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II. The Nature of Brahman-God

Throughout this book the “comparative method” is employed searching for similarities and contrasts between the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and other Indian and Western thinkers. Through this systematic analysis we gain a broader understanding of the various implications of the central idea presented.

1. Two Aspects: Brahman-God as Static-Undivided-Formless-Transpersonal (Nirguna Brahman) and Dynamic-Composite-With Form-Personal (Saguna Brahman)

Sri Ramakrishna was initiated into the Tantra religion of Shakta Monism that teaches (according to Jadunath Sinha) that Parama Shiva “is inactive, calm, unborn, imperishable, unaging, immortal, unmanifest, unknowable, immovable, stable, and transcendent of the gunas.... Parama Shiva is the transcendent, self-revealing, infinite, undifferentiated, consciousness (chit). Shakti (Divine Power) is His aspect inseparable and non-different from Him. He is the quiescent, static, impersonal or suprapersonal, Absolute [equivalent to Nirguna Brahman]. But Shakti [equivalent to Saguna Brahman, Personal God] is the personal, active, dynamic, God invested with ‘I’ consciousness, knowledge, will and action as essential attributes and powers. Shakti is feminine in Sanskrit, and is so called Divine Mother. The universe is the expression of Her free will. Shiva is indifferent to the creation, maintenance, and

destruction of the universe. Shakti creates, maintains, and dissolves it ... Parama Shiva is called Sunya, because He transcends all phenomenal appearances, and because He is unqualified and predicateless. Bindu, dynamic consciousness, was created out of static universal consciousness—Parama Shiva.... Shiva and Shakti are not two supreme realities, but are the two aspects of the Supreme Reality—the Brahman. They are not two Deities but one Divine Being, impersonal-personal, static-dynamic, transcendent-immanent. Shiva is the non-spatial, non-temporal, transcendent, indescribable, incomprehensible, formless, partless, indeterminate, Nondual, Supreme Reality of the nature of infinite bliss. He is supremely beautiful. He is the supreme light of consciousness residing in the hearts of all creatures as their Supreme Self (Paramatman).”¹ “The same Reality as the Immutable, the Static, is Shiva; and as the Mutable, the Dynamic aspect, It is Shakti. There is no difference. 'Within Shiva there is Shakti; within Shakti there is Shiva. [There is] no difference between them; they are like the moon and the moonlight'.... Shiva is the Reality as Being; Shakti is the same Reality as Becoming. Both are different poises of the One. The universe is a Becoming, a Self-manifestation of Shiva worked out through His innate Power, Shakti. Creation ensues in the expansive mood of Shakti, destruction in the mood of withdrawal into Herself, in to Shiva.”²

Following Sri Ramakrishna’s parables, “God is formless, and God is possessed of form too. And He is also that which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone knows what all He is.” “To think of Him as formless is quite right. But take care that you do not run away with the idea that that view alone is true and that all else is false. Meditating upon Him as a being with forms is equally right. But you must hold on to your particular view until you realise God; and then everything would be clear.” “As water, when congealed, becomes ice, so also the visible form of the Almighty is the materialised manifestation of the all-pervading formless Brahman. It may be called in fact Sachchidananda solidified. As the ice, which is part and parcel of water, remains in water and afterwards melts into it, so the Personal God, Who is part and parcel of the Impersonal, rises from the Impersonal, remains there, and ultimately merges into It and disappears.”³

From his spiritual experiences Sri Ramakrishna mentioned that Brahman-God is beyond:

Being and Non-being; the gross, subtle, and causal bodies; everything, existence and non-existence, form and formless, good and bad, three gunas [including sattva] and prakriti, *Vedas* and their injunctions, knowledge and ignorance, life and death, realm of maya; mind, speech, and words; pain and pleasure, the Relative state of

existence, righteousness and unrighteousness, religious scriptures, vice and virtue, and word and thought.⁴

Ramakrishna explains the Vijnana Vedanta philosophy of the reality of the Personal Brahman-God with attributes and Impersonal aspects of Brahman-Essence of God without attributes. “The vijnanis accept both God with form and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Impersonal.... But to tell you the truth, He who is formless is also endowed with form. To His bhaktas [loving devotees of God] He reveals Himself as having a form. It is like a great ocean, an infinite expanse of water, without any trace of shore. Here and there some of the water has been frozen. Intense cold has turned it into ice. Just so, under the cooling influence, so to speak, of the bhakta’s love, the Infinite appears to take a form. Again, the ice melts when the sun rises; it becomes water as before. Just so, one who follows the path of knowledge—the path of discrimination—does not see the form of God any more. To him everything is formless. The ice melts into formless water with the rise of the Sun of Knowledge. But mark this: form and formlessness belong to one and the same Reality.... Then one doesn't feel any more that God is a Person, nor does one see God's forms. What He is cannot be described. Who will describe Him? He who would do so disappears. He cannot find his ‘I’ any more.” “It is a joy to merge the mind in the Indivisible [Nirguna] Brahman through contemplation. And it is also a joy to keep the mind on the Lila, the Relative, without dissolving it in the Absolute.” “It is like a bel-fruit, which consists of three parts: seeds, shell, and flesh. That which is the Absolute has also its relative aspect, and that which is the relative also has its absolute aspect.”⁵ Ramakrishna places the Personal God with form and the Impersonal without form on the same level. He does not say one is superior to or ontologically prior to the other. Vijnana is an example of the plenitude of the infinite Brahman-God whose actions and capabilities far exceed ours. In Christian thought one Essence manifests as a Trinity of three hypostases (Persons) differentiated by the relations among them.

Ramakrishna continues emphasizing their bidirectionality, “Thus [Nirguna] Brahman [Essence of God] and Shakti [Power of God] are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays. What is milk like? Oh, you say, it is something white. You cannot think of the milk without the whiteness, and again, you cannot think of the

whiteness without the milk. Thus one cannot think of [Nirguna] Brahman without Shakti, or of Shakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of 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 Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kali. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call It Brahman. But when It engages in these activities, then we call It Kali or Shakti. The Reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form.”⁶ “Krishna [Personal God] is none other than Satchidananda, the Indivisible Brahman. The water of the ocean looks blue from a distance. Go near it and you will find it colourless. He who is endowed with attributes is also without attributes. The Absolute and *the* Relative belong to the same Reality.” “Yet Brahman and Shakti are, in fact, not different. That which is the Blissful Mother is, again, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. They are like the gem and its lustre. When one speaks of the lustre of the gem, one thinks of the gem; and again, when one speaks of the gem, one refers to its lustre. One cannot conceive of the lustre of the gem without thinking of the gem, and one cannot conceive of the gem without thinking of its lustre. Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute is one, and one only. But It is associated with different limiting adjuncts on account of the different degrees of Its manifestation. That is why one finds various forms of God. The devotee sings, 'O my Divine Mother, Thou art all these!' Wherever you see actions like creation, preservation, and dissolution, there is the manifestation of Shakti. Water is water whether it is calm or full of waves and bubbles. The Absolute alone is the Primordial Energy, which creates, preserves, and destroys.”⁷ We can think of not only omnipotence, but also omnipresence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence as the powers of Brahman-God.

