

Sri Madhava Ashish: A View of the Universe and its Spiritual Origins

Out of all this came the realisation that we were dealing with a view of the universe and its spiritual origins which, if we were honest, would make us examine and reformulate the religious teaching which had guided us so far. For we had been introduced to and brought up in a school of the orthodox *Krishna* cult. There were some things one just did not question, such as what one meant by *Krishna*. I was given an overwhelming vision of *Radha-Krishna* shining in all their glory, and within a few days shown that this was the view of an immature boy. It was by no means the end of the path as it had seemed to be, but only the beginning of a new stage on the road to the completion of the human task.

So slow is the pace of change at times that it took a long time before one could see how this ‘new’, almost secular approach to the truth, could be reconciled with what were also the real truths of the devotional approach. *Omnia vincit amor* (love conquers all), the Vaishnava greeting *Jay Radhe* (victory to Radha) and Krishna as *Prema Swarup* (the self-nature of love) were all saying the same thing, and one did not need to get stuck with a particular image. The love which glues the universe together is utterly real and needs no peacock feathers, flutes, necklaces and caste marks to make it visible.

It all sounds so simple that one is almost ashamed to admit to having found it so difficult to see. Yet I have known people ready to sneer at my simplicity who seemed to have understanding without love. **And all sorts of people who agree with what I say yet still want the blessings of a mythical deity for their sons’ success in school examinations.**

The way I like to present it goes something like this: We find ourselves in this wonderful universe, full of living things that grow and decay — sensitive plants, intelligent animals, singing birds, roaring tigers, and caterpillars that metamorphose into butterflies. And then there are men: wonderful men and horrible men, crude and refined men, dull and brilliant men, the only living beings capable of formulating the question of where everything comes from and what it is all about.

As a man, if one was to ask these questions while ignoring the second-hand wisdom passed down to us, might one not arrive at the conclusion that the answer to the whole mystery must lie in the solution to the greatest mystery of all, namely, what is the nature of the awareness that allows one not only to observe this mysterious universe, but also to know that one observes it — to lie in the distinction between the observer himself and the biological apparatus of observation?

As soon as one begins this enquiry, one is faced with its root problem: what I seek at the root of my being by its very nature cannot be taken out and looked at, for it is itself the very thing that looks. Yet, like the mirror in which I can see my own face, there is a mirror that reflects many of the qualities of this unseeable source of awareness.

That mirror is dream. The more one cleans and polishes it, the more clearly it reflects. And though one must not confuse the brilliance of the mirror image with the incandescence of what it reflects, neither should one deny the validity of the knowledge it gives, for dream can turn to vision, and vision can turn to understanding.

Madhava Ashish, *An Open Window: Dream as Everyman’s Guide to the Spirit* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2007) xviii-xx

