

## ***Bhāvanā: A Precursor to Understanding*** **Swami Dayananda Saraswati<sup>1</sup>**

*Hey mind let's go to the banks of river Gaṅgā & Yamunā  
The sacred water of river Gaṅgā & Yamunā cools my body  
Meera says Hey Lord I rest at your lotus feet....*

Nowhere else in the world do you have an attitude like this towards a river. Perhaps if the Hudson had flowed in India, it would be equally respected, revered, and worshipped. The devout Hindu, though he may be in Bombay where there is no river, repeats this verse:

*Gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvari sarasvati  
narmade sindhu kāveri jale 'smin sannidhiṃ kuru*

O rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu, Kāverī, may you all be present in this water!

These are the main rivers in India: Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu and Kāverī. Only the Sarasvatī has either dried up or it is a mystic river.

These main rivers are considered sacred. And the devotee says “*asmin jale sannidhiṃ kuru*”. May you take your presence in this tub of water, or bucket, or shower head if you have a shower. Gaṅgā is looked upon as *jñānam*, knowledge and Narmadā is *yoga*, power. *Sādhus* who seek knowledge are on the banks of the Gaṅgā. Those who seek *yoga* go to the Narmadā. And thus, all the rivers have some meaning and are considered sacred.

There is an anecdote. Once there was a big discussion on these main rivers. Someone asked, although all of these rivers are sacred for a Hindu, which is considered the most sacred. Everybody said Gaṅgā. There seemed

to be no second opinion about it. Everybody said Gaṅgā. Then one fellow stood up and said, “Yamunā”. “Yamunā is the most sacred river”. Of course, this was highly disputed. But this one fellow would not back down. He kept insisting that Yamunā was the most sacred river. Finally, the king, hearing of the dispute, called all these people together and asked them to prove why Gaṅgā is the most sacred. Everyone agreed that Gaṅgā is the most sacred river because of the *purāṇas*, the stories we have associated with the Gaṅgā, and the sages who have lived upon its banks. For many reasons the Ganges was decided on as the most sacred.

Then this lone fellow stood again and said, “What was the question? The question was among all the rivers in India which is the most sacred. I said Yamunā because Yamunā was the river on the banks of which Lord Krishna grew up. He grew up there and played there, and the Yamunā became associated with his name. All rivers are sacred, but Yamunā is the most sacred because of Lord Krishna. He had taken a bath in that river and played on the banks. He is the cause for Yamunā being the most sacred”.

Then the king asked, “What about Gaṅgā? It came from the heaven, etc. It must also be considered most sacred”. This fellow answered, “You forgot the question. Among the rivers which is the most sacred? Who told you Gaṅgā is a river? Gaṅgā is not a river. Gaṅgā is *jñānam* – knowledge. It came from the head of the Lord. What comes from the head of the lord is only *jñānam*. Gaṅgā is not a river. It is *jñānam*, knowledge.”

This is how we look upon Gaṅgā. It is purely *bhāvanā*, an attitude that comes from seeing the lord, *Īśvara*, in everything. The whole Hindu religion is a religion of *bhāvanā*.

At one time I was living on the banks of the Gaṅgā. In those days there was nothing there but my small hut, and next to me one *sādhu* built another hut with his own hands. He was living there, just a few yards away, and he had some kind of an attitude. He was a *sādhu* all right, but he had his own attitude, and he created some nuisance by the Gaṅgā. Some devotees who had come all the way from Rajasthan were taking a bath and they complained to some elder *mahātma* there, “*Yeh sādhu easa karta hai*, and what is all this? We have come here, it is a sacred river, and how can he desecrate this river like this?”

Then the *mahātma* called him and said “Why did you do this?” The *sādhu* said “Oh this is just water so why not?” The *mahātma* said, “Yes it is water. Who says water is not there? But for those people who come from all over India, for them it is not water. Not that they don’t see water. For them too it is water. That’s why they get in and take a bath. They don’t think it is mud or anything. For them also it is water. And for us also it is all water. But they see something more than water. Who is greater then? You don’t see more than water. Ordinary people who are not *sādhus* who are just devotees just simple people from all over the country, they come here to see this water. Do they come here to see water? They don’t see just water. Who is greater? Are you greater or are they greater?”

The *sādhu* said, “They’re all fools”.

But they are not fools. They still see water. If they don’t see water then you can call them fools. If they don’t see it as water then there is something wrong. But they see something more, they see some sanctity there. To have that heart takes ages. To look upon flowing water as

something sacred, and travel miles to see it, definitely takes a certain attitude. *Bhāvanā*.

That attitude comes from our concept of *Īśvara* – the Lord. The concept, the vision of *Īśvara*, is that there is nothing separate from *Īśvara*. There is a *mantra* that reveals this particular aspect of *Īśvara*. Everyday when we eat we are supposed to chant this mantra:

*brahmārpaṇaṃ brahma havirbrahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam  
brahmaiva tena gantavyaṃ brahmakarmasamādhinā*

The means of offering is *Brahman*. The oblation is *Brahman*, offered by *Brahman* into the fire, which is *Brahman*. *Brahman* indeed is to be reached by one who sees everything as *Brahman*. (Bhagavad Gītā 4-24)

It means that nothing is separate from *Brahman* for the one who has the vision of *Brahman*. Therefore he doesn't lose the vision. Just like you don't require to make a special effort to recognize the space, because everything is in space. Objects happen to be in space. I see only a table, and don't take special notice that the table is in space. One who has the vision of *Brahman* is '*brahmakarmasamādhinā*'. The eater is *Brahman*. The fire is *Brahman*. The food is also *Brahman*. *Prāṇa* is *Brahman*. Therefore we also say, '*prāṇaya svāha, apānāya svāha, vyānāya svāha, udānāya svāha, samānāya svāha, brahmaṇe svāha.*' *Prāṇa* is respiration, *apāna* is exhalation, *vyāna* is circulation, *udāna* is the reversal process, *samāna* is digestion. Each one has got a certain sphere of activity in the metabolism, in the physiological functions. We just name each one. It is a crude way of naming, but then it covers everything. We are not concerned with the specifics of anatomy because it is religion. Anatomy is not important. It is only the attitude or, *bhāvanā*.

*To be continued..*