He adds, “The jnani gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating, 'Not this, not this.' Only then can he realize Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the vijnani who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks, lime, and brick-dust. That which is realized intuitively as Brahman, through the eliminating process of 'Not this, not this,' is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The vijnani sees that which is nirguna, without attributes, is also saguna, with attributes.” “God has an unlimited number of forms, some of which are eternal. God has form and He is formless too. Further, He is

beyond both form and formlessness. No one can limit Him.”⁸ In this statement does he equate Nirguna Brahman with “beyond both form and formless,” and Saguna Brahman apart from the creation (as formless) and within the creation (as form)? Or does the “formless” describe Nirguna Brahman?

The Lord “assumes different forms and reveals himself in different ways for the sake of His devotees.”⁹ “Many are the names of God and infinite forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him through that you will realize Him.”¹⁰ For Ramakrishna the Personal Brahman-God is a dominant metaphysical reality that most devotees should worship. An omnipotent and omniscient Personal Brahman-God responds to our prayers and spiritual yearnings. Develop a personal relationship with Brahman-God as son, daughter, servant, and/or friend.

Sri Ramakrishna employs a number of analogies to explain the Vijnana Vedanta philosophy and the relation between Nirguna Brahman the Absolute (Pure Consciousness) and Saguna Brahman, Shakti, the Personal God (Divine Consciousness) who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe. They include:

- a) Substance-Attribute relation: “fire and its power to burn,” “milk and its whiteness,” “water and its wetness,” and “the lustre of the gem.”¹¹
- b) Substance-Mode relation: “The ice melts; it becomes the same water it was before” and “Milk sets into curd, and the curd is churned into butter” they are not essentially different.¹²
- c) Substance-Action: “The snake and its wriggling motion.”¹³
- d) Substance-Form: “Shakti cannot exist without Brahman, just as waves cannot exist without water.”¹⁴
- e) Inactive-Active aspect relation: “Shakti, the Power of Brahman-God. This Primal Power and Brahman are one and the same.”¹⁵
- f) Emanation relation: “The Absolute may be likened to the sun, and the Relative to the rays.”¹⁶
- g) Whole-Part relation: “Whole and part are like fire and its sparks.”¹⁷

Jiva Goswami (c. 1511-96) the Bengal Vaishnava religious philosopher indicated that Ultimate Reality is the unchangeable Substance (Brahman). The relation between Substance and its Shakti (power and energy) is so intimate that one cannot be conceived apart from the other. They are correlative terms mutually implying each other. Shakti being an Essential Attribute is inseparable from Substance, yet they are distinguishable. It is the Shakti and not the Substance that

is transformed into phenomena. Shakti is one and imperishable, while its manifestations are many.¹⁸

A monastic disciple of Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) relates Vedanta philosophy “believes in an intra-cosmic, eternal Being, who is personal as well as impersonal. The personal aspect of that Being is called Ishvara, the creator (i.e., the projector) of the universe, who is worshiped by all nations under different names: by some as the Father in heaven; by others as Divine Mother; by some as God; by others as Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Hari, Buddha or Lord. The impersonal is called Brahman by the Hindus, Will by Schopenhauer, The Unknown and Unknowable by Herbert Spencer, Substantia by Spinoza, Oversoul by Emerson, The Good by Plato, and The Absolute and the Noumenon by others.”¹⁹ Brahman-God is free from all limitations including an anthropomorphic personality. It transcends our conception of personality, yet can assume either a human or a nonhuman form.²⁰

Following Abhedananda’s line of thinking, The supreme Brahman-God, i.e., the Essence of God transcends gender, while Its manifestations encompass both sexes. If Brahman-God was only male or only female, He/She would be a limited and an incomplete deity. Brahman-God is more than a super-human. It objectified Itself as the male Father in Heaven whom Jesus worshiped, and as the female Mother Kali whom Sri Ramakrishna venerated. Out of compassion for His devotees, Brahman-God manifests in the world in both male and female form. Only in this way can the devotee gain a rapport with Brahman-God, since the Supreme Deity in Its internal nature is beyond their comprehension. Can Personal Brahman-God combine both male and female natures in a single being or transcends gender?

The Vedantic philosopher and mystic Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) comprehended that the one integral Brahman is referred to as the transcendental triune principle of Sachchidananda (“Infinite Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss”) in Its static aspect, and the immanent Supermind in Its dynamic aspect. “Being turns into becoming and yet it is always Itself and other than Its becoming.” Sachchidananda is a pure unity without any trace of division and differentiation. Supermind is “Sachchidananda not resting in Its pure infinite invariable consciousness, but proceeding out of this primal poise ... into movement which is Its form of Energy and instrument of cosmic creation.”²¹ If there was no Supermind, and Sachchidananda “is the sole reality, then the world is not and never existed, could never have been conceived; for indivisible consciousness (such as possessed by Sachchidananda) is undivided consciousness and cannot originate division and differentiation.”²² Supermind is the self-consciousness and self-understanding of

Brahman the highest reality. Being omnipotent and omniscient, He is the spiritual force of the Divine creative consciousness. As Personal Brahman-God, Supermind is called Ishvara who comprehends all of the possibilities of creation, and as “active will and knowledge” has the understanding to always select the proper course and the effective potency to achieve what He chooses. Supermind is not “a being limited by his qualities, individual, and separate from all others; for all such personal gods are only limited representations or names and Divine personalities of the one Ishvara.” “We must not indeed exclude the personal aspect of the Deity, for the impersonal is only one face of existence; the Divine is All-existence, but it is also the one Existent.”²³

R. K. Garg expresses this view, “For [Sri] Aurobindo, Brahman is a dynamic unity of existence, conscious-force, bliss and supermind. It is simultaneously both transcendent and immanent, dynamic and static, being and becoming, without forms and with forms etc. Brahman, for Aurobindo, has an eternal creative power which being an integral and real part and parcel of Brahman creates a real world.... To quote him, ‘Force is inherent in existence. Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest it exists none-the-less and is not abolished, diminished or any way essentially altered.’”²⁴ Aurobindo writes, “This is the supreme Divine, God, who possesses both the infinite and the finite, and in whom the personal and the impersonal, the one Self and the many existences, being and becoming, the world-action and the supracosmic peace, pravrtti and nivrtti, meet, are united, are possessed together and in each other. In God all things find their secret truth and their absolute reconciliation.”²⁵ “The Supreme Reality is an Absolute not limited by either oneness or multiplicity but simultaneously capable of both; for both are its aspects, although the oneness is fundamental and the multiplicity depends upon the oneness.”²⁶

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) the Vedantic philosopher affirmed, “According to the *Upanishads*, the Absolute and God are one; we call it the supreme Brahman to emphasize its transcendence of the finite, its unknowability, its all-comprehensiveness; we call it Ishvara to emphasize the personal aspect so necessary for religious devotion.”²⁷ “The supra-personal and the personal representations of the Real are the absolute and relative ways of expressing one Reality. When we emphasize the nature of reality in Itself, we get the absolute Brahman, when we get emphasis on its relation to us, we get the Personal Bhagwan [God].”²⁸ “The question of the relation of God and the Absolute. These are not to

be regarded as exclusive of each other. The Supreme in its non-relational aspect is the Absolute; in its active aspect it is God.... The infinite is both *amurta*, formless, and *murta*, formed. The coexistence of the two is the very nature of Universal Being. It is not a mere juxtaposition of two opposites. The Divine is formless and nameless and yet capable of manifesting all forms and names.”²⁹ “Brahman and Ishvara are not distinct entities but different aspects of the same Reality.... The Absolute is a living reality with a creative urge. When this aspect is stressed, the Absolute becomes a Personal God, Ishvara.... Ishvara is Brahman with creative power. He is Brahman with the principle of self-manifestation.”³⁰ “If *Sat* denotes the primordial being in its undifferentiated unity, *Satya* is the same being immanent in its differentiations. If the Absolute is pure unity without any extension or variation, God [Saguna Brahman] is the creative power by which worlds spring into existence. The Absolute has moved out of its primal poise and become knowledge-will. It is the all-determining principle. It is the Absolute in action as Lord and Creator. While the Absolute is spaceless and timeless potentiality, God is the vast self-awareness comprehending, apprehending every possibility.... Supra-cosmic transcendence and cosmic universality are both real phases of the one Supreme. In the former aspect the Spirit is in no way dependent on the cosmic manifold; in the latter the Spirit functions as the principle of the cosmic manifold. The supra-cosmic silence and the cosmic integration are both real. The two, *Nirguna* and *Saguna Brahman*, Absolute and God, are not different.... It is the same *Brahman* who is described in different ways.”³¹

