *Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan* by H.T. Dave, *English Translation of the Vacanamrta* by H.T. Dave, etc.
CHAPTER FOUR
SVAMI NARAYANA AND HIS SOCIAL SERVICE

An attempt is being made in the following pages to present an account of the social activities of Svami Narayana (Nilakantha or Sahajananda) which provided a great inspiration to the people and which brought out a spiritual transformation in their outlook. He was the most pragmatic philosopher of the day who provided a paradigmatic interpretation for the Gita statement.

“na karmanam anarambhat naiskarmyam puruso ‘snute naca samnyasanadeva siddhim samadhisgacchati”(III-4)

(One does not attain the state of actionlessness by abstaining from the performance of works. By merely renouncing his duties, one does not attain perfection).

Muktananda and the other inmates of the Asrama felt enlightened and elevated by the eloquence of Nilakantha. He acceded to their request to stay in the Asrama till Ramananda returned. While living there, he brought in a number of important and significant changes in the behaviour of the inmates. From then on a new chapter had been opened in the life of the brother monks. Everybody felt the impact of Nilakantha’s presence there and although initially they were reluctant to change, the change took over them imperceptibly and powerfully so that the status of samnyasa was raised within a short span of time.

One day Nilakantha noticed a hole in the common wall of the Asrama from which the monks used to take fire from the women living in the adjacent house. He considered this as a bad practice. A celibate should avoid all kinds of association and dealings with women. He therefore ordered that the hole be closed. He also objected to women freely coming to the Asrama and mingling with the ascetics there. This is also against the strict rules of celibacy. He therefore arranged separate meetings for men and women. He engaged himself in serving the inmates of the hermitage. He went out for alms, cooked food for them, collected firewood, and even washed their clothes. He did everything for them, promoting the ideal of service among them. When he had
some leisure time, he taught them Yoga. At last the meeting between Nilakantha and Svami Ramananda took place at a place called Piplana which was near Mangrol Bunder, in the house of Narsi Mehta. It was not a meeting -- it was a happy union of two souls which were yearning to come close.

Nilakantha prostrated before the senior Ramananda who accepted him as his disciple. He was struck by the brilliance of his form and mind and considered him as the only person who can deliver the goods, deliver the suffering humanity from the world of transmigration. He gave him Vaisnavi Diksa and gave him a new name, "Sahajananda". He installed him as an Acarya in charge of the monastery although the claims of some admirers of Muktananda to become the head of the Asrama were taken note of. But the decision taken by Ramananda was irrevocable. He foresaw a great revival of the Bhagavata Dharma under the leadership of the young Sahajananda (who was only 20 years of age by that time). Wide powers were vested in him to conduct the fellowship, initiate new disciples, issue injunctions, wear valuable clothes and ornaments, ride horses or travel by chariot, cart or other vehicles. Though first Sahajananda was reluctant to accept this new position, he had to obey the command of his Guru Ramananda in view of the good that may come to many. The large-hearted Sahajananda who was an embodiment of compassion for the brother monks, was prepared to face any trials or tribulations for their happiness and comfortable living so that their religious practices would go on uninterruptedly. Sahajananda convinced Ramananda that none under his governance should suffer for want of food and clothing. An empty stomach cannot be taught philosophy. The basic necessities of life should be taken care of first before people are educated in spirituality. Thereafter the Asrama was shifted to a place called Faneni, a centre for spiritual learning established by Ramananda. Having installed Sahajananda as his spiritual successor and the head of the Asrama in the new surroundings, Ramananda quietly withdrew into the forest at Faneni. Nothing was heard or known about him thereafter.
Sahajananda who became the chief of the Asrama started his work right earnest from the day he assumed office. The State where he worked, viz., Saurastra was not congenial for the spread of religion. Petty feudal chiefs were at constant feuds. The notorious Kathi looters made life horrible for the people. There were no norms, no traditions, no conventions and no customs. Social life became a non-entity. The entire atmosphere was surcharged with hatred, violence and fanaticism. Food and clothing became scarce in the State and as such, there was widespread looting and cheating. In addition to this disturbing social situation, some followers of Ramananda openly expressed their unwillingness and opposition to Sahajananda’s ascendancy to the pontificate. Sahajananda made himself very clear: “Those who wanted to follow his authority may remain. Others who had a different ideology were free to leave the organization.” He thus weeded out all unworthy and unbecoming elements and purified gradually the entire fellowship. This paved the way for him to establish his authority without any hindrance so that the changes he wanted to usher in became practical realities.

He then began to distribute food free to all the people. For this purpose he established centers at several places. His first and foremost concern was to serve the poor and the downtrodden in society. He told his brother monks that they should give prime importance to this one single point, i.e., feeding the hungry and the needy. At his command, several Sadhus went round for alms, collected whatever was given by the well to do, cooked food and distributed it to the poor. The Sadhus, on their own, dug out wells and ponds and provided water to the parched throats. Sahajananda’s magnetic personality and eloquent eyes beaming with love and compassion, made him a veritable God; and people of all walks of life began to flock around him. Ignorance and illiteracy are the parents of all evils. People around Sahajananda were steeped in superstitions of all sorts and they believed in polytheism. They were, out of their ignorance, afraid of petty gods and goblins.
Sahajananda studied the situation very carefully and chalked out a plan of action. He explained to them in their own mother-tongue, and in simple terms, that there is but one God. They need not be afraid of the petty gods and goddesses, devils and demons. The Supreme God will be pleased by good deeds. He told them in intimate terms that God is full of love and compassion. He explained to them that Religion does not mean dogmas and rituals, ceremonies or festivities. It means love for God and His creation. One should lead a pious, disciplined and truthful life. Only those acts and customs which can uplift the social and moral life of people should be undertaken. Otherwise their value is next to nothing.

The teachings of Sahajananda soon caught the imagination of the masses. He started a socio-religious movement on a large scale. He pointed out that the day-to-day life of the people should be coordinated with religious precepts through which the value of life will be enhanced. He told them in so many words that life without religion is a life wasted. Life becomes worth living only when religious virtues are imbibed and imparted. The mission of every Sadhu under his guidance was to go to the common masses and teach them spiritual values. They should preach but should not expect anything in return. They should live like mendicants and should fast if nothing was available to eat. They should not harbour any ill-will against anybody. Love and nothing but love should be their watchword.

The fame and name of Sahajananda gradually grew and became widespread. His followers obeyed him implicitly and they too commanded respect wherever they went. But as usual, this stimulated the jealousy of a few hypocrite “Sadhus” whose only means of livelihood was hoodwinking people. They were afraid that their own cult of wine, women and wealth will die a natural death. They therefore began to persecute Sahajananda and his followers. They attacked the alms house established by Sahajananda. They looted the grain and beat the inmates. They wanted to bring bad name to Sahajananda and brought harlots to the Asrama and induced them to
seduce the monks living there. They cut off the sacred threads of the Sadhus, mutilated their idols of worship, desecrated their food with meat and onion. Still the Sadhus remained unprovoked and unruffled like rock. They thought that God, their own master Sahajananda was testing their sincerity. The nomadic ruffians tried their best to convert the followers of Sahajananda with false promises and bogus allegations against Sahajananda. But being the followers of the great Saint to the core, the Sadhus stood unruffled and repulsed the attack of the hypocrites. It was thus a victory for Sahajananda and his followers in their noble mission of spreading Sanatana Dharma.

The followers of Sahajananda began to admire and worship their master with total faith. This grew into deep devotion for him. As they began to concentrate on his physical form, gradually they forgot all their physical environs, the functioning of their sense faculties, vital breath etc. and began to feel a merger in him. They enjoyed immense Bliss as in the state of Samadhi. They had the vision of the divine form of Sahajananda in His highest abode, viz., Aksara Dhama. This Samadhi was granted by Sahajananda to disciples out of his unconditioned love and affection. This Samadhi was not due to the practice of Astangayoga. Sahajananda blessed infinite number of devotees with this Samadhi state. This news spread throughout the country and Svami Sahajananda came to be known as Jivanmukta. By merely chanting the name “Jivanmukta” people were filled with infinite bliss. Many thousands of devotees began to arrive in Dvaraka to have a darshan of this Jivanmukta Svami. They derived the superb bliss of Samadhi in his presence and they joined what is called the “Jivanmukta Panth” (group).

This news reached Svami Muktananda also. He could not believe that without the practice of the Astangayoga consisting of Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dhyana and Dharana, Samadhi could become possible. He thought that Sahajananda was adopting tricks for cheap popularity and hoodwinking the gullible masses. So he rushed from Kutch to Meghpur where Sahajananda
was camping. He admonished him and asked him not to be an imposter in Satsang since the state of Samadhi was difficult to achieve even for an accomplished Yogen of long standing. Sahajananda smiled and replied that all the Sadhus and Satsangins they there were worshipping Svami Ramananda alone. But still Muktananda did not believe in his words. Then Sahajananda actually demonstrated his capacity to introduce Samadhi in Santadas, one of the disciples of Ramananda himself, by withdrawing his vital breaths into his heart. The number of devotees who used to flock around Sahajananda to have a taste of the Samadhi steadily grew. Sahajananda obliged them all by enabling them to see their own chosen deities (istadevatas) through Samadhi. They had the darshan of Rama, Krsna, Siva, Visnu, Dattatreya, Ganesa and other gods and goddesses according to their own mode of worship. The Jains had a darshan of Tirthankaras and Mahavira. The Muslims had a glimpse of their prophets. As they experienced this state, they all became motionless. But when Sahajananda intended, they all woke up. Ultimately, after much vacillation and doubt, Svami Muktananda developed immense faith in the powers of Sahajananda. He prostrated before him. Sahajananda then told him that only by the Grace of Lord Krsna such a state of Samadhi becomes possible. Out of infinite grace he then initiated Muktananda also into the Samadhi. Muktananda was filled with immense bliss.

The term Samadhi became a household name those days. Sahajananda became a celebrity and he had a very large following of people young and old, holy and lay men. He became an instant success as a social reformer. He believed that a society immersed in illiteracy, poverty and superstition could not be reformed unless every one is won over by love, brought together and taught truths about one’s own nature, the righteous mode of living and the ultimate goal of life. He alone successfully carried out all these reforms and improved the lot of the Kaths, the looters, the plunderers and the dacoits. He taught them religion and philosophy and made them live a life of devotion. His influence was felt even by the Christian leaders of those days. Bishop Heber wrote: “The system of Svami Sahajananda is a strange mixture
of theism and Hinduism and of a sound and discreet morality. While Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s name is about being forgotten, Sahajananda’s will wax brighter by that waning influence.\textsuperscript{79}

Dr. K. M. Munshi described Svami Sahajananda as a great conciliator between the conflicts of casteism and Dharma. He removed the irregularities from society and propagated the true precepts of knowledge and morality. He stopped adultery and suffering, which were both rampant in those days. Through his efforts, the demoralised classes of Gujarat were uplifted. Being a Brahmin, a versatile Pandit, a staunch Vaisnava and an ideal Samnyasin, this Sadhu-cum-reformer added a great enlightenment to the culture of Gujarat by his life and living. A representative of the lost religious era was reappearing on the threshold of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{80}

Svami Sahajananda one day heard from an assembly of five hundred monks of his fold that the ignorant and hardhearted people around committed several atrocities against them and that they had been patiently bearing with them all. He felt sad for them and advised them to practise forbearance with greater force so that the evil-mongers around will become frustrated and would ultimately give up torturing them. He asked them to discard their sacred thread, the tuft on their head, the necklace of basil seeds and the worship of idols which, because of their external appearance, irritate the ignorant and the mischevious. Instead they should practise introverted meditation which is real worship. He conferred upon them what is called “Paramahamsa Diksa” and set them free from the obligation of performing rituals and ceremonies. As a result, all the monks attained the-highest status of Paramahamsas. He ordained upon them the performance of five vratas viz., freedom from egoism, passions, covetousness, taste and affection. He decided to bestow upon them the highest bliss enjoyed by Brahman, i.e., the Aksara. The most important ones who were converted as Paramahamsas by Svami

\textsuperscript{79} See Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, pp. 79-80
\textsuperscript{80} Quoted in Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, p. 80.
Sahajananda are Nityananda Svami, Gopalananda Svami, Gunatitananda Svami and Satananda Muni. Of these, Svami Nityananda wrote in Sanskrit the Haridigvijaya on the life and philosophy of Svami Narayana, Commentary on the Veda Stuti and a Commentary on the Bhakti Sutras of Sandilya. Gopalananda Svami wrote a commentary Bhaktamanoranjani on the Bhagavata, commentaries on the Upanisads, the Gita, Brahmasutras and on the Veda Stuti, all in Sanskrit. Satananda Muni wrote a commentary Anvaya Dipika on the Siksapattri, a work called the Narayanacaritam, the Harivakyasudhasindhu (a Sanskrit rendering of the Vacanamrta uttered by Svaminarayana) and the Uddhava Siddhanta, among others. Of all these Paramahamsas the one who was very dear to the Master was Svami Gunatitananda.

Gunatitananda Svami is considered to have been the incarnation of Aksara Brahman, the highest abode of the Supreme Lord. He was born at Bhadra near Jamnagar. His original name was Mulji Sharma. He was from his younger days, yearning for renunciation. He used to tell his mother that Parabrahman came to the earth in a human garb and that he would be visiting that place in a few years. He was a precocious genius. Mulji had his first meeting with Svami Sahajananda in the Asrama of Svami Ramananda. Svami Sahajananda told Ramananda: “Mulji is the incarnation of the Aksara Brahman, my highest abode. He will in future, demonstrate through his speeches and discourses, my superlative greatness.” One day Svami Sahajananda disclosed this truth in the presence of many. He gave Vaisnnavi Diksa to Mulji at a place called Dabhan and named him Gunatitananda Svami. Since then Gunatitananda Svami began to display superhuman wisdom and power. The relation between the disciple and his master may be compared to the one that subsists between Sri and Narayana which is described with great piety in the Srivaisnava Religion.

It may not be out of place to state in this context that in the expression “Svami Narayana” there are two names involved. “Svami” stands
for Gunatitananda, the Servant while “Narayana” stands for Svami Sahajananda the Master and Lord.

Svami Gunatitananda became the head of the Svaminarayana temple at Junagadh. He taught Brahmavidya to many. His discourses used to draw large crowds. He used to tell them that Svami Sahajananda was himself the Supreme Brahman, Purusottama. He also told them that his own manifestation was to declare the glory of the Lord and help the humanity in attaining His feet.

All the Paramahamsas mentioned before and many others such as Vyapakananda, Svarupananda, Swayamprakasananda, Anandananda and Krpananda, who were heads of various muths, temples or institutions, were attracted and charmed by the personality of Svami Sahajananda. They accepted him as their Master and were directly initiated by him into Brahmavidya. They came to him not just in ones or tens but in hundreds. They were completely enraptured with the knowledge, other-worldly behaviour, beatific personality and above all, with the tremendous love and concern he had for them. They later on inspired people by their personal lives and teachings which were in tune with the spirit of the scriptures and the intentions of their Master.

**SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE NAVYA VISISTADVAITA**

Although the Navya-Visistadvaita of Svami Sahajananda is based on Ramanuja’s Visistadvaita, it has some special features which make it unique and acceptable. While Ramanuja believed that souls and Prakrti form the body of the Lord, Svami Narayana declared that it is the souls and Aksara (Brahman) who constitute the body of the Lord. This brings us to the most significant contribution made by him in the annals of Indian Philosophy. The Gita (ch.XV) speaks of two Purusas called “ksara” and “aksara”. It speaks of another super category called Purusottama or Uttama Purusa. According to it, Ksara refers to all the beings (sarvani bhutani). Aksara is immovable and immutable (kutastha). According to Sri Sankara, Ksara means the
cosmos and Aksara, the chaos, the seed of the cosmos, i.e., Maya. For Ramanuja, Ksara and Aksara refer to the souls in bondage and souls liberated, respectively. Svami Narayana differs from Ramanuja and gives a totally new picture of Godhead. For him, Ksara is the individual souls and Aksara is what the Advaitins call Brahman. And the Purusottama is the highest being, higher than even Brahman. The souls and Brahman constitute the body of Purusottama or Paramatman. Aksara transcends both Prakrti and Purusa where Purusottama transcends even Aksara. Aksara has the Saguna and the Nirguna aspects while Purusottama has neither, and is beyond both these aspects. Still it is the source of these aspects. This Aksara is the abode of Purusottama and it can incarnate upon the earth in human form without of course leaving Its divine abode. It was Sri P.M.Modi who in his work entitled Akhsara; A forgotten Chapter in the History of Indian Philosophy highlighted the speciality of the concept of Aksara which has become the hallmark of Svami Narayana’s Philosophy. Sri Aurobindo is the other scholar who made the Trinity of Ksara, Aksara and Purusottama as the basis of his philosophy.

Purusottama is not Isvara as held in Ramanuja’s Philosophy. Though the word “God” is used indiscriminately to denote Purusottama, Brahman/Aksara as well as Isvara, all these terms are different in their connotation, says Svami Narayana. As can be seen, Isvara is far removed from Purusottama.

Svami Narayana has added one more distinction to his philosophy. He stresses repeatedly the fact that God has always a divine form and that those who believe that God has no form, commit the blasphemy which is a sin greater than the so-called “pancamahapatakas” (five great sins) mentioned in our Smrti-texts. Another innovation brought out by Svami Narayana is that Akasara Dhama is in a dual form: the form of the all-pervasive Caitanya (Consciousness) called Cidakasa which is formless and which is too subtle to be seen by the naked eye. The second form is that which is always present in the proximity of the Lord, serving Him.
As already explained, Svami Narayana has accepted five categories: Purusottama, Aksara-Brahman, Maya, Isvara and Jiva. and each one is distinctly different from the other. The pluralism and the distinction of different realities is more pronounced in Svami Narayana’s system, than in Ramanuja’s. For Ramanuja, Brahman is all-pervasive all the time, whether it be in the state of Pralaya or in the state of Creation. Even in spatial terms, He cannot be conceived as being away from Cit and Acit since He happens to be their soul. But in Svami Narayana, it is not so. Though the Lord is accepted as Vibhu (all-pervasive) here also, it is only in a technical sense. His proper place of residence is Aksara-Brahman where He is always present. It is only when He wishes, that He is present at other places through His wonderful powers. He says in his Vacanamrta:

“Lord Krsna is always present in His divine abode, Aksara Dhama. His simultaneous appearances before His devotees, His spiritual dialogues with them, His divine touch and all the divine actions. He performs while seated in His abode itself. One who attains siddhi can see things thousands of miles away and does hear, talk and act, equally being distant. Likewise, God can remain seated in His divine abode and appear simultaneously in a particular macrocosm out of millions of macrocosm. All this He can do because of His yogic accomplishments. So when God is called immanent, His immanence does not imply mere pervasion like that of space, but it implies His simultaneous appearance at various places being all the time, seated in His Aksaradhama.81

Another important deviation from Ramanuja is that God is not directly the material cause (upadana karana) of the Universe. Ramanuja believes that God is both the material cause as well as the efficient cause (nimitta karana). He has Cit and Acit as His body which becomes subtle during dissolution and becomes gross at the time of creation. When He wills creation, He would become the efficient cause also. For Svami Narayana, however, the Lord first induces Aksara

81 See Gadhada, Sec. 11.64
for creation and Aksara in turn induces Purusa for creation. Purusa inspires Prakrti and through their union the process of creation starts. It is therefore Purusa and Prakrti that form the material cause of the universe and not Parabrahman directly. Svami Narayana denies material casualty even to Aksara.

It is therefore evident that though Svami Narayana did follow Ramanuja and his system to a great extent, still he has differed from it at a number of points. He gave his own interpretation of Vedic and Bhagavata Dharma. The overall effect is that the system tends to become more pluralistic and more colourful, satisfying greatly the need of the religious aspirants than that of those who are merely intellectual and philosophical in outlook.

Svami Narayana was not merely an idealist but was also a great social reformer. He removed irregularities from society and propagated the true precepts of knowledge and morality. As a distinguished social reformer, he waged a holy war against the Vama Marge (leftist cults) which sanctioned the eating of meat, drinking of wine and indulging in sexual acts. His spiritual movement was not merely confined to the people of the higher castes or devotees but to all the backward castes and even the criminal tribes. He tried to eradicate the social evil of female infanticide and animal sacrifice. He created a strong public opinion against another social evil, sati. He carved out for himself a permanent niche in the hearts of all people, high and low, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, alike.

The following account would bring out another reform he brought out against sacrifices involving the killing of dumb animals. The so-called higher classes were exploiting the masses because of their ignorance. To satisfy their own cravings the Brahmans of those days misled people by advocating the performance of sacrifices which involved the killing of beasts. They gave the authority of the Vedas to sanctify their preaching. Svami Narayana found out that when the so-called custodians of Dharma stooped so low, society was bound
to break into pieces. He wanted to put an end to this practice of killing animals in the name of religion, and to teach people to perform ahimsa-maya yajnas or sattvic yajnas which did not involve any cruelty to mute creatures.

When Svami Sahajananda was in Bhuj, he came to know that one Jagjivanram, the Diwan of Kutch, an avowed Sakta was going to perform a sacrifice. His brother Kuberjit invited Svami Sahajananda to attend the event, to add glory to the sacrifice. When the Svami wanted to attend the function, some of his disciples told him that animals would be sacrificed in that yajna. They tried to dissuade him from going there. But the Svami made up his mind to go there. He told them that one should attend the sacrificial performances even if one is not formally invited⁴². Accordingly he took with him a good number of saints and devotees. At the sacrificial hall, he saw a large number of goats and other animals kept ready for killing. He told Kuberjit that wise Brahmins should not perform sacrifices involving the killing of animals. The scriptures do not sanction this act. Only rice, curds and ghee are the objects fit for oblation in sacrifices, he observed. A replica of animal made with the flour of rice (pista-pasu) could be substituted for the live animal, he suggested. But the arrogant Jagjivan retorted very vehemently and said he had no right to suggest an alternative to animal sacrifice. He said that he was not the only wise man of the land. There were many wise Brahmins who are the custodians of the Vedas who strongly advocate the killing of animals in a sacrifice. He also told the Svami that although an animal is killed in a sacrifice, it is not real himsa (injury) for the animal. The animal thus killed in a sacrifice would directly go to heaven and attain a celestial body, remarked Jagjivan. The Svami told him thus: “I have come here to witness this function. But when Dharma is being violated, I cannot remain a passive spectator. I gave you the correct picture of the so-called Yajnas. It is up to you to accept or reject my

⁴² Vide the saying, “anahutah adhvaram gacchat” (One should make it a point to attend a sacrifice, even uninvited).
advice.” Saying so, Svami Narayana quoted a number of texts from the Vedas and allied literature in support of his contention. But Jagjivan was in no mood to listen to him. At the height of his arrogance, he ordered the Svami to leave the place. The Svami, before leaving the place along with his band of devotees told Jagjivan and his brother Kuberjit that the time had come to give up such senseless acts of sacrifices. If they did not mend their methods, the Law of Dharma would take its own course, he warned them.

The words of the Svami proved prophetic. Jagjivan and his brother found themselves in trouble on the third day itself. The King of Kutch summoned them both and reprimanded them for insulting Svami Sahajananda who was adored by thousands as an incarnation of Lord Narayana Himself. But the arrogant brothers disregarded the words of the king and protested. The enraged King then ordered that they be executed. They thus met with their fate for disregarding the Law of Dharma.

Ahimsa is the greatest Dharma, explained the Svami to the devotees who thronged his sacrifices. The words Yajna or Yaga are derived from the root “yaj” which means “worshipping gods” (yaj devapujayam, according to the Grammarians). Gods will not be happy if animals are killed as a form of worshipping them. The concept of Ahimsa takes under its shade several other virtues such as mercy, forgiveness, charity, truthfulness and penance. By not being cruel to any living being, one becomes a living god on earth. The truth behind the concept of Ahimsa is that one should not interfere with the law of karma which has to work in the case of each and every living being. Each creature, big or small, is born in this karma - bhumi to work out its own salvation, by exhausting its own past karma, good or bad, by experiencing it. None has the right to interfere with this. To give validity to his advice to sacrifice-minded people, he started performing Yajnas which involved no cruelty to any living being. His Ahimsa yajnas were called Visnu yagas where “aja” i.e., “rice”
was offered in the fire but not a “goat”, which latter meaning was
given to the word by deceitful priests.\

Svāmi Narayana also quoted
the following passage from the Yāsmṛti in support of his contention.

"Ahimsanirato nityam juhvanō jatavedasam
svadaranirato data sarvo Brahmana ucyate” (11.78)

(He who is committed to non-injury to animals and accordingly
performs fire-sacrifices, he who is loyal to his wife and charitable by
disposition, is known as a Brahmana.) This came as an eye-opener to
many who were till then, thinking that sacrifices must necessarily
involve the killing of animals like goats and horses.

But it was not easy to extirpate this erroneous concept from the minds
of people which took deep roots, due to age-old superstition and
ignorance. Some priests who were till then making a roaring business,
found the Svāmi a real threat to their power, prestige and profession.
One Vithoba, the Suba (a high officer of the status of a Mayor) of the
Peshwas residing at Ahmedabad was provoked and instigated to
capture Svāmi Sahajananda, alive or dead. It so happened that the
Suba’s father died suddenly. His death was attributed to the Ahimsa-
yajnas performed by Svāmi Sahajananda which provoked the anger
of Goddess Kali. She gushed the Suba’s father since she was not
offered any animal in the sacrifice performed by the Svāmi. The Suba
also thought that unless Sahajananda was finished off, the wrath of
Mother Goddess would take a toll of his own life. The Suba conceived
to kill Sahajananda Svāmi and invited him to his palace. He arranged
a seat for him over a deep tank which was filled with oil. The hall
was magnificently decorated and the gadi for the Svāmi was tastefully
bedecked, giving the impression that the Suba had great reverence
for him. As the Svāmi came there, the Suba received him with all
ostentation. He stopped the followers of the Svāmi at a particular
point and asked him to proceed and take his seat. In spite of resistance,

83 Some of the connotations of the word Aja are: the Unborn (an epithet of the Almighty); name of Visnu; name of Siva; name of Brahma; the individual soul (jiva); a ram or he-goat; the sign Aries (Masa) of the Zodiac; a sort of grain or corn; name of Moon; name of the God of Love.
however, a disciple of the Svami, Devananda by name, proceeded along with his master since he sensed some danger to the life of his Guru. Unruffled, the Svami received the welcome of the Suba. The Suba then 'reverentially' asked him to occupy his seat. The Svami told him smilingly that such a gaudy seat was not befitting his stature as a Samnyasin. Only a King or his Suba should occupy it. The Suba who was taken aback, still insisted that he should take the seat specially prepared for him with due respect and love. The Svami who was omniscient, knew the evil designs of the Suba and with his staff pushed that seat away. It moved and fell into the concealed tank of oil. The evil plan of the Suba came to light in the presence of all the people. Devananda was about to curse the Suba for misdeed but the compassionate Svami calmed him down. Totally perplexed, outwitted and enraged, the Suba ordered the Svami and his followers to leave Ahmedabad and stay in the outskirts of the city, not to enter it again. The smiling Svami said he would obey his orders. But he asked him the period of time during which he should not enter the city. “So long as the Peshwas rule this city” was the curt reply given by the Suba. The Svami left the city at once as the Suba watched with pride and pleasure. Within a year, the Peshwas were defeated by the British and the prohibitory order automatically became null and void. The glory of Svami Sahajananda became widespread. Even the British rulers developed great reverence to him for the miracles he accomplished with the help of his rosary. He preached Sanatana Dharma to the people with love and compassion. He converted bandits into law-abiding citizens and changed looters into devotees. Even with the help of a modern army, the British felt themselves unequal to the task of subduing the violent and cruel Kathis of Saurashtra. But Svami Sahajananda did this single-handed. There is no exaggeration in saying that the history of Gujarat and Saurashtra during this period was rewritten by Svami Sahajananda and his dedicated band of devotees. Because of his dedication and personal charisma radiating divinity, he succeeded in weeding out all social evils from the soil of Gujarat and the nearby places.
FIGHT AGAINST SUPERSTITION AND LEFTIST CULTS

Reference has already been made to the way in which Svami Narayana waged a relentless war against social evils of which superstition is one. The Saktas for instance could not bear with the tremendous popularity of the young samnyasin who mesmerized people as it were and became a legend in his own lifetime. They felt that the Bhagavata movement spearheaded by the Svami was ringing a death knell to their cultic activities. One such Sakta, Pibek by name, was a very crude and cruel person who killed several innocent men and animals to propitiate Goddess Kali. He believed that life was meant only for fulfilling carnal desires. One day he came to the place where Nilakantha (the pre-Diksa name of Sahajananda) was doing his worship. He wanted to give Nilakantha as an offering to Goddess Kali. He was dressed in the most abominable way. Heavily drunk and wearing garlands of human skulls and bones he carried a trident and proceeded menacingly towards the young ascetic. Nilakantha was unruffled. Pibek tried to show his mantric power by doing certain dreadful things such as making a tree shed its foliage by throwing a few grains at it. The Sakta tried his best by displaying all his cheap powers to demoralise Nilakantha, but in vain. He invoked petty gods and goddesses, demons and demonesses to harm the young monk. This also proved futile. Ultimately he realised that the power of the young ascetic was spiritual and that he was far more superior to himself. He ultimately surrendered to the young Samnyasin and on his advice, gave up his abominable cultic practices. He turned a new leaf in his life by embracing the Bhagavata Dharma preached by Nilakantha. He was given the Vaisnava Diksa and taken as a disciple by the young monk.

