



The Concept of Shakti in Indian Philosophy

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No study of Indian philosophy is ever complete without reference to the concept of Shakti. God as the divine Mother is considered as a common metaphysical principle by a greater mass of mankind, and hence, finds a prominent place in Indian philosophy. Indian philosophy, as a treasure-trove of diverse faiths, beliefs, concepts and ideologies, has amply been demonstrated by the seers and sages, exponents and expounders, teachers and commentators. Our scriptures, down the ages, have faithfully recorded the visions and views of seers and philosophers respectively. The Vedas, Upanishads, Epics, Puranas, notwithstanding different treatises of great teachers, have highly contributed to this field of realisation and understanding.

In Advaitavada, Brahma is considered to be the formless Absolute, the summit of spiritual

consciousness. In this state, one enjoys Satchidananda, the existence-consciousness-bliss. Shakti is Brahma with attributes, the manifest power of Brahma. When Brahma is power in



passive form, Shakti is the active power at work. Shakti, the Ultimate feminine power is always at play in creation, preservation and destruction.

In Rig Veda, a hymn reads in honour of God, the Mother:

"I spread the heavens over the earth. I am the energy in Brahma; I am the mother of all. It is for Me that Brahma resides in all

intellects, and it is I Who have penetrated all the worlds with My power and holding them in their places..... Again, apart from the heavens and apart from this, I remain always the all-important primal energy, as well as the intelligent being perfect and untouched by the magic creation."(R.V. - X.125.3, 7)¹



In Kenopanishad we find an interesting episode. When the gods grew arrogant after their victory over the demons, it was Uma, God the Mother, Who appeared before them and revealed the supreme knowledge. In this regard, a philosophical explanation will be helpful. The supreme power cannot perform the activities of creation, preservation and destruction without the help of energy. S. Radhakrishnan interprets the play of the Shakti in the following manner:

When Isvara creates, He is dominated by the energy known as Vak or speech, when He preserves, by that of Sri or Laxmi; when He destroys, by that of Durga. Shakti is Isvari, the source, support and end of all existence.²

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) was a great spiritual teacher of his time. He experienced the highest state of consciousness in his life. His day-to-day conversations were replete with highest spiritual truth. He experimented diverse religious practices and established a spiritual unity underlying among them. From his realisation he says:

He who is Purusha is also Prakriti; He who is Brahma is also Shakti. He is called Purusha or Brahma when He is inactive, that is to say when He ceases to, preserve or destroy; and He is called Shakti or Prakriti when He engages in those activities. But He who is Brahma is non other than Shakti.³

He goes on to say further:

One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative or the Relative without the Absolute. The primordial power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving and destroying in play as it were. This power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahma; and Brahma is verily Kali. It is one and the same reality.⁴

Sri Ramakrishna calls the Divine Mother as Kali. She is known in different names in different religious sects such as Shaktism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Tantrism. She is known as Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kali, Chandi, Chamundi, Tripurasundari, Lalita, Kundalini, Parvati, and in many other names. As Mahakali, She destroys evil and restores righteousness. As sustainer, She is Mahalakshmi, Who bestows bliss and prosperity. She is Mahasaraswati, who nourishes all creative faculties like art, music and dance. Shakti, as Great Mother, finds elaborate exposition in Devi Mahatmya of Markandeya Purana. Thirteen chapters of the text are devoted to the Adyashakti, the primordial power. This is known as Chandi or Durga Saptasati. The Divine Mother is worshipped as the supreme power immanent in all the beings of the universe:

Ya devi sarvabhuteshu Shakti rupena samsthita
Namastasyei namastasyei namastasyei namonamoh
Ya devi sarvabhuteshu matrurupena samsthita
Namastasyei namastasyei namastasyei namonamoh⁵

The tradition of worshipping goddess Durga is associated with the unceasing spiritual heritage of India. Devi Durga killed Mahisasura to dispel the sufferings of the gods. In the Ramayana, Ramachandra of Ajodhya, worshipped goddess Durga before he fought the battle against Ravana, the mighty demon-king of Lanka. During Mahabharata war, Arjun was asked by Sri Krishna to worship the goddess Durga to fight against the Kauravas.

In Devi Bhagabata, the Divine Mother preceded the Gods-Trio. She not only annihilated the evil, but also paved the way for the wellbeing of the gods and men. After the Pralaya, the Great Deluge, Vishnu emerged as a child floating on a fig leaf. In his utter astonishment, he asked who he was, who created him, and why he was there.



Suddenly a celestial voice was heard, which announced the advent of the Divine Mother. He was astounded to witness Her majestic form in limitless grandeur. Vishnu realized that She was Adyashakti and bowed to Her in reverence.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was an ardent advocate of evolutionary consciousness and the concept of superman. *The Life Divine* is a record of his intimate spiritual realisations. A great poet and a seer, he could foresee the progressive rise of human consciousness. As a spiritual collaborator of the Mother, he made Pondicherry a preparatory pedestal for the new age to come in. He presents an explicit exposition of the Divine Mother in his *Life Divine*:

For we can see the Conscious-Power, the Shakti that acts and creates is not other than Maya or all- knowledge of Brahman; it is the Power of the Self; Prakriti is the Power of the Self; Prakriti is the working of Purusha, Conscious Being active by its own Nature: the duality then then of Soul and World-Energy, silent Self and the creative power of the Spirit, is not really something dual and separate, it is biune. As we cannot separate Fire and the power of Fire, it has been said, so we cannot separate the Divine Reality and its Conscious-Force, Chit-Shakti.⁶

The concept of Shakti is as old as Indian civilization. It has been reflected in scriptures from ancient time to the present time. In spite of variations in the form of worship in diverse religious principles, the internal spirit of realisation of the Divine Mother has always remained the same. She is both immanent and transcendent.

References :

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4. Nikhilananda, Swami, (2003), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Chennai, p-134.
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