2. Western Concepts Concerning the Two Aspects of God

From the Western standpoint Plotinus (c. 205-70) describes how the One (Hen, equivalent to Nirguna Brahman) brings the Nous (Divine Intellect, Saguna Brahman, Ishvara) into existence. “What comes into being from the One does so without the One being moved ... It must have come to be without the One moving at all, without any inclination or act of will or any sort of activity on Its part. How did It come to be then, and what are we to think of as surrounding the One in Its repose? It must be a *radiation* from It while It remains unchanged, like the bright light of the sun which, so to speak, runs round it, springing from it continually while it remains unchanged. All things which exist, as long as they remain in being, necessarily produce from their own substances, in dependence on their present power, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside of them, a kind of image of

the archetypes from which it was produced: fire produces the heat which comes from it; snow does not only keep its cold inside itself.... the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and Its product is less than Itself. What then must we say about the most perfect? Nothing can come from It except that which is next greatest after It. Intellect [Nous] is next to It in greatness and second to It: for Intellect sees It and needs It alone; but It has no need of Intellect ... But we say that Intellect [Nous] is an image of that Good [equivalent to the One]; for we must speak more plainly; first of all we must say that what has come into being must be in a way that Good, and retain much of It and be a likeness of It, as light is of the sun.... Intellect, certainly, by Its own means even defines Its being for Itself by the power which comes from the One, and because Its substance is a kind of single part of what belongs to the One and comes from the One, It is strengthened by the One and made perfect in substantial existence by and from It.”³²

Ibn al-'Arabi (1165-1240) the Islamic sage born in Spain and whose school dominated Muslim India discerned, “The Divine Essence, which is all that exists, may be regarded from two aspects: (a) as a pure simple attributeless essence; (b) as an essence endowed with attributes. God, considered absolutely, is beyond relation and therefore beyond knowledge—inconceivable and ineffable. From this point of view, God, in a sense, is not God.... His essence is one and His attributes are many. When the essence is independent of us all, it is named absolute Oneness; and when it manifests its attributes and names, it becomes Oneness in multiplicity.... While God is independent of created beings in respect of His essence, He requires them in respect of His Divinity.”³³ God as an essence cannot be understood in the same way as God as a god.... In respect of Himself, He is ‘independent of the worlds,’ but, in respect of the most beautiful Names which demand the cosmos because of its possibility in order for their effects, to become manifest within it, He demands the existence of the cosmos.” Professor William Chittick clarifies Arabi’s position, “The Divinity [Allah] is the highest level and the essence stands ‘beyond’ the Divinity, which is to say that the essence is not a level. Or rather, Divinity is the level of the essence.... ‘The Real can be viewed in respect of the essence or in respect of the name Allah.’ As stated earlier, the terms essence and Divinity are applied to the same Reality, but from different points of view. In respect of the essence, nothing positive can be said about God; attributes must be negated from Him. But in respect of the Divinity, all names can be ascribed to Him. In other words, God cannot be understood in a positive, affirmative way in respect of His essence, but He can be understood so in respect of His names. In the same way, levels—which, like the

names, are relationships—can only be discerned in respect of the Divinity, not in respect of the essence.”³⁴

Japanese Professor Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-93) with a Zen-Buddhist background further clarifies Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophy, “The first of these two is the self-manifestation of the Essence within Itself. Here the Absolute reveals Itself to Itself. It is, in other words the first appearance of the self-consciousness of the Absolute.... The 'most holy emanation' represents the first decisive stage in the self-manifestation of the Absolute. It is the stage at which the Absolute manifests Itself not to others but to Itself. It is, in modern terminology, the rise of self-consciousness in the Absolute. It is important to remark, further, that this kind of Self-manifestation has occurred from eternity.... [In the next two stages] what are generally known as 'Names' and 'Attributes' are nothing but theological expressions for this infinite variety of the possible forms of Self-manifestation of the Absolute. The Names and Attributes are, in other words, a classification of the unlimited number of relations in which the Absolute stands to the world. These relations, as long as they stay in the Absolute Itself, remain *in potentia*; they are not *in actu*. Only when they are realized as concrete forms in us, creatures, do they become 'actual.' The Names, however, do not become realized immediately in individual material things, but first within the Divine Consciousness itself in the form of permanent archetypes.”³⁵

In the Jewish Kabbalah the first principle is God the infinite (Ein-Sof), being an absolute unity that is endless and boundless. “The hidden God” or “innermost being” of God is without qualities or attributes, formless, not comprehended by the human intellect nor described in words, for there is nothing that grasps or depicts It. Being infinite It has neither a will nor intellect, language, or actions which are characteristic of finite things. In the strict sense, It is non-personal, although It reveals Itself as personal. The *Torah* refers only to God's manifestations and not to God's own Being, which is, transcends Its relationship to the created world. The term Ein-Sof is found in Kabbalic literature after 1200 to distinguish It from the Sefirot that emanates from It.

Ein-Sof (the Infinite) makes Its existence known to the creation through the ten Sefirot, which are divine manifestations and emanations of Its attributes, being stages of self-manifestation and self-revelation. The creative power of the sefirot lives and acts in them, by which the sustaining life force of existence is channeled. It continually creates the physical and higher metaphysical realms. They are ten

different channels through which the one God reveals His will. Each has a particular role to play in forming reality.³⁶

“The Ten Sefirot are: (1) Keter, ‘Crown’, the divine will to create; (2) Hokhmah, ‘Wisdom’, in which all God’s creative activity is contained in *potentia*; (3) Binah, ‘Understanding’, the unfolding in the Divine Mind of the details of creation; (4) Hesed, ‘Loving kindness’, the divine goodness in its uncontrolled flow; (5) Gevurah, ‘Power’, the divine judgment which arrests the flow of loving kindness so that creatures can endure and not be engulfed in the splendour of the divine grace; (6) Tiferet, ‘Beauty’, the harmonizing principle affecting the necessary balance between Hesed and Gevurah; (7) Netzah, ‘Victory’ and (8) Hod, ‘Splendour’, the two supporting principles; (9) Yesod, ‘Foundation’, the generative principle; and 10) Malkhut, ‘Sovereignty’, the governing principle, the prototype of God’s rule over His creatures. God thus unfolds Himself to His creatures by means of ten emanations. He emerges from His concealment in order to bring His creatures into being that they might share in His goodness.”³⁷ Netzah is the lasting endurance of God, Hod the majesty of God, and Yesod all active forces of God.