Some of the disgruntled Saktas were still at the Svami. They wanted to wreak their vengeance against him for the enormous harm he was doing to their cultic activities. Some of the followers of Pibek could not digest the fact that their leader had become crestfallen before the Svami. They incited other twice-borns of the Kaula and Sakta cults.
to stem the popularity of the young Vaisnava. Thus came another
callenge to the Svami in the form of one Mugneeram who embraced
Saktism. He came to Gujarat from Bengal. He was also like Pibek,
an awful person given to all kinds of vices. He collected huge sums
from small feudal chiefs and other rich people as a gesture of goodwill
towards him. They paid the amounts he demanded of them, for the
sheer fear of his tantric spell. His name reigned terror in the hearts of
all the people. He came to the assembly where Sahajananda was
addressing his disciples and demanded money at dagger-point, as a
token of recognising his superior spiritual prowess.

Svami Sahajananda with his usual calm, met the challenge of
Mugneeram. He told him point blank: “Your goddesses and your spells
can do no harm to me. Those who devour, cannot be great. Only those
who deliver are really great. Your mantras will recoil upon you like
the roars of lions before mountains”. Mugneeram could not advance
against the spiritual lustre of the young monk. Unable to do anything,
he left the place warning the Svami to keep the money ready and that
he would come and collect it the next day. This was something which
Mugneeram’s own followers did not anticipate. The demons and
goblins invoked by Mugneeram that night in his Asrama, refused to
proceed against the Svami. Goddess Kali Herself appeared before
him and said that Sahajananda was not an ordinary saint. He was the
Supreme Lord Narayana Himself incarnated on earth to spread the
Bhagavata Dharma and redeem the virtuous souls. This opened the
eye of the wisdom in Mugneeram. He recognised Svami Sahajananda
as Visnu and surrendered before him. At the behest of the Svami he
gave up his Sakta practices and became a humble servant of the new
found Master. Sahajananda initiated him into the Bhagavata Dharma
and gave him a new name, Advaitananda.

Likewise, he put down the arrogance of another Vama Margin,
Lolangar by name. He was the head of some nomadic Sadhus who
always carried lethal weapons. He was ”a giant of man with enormous
physical strength. The number of people thus converted by him was
quite large and this is a standing testimony to the kind of silent
revolution he was bringing about in the minds of people, who due to some bad influences took to evil ways in the beginning of their lives. They ultimately found a proper Guru and saw the path of redemption and rejuvenation. Thus Svami Sahajananda proved that molecules can be converted into mountains and that rosary is more powerful than the sword, dagger or any weapon for that matter.⁸⁴

Another instance of how imperceptible and impregnable is the reformative power of Svami Narayana can be cited. Like all great leaders of the masses, he spoke to people in their mother-tongue. Those who came to him with implicit faith and a yearning for liberation received from him Buddhiyoga, a spiritual bent of mind. They gave up their polytheistic beliefs and worships. They shed all fear and vices and led a simple and pious life. Slowly the impact of Svami’s teachings was felt by every body in society. Hardcore criminals became converted to the path of virtue. One Joban Pagi of Vadtal was a dacoit who reigned terror in the heart of every one. He came to know about Svami Sahajananda’s having a fine horse named Manaki and he developed a craving for that horse. He decided to steal it. Once he came to Dabhan, where Sahajananda was performing an Ahimsamaya Yajna. At midnight Pagi went to the place where the Svami’s horse and the horses of other feudal chiefs were tied to various trees. As the watchmen slept, the dacoits stealthily moved under the cover of darkness to locate Manaki, the horse of the Svami. But to his consternation and fright, he found Sahajananda near every horse, patting the horse of cleaning it or nourising it with fodder. Pagi had to leave disappointed. The next night also he saw the same phenomenon. The third night also he saw Svami Sahajananda tending each and every horse separately. The dacoit then decided to steal the horse in broad daylight. By this time, his accomplices told him that Sahajananda should not be taken lightly and that there was something divine about him. Pagi refused to believe them and told them that he would believe in the greatness if the Svami called him by name in the assembly which he planned to attend the next day.

⁸⁴ See Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, p.100 ff.
Next day, Pagi attended the congregation of the Svami where several devotees gathered. On seeing Pagin from a distance he called him by name and asked him if he could take away the horse Manaki. This changed the evil propensities of Pagin who immediately fell at his feet and sought forgiveness. The Svami showered blessings on him and gave him a rosary. He became a devout disciple of the Svami and this came as a big relief to all the rulers of the states which were reeling under fear of Pagin. The ruler of Baroda State arranged to pay a pension to him for life also. Pagin laid all his possessions in Vadtal at the disposition of the Svami. If Vadtal has now become the main centre of the activities of the Svami Narayana tradition, it was because of Pagin’s dedication to the Lord and His suzerainty. Later on the Svami erected a huge temple at Vadtal.

The Svami Narayana Movement gained momentum. People were able to practically see how their own lives changed from worse to bad and bad to good. The band of monks under the leadership of the Sami began to move in groups through every village, town and city including the most inaccessible parts of the States at the command of the Lord, preached the need to live a life of devotion and dedication, a life of virtue and love, a life without hedonistic pleasures, and a life of singing and dancing in ecstasy, chanting the names of Svami Narayana. People were simply charmed when they took the name of the Svami and were transported to a world of inexplicable bliss.

Svami Narayana’s social reform has another important dimension: he put an end to the cruel and barbarous custom of killing baby girls as soon they were born. It was a custom among the Kathis that if a female child was born, she was immediately drowned in a pot of milk and suffocated to death. This was mainly due to their fear of spending enormous amounts on dowries should the girl grow up and get married. Since they could not afford the luxury of conducting a marriage for the girls, they adopted such a cruel way of disposing off the infant girls. Sahajananda told them that they were committing horrible sin. He told them in so many words that if they did not heed to his advice
and went on with their diabolical custom, then the law of the land would soon tighten the noose around their neck. He warned them that the rulers from the West would soon enact strict laws to stop infant killing throughout the land. The sincere and tireless efforts of the Svami ultimately bore fruit and the Kathis gave up this horrible habit. The Svami had to deal most of the time with ruffians, goondas, dacoits, hard-core criminals and barbarous people who would not hesitate to kill the other person at the slightest provocation and sometimes, without any provocation. Sura, Mamaiya, Allaiya, Matra, Rathod, Dhadhal, Vasta, Jeeva and various other Kathi warriors were converted by the Svami to the path of Bhagavata Dharma through love and gentle persuasion. Now his devotees began to consolidate the Svami's Bhagavata Dharma by becoming themselves his able representatives. This is the most important part of the Svami's social reform: reforming the mind of the people.

Change in the heart and thinking of the people are more powerful and abiding than mere outward change. Aldous Huxley, in his work *The Perennial Philosophy*, observes: "The complete transformation of consciousness, which is 'enlightenment', 'deliverance', 'salvation', comes only when God is thought of as a Perennial Philosophy, only when God is thought of as both immanent and transcendent, suprapersonal as well as personal, and when all religious observances are adopted to this conception."*85 Therefore in the views of his devotees, Sahajananda was God personal and suprapersonal, immanent and transcendent. He revived Vaisnavism from great disrepute caused by a few cults of the period. He tried to establish Bhagavata Dharma by infusing Dharma with Bhakti {motiveless love for God). For him Dharma was the consummation of Ahimsa and Brahmacarya. Sir Monier Williams described the new movement of Sahajananda Svami in glowing terms thus: "This sect is worthy of notice, because it affords a good example of the best aspect of modern Vaisnavism and because the efforts of its founder to deliver the

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*85 The Perennial Philosophy, p. 108.*
system... from the corrupting influences of the profligate Maharajas are worthy of praise." 86

The Svami attracted many notorious robbers and converted them into the Bhagavata way of life. He even made his abode in the home of one of them, a small feudatory chief called Dada Khachar of Gadhada. The Chief and his two sisters called Jiva Bai and Ladu Bai were so devoted to him that he, who would not be bound by any earthly relations, made himself a willing captive of their faith and devotion and became almost a member of their family. These two sisters were married but because of their deep religious bent of mind, they left their homes and stayed with their father, Abhel Khachar. It was sometime after this had happened that the family came to know Svami Sahajananda and they all became his devoted disciples.87 For over two decades the Master stayed with this devout family. Since the Svami was thronged all the time by hundreds of visitors, the expenses of the family mounted astronomically but the family bore it all with cheerfulness. It may be noted in this context that the two sisters Jivu Bai and Ladu Bai were amongst the foremost women teachers in the Satsang (Congregations of the Holy Order).

The Lord Svami Narayana did not (merely) confine his activities to "the rigid establishment of Hindu worship in its virgin integrity and purity. He also directed his spiritual movement against the irregularities of the age and to the recovery of thousands of those unfortunate souls to be found throughout Gujarat whose means of subsistence hitherto were equally lawless and precarious". 88 He turned vast hordes who have thus been reclaimed to honest and industrious pursuits. Every Englishman who visited Gujarat during the days of the Master acknowledged this great social reformation and spiritual rejuvenation brought by him in the dark and fearsome lives of the hard core criminals and lawless people. The members of these martial

86 *Religious Thoughts and Life in India*, p.78
87 This has a parallel in the Biblical story of Jesus Christ who had great affection for Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary.
88 See *Shri Swaminarayan* by Manilal C. Parekh, p.92
and criminal tribes gave up meat and drink. They gave up opium and tobacco to both of which they were addicts. One day there came to the Master, the chief of Kambhala called Mulu Khachar as he was staying at Gadhada. The master asked him to become a Satsangin, by giving up both opium and smoking. Mulu Khachar said it was impossible for him to give them up. The Master said that he was free to do this provided he observed the five major Vratas.\textsuperscript{89} The chief consented and became a disciple. Once the master took him along with him to Varta to participate in a congregation. On seeing the company of the Lord, the passersby began to remark: “All these men who come riding along, are Svami Narayanis (followers of Svami Narayana), excepting the one who is carrying a hookah (hubble-bubble) with him”. This criticism fell on the ears of Mulu Khachar repeatedly wherever he went. This made him angry and in a fit of ire, he broke the hookah and threw it on the way. Once they reached Vartal, all the local devotees who came for the convention began to embrace the visitors with affection and greet each other. But none would go to Mulu Khachar because they saw him taking opium. This was enough to make him shed that habit also. Later the Master asked him why he gave up his habit of opium and smoking. Mulu Khachar replied that he gave up smoking “because of the criticism of the non-believers, and opium because of the criticism of the believers”.\textsuperscript{90}

Another important feature of Svami Narayana’s work was the admission of the Muslims into the Satsang. This was not something unusual because such movements as those of Ramananda in the North and Caitanya in Bengal always encouraged such acts. But it was something unknown to the history of Vaisnavism in Gujarat. Svami Narayana did not hesitate to take Muslims as his disciples almost from the beginning of his career. In course of time, some scores of families belonging especially to the Khoja community of Muslims joined the Fellowship and some of them remained faithful to it until now. This is a community which is on the borderline of Hinduism

\textsuperscript{89} For details, see below, pp. 102-106
\textsuperscript{90} Shri Swaminarayan, p.93

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and Islam and the peculiarity of its belief is that it looks upon the family of Aga Khan as divine. In regard to Hinduism their attitude is one of eclecticism and also fulfillment, for while believing in all the incarnations of the Hindus, they look upon the Aga Khan himself as the last and supreme incarnation of God. Another marked peculiarity of these people is that many of them are true to their name “Khoja”, which signifies “seekers”. It is no wonder that many of them “saw” and “recognized” the glory of Svami Narayana and accepted him as their Master. In addition, a few from the Muslims proper also became his disciples. The Fellowship of Svami Narayana thus opened its doors of salvation to all and sundry. In fact this was its chief and sole aim, and therefore, it embraced the Muslims also.

In addition to the social, moral and religious uplift of the disciples belonging to all castes and communities, the indirect influence of the Satsang on the general public was very great. The movement brought a wholesome change in the manners and morals of the people. Evil customs such as the singing of lewd songs and using filthy language during certain festivals such as the Holi were banned in the Fellowship and such events came to be celebrated in accordance with the lofty and puritanical spirit of the new religion. It was also a social custom in Gujarat that during marriages women used to sing songs which were full of jokes and which bordered on vulgarity. This practice was forbidden among the faithful ones. Reforms in this manner came about due to the influence of the Svami’s movement. Once Svami Narayana attended a marriage where such songs were being sung. He immediately left the place. The people repented and begged him to come back. It was from that very place that the master sent a circular letter to all his followers all over the Province forbidding them the use of such songs and asking them instead, to sing songs celebrating the marriage of Lord Srikrsna with Rukmini. He asked poets like Svami Muktananda and Premananda to compose religious songs that may be used on such occasions.91

91 See Shri Swaminarayana, pp.94,96.
The new movement also dealt a serious blow to the age-old superstitions that prevailed among the people. The Svami preached them a kind of religion which was thorough and militant in its nature against blind beliefs of all kinds. The members of the Satsang knew about the tremendous change the Svami brought in their lives. There are innumerable instances of people literally throwing away their gods and goddesses on their joining the Satsang. One or two incidents may be cited to illustrate this point.

Once the Master went to see his disciple who was ill. He noticed a thread tied to the bed of the man, like a charm for the removal of his disease. The Svami at once left that place. He did this to show that true discipleship was in compatible with such blind beliefs.

On another occasion, a disciple of the Lord was suffering from fever. When he was asleep, an ascetic was brought there by his family members who thought that some trick could remove his fever. When the patient woke up, his mother told him that she brought some ascetic doctor who remove his fever with some chants. The disciple then asked that doctor to return his fever back to him. He did not want the fever to leave on account of his magic. He said: “My Master is Svami Narayana and if it be His will, then the fever would go. Or else, let the fever be with me alone. Nobody else should do anything to interfere with my fever.”

The activities of the Svami were spiritual and his influence pervaded the entire sphere of human life. State of Gujarat were affected by the beneficent and benevolent atmosphere he created around. With the advent of Svami Narayana, the religious and social scenario changed for the better. He brought prestige and dignity to the ochre robes he wore and to the rosary he held.

**CODES OF CONDUCT FOR ONE AND ALL**

The fame of the Svami spread far and wide. His followers and devotees began to swell in number day by day. Five hundred Paramahamsas came under his direct influence and began to spread his gospel of

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*See Shri Swaminarayana, pp. 96-97*
love and ahimsa. His message of eight-fold celibacy went into their very vitals and they sang the glory of their master wherever they went.

His prescription of five vows for sainthood was strictly followed by them. These vows are: Nissvada (Control of the Palate), Nirmana (Humility), Nirlobha (Non-covetousness), Nissneha (Non-attachment) and Niskama (Absence of carnal desires). Since these are very vital to the institution of saints, it is worthwhile to describe these vows in this connection.

(a) **Nissvada (Control of Palate):** Controlling one’s tongue or desire for taste can effectively put an end to all other baser instincts. Desire for food and delicious dishes breeds attachment to objects other than God. When the desire for food is not satisfied, it leads to restlessness and fight - both physical and verbal. Any inclination for fine food deviates one’s thoughts from the path of God.

In a village called Tera, once Svami Narayana asked his Paramahamsa-disciples to gather food from three upper classes of society and then put it in a piece of cloth and dip it in water. Then food became tasteless. He then asked them to give it to the dogs. Even the dogs would refuse to take such a tasteless food. Then the Paramahamsas should take such a food. Svami Narayana would himself go for alms, collect the food, make it tasteless in the process mentioned before and then would ask the monks to take it. He too would partake of such a food.

(b) **Nirmana (Humility):** Absence of ego makes one’s life free from strife. Once Svami Narayana (in his Purvasrama as Nilakantha) went to a Dharmasala (inn.) He sat for lunch in a particular place. As he was about to take it, a hefty monk came there and shouted at him: “This is my place”. The young Nilakantha immediately got up and sat down in another place. Then another monk came and claimed that seat to be his. Nilakantha vacated that place and went to some other place. The same thing happened there also. This incident took place
for eighteen times. Each time Nilakantha got up patiently and kept changing his place, without a word of protest.

On another occasion, when Svami Narayana went to the town of Anand along with his retinue of saints and devotees, another unpleasant incident took place. He warned his disciples not be upset by what might befall them. They should not show their anger in any way and they should not react to exhibit their displeasure or anger. They should be above the feelings of anger and hatred. He subjected them to a kind of practical test as it were by taking them to Anand. Some local devotees received the master and the brother monks by offering them all honour. Soon there gathered a huge mob who shouted "go back" and began to rain stones and hurl abuses on them. They chased the Master and his group of followers to the outskirts of the town. The devoted band of followers of the master wanted to retaliate but he silenced them. Then he settled down to take rest. In training his disciples, the master underwent even personal risks several times.

(c) Nirlotha (absence of covetousness): Greed (lobha) is one of the main cause of many a misery making human life unhappy. The life of Svami Narayana is full of illustrations which reflect his total freedom from the quality of Lobha. Once a devotee from the port of Diva brought superfine clothes for the Master and offered him those clothes. On his request and prayer he wore them and immediately thereafter, donated them to a Brahmin called Dinanath Bhatta. The Darbars (the locals of Kathiawad) were very good with horses. Once they gave him a horse and the Svami rode it. A poor man was looking intently at the horse on which the Svami sat. He was desirous of getting the horse from the Master as a gift so that he could sell it and perform his daughter's marriage with the money thus obtained. The omniscient Svami got down the horse immediately, walked up to that Brahmin and gave the horse to him as a gift!

(d) Nissneha (Non-attachment) The life of the Svami was itself a standing testimony to this great quality of non-attachment. Though he was apparently involved in the personal life of his devotees, he
was full of the quality of detachment. He, as Nilakantha toured the four corners of India for seven years, with total disregard towards bodily comforts. In the scorching heat of summer and the biting cold of winter, he travelled in rugged territories and dense jungles occupied by wild beasts and beast-like nomadic tribes. He was absolutely free from attachment to any of his family members, monks or students.

(e) Niskama (Control of carnal desires): Svami Narayana laid great stress on celibacy since it forms the foundation on which the mansion of spirituality is built. Reference has already been made to a drastic step taken by Nilakantha while he was in the Asrama of Svami Ramananda. He arranged to plug a whole in the wall but an inlet of lust in the saintly order. He also instructed that women should not mingle with the monks of the Asrama even during religious congregations. A temple or an Asrama is the place for offering devotion or worship and for acquiring spiritual knowledge. To prevent it from becoming a market for marriage arrangements or a playground for men and women for exchanging their material and carnal views, Svami Narayana separated women from men. Naturally some of the so-called monks lodged their protest against this reformatory step of the Svami. Some elderly women devotees like Harbai and Valbai who claimed to have reached the pinnacle of spirituality refused to obey his command. They abused the young Nilakantha that he was drawing a distinction between the men and women-devotees and was committing a grave blasphemy towards God who created all alike.

But the Svami was unperturbed in his attitude. As a matter of fact, he had great respect for women and what he did actually elevated the status of women. He encouraged them for education and spiritual striving. They were encouraged to conduct spiritual discourses amongst themselves. He laid down separate codes of conduct for the celibacy of saints and for the “celibacy” of his householder devotees. That is to say, he encouraged the householder-devotees to observe

\[ See \ pp. \ 72-73 \ above]
monogamy and to be faithful to one’s mate. This vouchsafed respect in the family life and the social life of the people. Armoured by these Vratas the devotees of Svami Narayana freely wandered over the land and spread his message of Dharma.

THE SVAMI AS A CRUSAIDER AGAINST CASTEISM

Another revolution brought in by the Svami was the non-observance of class-distinctions. This may be illustrated by one incident in the life of the great master: Once a grand feast was arranged in the village of Pancala. Food was being given lavishly to each and every one. The Svami asked: “Is there any one left out?” The kitchen staff replied: “None”. The Svami saw a group of people sitting on the bank of a river nearby. “Who are they?” the Svami asked. “They are Vaghris” replied the cooks. “Have you fed them?” asked the Master. They replied: “Maharaja! They eat the flesh of animals. Why should we feed these sinners?” Thereupon the Svami said: “All are equal in the eyes of God. The sun shines for all. His effulgence is for the good and the bad. The rains come down from the heavens for the good and the bad, for the devout and the sinners. The flowing river does not complain or disallow a sinner from drinking its water. Nature’s bounty is open to all. Why should I discriminate between the sinner and the pious, between those belonging to the upper classes and the so-called lower classes? I have come to offer salvation to one and all. Come on. Let us feed them all.” So saying, the Svami called the Vaghris by the name “Maharajas” and served them food personally with love and affection.

On another occasion, there was a great congregation at a place called Loya (Kathiawad). A dheda (untouchable) lady called Gangabai came there with great difficulty, travelling for many days, to have the darsham of the Svami. She sat in an area reserved for women. Seeing her, many ladies who came there earlier began to grumble. There was great commotion and soon it attracted the attention of the Svami. He understood the reason behind it all. He then asked the wife of a person by name Sura Khachar: “Who disposes the dead animals from
your stables?” The lady replied: “Maharaja! The dheda does all the job of clearance.” The Svami said: “So whenever an animal dies in your house, you allow the dheda to enter your house or its precincts to removing the dead rotten animals. Then why do you grumble now? This lady Gangabai is sincerely aspiring for liberation. In her previous birth she was also Nagara Brahmin like you. But she insulted the downtrodden and treated them shabbily. As a result, she is now born as a dheda, to pay for her persecutions. If you are adopting the same attitude towards the dhedas now, you too will pay for it in your next birth. Do not be proud of the community into which you are born.”

These words came as an eye-opener not only to that lady but many others who thought very high of themselves in the social hierarchy just by virtue of their birth. Several were the instances through which the Svami told the common uneducated people as well as those well-versed in scriptures what the real meaning of acara was as laid down in scriptures. He told them that the Vedas do not make one holy if his personal conduct was not good, even if one might be good in chanting the Vedas and memorizing them.4 One’s love and respect for the entire creation of God alone qualify one to be loved by God. The Svami brought the inner meaning of the scriptures to the reach of the common man through telling instances.

The Svami was a great lover of music and other fine arts. Till then Indian music was interned in the posh palaces of kings and feudal lords for their own pleasure and enjoyment. But the Svami gave it a devotional fervour. He with a musical tone began to sing the praise of God and all the Paramahamsas began to spread his gospel to the common masses through soul-stirring songs. Thus Music became a sacred vehicle to take spirituality to the doors of the common masses.

Once congregation was going on one evening. The Svami posed a question to all the devotees gathered there: “Why do you believe that I am God supreme? I have not performed any miracles to deserve

4 Cf. “acarāhinam na punanti Vedah”
such an encomium. I did not kill Ravana or Kamsa or Sisupala. Tell me. Why do you make me a man, a God?"

The saints and devotees who had a personal knowledge of the divinity in him said: "Your most exalted Holiness! You might not have performed such feats or miracles. But still you have vanquished far greater forces lurking in the minds of men. You have successfully defeated the enemies of our souls and restored them to their rightful place of purity and piety. This is more than what an Avatara can accomplish". There was a beautiful smile on the lips of the Svami as he heard these words.

It has to be pointed out in this context that many of those who had an intimate knowledge of the Svami were fully aware of his Supremacy. A few instances may be cited: A person called Abheram saw the Svami and on going home he told his mother that he believed him to be the incarnation of God. He told her this several times. Ultimately, she retorted: "Look, my dear son! May be, Svami Narayana is no God at all! Or else, how could you leave him and come home?" One day that person happened to come to Vadtal to see the Master. He brought his mother also along with him. She was fully convinced then that the Svami was God incarnate. After returning to her house, she developed fever and it took a serious turn. Then she asked her son to request the Svami to come to her house so that she could see Him once again. The son went to the Master and prayed that he come to his house to see his ailing mother. The Master obliged. After he left the house, the old lady passed away with a smile on her lips.

On another occasion, the Svami was in Bhuj when some believers came from the villages around to have His darshan. They stayed there for a few days and at the time of leaving for their respective places they came to the Master and said: "Maharaj! Have pity upon us!" To this the Svami said: "You too have mercy upon us!" Those people left and began to talk among themselves as to what could be the meaning of the words uttered by the Svami. Some of them came back and asked him the import of his words. With a smile on his lips, the
Svami explained: “This body is five feet and a half in height and within it is the heart in a very small space. It is there that I live. Please keep it pure and clean. If you choke it up with the desires of flesh or the world, I shall not be able to stay there. This is the mercy I pray for.”

One Narasimhananda Svami took a vow before he came to the Svami to offer worship to Lord Krsna in some temple in Oudh for a period of twelve years. While he was there, an ascetic who had been to Dvaraka on pilgrimage came there and said: “In the West there is a Jivanmukta who established a new Way of Life. He is called “God” by the people. He is putting people in a kind of trance and thus misleading them.” The man was thus finding fault with the Satsang being conducted by Svami Narayana. There was a light in the temple though it was night. That light remained as long as that ascetic talked. Narasimhananda saw that rare glow at the dead of night and thought to himself: “If such is the glory of His name, I am sure God Almighty has manifested Himself on earth afresh. If I do not take refuge with Him right now, my whole life would have been wasted.” Then Narasimhananda left that place which was more than a thousand miles away from Dvaraka. He ultimately reached Dvaraka and made inquiries about the whereabouts of the Jivanmukta he heard about. Some one said that there was a prophet called Khaiya in Mandvi. He was a Vedantin of Sri Sankara’s school and attained some reputation in those parts as a teacher. Narasimhananda went to him and asked: “Sir! Why did you renounce the world?” He replied that he wanted to see God and hence renounced the world. Narasimhananda asked him if he could show him God. The Sadhu then said:” If you want to see the One Immanent Formless Impersonal God, then I can show him. But if you want to see God Incarnate, then you may go to him who is at Gangaram’s house in Bhuj.” Narasimhananda said that he was not interested in the Immanent Impersonal God. He wanted to see God incarnate. So saying, he came to the house of one Gangaram where the Svami was staying. As he was going up the staircase he

* See Shri Swaminarayana, pp. 118-119

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saw the Maharaja and was thrown immediately into a trance. Seeing this, the Svami at once cried out: "Hold him! Hold him lest he fall!" He was taken hold of by the assembled devotess and thus saved from falling down. When he came to himself, he could experience the supernatural glory of the Svami. He immediately became a Sadhu under His governance.

THE SVAMI AND THE MIRACLES

A number of supernatural phenomena or miracles are also related in the life history of Svami Narayana. In the Satsang they are taken for granted and they testify to the supernatural character of the person. The entire atmosphere of this Movement is saturated with supernaturalism of a very high order. It has to be pointed out that miracles are only of a secondary role. The Hindus as a people have always believed in miracles but they do not attach much importance to them. It is interesting to note that Svami Narayana was called Jivanmukta by his devotees whereas those who were ill-disposed towards him used to call him jadugara i.e., magician. In any case it is clear that people found something extraordinary about him. Several are the instances pointing to his power of exorcising evil spirits. On several occasions, the Master supplied ghee and other things for sacrifices by materialising them. In one of the sacrifices at Dabhan, ghee was not enough and what was sent for did not come in time. Knowing this, some people who were highly critical and inimical to the Svami wanted to spoil the sacrifice by saying that ghee was in short supply. Only two small bottles of ghee was available, the pundits said. The Svami went to the store room and from those two small bottles, began to supply large quantities of ghee. The evil mongers were thus snubbed by the Lord through such miracles. The sacrifice went on unhindered.

There was a terrible famine in the year 1812 A.D. Svami Narayana warned people against it well in advance. He advised them to sell their cattle and buy grain and store it to last one full year. In the case of many others who did not have anything at all to eat, the Svami
performed miracles and supplied food to eat and water to drink for several hundreds of starving men and women. He also brought rain in particular places which were hit by a severe drought. He once turned sea-water into fresh water to slake the thirst of a disciple. When somebody asked him how he could do it, he replied that there was no miracle in it because even in the sea-water, there was some current of fresh water in that particular spot. Sometimes he saved his disciples from real death at the hands of robbers, from fire or from shipwreck and the like. Several of his disciples saw the Svami and this party simultaneously at different places separated by hundreds of miles. Several are the episodes of the Master healing the blind. He is also said to have raised the dead. For instance one of the Satsangins, Pranavallabha, a native of Ahmedabad, died of apoplexy. The Svami took the soul to himself and asked him if he had any unfulfilled desires. The soul of Prananvallabha said that he could not tell his kith and kin that he would join the Master. The Master, out of compassion, allowed his soul to enter the dead body. The body which was about to be placed on the pyre, rose to the surprise and awe of one and all. He told the people that he came back from the mansion of the Svami just to tell them one truth: Death is going to swallow up every one. They would be saved only by the Master. He then asked them to sing the name of the Lord Svami Narayana. Clapping hands with them and singing in chorus, he left his body once again and joined the Master. When some people asked the Svami as to how he could revive a dead person, he coolly replied that he was not really dead. Once a person is dead, he is dead once and for all. Since life did not completely leave the body, Pranavallabha could rise once again. Once life parted, he died. Everything was therefore natural and there was nothing unnatural with the phenomenon, he used to say. This shows the kind of importance he gave to the so-called miracles. It is significant to note that miracles have no place in the work called Vacanamrta.  