In the Kabbalah, Malkhut is also referred to as Shekhinah (from root shakhan “to dwell”) the female aspect of God. Malkhut the lowest of the sefirot is the intermediary between the emanations and the material world. In Judaism the concept of Shekhinah is also associated with the Holy Spirit. Contemporary Jewish feminists and others have placed an increased emphasis on Shekhinah as possessing the feminine attributes of God with the characteristics of mother, nurturer, protector, and compassion.³⁸ For the Holy Spirit as feminine see Ch. III. Avatara-Divine Incarnation: Their Spiritual and Human Nature, Sec. 2. Possible Indian Views of the Christian Trinity.

The most outstanding Christian interpreter of this doctrine is Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327). His writings are based on religious philosophy, the *Bible*, and most important on his own spiritual experiences. He relates the Essence of God to the Power of God this way. The eternal Godhead (Gottheit, Divinitas, Nirguna Brahman) is without beginning or end, inexpressible above all names. It is inactive, negation, one, absolute unity, simple One without any division or multiplicity, transcending modes, power, and qualities, the “original ground” of all existence. It transcends the power of thought used to express It and is not reducible to human intelligence. Unity with the Godhead, the highest attainment in this life is attained through deep contemplation and not discursive thought. One enters the formless essence that precedes creation and all separation. From the anterior Godhead the Divine

Essence, there is an emanation, a diffusion, a flow resulting in God (Gott, Deus, Saguna Brahman). The Godhead remains as the Divine Substance, the ground and unity underlying the three Persons of the Trinity, the Godhead beyond God. It exists in the mode and property of the three Persons. God's three relations with one nature are not separate from His essence. God is the Divine Being, creator, the First Cause; the Son the Second Person is the thought in which the Father knows Himself, and the Holy Spirit is the love that unites the Father and Son.³⁹ Eckhart's teachings have been compared to those of Shankara by Rudolph Otto in *Mysticism East and West* (1932) and to Mahayana Buddhism by D. T. Suzuki in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (1957).

The Eastern Orthodox Christian Church follows the theology of Archbishop Gregory Palamas (1296-1357/59). His fundamental idea is the distinction between the Essence (Ousia) and the uncreated Divine Energy of God. These two remain differentiated for all eternity. The essence is nameless, unmanifested, unknowable, and imparticipable, transcending all names, manifestations, finite knowledge, and participations. It is ontologically (not chronologically) prior to the energies that proceed from It. Energies are manifestations and exteriorizations of God acting on the world. They are not separate from God, but are God. The relation of essence to energy [shakti] is cause to effect. Since the essence of God is eternally unknowable, it cannot be experienced by a person while living on earth or in afterlife. Conversely, His uncreated energies can be known by humans in this life and in the next. Energies are Gods activities in our life and His relation to the creation and humanity. God is not revealed in His essence, but in His divine grace (charis), powers (dynamis), and energies (energeia). He is personally present in all three of these. Can we say that each of these three is the one God in another form? While God as transcendent is forever hidden in His essence, conversely as immanent He seeks to communicate and unite with us personally through His energy. Human's can participate in God's energy but not in his essence. Divine energies concern both the mutual relations between the Persons of the Trinity (within the divine life) and God's relation with His creation and with humans. We learn what He does, and how He relates to His creation and to humans. Through His energies God is self-revealing and empowers others to share in His divine life. God seeks to be personally united with each of us through His divine energies. God is fully present both in His essence and energy, yet is imparticipable in the former and participable in the latter. Thus, we can have a union with God as personal but not with His unknowable essence. The energies can be experienced in the form of light,

which is of divine origin. The uncreated light of God that was manifested to the apostles at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor is seen during prayer and contemplation by the saints in our own time. To maintain monotheism the essence and energy must be two aspects of a single God. In the past Western Christianity tended to reject the essence–energies distinction as polytheistic, characterizing it as a heretical introduction of an unacceptable division of the nature of God. They believed this contradicts the divine unity, though God is One in essence and energy. More recently in the latter part of the 20th century, some Roman Catholic thinkers have taken a positive view of Palamas' teachings, realizing the essence–energies distinction, is compatible with their way of thinking.⁴⁰ Energies bear some relationship to the Indian Shakti.

The Greek word *ousia* can be translated as Essence or as Substance (Latin *substantia*). The Council of Constantinople (1351) concluded, “We conceive this (Energy) not as being outside the substance [essence] of God, but as a substantial and essential movement of God; we say that It proceeds and flows from the Divine Being.... It cannot be separated from the Divine Substance [Essence] either by time or by any temporal and spatial distance but proceeds from It and eternally coexists with It outside time in eternity.” Though there is a conceptual distinction between the cause and Its effects, the separation of substance-essence and energy would break up the unity of God splitting It into two parts. Gregory points out that, “The substance [essence} is incommunicable, indivisible, unnamable, and inapprehensible, the energy is communicable, divisible, nameable, and apprehensible.” All things participate in God’s energy but not in His substance (essence). They concluded that creatures cannot partake of the indivisible Divine Substance-Essence, since if they did they would become one with the Creator having all of His powers, and there would be no distinction between them and God.⁴¹

When Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) the Dutch Reform (Calvinist) theologian in his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek (Reformed Dogmatics, 1895-99)* and other Christians refer to God’s unknowable “being” or “pure essence,” they are approaching the idea of Nirguna Brahman. By contrast, God’s attributes refer to Saguna Brahman the Personal God. Bavinck explains, “In the doctrine of God's attributes we must needs speak of God's being, for whereas God is pure *essence*, the absolute, perfect, only, and un-composed being, no definition can be given of Him: there is no genus to which He belongs, and there are no specific characteristics by means of which He may be differentiated from other beings which belong to the same genus. Even existence as such, which, let us say, He has

in common with all creatures, does not pertain to Him in the same sense as it does to creatures, but pertains to Him analogically. Nevertheless, name him we must: in religion and in theology we need a description of Him in order that we may be enabled to distinguish him from whatever is not God.”

Based on the simplicity (unity, oneness) of God, Bavinck expresses an idea that resembles Ramakrishna’s Vijnana Vedanta philosophy, “Every one of God's attributes [Saguna Brahman-Shakti] is identical with his being: God's attributes do not differ from His essence [Nirguna Brahman] nor from one another.... When the Christian theologian speaks of God's essence he is not speaking of one fundamental attribute from which the others are derived, but he refers to an essence which is identical with supreme life, supreme wisdom, supreme love, etc. Furthermore, the Christian theologian does not have in mind the abstract, contentless essence to which the philosopher refers but the infinitely rich, intensive, concrete essence, an infinite and unbounded ocean of essence, the sum-total of all reality.... God is simple, exalted above all composition, and that there is no real distinction between His being and His attributes. Every attribute is identical with God's being.... when we speak about God, we must maintain that each of His attributes is identical with His being. God is all light, all mind, all wisdom, all logos, all spirit, etc. In God ‘essence is the same as wisdom, the same as goodness, the same as power. One and the same thing is said whether it be stated that God is eternal or that He is immortal or good or just. Whatever God is He is completely and simultaneously. ‘God has no properties but merely is essence, God's properties are really the same as His essence: they neither differ from His essence, nor do they differ materially from one another.’ By means of this doctrine of God's simplicity Christian theology was kept from falling into the error of regarding God's attributes as separate from and more or less independent of His essence.”⁴²

Swami Saradananda mentions, “Generally speaking, this effort to know the truth that transcends the world has developed along two main paths: the negative and the positive. The first is described by the scriptures as *neti, neti* [not this, not this], the path of knowledge; the second as *iti, iti* [this, this], the path of devotion.”⁴³

Ramakrishna before he attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi followed the jnani path to reach the goal, which Bavinck describes from a Christian standpoint. “The philosopher arrives at his concept of essence by means of a process of elimination or subtraction [apophatic, *Via Negativa*, *neti neti*].... Philosophy arrives at this concept by means of subtraction or elimination; i.e., by subtracting from existing

objects whatever pertains to them distinctively, so that only essence, bare existence, common to all things, remains.” After Ramakrishna reached the goal his doctrine of Vijnana Vedanta is based on what Bavinck referred to as the path of addition. He “arrives at his concept of essence by means of addition.... On the other hand, when theology speaks of God as essence, it arrives at this concept not by way of subtraction or elimination but by the opposite process, namely, by addition [Cataphatic (or Kataphatic), *Via Positiva*, Anvaya], i.e., by ascribing to God all creaturely perfections in an absolute sense and by viewing him as absolute reality, the sum-total of all essence, ‘most pure and simple actuality.’ The essence which theology ascribes to God is at once the richest, most complete, and most intensive essence and the most determined and concrete, the absolute, only, and simple essence.” “Absolute essence was not conceived of as *abstract* essence, free from every property and relation, and deprived of all contents; but it was looked upon as the real, the only essence, of infinite fullness, by 'reason of this very fact: that it was absolute (i.e., independent) essence, having the ground of its existence in itself. ‘Absolute is the same as not depending upon anything else.’... description of God's being as absolute essence: God is the real, the true essence, the fullness of essence, the sum-total of all reality and perfection, the totality of essence, to which all other essence owes its origin, an ocean of essence, unbounded and immensurable, the absolute Being, the only Being who has the ground of his existence in himself.”⁴⁴

J. Norman King and Barry L. Whitney spell out the American philosopher Charles Hartshorne’s (1897-2000) position on the idea of the two aspects of God that originated with Alfred North Whitehead, “Hartshorne's contention is that God is best conceived in ‘dipolar’ terms, that is, as having both immutable and mutable aspects. The error of traditional theism, he feels, is that in seeking to preserve God's absolute perfection, it has paid him the unnecessary and erroneous metaphysical compliment of conceiving His nature as monopolar—as pure Being, devoid of becoming, as wholly immutable, without a dynamic aspect, etc. Hartshorne insists that a more adequate conception of the Divine Reality is to conceive God as dipolar: He is both immutable (in his intrinsic, eternal essence) and mutable (in his experience of and response to his creatures); He is the supreme cause of all things, yet is affected by the acts of his creatures; His intrinsic being is an immutable (i.e., steadfast) ethical character, yet His nature becomes (processes) as He expresses that character in response to the contingent acts and decisions of his creatures; He is infinite in his knowledge of all potentiality, yet finite

in His awareness of the world's contingency (for the latter is finite); etc... Against those who contend that the dipolar interpretation of beings results in an untenable paradox of juxtaposing polar opposite categories within a single being, Hartshorne's response is to point out that each being exemplifies the polar categories in different aspects—not the same aspects—of its nature. ‘The law of contradiction,’ he notes, ‘does not bar the presence of contrary determinations in the same entity, but only requires ... a distinction of aspects ... in which the contraries hold.’”⁴⁵ The dipolar relationship between God as ground and consequent has always existed in a state of metaphysical unity. There never was a time when there was only one and not the other. God is dipolar having two aspects. It is nondual, simple, immutable, formless, and one (comparable to Nirguna Brahman) in Its intrinsic primordial nature of Being. It is dual, complex, mutable, with form, and many (comparable to Saguna Brahman) in Its dynamic consequent nature of Becoming when it acts in the universe and responds to humans. The plenitude of Brahman-God requires that It has both natures; otherwise it would be lacking in Its Divine characteristics.⁴⁶

Concerning the antecedent nature of a dipolar God, W. Norris Clarke, S.J. (1915-2008), makes this statement, “According to this philosophy, the ‘primordial nature’ of God is immutable and infinite, but the ‘consequent nature’ of God, as related to the ongoing world process by knowledge and love, is truly involved in this temporal process itself, affected by it in his life of knowledge and love, hence really related to it and truly changing and growing with it, as He knows it and responds to it. Hence God is mutable, finite, and really related to the world in his consequent nature.”⁴⁷

An impartial view from outside the Ramakrishna Order is expressed by Keith Ward (b. 1938) an Anglican priest and professor at Oxford University, “In practice the key teachings of the Ramakrishna Math are its emphasis on realizing the God within, on sensing the presence of divinity in all things, on compassionate service of others, on meditation and renunciation as the true paths to knowing God, and on celebrating the good in all faiths and cultures.... It [Advaita Vedanta] does affirm the existence of one nondual Self, which alone is absolutely self-existent, and so independently real. This Self is not a distinct person, standing in need of or in contingent relation to other persons. It is a reality whose infinite fullness is beyond all conceptual grasp. Yet, It can and does truly manifest in personal form, perhaps as Siva or Kali, and can rightly be worshipped as a supreme personal divinity. It manifests in human forms, in Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, to communicate

God-realization to those who are ready for it. And it lies potential in every human soul, waiting to be realized in all who seek release from bondage to possessions and desires. From It all universes emanate, without beginning or end, and by necessity. In their emanation, infinite possibilities of the Divine Self are expressed, from ignorance, suffering, and passion, to worlds of wisdom, bliss, and calm.... Through many lifetimes they learn to realize God again: Its primitive purity is to be regained by the knowledge of God. It is Brahman who 'becomes' the universe, so Brahman and the universe are identical.... The exclusive interpretation holds that everything except completely changeless nonduality is illusion, and the insight that meditation can bring is to overcome all sense of duality, individuality, and temporality, in a blissful experience of nonduality, which is the goal of religious practice. The inclusive interpretation holds that the one Real expresses Itself in individual souls and their history, so that the basic religious insight is to see Brahman as realizing Itself within and through human lives, in an endless 'playful' manifestation of the infinite possibilities of Brahman. The soul is the instrument and finite experiencer of Brahman.... The simplest way to ease the tensions is to see the whole of creation as a field for the self-realization of the Divine through the compassionate action and growing knowledge of many individual souls, and to see all finite things as wholly dependent on a self-existent reality which is utterly simple and so beyond description.”⁴⁸

Philip Clayton (b. 1956) of Claremont University in California adds, “Dipolar theism is the view that God consists of two natures: an antecedent nature, which is fixed and unchanging and a consequent nature that is fully responsive to the world and arises only in interaction with it.” There is a unity-in-difference, the universe is neither indistinguishable nor ontologically separate from God. “God is related to the world in two modes: as its eternal Ground, the source of all possibilities; and as the Infinitely Related One, the One who internalizes and unifies all experiences within the world.”⁴⁹ “Divinity must include the Ground of Being [Nirguna Brahman] as well as the highest Personal Being {Saguna Brahman}. The two cannot be posited as separate: the Ground of Being cannot exclude the highest Being, nor can a being be God without including the Ground of Being within Itself. However, since God as ultimate principle and God as person stand (in certain respects) in opposition to one another, they cannot simply be asserted simultaneously side by side—unless we think of them as in some way mediated by a third moment. The two must be conceived as combined, yet they cannot be identical.”⁵⁰ Can we think of God with form and without form, as being two aspects of a higher-order Divinity?