As a matter of fact, the Svami himself and his followers considered life without sin to be the greatest of all miracles. This is the only

96 See p. 107 above
miracle worth performing and knowing. Miracles thus played a secondary part in the life of the Fellowship. The golden rules the Lord prescribed in his Siksapatri for all his devotees whether they be monks or householders, speak volumes about His sincere concern for their amelioration both socially and spiritually. One who cannot be a responsible and useful man in society cannot, according to the Svami, stake any claim for spiritual progress. Rules of Varna and of Asrama cannot change the inner core of a man if he has no regard for the welfare of the fellow-beings. Such people become hypocrites and they cannot even dream of being anywhere near to God. Even householders who get involved in mundane things of life have a fair chance of liberation provided they abide by the codes prescribed. It is significant that the Maharajas who occupied the pontificate, after the physical demise of the Svami such as Mula Aksara Svami Gunatitananda who immediately succeeded the Lord and the present Paramahamsa, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Svami Maharaja and his vast following of saints, adhered to, and still adhere to the injunctions laid down by the Siksapattri punctiliously and are trying to carry out the mission which was very dear to His heart, viz., the spread of Bhagavata Dharma through the length and breadth not only of our country but the entire world. This is indeed the only remedy for the threefold affliction -- the tapatraya which is now gripping the entire humanity. Manu the ancient Law-giver said that the sources of Dharma are first the Vedas, then the Smrti-texts, then the character of those who know the Vedas, then the code of conduct of the virtuous, and then the dictates of one’s own heart. 97 Certainly the codes of conduct laid down by Svami Narayana re-emphasized the ancient values of our scriptures and put the people on the right path.

In this context it is worthwhile to trace here the circumstances under which a copy of the Siksapatri was given by the Svami himself to Sir John Malcolm, the then Governor of the Bombay Presidency, at the end of their meeting at the residence of the Acting Political Agent in

97 Cf. Manusmriti 11.6: “vēdo ‘khilo dharmanvālam, smṛti-sile ca taddvām acarascasiva sadhimam atmanah tustireva ca”
Rajkot on February 26, 1830. The meeting took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and goodwill. The Collector of Baroda, Mr. Williamson reported to Bishop Reginald Heber that “some good has been done among many of these wild people by the preaching and popularity of the Hindu reformer, Swamee Narain.” Mr. David Anderson Blane was the Acting Political Agent at Rajkot during 1828-1830 and it was he who informed Governor Malcolm about the good work of Sahajananda Svami. The Swami in spite of his ill health, came to Rajkot at the invitation of Mr. Blane. The Swami was warmly welcomed by the British authorities. During the meeting the Governor Malcolm asked if he or his disciples had been harmed under British rule. Sahajananda replied: “On the contrary, every kind of protection was given to us by all the officers in authority”. ⁹⁸ There was in fact no alliance or cause and effect relation between the new religious movement and the new political power in Gujarat; but still there was a coincidence in time and many areas of mutual concern. Both the writings and his politics indicate that Malcolm had great respect and sympathy for the Indians. He, like Svami Sahajananda, endeavoured to eradicate certain social evils like robbery, murder, sati and infanticide. He wanted to bring in changes in society not through force and enactment of laws, but through the rather slow but sure process of conciliation and willingness. After his meeting with Sahajananda when the latter arrived in Kutch, he gathered the local leaders of a Jarijah Rajputs and tried to persuade them to give up the practice of killing infant daughters. He believed that true and lasting reform would come by persuasion and through the leadership of enlightened Indians like Svami Sahajananda. He believed that Sahajananda was such a leader who could bring the desired results.

The manuscript of the Siksapatri is now preserved in the Indian Institute Library of the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. The text was completed by the Svami in 1826. The commentary in Gujarati was written by Nilakanthananda Muni in 1830. It was presented by the Svami to the Governor in February 1830. Another copy of the

⁹⁸ See Swami-Narayan Sect and Its Leaders, pp. 25-26
work is available in the Indian Institute Library founded in 1880 by Professor Monier Williams, Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University. Professor Monier Williams, Sir John Malcolm and Bishop Reginald Heber expressed their admiration and appreciation for the highly moral character of the precepts of the Siksapatri as taught by Svami Sahajananda.

Given below are a few excerpts from the Siksapatri, which reflect the good intentions of the Svami to reorganize the Fellowship and the society purely on the foundation of Sanatana Bhagavata Dharma.

I. Code of conduct in general for disciples of all classes:

- None of my followers should ever kill any living creature, nor should they intentionally kill insects such as lice, bugs and the like (v.11).

- No one should kill animals (such as goats) even for the purpose of performing sacrificial rites or for propitiating any deity, for non-violence is avowedly held to be the highest ethical code (v. 12).

- No one should ever commit homicide for any object, whether it be for women, wealth or even a kingdom (v.13).

- No one should ever commit suicide, in a fit of anger, or being vexed by some sinful act, by means such as taking poison, strangulation, or a headlong plunge into a well, even in a place of pilgrimage (v.14).

- No one should ever eat flesh or meat, even the remnant of offerings in a sacrifice, and no one should drink alcoholic liquor, wine, or any intoxicating beverage, even if it has been offered to deities (v. 15).

- No one should steal, even for benevolent purposes, nor should anyone take things like fuel, flowers and the like without the consent of their owners (v. 17).

- None of my followers, males and females, should commit adultery or practise gambling and similar vices, and they should abstain from drinking or inhaling intoxicants like Bhang (hashish), tobacco, snuff and the like (v.18).

- No one should accept an offering made to a deity to whom flesh and wine are offered, and before whom goats and such beasts are sacrificed (v.22).

- If my followers should happen to pass by temples of Siva or other deities, they should bow down with due reverence to the idols therein (v.23).

- None of my followers should ever dispense with the conduct prescribed in the code of Varnasrama-Dharma, and should never accept any code of behaviour not sanctioned by the scriptures (v.24).

- No one should keep contact with those who hanker after women and wealth, or practice sinful acts under the cloak of hypocritical devotion or so-called wisdom (v.28).

- No one should listen to or pay any credence to scriptures skillfully contrived to deny the existence of the supreme eternal reality and His incarnation (v.29).

- None of my followers should wear any garment which is likely to expose any part of the body to view (v.38).

- All males and females coming to the temples of Sri Krsna for Darsana either daily or on days of religious festivals, should keep themselves aloof from the opposite sex (v.40).

- The Vedas proclaim Narayana and Siva as one and as Brahmasvarupa; therefore they should be generally known as such (v.47).

- My devotees should worship only those images of the Lord that are given by the Acarya or installed by him. Only obeisance should be offered to other images (v.62).
All my followers should go to the temple every evening, and there sing loudly songs in praise of the Lord (v.63).

They should read and hear narrations from the life of the Lord with utmost reverence and on festival days they should sing songs of Sri Krsna to the accompaniment of musical instruments (v.64).

All my devotees should invariably follow the course prescribed above, and also study religious works in Sanskrit or vernacular to the best of their knowledge (v.65).

A preceptor, a king, an elder, a remunciate, a learned man and an ascetic should all be duly honoured on their arrival by rising up and bowing to them (v.69).

My devotees should desist from performing any acts which are contrary to the scriptural tenets, however fruitful they may be, for verily, Dharma alone yields all the desired results (v.73).

During the four months of the monsoon, all my devotees should take up additional religious duties, and those who are physically invalid should take up additional religious duties at least during the month of Sravana (v.76).

All my disciples should observe fast on Ekadasi, as also on Janmastami and on Sivaratri days, and these festivals should be celebrated with great reverence (v.79).

Sri Vitthalnathji, son of Sri Vallabhacarya and the exponent of Vaisnavism, has prescribed the days of Vratas, and my disciples should observe these Vratas and perform festival duties accordingly; they should religiously adopt the practice of adoration and worship of the Lord as laid down by Sri Vitthalnathji (v.81-82).

My devotes should hold the five deities Visnu, Siva, Ganapati, Parvati and Aditya in great reverence (v.84).
In the event of an affliction through the influence of an evil spirit, recourse should be taken to the chanting of Narayana Kavaca or the Hanuman Stotram, but in no case should invocation of any inferior deity be resorted to (v. 85).

My Brahmin devotees should cultivate the qualities of tranquillity, self-restraint, forbearance, contentment and similar virtues. The Ksatriyas should cultivate valour, fortitude and other appropriate qualities (v.89).

The Vaisya class should take to agriculture, trade, money-lending and such pursuits; those of the Sudra class should serve the above-named three Varnas (v.90).

II. Authentic Scriptures:

The four Vedas, Vedanta Sutras by Vyasa, Srimad Bhagavata, Sri Visnusahasra Nama, Sri Bhagavadgita (from Mahabharata), the Code of Ethics enunciated by Sri Vidurji (Viduraniti), Sri Vasudeva Mahatmya from the Visnu Khanda of Skanda Purana, and the Yajnavalka Smrti, are the chief amongst all religious scriptures, and I hold these eight scriptures as authoritative and of special significance (vv. 93 to 95).

Among the aforesaid eight treatises, my followers should hold Mitaksara commentary on Yajnavalkya Smrti as the guiding authority to determine matters of usage, mutual dealings, code for expiation and Nitya, Naimittika Karmas (v.97).

The 5th and 10th Skandhas of Srimad Bhagavata Purana should be regarded as best for acquiring knowledge of the glory and greatness of Sri Krsna (v.98).

The 10th and 5th Skandhas of Srimad Bhagavata and the Yajnavalkya Smrti are authoritative treatises on Bhakti, Yoga and Dharma in the order given (v.99).
- Sribhasys on the Sariraka Sutras, and the Bhasys on Bhagavad Gita, both by Sri Ramanujacarya, are accepted by me as authoritative for acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of philosophy (v.100).

- My devotees should listen with full reverence to the tenth Skandha of Srimad Bhagavata daily or at lest once a year; so too should learned persons. (v.117).

- The creed of our Philosophy is Visistadvata -- qualified non-dualism and the Goloka Dhama is the desired abode for souls who, in the released state, assuming Brahmabhava, serve Lord Krsna. This is ultimate Mukti or liberation.

III. Special Duties:

- The Acaryas, the sons of my elder and younger brothers, should never preach to females other than those of their kindred (v.123).

- They should never touch or talk to females not closely related to them, nor should they be cruel to any living being, nor accept money from others as deposits in their charge (v.124).

- They should perform a special ceremony on the fourth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadrapada, which is the birthday of Ganapati. On the 14th day of the dark half of the Asvina month, they should perform a similar ceremony for the propitiation of Hanuman (v.127).

- Anybody who enters the temple with a desire to have food should be so served with food and treated hospitably, according to the means available (v. 131).

- A Pathasala for teaching Sanskrit should be established, and a learned Brahmin preceptor should be appointed therein to impart the knowledge of Sadvidya, for, verily, the propagation of the scriptural lore is an act of great benediction (v. 132).
IV. Special Duties of the wives of the Acaryas:

- The wives of the Acaryas, Ayodhyaprasada and Raghuvirji, with the permission of their husbands, should preach to females only and initiate them, giving them Krsna Mantra (v.133).

- They should never touch, talk to or even show their faces to males other than those who are closely related to them (v.134).

- The householder disciples should not remain in private company with either their mother, sister or daughter (who may be of young age), except in the strictest emergency. They should never give away their wives to anyone out of a sense of emotional extravagance (v.136).

- My disciples should regulate their expenses according to their income and must never indulge in extravagant expenses, for expenses incurred in excess of income beget future misery.

- My disciples should donate one-tenth of their income or the food grains that may be their agricultural income. Those who have insufficient means should donate one-twentieth of their income, either in money or in kind (v.147).

- In the month of Sravana they should worship, or engage the services of pious Brahmin devotees for the worship of Siva with Bilva patras and the like (v.149).

- My disciples with means should perform Ahimsa Yajnas (sacrifices without killing) for propitiating Visnu, and should feed Brahmans and ascetics on the day following Ekakasi fast, or on religious days in places of pilgrimage (v.155).
V. Special Duties of Female Disciples and Married Women:

- The female followers should not, under any circumstances, develop contact with any young, handsome or virtuous man (v.160).

- No devout wives should dress in such a manner as to expose their breasts, navel or thighs and thus attract the glance of males. They should never move about without putting on their sari and should never go to see vulgar shows. Again they should never maintain contact with debauched women or courtesans (v.161).

VI. Special Rules of Conduct for Ascetics:

- The Naisthika Brahmacarins (who have observed eight fold celibacy) should avoid all contact or talk with females, nor should they intentionally look at them (v.175).

- They should never indulge in talk about females nor listen to such talk, nor should they ever go for their bath in places usually frequented by females (V. 176).

- They should not touch or look at pictures of females or their idols made either of wood or metal, except those of Goddesses (V. 177).

- These Brahmacarins should not draw the pictures of females, nor should they touch any garment worn by a woman nor look at animals in coition (v.178).

- My saints should go to such places for their meals where the food is served only by males, and the contact of female is totally out of sight (v.194).

- The Brahmacarins and the Sadhus of this fold should completely abstain from taking betel leaves, opium, tobacco or other forbidden substances (v.197).
I have compiled this Siksapatri, the Epistle of Precepts, and have incorporated therein the quintessence of all the scriptures, the observance of which will yield the desired results (v.204).

Hence all my disciples should observe all the rules laid down in this Siksapatri and should never take up freedom of behaviour (v.205).

Those of my disciples who live in accordance with the precepts laid down here will attain all the four desired objects (Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksa) on this earth (v.206).

All those of my male and female disciples who do not follow the tenets of this Siksapatri are considered as excommunicated from the fellowship (v.207).

All my disciples should, as a rule, read this Siksapatri daily, and those who cannot read it should listen to its recital with great devotion (v.208).

If one does not find someone to read this Siksapatri, he should worship it daily, holding every word of it as the personified form of my divine self (v.209).

This Siksapatri should be given only to those who possess aptitude for spiritual learning; it should never be given to those who are devoid of such learning(v.210).

I have written this Siksapatri, which is the bestower of the highest bliss to all souls, on the fifth day (Vasanta Pancami) of the bright half of the month of Magha of the Samvat year 1882 (AD.1826) (v.211).

May Lord Sri Krsna, the destroyer of all miseries of His devotees, the defender of Dharma and Bhakti, and thebestower of all cherished objects, spread His auspiciousness everywhere (v.212).
Thus ends the code of conduct laid down by Sri Svami Narayana for the benefit of one and all. One can easily discern from these statements that Svami Narayana is quite uncompromising regarding the observation of rules regarding one’s behaviour in accordance with the Varna and Asrama, food, dress, association with women and the like. One may also notice in this work, certain rigidity of attitude towards women with which many in the modern world may not be quite happy. Even today, one who visits the temples managed by the Svami Narayana sect, or attends their congregations or festivals, does not fail to notice that the Brahmacarins and the Sadhus of this order will try to avoid seeing women. They sometimes even run away from the vicinity of women. They will never look up at a woman. Well, these were the rules laid down by the Svami for strengthening the spirit of Brahmacya and Samnyasa among his devoted followers. Constraints laid on married men and women regarding their social movements, their ways of speech and dress are done with good intention. If in the so-called liberal society we find these rules objectionable, Svami Narayana is not be blamed. We see in our modern society, the dangers involved in allowing our young boys and girls, men and women, absolute freedom regarding their mutual relationships. In the modern world, which is witnessing a tremendous change in the outlook of people regarding social habits, duties and rights, the codes of conduct laid down by Svami Narayana may not be quite palatable. But that does not mean that his movement is outdated. The Siksapatri has taken the overall good of society into consideration and laid down the rules of behaviour. Those who adopt them will be benefited. Those who flout them and do things as they like, would certainly suffer in the longer run. A society which is not founded on morality is sure to crumble. A society which does not observe Dharma guided by Artha and Kama will lose its identity and become a bedlam. A society where Adharma dominates will spell ruin to the entire fabric of human existence. This will require perhaps another incarnation of the Lord, as the Gita has declared ages ago:
“dharmasamsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge” (IV.8b)

(I shall create myself from time to time, so as to establish Dharma on a firm foundation)

The succeeding chapter, which is the last one, provides the Conclusion of this study. It will summarize the points that emerged in the earlier chapters and highlight the relevance of the teachings of Sri Svami Narayana in the contemporary Indian situation.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

An attempt is made in the following pages to present an overall picture of the Svami Narayana Movement and the effective manner in which it has been rendering service to society at the physical, mental and spiritual levels. Before taking up this matter for a final assessment, it is worthwhile to write about the last phase of the great Master’s life who is worshipped now by millions of people all over the world as God incarnate.