Since Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God is One and indivisible, as Pure Consciousness It transcends all intellectual knowledge that requires distinctions. Following Ibn al-'Arabi's reasoning in the first objectifying stage, Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God reveals Itself to Itself by becoming Self-conscious as Saguna Brahman the Personal God. Saguna Brahman-Personal God is the Self-manifestation and the Self-consciousness of Nirguna-Brahman-Essence of God. In the second stage of self-actualization, Saguna Brahman-Personal God as Divine Consciousness contemplates Its internal nature as an infinity of intelligible ideas and potential determinate forms that manifest as the Divine world, In the third stage these forms are actualized in creating the phenomenal world. This process is an ongoing perpetual eternal event without beginning or end. Consequently, the process is not chronological, but follows an ontological ordering occurring at each instance.

Not accepting the idea of God as having two aspects, Nirguna (without attributes, Essence of Brahman-God) and Saguna (with attributes, Manifestations of Brahman-God) has caused modern Christian thinkers to have to deal with difficult theological problems. They ask the questions, how can God be timeless, and yet act in time and know the world as temporal and changing? How God both act in space and yet be non-spatial having no spatial location?⁵¹ How can God be both immutable and mutable, impersonal and personal, partless and with parts, Infinite and with finite form, transcending and within time and space, simple and a Trinity? They falsely assume that God can be only one of these and not both. Most often the former conception (e.g., immutable) was derived by the Christian philosophers from Greek philosophy and the latter (e.g., mutable) by the theologians from the *Bible*. Following Ramakrishna's Double Aspect idea, God is both. They commit the False Dilemma Fallacy thinking there are two mutually exclusive outcomes and only one is possible.

According to the idea of Divine Plenitude, Brahman-God is both Nirguna and Saguna. The contrasts between the two are: absolute-relative, being-becoming, essence-existence, eternal-temporal, formless-with form, immutable-mutable, impassible-passible, one-many, rest-motion, simple-divided, static-dynamic, undivided-divided, and unmanifested-manifested. Five ways of viewing the two nature of Brahman-God are to consider: Brahman-God having two aspects that are ontologically equal (Shaivites, Sri Ramakrishna, Aurobindo); the former describe the essence of God (Nirguna Brahman) and the latter the manifestations of God (Saguna Brahman, Ishvara, Personal God, Trinity); the former are characteristics of the One and the latter of its emanations (Plotinus); a cause and effect relationship

between them (Palamas); and the former are Brahman-God's real characteristics but the human intellect understands Him as the latter (possibly Thomas Aquinas).

3. Brahman-God and the World

Ramakrishna is a panentheist meaning that Brahman-God is both the transcendent Reality and is immanent as being identical with the universe. "The inferior devotee says, 'God exists, but He is very far off, up there in heaven.' The mediocre devotee says, 'God exists in all beings as life and consciousness.' The superior devotee says: 'It is God Himself who has become everything; whatever I see is only a form of God. It is He alone who has become maya, the universe, and all living beings. Nothing exists but God.'" "After realizing God, one sees that it is He Himself who has become the universe and the living beings. But one cannot realize this by mere reasoning." "He is within us, in our hearts. Again, he is outside. The most advanced devotees say that He Himself has become all this." Rama found that it is God who has become the universe and all its living beings. Everything in this world appears real on account of God's reality behind it." "When one is intoxicated with prema, one sees God in all beings." "A man is ignorant so long as he feels that God is far away. He has knowledge when he knows that God is here and everywhere."⁵²

On many occasions, Ramakrishna teaches a Manifestational Panentheism based on degrees of the presence of Brahman-God in the universe. He continues, "God alone has become all this; but He manifests Himself more in certain things than others." "It is God alone who has become everything. But in man He manifests Himself the most." "In some objects He [Brahman-God] is manifested more clearly, and in others less clearly." "He is the gold in all. In some places it is more clearly manifest than in others." "God no doubt exists in all beings as the All-pervading Spirit, but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings."⁵³ "God is everywhere. But then you must remember that there are different manifestations of His Power in different beings.... Through different instruments God's Power is manifest in different degrees, greater and smaller. Therefore all men are not equal." "God dwells in all beings, undoubtedly. That being the case, who may be called His devotee? He who dwells in God, he who has merged his mind and life and innermost soul in God."⁵⁴ We add, people differ as to how much of Divine knowledge, power, and goodness they manifest. Evolution occurs when more of Brahman-God is manifested and devolution when less is manifested.

From the standpoint of Manifestational Panentheism,” the more an entity resembles Brahman-God the closer to Reality it is. It manifests to some degree the purity, humility, omnibenevolence, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibliss of Brahman-God. The fact that we manifest Brahman-God to varying degree (scale of Being) means there is some likeness between the highest Reality and us. As we evolve we manifest more of Brahman-God. F. H. Bradley’s also accepts “Degrees of Reality,” but for him what is imperfect is an appearance.⁵⁵

Since God (Saguna Brahman) does not manifest fully in us, Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva all agree we cannot become the creator, preserver, or destroyer of the universe. At our highest level of evolutionary development we can worship Saguna Brahman. When a great yogi merges with Saguna Brahman they remain separate as a worshiper, while when merging with Nirguna Brahman there is no separation between them and It. Is an Avatara a full or partial manifestation of Saguna Brahman and if the former are they identical?

Ramakrishna explained, “Why should the universe be unreal? That is a speculation of the philosophers. After realizing God, one sees that it is God Herself who has become the universe and all living beings. The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss—the Bliss of Satchidananda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating.... After realizing God, one sees all this aright—that it is He who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.”⁵⁶ “As Consciousness, He pervades the entire universe of the living and non-living.” “It is the Divine Mother who exists in the form of the universe and pervades everything as consciousness.”⁵⁷ Swami Saradananda tells us concerning, “insentient matter ... he saw Its true nature and experienced It as the living, conscious.”⁵⁸ Ramakrishna had that experience in a state of samadhi viewing the universe from the spirit. He also opposed the idea of the “unreality of the world” for pragmatic reasons. It is harmful for a householder to think that his wife, children, or job is unreal.

This implies, in spite of the world’s imperfections at a deeper level beneath the surface the sacred and spiritual are everywhere present. What he is saying is that the world is real as seen through the Spirit as composed of consciousness and

bliss, but this does not mean it is real as experienced through the five senses, the human intellect, and the ego, which contains, evil, ignorance, and pain. It is important to realize that according to Divine Panentheism, Brahman-God has become the perfect spiritual universe of Divine consciousness and bliss, not the imperfect universe that we experience.

From an epistemological standpoint Vivekananda stated, “The sum-total of this whole universe is God Himself. Is God then matter? No, certainly not, for matter is that God perceived by the five senses; that God as perceived through the intellect is mind; and when the spirit sees, He is seen as spirit.”⁵⁹ “Deification of the world--giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us--and to know what it really is. Deify it; it is God alone.”⁶⁰

For Plotinus matter is a phantom, non-being, appearance, an image, and shadow; Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) mortal mind is untrue and unreal; and for F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) this phenomenal world is an appearance. For Ramakrishna and Plotinus both Nirguna Brahman (Hen=One) and Saguna Brahman (Nous (Divine Intellect) and Soul (Universal Mind)) are real; M. B. Eddy, God as Spirit (Saguna Brahman) is real and eternal and humans our in His image and likeness; and for F. H. Bradley reality is an all-comprehensive and logically consistent omniscient Absolute.