Svami Narayana finished his mission on earth even when he attained his 50th year. He strove for 30 years as the Head of a Movement which has now become a glorious organization with its branches spanning the whole world. No institution or organization is built in a day. Every institution worth its name has its own history of rise and fall, initial hurdles and victories over powers evil and malefic. Every organization has in its history many selfless souls who sacrificed their individual comforts for the benefit of society at large. The case of the Svami Narayana Movement is one with a difference. Svami Narayana is the main spirit of this organization. He single-handed, built up the organization in the face of tremendous opposition and persecution, and without any support from any surce-organization or individual. The only support he had was from his own devoted followers. Even the British who ruled the country then admired him for the great revolution he brought in, but did not help him directly in his efforts to establish Sanatana Dharma. Like the Lord Buddha who spoke of his organization as meant for bahujana-hitaya, bahujana-sukhaya ca (for the welfare of many, and for the happiness of many) Svami Narayana worked for the amelioration of the common masses. When the Svami knew that the time had come to leave for his Home, he left no loose ends in his mission. He was fully prepared for his final departure.

Svami Narayana fell ill at the beginning of AD 1830. He still kept an appointment with the Governor, Sir Malcolm, at Rajkot during which meeting he presented him a copy of his Siksapatri. His condition
became critical after he returned to Gadhada. As the news of his illness spread, his disciples, Sadhus and laymen, began to throng from all parts of the country to pay their respects to him and have a glimpse of him. The Master consoled them and sent many of them to their respective places. He knew about the tremendous emotional outburst that may take place among his disciples after his departure and so he commanded them that they should, under no circumstance, commit suicide. In fact, one of the precepts of his Siksapatri(v.14) is that none of his disciples should put an end to their life. After a few weeks of serious ill-health, the Svami showed signs of improvement so that many of his devotees who were still lingering there, would gladly go home. This was but a make-believe trick played by the Master. But for the inner circle of his devotees like Svasis Gunatitananda, Muktanandanada and Gopalananda, practically everybody was sent away by the Master. He left the world on the tenth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Jyestha, corresponding to the 28th of June, 1830, at 11.00 a.m. He enacted the last episode of his life and returned to his divine abode. Inconsolable was the grief of his ardent devotees. The funeral pyre was lit by Raghuvirji, Gopalananda and Gunatitananda Svami. Although the Master had left his mortal coil, he continued to manifest himself on earth for upholding Bhagavata Dharma, a cause dear to his heart and for establishing which he took to Samnyasa, very early in life. 101

There are a few stories narrated about the reappearance of the Svami to various disciples even after he had passed away. A few instances may be cited.

As the Svami's cremation was going on, Dada Kachar became grief-stricken. Seeing him, Gopalananda Svami asked him why he was so sad. He asked him to go to the terrace on the other side and see for himself. Accordingly Dada Kachar went there and saw to his pleasant surprise the master seated in a chair fully garlanded, the Svami beckoned him and said: "You have been with me for several years.

101 See p. 53 ante
Still you have not fully realized who I am. You look within your own heart.” As Dada did so, he saw the radiant figure of the Master in his own heart. The Master gave him a garland and said: “Hereafter follow Gopalananda Svami at all times. I am abiding in him and directing all the activities of our organization. Do as he asks you to do.” He also said: “There is neither birth nor death for me. I took human form resembling the form abiding in heaven. Keep this garland and worship it”.

On the day the Master left the world, two poor brahmins of Vanagar went to collect alms in Kathiawad. They were returning home and were planning to see Svami Narayana in Gadhada. On the way they saw the Master himself along with his usual company of Kathi horsemen. On seeing the Svami they prostrated before him. They told him that they were going to Gadhada to pay their respects to him. Thereupon, the Master blessed them and asked them to go to Gadhada and told them that he would join them there later. Those brahmins came to Gadhada and to their consternation, they came to know that the Master had already left the world. They understood the intention of the Master. From then on, they resolved to join the Order. Later they assumed the names Hari Krsnananda and Ramacandrananda.

Another such miracle which happened that day on which the Master passed away may also be noted. A doctor by name Ramacandra was going to see the Master at Gadhada, being informed that he was not doing well. On the way he saw the Master in the usual company of attendants including Dada Khachar. The Master asked the doctor where he was going. He replied that he was going to see him only on hearing about his illness. The Svami extended his hand and asked him to feel his pulse. The doctor felt it was normal. The Svami then asked him to go to Gadhada and said that he would join him later. The doctor reached the place by the evening and to his shock and suprise he learnt that the master had already passed away. Innumerable are the instances of men having seen the Svami at the time of their
quitting the physical bodies, even long after the Svami himself had left the world. They saw a wonderful kind of supernaturalism with which the Sampradaya is saturated. The saintly character of the Master, his sanctity and the tremendous love he had for all the living beings, placed him in a position which very few religious leaders can claim.

In Svami Narayana we have both a religious teacher par excellence and a committed social reformer of total dedication and concern. Our country produced many religious teachers who were not social reformers, and many social reformers who were not religious teachers. But in Svami Narayana, as in Sri Ramanuja his exemplar, we have the most illustrious blend of both these dimensions. In so far as social reform is concerned, the Svami went to the root cause of the main problems that plagued the society, instead of looking at the exterior. He changed the thinking of each man and woman who came into contact with him. He took personal interest in their problems and made them free from lust, greed, pride, anger and selfishness and conferred upon them the Brahmi state. He saved them from calamities due to fire, water etc. He saved many a soul who were good and helpful to the establishment of Bhagavata Dharma. He saved many animals and birds who were helpful to the sadhus. Like Sri Rama of Ramayana-fame, he conferred moksa on all those who were contemporaneous with him -- animate or inanimate. Some were transported by him to a world of bliss by keeping them in nirvikalpaka samadhi. Even a stick or a creeper or a piece of cloth, not to speak of birds such as doves and sparrows and animals such as monkeys, were put into trance by the mere sight of the Svami. Their spirits used to go to different mansions where they used to see the Svami himself in a variety of celestial forms. The lords of those mansions and the souls residing there used to come to him for worship. Such was the supernatural glory of the Svami.

Normally, unless one becomes perfect in yoga one cannot have even a taste of the bliss of samadhi, but the Svami gave to those who came
to him that highest state by his mere glance or touch or through a few words. This happened to both his devotees and non-devotees alike, to those who were spiritual - minded and even to those who were even evil-minded.¹⁰²

Now let us consider the nature of social service rendered by Svami Narayana. Through his flawless character and strictly austere life, he set an example before others for leading a life divine, dedicated to the spread of Bhagavata Dharma. Ideal leadership lies in showing others more by personal examples than by theoretical precepts. The Bhagavadgita has already declared(VII.21):

“yad yadacarati srestah tattadeva itaro janah sa yat pramanam kurute lokah tad anuvartate”

(Whatever an exemplary person does, others also try to do it. Whatever he adopts as a standard or code to follow, others also follow it.)

One remarkable characteristic of the Fellowship of Svami Narayana is the mutual co-operation that existed between the laymen and the sadhus in matters spiritual and secular, so that the Movement could gain remarkable strength without any split or sub-divisions. This is something unusual in the history of any religious school. He told his disciples that matter without spirit has no roots and spirit without matter has no fruits. The Svami was the originator of the wonderful spirii of co-operation and synthesis between the spiritual and the material. One instance may be cited: Once the Svami went to Agatrai and stayed there with one Parvat Bhai. Before leaving the place he asked one Narayana Bhatta to come along with him to Gadhada to celebrate the Vasanta Pancami festival. Narayana Bhatta replied that he could not do so because the millet crop became ripened and if it was not reaped in time, the crop would be spoiled. Immediately the Svami ordered for thirty or forty sickles, and with his band of sadhus went to the fields, reaped the crop and asked Narayana Bhatta to

¹⁰² See Shri Svaminarayan, pp.248-250
start for Gadhada. The Master was full of parental love and compassion for everyone. He set an example to others by first implementing his own teachings. The Svami’s teachings were simple, but subtle and penetrating at the same time. His entire life was dedicated to promote the age-old Vedic Dharma. He did not waste his time simply talking or preaching or by interpreting the scriptures through mere intellectualism. On the other hand, he insisted upon right conduct and real action, living up to the tenets of Bhagavata Dharma.

The next dimension of the social reformation brought in by the Svami for the sake of the common man was the building of temples. Although he was at the beginning reluctant to advocate image-worship, he later thought that it was necessary to instill devotion and love for God in the common man. The beautiful and massive temples that came up in several places in Gujarat and Saurashtra are standing monuments for the initiative taken by Svami Narayana for bringing religion to the reach of the common masses who did not have even the basic education. The Svami was a great lover of fine arts. Architectural designing, sculpture and handicrafts were developed by his Paramahamsas and other devotees under his personal care. He encouraged music, rasa-dance, celebration of the festival of Holi, etc., for the sake of the common man. He evoked divinity through these methods and succeeded in a remarkable way in his sincere efforts to opening the door of religion to one and all. This may be illustrated by a few examples.

Svami Brahmananda, an ardent follower of Svami Narayana designed many temples. The lotus-shaped pedestal on which the temple at Vadtal stands is a marvel of architectural skill. The temples at Junagadh, Muli and other places were entrusted to him for construction. Whenever Brahmananda had any difficulty in carrying out the orders of his Master, he used to invoke his grace and thus overcome even insurmountable difficulties in the execution of his work. For instance, for the temple at Vadtal there were no funds at
all. But one Narayanagiri Sadhu who had enormous wealth came forward and helped the construction of the temple. He offered the money and said that he was one of the humble devotees of the Master and that his money could serve no greater purpose than that. The Master blessed him heartily. Likewise the temple at Muli (Saurashtra) was under construction and there was a sudden shortage of water and stone. Brahmananda tried his best to procure them but in vain. He composed some poems out of intense devotion and 'rebuked' the master for putting him in such an awkward situation. He went to sleep afterwards. The master came to him and woke him up. He took him to a place and said: "There lies the stone and here lies the water". Brahmananda was all happiness; but he felt ashamed that he lost his patience and rebuked the Master in a fit of frustration. But the Master consoled him saying that he enjoyed his poetic reprimand which stemmed from his sincere love and regard for him.

The construction of the temple at Junagadh proved to be a difficult task. The officers of the State were Saivites and they were not happy with the construction of a Vaisnava temple in their province. However Brahmananda had the goodwill of the Nawab of that area who was also a poet of his own right. He loved the compositions of Brahmananda which were fine examples of his religious fervour. The Nawab gave him all co-operation and overruled the decision of his officers. As a result there came up a glorious temple which is a manifestation of architectural splendour.

The playing of rasa-lila brought back to the minds of the people the grandeur and fervour of the rasa-dance enacted by Lord Krsna ages ago in the Brindavana. Now Svami Narayana, the Supreme Being, enacted the rasa-lila with his Paramahamsas. He appeared before them in as many forms as they themselves were. The Paramahamsas enchanted by his divine presence, could not resist the temptation of playing rasa with him. This form of folk dance which became almost an antiquated art through sheer negligence and ignorance of the people, was thus revived by the Svami to demonstrate to people how
rich a heritage we have inherited from our ancestors, and how we have been neglecting it and slowly becoming alienated from our cultural moorings.

Likewise, the Holi celebrated by the Svami in the company of the sadhus attained a new colour and significance. In former years the Holi dances encouraged vulgarity and obscenity. The Svami told people that all festivals had a religious background and that they had to be cleansed of all their dross and impurity. He explained the religious significance of the Holi festival. As a matter of fact all the other festivals which he encouraged were interpreted by him in a new light as forming integral components of the culture of our land.

As pointed out earlier, the Svami was a fine connoisseur of music. He loved this art not simply for its rhythm and melody but for its tremendous potentiality to invoke the presence of God. He believed music was the surest and quickest means of propitiating God.103 His Paramahamsas, and in particular Premananda, Muktananda, Devananda and Brahmamanda were supreme musicians. Many masters of music had great admiration for these svamis. They were invited time and again to sing in the assemblies of great kings but they politely declined the offer saying that their singing was meant only for the enjoyment of the King of kings, namely God, but not for the amusement of mortals.

Once two artists from Gwalior came to Junagadh to display their musical talent before the Nawab. But the Nawab who already heard the sole-stirring music of Premananda, refused to entertain these musicians. He instead directed them to go to Premananda and sing before him. Out of great inquisitiveness, they came is search of Premananda and introduced themselves as musicians of high reputation. By the time they came the congregation held by Svami Narayana came to an end. Even then, the Master welcomed the guests and found out that they were keen on hearing the music of Premananda.

103 Cf. “nahatn vasami Vaikunthe, na yogihrdaye ravau madbhaktah yatra gayanti tatra tisthami Narada”
He then asked Prenamanda to oblige the visitors from Gwalior. In all humility Prenamanda asked his master: “O Lord, what raga shall I sing?” The Master, looking at Prenamanda with a beatific smile said, “sing Bhairavi”. Hearing this, the visiting musicians were amazed because Bhairavi was sung normally in the early hours of the day. It was already afternoon. They laughed within themselves at the ignorance of the Gujarati people regarding music. They were just preparing themselves to hear the song of Prenamanda. Prenamanda started his alap (the opening expression) in the traditional style. He exposed the resource of the Bhairavi-raga in a fantastic manner. His diction and modulation matching each other, embellished the incredible sweetness of his voice, and brought the entire audience to the status of a painted picture. The way he developed Bhairavi - raga made an indelible impression on the Gwalior musicians. Such was the absorption of premananda with the Raga that it became early dawn as it were; and birds began to chirp sweet notes, thinking it was daybreak. The veteran musicians were amazed to find the unfathomable potentialities of the Bhairavi-raga so splendidly displayed by Preamananda. They bowed down to the musician, showering praise on him and his Master.

Svami Narayana possessed such highly talented artists in his fellowship who may be described as rare gems. There were under his command eminent musicians, excellent sculptors, skilful engineers, great doctors, superb painters, outstanding architects and many others, as a result of which the Organization never needed any extraneous help for the successful conduct of its activities. The Svami believed that the promotion of fine arts contributed to the growth of our rich culture and the finer instincts of people. The ultimate goal of all our actions must be a preparation as it were, to attain perfection.

The Svami used to convene congregations of devotees at fixed intervals at the temples built for him. These were necessary for them to be in constant communion with him. They also helped people to learn his teachings, to lead a life of simplicity and austerity, and to develop
fraternal feelings with the fellow disciples. Such gatherings, the Svami believed, helped the people to learn the culture of different provinces, the habits, the education, customs, geographical conditions etc. of different lands. It thus fostered a feeling of unity among people of different states. The Svami may thus be described as the harbinger of the concept of national integration, cutting the barriers of narrow provincialism.

The greatness of Svami Narayana as a social reformer has been already referred to. Any reformed society must be based upon spiritual humanism. Among the different philosophies of life discovered by men in the East and West, the most important and relevant philosophy is only that of humanism. To explain, humanism is the philosophy in which man occupies the central place. We have in the West concepts like rational humanism. Faith in human destiny, synthesis of religion and philosophy, and emphasis on moral values are the chief characteristics of humanism. According to Svami Narayana who is one of the greatest spiritual humanists of our land, spiritual consciousness must first be developed in men so that the instinct of Maya can be successfully eradicated. According to him Jiva, Isvara and Maya-are eternal. Jiva is not an amsa of God. Man seeks God but he does not become God. According to him man maintains identity with God but does not become the part of God. In his Vacanamrta (Sarangpur section 10) divine love is stated to be the most important characteristic of a spiritual person. For him ethics and religion are interdependent. The most benevolent attribute of a devotee of God is his sense of service to God and his devotees. Serving the devotees of God is the highest merit which makes one's life spiritual. Spiritual transformation makes the person absolutely pious. One who is Brahananized by his contact with Brahman is never drawn to the whirlpool of wealth and women. According to Svami Narayana there is a state of Jivanmukti which of course, was not accepted by Sri Ramanuja. Svami Narayana describes the Jivanmukta as the Sthitaprajna of the Bhagavadgita. In his Vacanamrta he refers to a Satsangin as one who follows the commands of the master, even at
the cost of one’s life. He has such a deep and firm faith in God that nothing could shake it off. He feels a kinship with all those who worship the same Master. This kinship is to be like that of father, mother, son and daughter. The Satsangin should also observe five important principles: not to eat meat, not to drink wine, not to steal, no to commit adultery and not to contaminate others by one’s evil conduct.

Humanism can be studied at different levels like literary humanism, a movement started in America by writers like Irving Babbit, Norman Foerster and others, and the sociological humanism which was founded on the principles of love, loyalty, kindness, service and honesty. Humanism is more a tendency than a system. The belief in the ultimacy of human values is the central faith of the humanist. Great teachers, saints and prophets like Socrates and Jesus, the Buddha and Mahavira, Tukaram and Mahatma Gandhi no doubt lived and died for mankind. Still their message is more than this. They preached love, truth, benevolence and so on. They even outstepped the moral boundary. It is befitting to say that though they are humanists, they are also spiritual. They are not only moral but also mystical. Saintly reformers of devotional faith like Kabir and Nanak in the East and the Protestant reformists in the West also spoke of the spirit of essentialism in religion and the abandonment of ritualism. The Universal Religion of Svami Vivekananda, the Religion of Man of Rabindranatha Tagore and the ethical Religion of Mahatma Gandhi had the humanistic tendencies. The metaphysics of Advaita does not allow us to look upon anybody as an enemy in relation to us (cf. Chandogya VI. 8.7: tattvamasi). Vaisnavism also believes in the presence of God in all beings. Humanity, therefore, becomes the manifestation of divinity. Thanks to the spread of humanistic ideas, religion is now-a-days becoming more and more secularized and humanized. The Christian Church has become more an instrument of social service than an effective means of the practice of ritualism. Tilak and Gandhi extolled the poor as incarnations of God. Svami Vivekananda exhorted the rich to worship God in the poor (daridra-
narayana). The same Svami also declared in a trumpet voice: "The crying need of India is not religion but bread". Gandhiji said in one of his famous speeches that to slight a single human being is to slight the divine powers, and to harm him is harming the whole world. Gandhiji simply refused to suspect human nature. To him man is superior to the system and there is no religion higher than truth and righteousness. He also said in the Young India that there are seven social sins: Politics without Principles, Commerce without Morality, Wealth without Work, Pleasure without Conscience, Knowledge without Character, Science without Humanity and Worship without Sacrifice. Unless all these are wiped out, no real social reformation can be possible.

The Greek philosopher Protagoras said: "Man is the measure of all things; of what is, that it is; of what is not, that is not". By "man" he did not mean mankind at large, but the individual man as such. Once he stated; "As for Gods, I am unable to say whether they exist or whether they don’t." This provoked some of his contemporaries and they publicly burnt his work for this statement, which according to them was blasphemous.

The Vaisnava Movement which had reached its culmination in Svami Narayana has had a continuous history almost from the beginning. In the Rgveda, Visnu is regarded as the 'pervader' having his abode in the Supreme Heaven (1:22.20). The word Bhaga in the Vedas means auspicious qualities like knowledge and strength. One who possess them in the highest degree of perfection is called Bhagavan. The Bhagavata Dharma believes in the worship of Visnu as the Supreme Being. The distinctive features of this concept are found in the Pancaratra Agamas, the Mahabharata, the Visnupurana, the Harivamsm and the Bhagavata, the hymns of Mystic Tamil Saints-Alvars and the works of Acaryas like Yamuna, Ramanuja and Vedanta Desika. The influence of Ramanuja is perceptible throughout the later history of Hinduism. The religious movements of Madhva, Vallabha, Caitanya, Ramananda, Kabir and Nanak and the reformism of
Brahmoism bear the indelible impression of Ramanuja's philosophy. The absolute Monism of Sankara fails to satisfy the cravings of the heart. As Dr. Radhakrishnan puts it, the Absolute Brahman of Sankara, rigid and motionless, cannot call forth our love, adoration or worship. It is a bloodless absolute 'dark' with excess of light and seems to be a finished example of learned error.\textsuperscript{104}

God is indeed real but the Jivas of the world are also real, though dependent upon God. This is what Ramanuja said in his Visistadvaita. The Vaisnava Theism is a protest against the intellectualism of Sankara and the ritualism of the Mimamsakas. Religion is more an affair of the heart than that of the head. Svami Narayana accepted the basic tenets of Visistadvaita propounded by Sri Ramanauja with subtle differences.

Svami Narayana imbibed this philosophy from his immediate preceptor Svami Ramananda. In tradition Ramananda is believed to be an incarnation of Uddhava of the Bhagavata fame. He was a great devotee of Lord Krsna. The Neo-Visistadavita of Svami Narayana is therefore known as Uddhava Sampradaya, a revival of the spiritual heritage of Uddhava. Svami Narayana is said to have sought two boons from his Guru which were granted. Firstly, he should be able to fulfill all his responsibilities in the proper manner with his whole being set on God. The second boon was that he should take upon himself the sufferings and miseries of all the members of the Satsang. This reminds us of the great Ranti Deva of yore whose story is narrated in the Bhagavata.\textsuperscript{105}

The feeling of absolute mercy towards the people sometimes made Svami Narayana restless. Once he stopped a religious discourse and ran to help a farmer whose house was about to collapse in a torrential downpour. He held on his shoulder the supporting beam of the house until the farmer cleared out his belongings and cattle. This shows his

\textsuperscript{104} See Indian Philosophy, Vol. II. p. 168
\textsuperscript{105} for details see p.45 f.
loving concern for the suffering humanity. The spiritual strength comes through love of God in His divine abode, and through love and service of man on earth, and of God abiding in man. If Philosophy claims the knowledge of the ultimate Reality as its fruit, religion is its actual realization. Narayana is the highest form of God in man. Svami Ramananda told his disciple that Lord Narayana manifested Himself in the form of his ardent disciple, Sahajananda (a former name of Svami Narayana). The Svami rose to the equanimity where a nugget of gold and a clod of earth made no distinction for him (sama-lostasma-kancana). In his view no human being was ordinary. According to him everyone must become the apostle of God, has to work for Him and save humanity from the dangers of worldly existence. He believed that though man is not God, he is not different from the light of God. The theory that man himself is God (as in Advaita) destroys both God and man and gives man a logical and moral holiday. Thus from the viewpoint of Svami Narayana Humanism cannot be separated from divine life and thought. His life was a life of equipoise, detachment, intense devotion and tremendous love for one and all. By contrast, it may be stated that Humanism lacking in spirituality cannot be a substitute for religion. We need a philosophy which provides us with a rallying centre, a synthesis both of Humanism and Spiritualism. Religion must be freed from dogmatism and senseless ritualism. Svami Narayana’s life is an excellent synthesis of unalloyed spiritualism and intense Humanism.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEACHINGS OF SVAMI NARAYANA TO THE PRESENT SITUATION

The teachings of Swami Narayana are more relevant to the present and even to the future, than ever before. In him there is a blend of the past, present and future. He dealt with the problem of understanding the nature of the universe, man and values in a very traditional, and effective way. He conceived the ultimate Reality Brahman both as one and many. The Upanisads speak of Anna, Prana, Manas, Vijnana
and Ananda as Brahman at various levels of evolution of human understanding. Each person is also both one and many, both within his own self and within Brahman. One who knows and realises Brahman attains the Para Brahman. The existence of Para Brahman is realised by establishing Brahman within, which radiates Supreme Bliss.¹⁰⁶

Svami Narayana united conceptually the different doctrines of Hindu Godhead. He appeared as Sri Krsna for the Vaisnava followers of Madhva and Nimbarka, as Laksmi Narayana and the divine hosts like Visvaksena and Garuda for the followers of Sri Ramanuja, as Lord Siva for the Saivites, as the “Hiranmaya Purusa” (the golden hued Person) for the devotees of the Sun, as Mahaganapati for the votaries of Ganapati, as Tirthankaras for the Jains and as Paigambar for the followers of islam.¹⁰⁷

It must be pointed out in this context that although Svami Narayana followed Sri Ramanuja’s Visistadvaita, there is a remarkable difference between his concept of gods and that of the Srivaisnavas (i.e., the followers of Ramanuja). The Siksapatri of Svami Narayana (verse 46) for instance, states that none of his Brahmin devotees should ever give up the family tradition of wearing the Tripundra and the Rudraksa-rosary. It is well-known that Rudraksa-mala is sacred to the Saivites whereas Padmaksa-mala (rosary prepared with the seeds of lotus) is dear to the Vaisnava traditions. Again the same work declares(v.47) that since the Vedas proclaim both Narayana and Siva as one and the same Brahman, his (Svami Narayana’s) devotees should understand the Deities as such, and worship them with equal devotion and arduor. Verse 79 of the same work states that all his devotees should observe fast on Ekadasi, Janmastami and Sivaratri and that these festival should be conducted with great reverence. Verse 84 ordains upon the followers of Svami Narayana that five deities -

¹⁰⁷ See H.T. Dave’s Translation of Sri Svami Narayana’s Vacanamrta, pp. xxxix-xl
Visnu, Siva, Ganapati, Parvati and Aditya should be held in great reverence. Verse 127 again speaks of the need to perform special worship on the fourth day of the bright half of the Bhadrapada month which happens to be the birthday of Lord Ganapati. All these are pointers to the broad outlood of Svami Narayana in so far as religious harmony is concerned.

Although Sri Ramanuja had through his “sarira-sariri” concept accepted the importance of all other gods in as much as they form the body of the Inner Controller (Antaryamin) Srimannarayana, his followers do not observe festivals like Vinayaka Caturthi or Sivaratri. This is a clear mark of the catholicity of Svami Narayana’s Religion.

It may not be out of the way to point out in this connection that due to some strange reason there has been a great rivalry and mutual ill-will between the votaries of these two sister religions, Saivism and Vaisnavism. Historical and literary evidences are replete with examples of these followers being at constant conflict and indulging in deplorable bickerings and personal feuds. At least we have a clear case of the persecution of Sri Ramanuja at the hands of the - then Cola King, Krimikantha, who, it is said, asked the Vaisnava to sign a document which declare “Sivat parataram nasti” (There is none superior to Siva). Ramanuja’s ardent disciple Kurattalvan who sensed danger to his master’s life, came there in the guise of Ramanuja and signed the document after adding one sentence, “dronamasti tatah param” (Beyond Sivafname of a small measure], there is “Drona” [name of a bigger measure]. This infuriated the Saiva king who ordered his eyes to be put out. Kurattalvan thus lost his “ darsana” (vision) for the sake of his “darsana” (religion). That Sri Ramanuja had to leave Srirangam in the hostile Cola kingdom and stay in the hospitable Hoyasala territory (at Melkote ) for 14 years is part of history.

Now, adverting to the point on hand, Srivaismava writers like Yammuna and Ramanuja classify Puranas as three fold: Sattvika, Rajasa and
Tamasa. 108 They argue that Brahma was the original expounder of the Puranas. When dominated by Sattva, he composed the “Sattvika Puranas” such as the Mastya, Garuda, Visnu, Varaha and Vamana. These Sattvic Puranas declare the supremacy of Lord Visnu. When dominated by Rajas, he composed the “Rajasa” Puranas like the Brahma Purana wherein the glory of his own self (i.e., Brahma himself) is prominent. When under the influence of Tamas, Brahma composed what are called the “Tamasa Puranas” which speak of the supremacy of deities like Agni and Siva. Puranas like the Linga and the Kurma belong to this category. There is yet one more category of Puranas and that is “Sankirna” (mixed up) wherein the glory of Sarasvati and the departed manes (pitr devatas) is highlighted. While all the Srivaisnava writers starting from Yamuna down to the latest writer speak about this classification with a sense of absolute and unquestionable faith, it was Nilakantha Diksita (A.D. 1580-1644) a great Saivite poet-philosopher and grandson of the celebrated Appaya Diksita who questioned the authenticity of this classification. Actually this classification is made on the basis of a few passages found in the Matsya Purana.