According to Plato (427-327 B.C.) the Forms-Ideas (*Eidos*) are abstract entities denoted by expressions like Justice, Beauty, and Goodness. They are eternal, unchanging, indestructible, perfect exemplars, independent of sensible things yet apprehensible by the human intellect, existing in a transcendental realm. A Form-Idea is spaceless (transcendent to space) and timeless (transcendent to time), yet provides the formal basis for space and time. Concrete objects are less real than Forms-Ideas since they resemble them in a limited way. These Forms are separate from God, yet they possess a number of Divine qualities.⁶¹

Augustine (354-430) the Christian Neoplatonist made the important contribution of identifying Platonic Forms-Ideas with the thoughts or ideas in the mind of God (Ishvara). From the standpoint of Brahman-God, in varying degrees It manifests the Forms-Ideas (Divine attributes) into nature. From the standpoint of humans, they asymmetrically participate in, copy, partake in, imitate, and resemble these Forms-Ideas, to varying degrees. Our world is imperfectly modeled after the patterns of the Forms-Ideas and consequently is an image or copy of the real world.

True knowledge/intelligence is the ability to grasp the world of Forms-Ideas with one's mind and to imitate the ideal world as much as possible.⁶²

As expressed by Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) the Italian Catholic friar (monk) in the Dominican Order, the reason for Analogical Predication is that there must be some similarity between God the cause and His effects the creation. Every effect must in some way resemble its cause. He states, “Effects which fall short of their causes do not agree with them in name and nature. Yet, some likeness must be found between them, since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produces its like, since each thing acts according as it is in act. The form of an effect, therefore, is certainly found in some measure in a transcending cause, but according to another mode and in another way.” “Now the forms of the things that God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of that Divine power: for the things which God has made receive in a divided and particular limited way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal unlimited way.”⁶³ The relation between Brahman-God and humans is therefore, neither identical nor totally different but analogous.

Predication between humans and Brahman-God is not univocal because: they belong to different orders and modes of existence, are not of the same genus, and the former are “material and manifold” while the latter are “immaterial and simple.” Brahman-God is the first uncaused cause and we are Its effects that differ from It. There is nothing prior to It, either chronologically or logically. We are an image of Brahman-God and thus bear a likeness to It that is not univocal. As a reflection of It, like an image in a mirror we are not the thing itself. We reflect some of the perfections of Brahman-God in a limited manner. It is perfect and humans manifest It but not to a full extent. What is divided, fragmented, and multiple in humans exists as a unity in Brahman-God without any partition or complexity.⁶⁴

A religious philosopher is apt to conceive of the Divine Mind as purely rational. For example, Georg Hegel (1770-1831) the German philosopher taught, “The real is the rational and the rational is the real.” Consequently, the world follows a logical process based on the dialectical unfolding of thought as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. There are scientists that attempt to reduce the world to a set of mathematical equations. A pragmatist is apt to think of the Divine Mind as practical. Conversely, a totally rational or practical world could be boring lacking drama.

But for Sri Ramakrishna the world as experienced by humans is more like a play, a drama freely created by Brahman-God, than a logical or mathematical

system. The world is a drama of life events where one seeks happiness, knowledge, productive activity, friendship, strength of character, health, excitement, certainty, etc. Being like a play, future events are often difficult to predict and the precise laws of human history have not been discovered. Philosophers have realized that the Divine Mind has the capacity for rational thought and practicality. But there is a third dimension, the genius of a playwright in creating the world drama.

Ramakrishna expounded, “God has created the world in play, as it were.” “The Divine Mother is always playful and sportive. The universe is Her play.” “Infinite are the ways of God’s play.” “This world is the lila [Divine play] of God. It is like a game. In this game there are joy and sorrow, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil.”⁶⁵ This adds drama and excitement to life. This makes it very difficult for a natural, social, or personal scientists to predict the details of future events. There is a difference between a Divine Play (Lila) and a Divine Plan based on rational and practical thought. The Divine Mind also is artistic creating a world with beautiful landscapes.

In relation to the idea of a Divine play, many scientists today think of the future of the world as open-ended and flexible, and not rigidly determined. The cosmic drama is an unfolding process in which both creatures and the creator participate. Brahman-God has relinquished some of Its omnipotence (kenotic self-limitation) permitting creaturely improvisation. Cosmic history is an unfolding continuous creation, characterized by new possibilities not previously realized. The creator has endowed creation with often-unpredictable new modes of manifestation and inherent fruitfulness.⁶⁶

According to the *Drg-Drshya-Viveka* a Nondualistic text attributed to Shankara or Bharati Tirtha (c. 1350) and Swami Sarvapriyananda’s commentary on its contents: Self-luminous Consciousness (Nirguna Brahman) illumines “witness consciousness”. It is the Witness Consciousness (Saksin) that perceives all. In our true nature (Self) we are Existence (Sat), Consciousness (Chit), and Bliss (Ananda) and identical with Pure Consciousness. As Pure Consciousness our true Self illuminates all thoughts and objects, which are separate from us. The buddhi (intellect) and phenomenal world are reflections of this Consciousness. We identify with the reflection of Consciousness and consider it to be the reality. Life in the world is due to superimposition that conceals its true nature. They are reflections of Pure Consciousness, like the image in a mirror that reflects the true object. Looking at the reflection, we should be aware of our real face that is projected onto the mirror. The goal of life is to become detached from the external and

internal world that is a reflection of Reality. To become completely absorbed in the bliss of the realization of our Supreme Self. Similarly, phenomenal existence is a reflection of Pure Existence. From a whole-part standpoint, we and everything else are the undivided Pure Existence (Sat), not separate names and forms. Look at an object and remove the separate names and forms from Pure Existence. Every object is a wave in the undivided infinite ocean of Existence (Sat). Focus on the Existence of a thing, not each thing itself. The same unitary Reality is everywhere. Similarly, we are the undivided Pure Consciousness (Chit) not separate individualized conceptions and perceptions.⁶⁷ Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" mentioned we are seeing shadows and mistake them for the Reality.

For the *Drg* the next step is to realize we are Pure Consciousness. Ramakrishna adds an additional step to the ladder. The next step is to realize we are Divine Consciousness. That it is the consciousness of Brahman-God that is reflecting off our mind. Ramakrishna both taught and practiced this idea since he first practiced Tantra (realizing Divine Consciousness) and later Advaita Vedanta (attaining Pure Consciousness) and not vice versa.

From the standpoint of Ramakrishna's Vijnana Vedanta philosophy the highest Reality has two aspects both formless (Pure Consciousness) and with form (Divine Consciousness). So in the above analysis it is possible to think of one's Chosen Ideal (Ishta Devata; that aspect of the Deity that you worship); the Personal Brahman-God as Avatara, Divine Mother, Shiva, etc. as the higher Reality that is reflected in phenomenal existence. It is both the witness consciousness and that which illumines the phenomenal world. Ramakrishna stated, that Brahman-God "hears the sound of the anklets on the feet of an ant."⁶⁸ The world is a reflection of the Chosen ideal. For many people it is easier to focus on and identify with the Personal Brahman-God with form (Chosen Ideal) rather than a formless principle.