“yasmin kalpe tu yat proktam puranam Brahmana pura
tasya tasya tu mahatmyam tat-svarupena varnyate
agnessivaasya mahatmyam tamsesu prakirtyate rajasesu ca
mahatmyam adhikam brahiano viduh sattvikavesvatha
kalpesu mahatmyam adhikam Hareh tesveva
yogasamsiddhah gamisyanti param gatim sankirnesu
sarasvatyah pitrnam cadhikam viduh”

(L.III.65,67-69)

In his thought -provoking work, the Sivatatvarahasys, Nilakantha refutes the contention of the Visistadvaitins that only Sattvika Puranas are to be relied upon for matters on spirituality and liberation (para gatih) and that those classified as Rajas and Tamasa are not to be

taken seriously. One important objection raised by Nilakantha is that the above passages are found in the Matsya purana which calls itself a Sattvika Purana. Naturally, this does not command the credibility of any sensible person. However skillful a person be, he cannot certainly climb his own shoulder!  \(^{109}\)

Now, in comparison with the standpoint taken by the Srivaisnava thinkers, one will certainly find the saving grace of the position taken by Sri Svami Narayana. He has in clear and unmistakable terms, declared that there is no difference between Siva and Visnu and that the Vedas speak of both as constituting the Supreme Brahman. Can there be a more valid proof than this to show the wonderful large-heartedness of Svami Narayana? At the turn of the century, when people are still locking their horns regarding sectarian, subtleties and staking claims and counter-claims to show that their own viewpoint is right, the philosophy of Svami Narayana blows upon us like a gentle wave of fresh breeze carrying with it the fine fragrance of sympathetic synthesis. Undoubtedly he was a very dynamic and pragmatic social reformer to whom the whole world seeking religious harmony should be grateful. He wanted to put an end to the acrimonious debate and meaningless feuds that flare up from time to time and break up society, drenching the land with human blood and breaking it into still smaller fragments. He succeeded, at least in so far as his Fellowship is concerned, in putting an end to sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism.

Speaking about the relevance of the teachings of Svami Narayana to the modern world, it must be pointed out that his followers, as they try to spread their mission to Africa, England and the United States of America, will confront many types of doctrines which do not have the same background or foundation as those in India. The problems of the one and the many will become more and more complicated. Pluralisms, atomisms, individualisms and dualisms which are entrenched in the Western setup will reject outright any kind of Monism as simply heretical and outmoded. If the Indians prefer

\(^{109}\) See Dr. Viswanathan, The Sivalilarnava of Nilakantha Diksita-A Critical study, pp. 35-38.
Monism in some form or other, the Westerners confront it with their own concept of Pluralism. As a result, tensions -- both conceptual and organizational -- will prevail, calling for harder work from the followers of the Svami Narayana Movement to bring in peace and harmony in the world that is already shattered by conflicting ideologies and misguided managements. Unity in diversity is favoured by many Indians thinkers, whereas diversity in unity is favoured by many in the West. The challenge to harmonize the Indian and Western ideals may call for an approach leading to unity-cum-diversity which encompasses the world and all its living beings.\textsuperscript{110}

As movements increase in their number and members they extend their developments over longer period and expand geographically. This calls for well-planned organizational work. Today, after 220 years of its growth, the Svami Narayana movement has not less than five million followers who are highly disciplined believers in His supremacy and dynamism. According to a Report of the Bochanwasi Sri. Aksarapurusottama Samstha, its organized activities cover such varied fields as "medical activities", "youth centres", "hospital activities", "educational activities", "Teachers", "Associations", "publications", "periodicals" etc. which were started in the year 1976. The Organization has tremendous possibilities for future activities and its potentialities for rapid expansion and sustained growth are excellent.\textsuperscript{111}

Consequent to the explosion of both population and technology, the need for checks and balances is more vital and urgent. The society is aware of a number of explosions in the areas of air-, water - and soil-pollutions, depletion of irreplaceable natural resources, deficit spending, stagnation, political incompetence and the constant threat posed by military armaments and armed militancy. Can these challenges be met by the Svami Narayana movement? The answer is a positive "yes". This Movement has succeeded in reviving concern


\textsuperscript{111} See Celebrations: The Bi-centenary of Lord Swaminarayan, 1781-1981, pp. 11-16
for moral behaviour. It has at least brought down, though not completely wiped out, the rate of crime and violence in society. Sir Charles Cunningham has raised a pertinent question in his Foreword to the Book of Sri H.T. Dave: “Today we live in a world in which violence is all too prevalent. May we not have something to learn from the record of Svami Narayana’s life and faith?” 112 As he has rightly noted, that faith is very much alive today. Those who profess it are conscious of their social as well as religious obligations. They have a strong sense of social duty.

But it must be admitted that the present situation in human society all over the globe is getting more and more complicated. There is what the scientists call “global warming” in an alarming degree not only from the viewpoint of environment but also from the viewpoint of religious fanaticism and irreligious faiths. There are for instance, thousands of multinational corporations, nuclear bomb proliferation, the Mafia, international terrorist organizations, space shuttles, round-the-clock satellite communications, DNA remodelling new forms of life, animal cloning and possibility of human cloning, industrial automation, heart and kidney transplantations, Credit Card purchasing, computerized banking and book-keeping, ocean mining and computer crimes, all interacting with greed, vested interests, fanaticism, poverty, maldistribution, mal-nutrition, famine deaths and lock-up death, crime against children and women, and on the top of it, illiteracy and ignorance. What type of Ethics can tackle this situation? What kind of religion can cleanse the society of this rot? 113

It must be admitted in this context that people who are living today and those who lived about 200 years ago are-partly similar to, and partly dissimilar with each other, what was true then, is true today as well. New ideas, new techniques and organizations are required now to tackle the problems that crop up afresh. It is hoped that the followers of Svami Narayana will succeed now in a better way since

112 See Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan, p.9
they combine both the old and the new in tackling the new problems confronting human existence today. The Indian experience for providing a working solution to the ancient problem of the one and the many, and of the whole and parts, continues to hold the key for meeting the challenges both of the present as well as the future.114

The present century has its own share of violence and crime. Mercy and justice are unable to stand the onslaught of narrow selfishness. Sympathy and fellow-feeling are fast disappearing form human heart. Due to rapid industrialization and unplanned urbanization, many people from rural areas are flocking to the urban centres and are slowly getting alienated from their cultural moorings. They are becoming an easy prey to vices. There is a sense of distrust and disrespect on a wider scale in society. Political independence is no doubt attained but economic independence and suitable social changes have not been accomplished in the expected measure.

This is of course a bleak picture but still we need not despair. The evolution of man described in the Taittiriya Upanisad (Ananda.8) starts from the annamaya level or the physical level. That man is also a thinking animal is asserted by the manomaya satta, referred to in the same Upanisad. It leads to vijananamaya- satta or existence in knowledge. Lastly, man can attain anandamaya - satta through Yoga and Concentration (nididhyasana). The point to be understood is that if human problem is not solved first at the annamaya level, then further spiritual progress becomes an impossibility.115 The scripture itself asks us to produce more food: ”annam bahu kurvita” (Tai.Ar. 1.4.1). One cannot preach religion to hungry stomachs. Great leaders like Svami Narayana addressed themselves to this task first, whenever they spoke of social reform and the elevation of masses.

India, more than any other Nation, needs a renaissance today based on these lines at the annamaya and the pranamaya levels. The state

114 Ibid., p.112
of our Nation today is not much different from what it was during the
times of Svami Narayana. A drastic change is necessary to save the
country from poverty, drunkenness, debauchery, hypocrisy,
superstition and moral bankruptcy. That avarice and greed of a few
have brought human society and whole nations to despair, is quite
well-known. In fact, the first Mantra of the first of the Upanisads,
viz., the Isavasya asks us not to covet the property of anyone else.

“isa vasyam idam sarvam, yatkinca jagatyam jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma grdhah kasya svid dhanam”
(The whole universe is pervaded by the Supreme Ruler. Therefore,
enjoy with a sense of detachment. Do not ever covet for the wealth of
others.)

The poverty-stricken masses have to be rejuvenated and given the
message of life -- creative and blissful. This is the message which
Svami Narayana gave to people more than 200 years ago, which holds
good today as well. There are broadly speaking, two ways to counter
what is happening around us in the modern world. One is to remain
totally a passive spectator and submit to the Will of the Almighty
with calm resignation, without trying to do anything to set the things
right. The other way is to get directly involved in a given situation
and try to do one’s best to ameliorate the lot of the people with
determination and grit. Svami Narayana believed in the second
alternative. He tried to remedy the social evils by active participation
and indomitable will which nothing could resist. His entire life is a
saga of total dedication to uplift the society first at the material level.
He did not simply take solace under “intuition” but took care to blend
human reason with intuition for attaining the goal. He exposed many
a pseudo-religious teacher who exploited the gullible people. If
religion descends to the level of exploitation, then it has to be saved
by retaining the pith and by removing the exterior. He established
alms - houses for the have-nots and distributed food and water in the
most devastating famines and testing periods of our history. Serving
humanity by providing them their basic needs of life viz., water, food and shelter is the real test of a practical religion. 116

India, or rather, the world today needs morally strong, ethically upright and spiritually giant-like leaders given to action rather than theoretical and dogmatic teachers. We should have leaders of great integrity and character who consider the whole world as a single family. The spirit of “Vasudhaiva kutumabakam” (treating the entire world itself as a single family) is there in the blood of the Hindu Nation. “Lokah Samastah sukhino bhavantu” (May all the living beings be happy) is the traditional universal prayer which characterizes our national life. The tradition of India is thoroughly humanistic and in that sense it is also spiritual. This tradition has continued through personalities like Svami Narayana and Svami Vivekananda in recent times. Svami Vivekananda had declared: “So long as a dog is hungry in my country, my whole religion is to feed it.”117 This may be described as the common heritage of our nation -- the humanistic tradition and the inspiring message of prophets like Svami Narayana. Only they can help preserve and strengthen our hoary and rich legacy.

The most significant aspect of Svami Narayana’s life and mission is that he rejects and ignores the distinction between man and man on the basis of religion, caste, financial status, intellectual attainment, etc. High or low, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, house-holder or an ascetic, everybody was equally adorable to him, simply because they are all humans. He extended the same love towards other forms of life as well -- a dog, cow, elephant, etc., as the Gita has stated:

“vidyainayasampanne brahmane gavi hastini
suni caiva svapake ca panditah samadarsinah”(v.18)

(The wise ones are equanimous towards one who is endowed with humility and education, towards one who is born a Brahmin, towards a cow, an elephant, a dog and even a dog-eater)

They are all equal because they are fit for attaining the Brahmanized condition, in the terminology of the Navya Visistadvaita. This was not a mere theory for him. It was the most pragmatic teaching bequeathed to us by our ancient seers and saints. Svami Narayana practised this throughout his life and generated a band of Sadhus and disciples who implement this teaching even today, some 170 years after his departure from this mortal world.

In the contemporary situation in India, the teachings of Svami Narayana and his illustrious successors like the present Head, His Supreme Divine Highness Sri Pramukh Svami Maharaj are not only relevant but extremely desirable alternatives to the social and moral stagnation, degeneration and nihilism that are spreading with lightning speed. The strong humanistic value-structure has to be rejuvenated for the survival of the comity of Nations. Preaching has to be practised and it must be based on “lived” experience like that of the great Master.

From another point of view also Svami Narayana’s teachings are more relevant than ever before, because of his message of Sad-dharma and Sat-sanga. In the Indian society which is dominated by wrongly understood Varnasrama-values the message of Sad-dharma alone can bring hope and peace. Like Sri Narayana Guru of Kerala (A.D. 1856-1928) who expounded “Manavadharma” to counteract the evils of casteism, Svami Narayana tackled the root-cause of the problem. He pronounced that all are equal. It is worth pointing out that Sri Narayana Guru founded the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yoga in Kerala in A.D. 1903 as a refuge for all the non-Brahmins, untouchables and other lower classes who numbered about one crore. They are given the sad dharma viz., the teaching about one God, one caste and one religion for mankind. Prior to Sri Narayana Guru, Sri Vidyadhiraja Chattambi Svami (A.D. 1853-1923) sowed seeds of religious integration in the fertile soil of Kerala. His Malayalam work, Vedadhikaranirupanam declares that every one is entitled to study the Vedas provided one is Sattvik by nature, has necessary
intellectual sharpness to grasp, and the tongue to utter the Mantras. Svami Narayana is very much relevant today because he admired the good both in Christianity and Islam. He knew that India had already become cosmopolitan and composite in culture, with the providential spread of these two religions. The broad outlook of Svami Narayana was later adopted by Svami Vivekananda who learnt from his Guru, Sri Ramakrsna Paramahamsa, that all religions lead to the same goal of God-realization. Helping the destitute, co-operating with all fellow beings in procuring and obtaining equally the means of leading a happy and harmonious life in this world are the basic principles on which the social philosophy of Svami Narayana is founded. In about fifty years of his sojourn on this earth, he worked for the uplift of the downtrodden and the degraded, the depraved and the demoralized men and women in such away that his work will remain as the inexhaustible source of inspiration for thirty hundred years to come. His glorious work concerned the culture of humanity beyond all barriers of time and territory. His contribution to Philosophy, Religion, Culture, Fine Arts like Architecture, Music and Dance take him beyond the limits of his own Fellowship in Gujarat or of Hindu community in India of his times. Now, the followers of Svami Narayana carried out the Aksara Purusottama doctrine as a synonym of Svami Narayana’s Philosophy.

The most important contribution of this Prophet is his crowing service as the link in the lineage of master-exponents, by precept and practice, of man’s infinite greatness and the dignity of all living beings. This is no small achievement. The Svami resuscitated the age-old Bhagavata Dharma, reformed sacrifices and rituals, denounced vices and created an awareness among masses of something higher in life. The result is that we enjoy the fruits of his “labour of love” and bow in reverence to his sacred memory with a prayer that he should take us from non-existence to existence, from darkness to light and from death to

immortality. His Paramahamsa disciples are the social, cultural and spiritual ambassadors of the world. One should take a lesson from them and then prescribe a code of conduct for the leaders in power, for those in opposition, for those in different sectors and organizations, for teachers and for students. The Siksapatri must be made available to one and all. The Svami’s life should be made more popular through films / TV shows and the like.

Certainly the life and teachings of Svami Narayana will make India once again a haven of Bhagavata Dharma and a spiritually reformed India will set other countries also in the right path.

*May Lord Svami Narayana inspire and guide every one!*
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As a social worker, she is deeply interested in the amelioration of the living conditions of the people in the society. This spirit was inculcated in her from early childhood by her illustrious father late lamented Sri. M. Bhakthavatsalam, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

While Vaishnavism met the mundane needs of this eminent social worker, music has been her spiritual fibre. She first started public work as a volunteer during Gandhiji's visit to Madras at the prime age of 18 years. She was for several years Chairman of Central and State Social Welfare Board and was also Sheriff of Chennai. She is the recipient of several awards in social work and scout movement and also Gold medalist of the Indian Red Cross Society awarded by the President of India.

She was deeply involved in Gujarat Earth Quake relief work during the year 2001 and collected Rs. 87 lakhs as donation from the public through Red Cross. She was also instrumental to build 5 primary schools for the Earth Quake affected children in Rajkot, Gujarat.

In the academic field she served as senate member of the Madras University and Executive Council member of the Mother Therasa Women's University and also Annamalai University. Now she is a member of the Syndicate, Bharathidasan University, Trichy.