4. Brahman-God as Impersonal and Personal (Vijnana)

Based on his spiritual experiences Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86), "maintains that the Supreme Reality is equally Nirguna and Saguna and refrains from subordinating the Impersonal aspect of the Supreme Reality to the Personal aspect, or vice versa."⁶⁹ The Impersonal, formless Nirguna Brahman is the Intrinsic nature of Brahman-God characterized as Simple (Nondual), Aseity, Infinite without parts, Timeless Eternity, and Immutable. The Personal Saguna Brahman with form is the Extrinsic nature of Brahman-God with the Divine attributes of Omnipresence,

Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnibenevolence, and Omniblissfulness. It is complex, infinite with finite parts, eternal within time, and changeable. Not realizing the dual nature of God, modern Western philosophers of religion have unending debates concerning whether God is simple or complex, immutable or mutable, etc. These two aspects of Brahman-God are interrelated and not independent of each other.

Vijnana philosophy is nondual if defined to mean Monism, that existence is reduced to a single substance, principle, or entity, which is the ground of reality. For Vijnana that reality is Brahman, which is both personal and impersonal. There is no hierarchy since Brahman is unlimited with multiple aspects. Brahman is just as much Saguna as Nirguna.

Sri Ramakrishna stated, "The jnani gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating, 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realize Brahman [God]. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the vijnani, who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks, lime, and brick-dust.... The vijnani sees that the Reality which is Nirguna, without attributes, is also Saguna, with attributes." "Vijnana means Knowledge with a greater fullness. Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant'. He who has seen it is a jnani. But he who has drunk it has vijnana, that is to say, a fuller knowledge of it. After having the vision of God one talks to Him as if He were an intimate relative. That is vijnana." "But a Vijnani is not afraid of anything. He has realized both aspects of God – Personal and Impersonal. He has talked with God. He has enjoyed the bliss of God." "He alone who, after reaching the Nitya, the Absolute, can dwell in the Līlā, the Relative, and again climb from the Līlā to the Nitya, has ripe knowledge and devotion. Sages like Narada cherished love of God after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman. This is called vijnāna." "To know only one thing is jnana, Knowledge, the realization that God alone is real and that He dwells in all. And to talk to Him is vijnana, a fuller Knowledge. To love God in different ways, after realizing Him, is vijnana."⁷⁰ One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or the Relative without the Absolute." "Both the Absolute and the Relative belong to the same Reality."⁷¹

Vijnana was also taught by Swami Vivekananda, "Are there then two Gods-- the 'Not this, not this', the Sat-Chit-Ananda, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss of the philosopher, and this God of Love of the Bhakta? No, it is the same Sat-Chit-Ananda who is also the God of Love, the impersonal and personal in one. It has

always to be understood that the Personal God worshipped by the Bhakta is not separate or different from the Brahman. All is Brahman, the One without a second; only the Brahman, as unity or absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped; so the Bhakta chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is, Ishvara [Personal God], the supreme Ruler.”⁷²

Ramakrishna’s conception of vijnana furnished the philosophical basis for his well-known teaching that all the various religious and spiritual doctrines are legitimate paths leading to the same goal of Brahman-God realization. He reiterates, “I say that we are all calling on the same God. There is no need for jealousy and malice. Some say that God is formless, and some that God has form. I say, let one man meditate on God with form if he believes in form, and let another meditate on the formless Absolute if he does not believe in form. That is to say, dogmatism is not good. It is not good to feel that my religion alone is true and other religions are false.... I say this because one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes Him.... Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Saktas, Saivas, Vaishnavas, the Brahmajnanis of the time of the rishis ... all seek the same Reality.... Do you know what the truth is? God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God.”⁷³ Sri Ramakrishna taught that Vijnana can be found in Indian scriptures such as the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Bhagavata Purana*.

In his excellent commentary *Swami Vivekananda’s Vedantic Cosmopolitanism*, Swami Medhananda (formerly Ayon Maharaj) explains that Vivekananda’s ideas on Vijnana are in tune with Ramakrishna rather than Shankara. For example, Vivekananda teaches that impersonal Nirguna and personal Saguna Brahman are two aspects of the same Ultimate Reality, the universe is a real, each of the four yogas is a legitimate path to liberation, and Advaita Vedanta is a life-affirming philosophy.⁷⁴

Ramakrishna’s seminal distinction between jnana and vijnana equipped Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), with the grammar and vocabulary, as it were, to make sense of his own mystical experiences. This influence shows up in Aurobindo *Essays on the Gita* (1916-1920) that stresses the impersonal-personal nature of Brahman-God.

Ayon Maharaj tells us, in January 1908 the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) met in Baroda a Yogi named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, who instructed him in meditation. Aurobindo clarified that these experiences were Advaitic in nature: they revealed to him the nondual reality of the impersonal Atman and the

corresponding unreality of the universe. He also claimed that during his time in Baroda, he made mystical contact with Sri Ramakrishna, who had passed away two decades earlier. Sri Ramakrishna's profound influence on Sri Aurobindo's spiritual development is evident from his statement to a disciple: "Remember also that we derive from Ramakrishna. For myself it was Ramakrishna who personally came and first turned me to this Yoga." ⁷⁵

Sri Aurobindo began practicing meditation in 1904. He reported, "I had ... direct experience of Vivekananda when I was practicing hatha yoga. I felt his presence standing behind and watching over me. That exerted a great influence afterwards in my life."⁷⁶ On another occasion Aurobindo was locked up in a solitary cell in Alipore jail in 1908-09 he had this enlightening spiritual experience, "I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence. The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject.... It was the spirit of Vivekananda which first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. This clue led me to see how Truth-Consciousness works in everything.... Vivekananda came and gave me the knowledge of the intuitive mentality. I had not the least idea about it at that time. He too did not have it when he was in the body. He gave me detailed knowledge illustrating each point. The contact lasted about three weeks and then he withdrew."⁷⁷ At this time, he read thoroughly the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali and the works of Vivekananda in English.

Ayon Maharaj adds, "The first six chapters of the *Gita*, according to Sri Aurobindo, focus primarily on the necessity of jnana, the realization of the impersonal Atman (p. 305). For Sri Aurobindo, chapter 7 adds a decisive new dimension to the *Gita's* progressively unfolding thought-structure by shifting focus to vijnana.... Sri Aurobindo interprets vijnana as the more "comprehensive" or "integral" realization that "the Divine Being is all" (p. 266).... the still greater realization of God as at once impersonal and personal, at once immanent in the universe and beyond it.... Aurobindo makes a sustained case throughout *Essays on the Gita* that God in the *Gita* should be understood as at once impersonal and personal, at once immanent and transcendent.... It is only through the spiritual experience of vijnana, not through the blindly groping intellect, that we can grasp the supreme divine mystery that God "is at once one with all that is and yet exceeds it" (p. 312).... As Sri Aurobindo observes, the vijnani's "integral turning of the soul Godwards bases royally the *Gita's* synthesis of knowledge and works and

devotion" (p. 324). I take this to be a very pregnant insight, for it suggests that the *Gita* holds up the vijnanis the ideal embodiment of the synthesis of jnana, karma, and bhakti that all spiritual aspirants should strive to emulate....

Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan have claimed plausibly that the *Gita's* remarkable acceptance of diverse spiritual paths can be extended beyond the Hindu tradition to encompass non-Hindu religious and spiritual traditions as well.... the infinite Purusottama, manifests Himself to religious seekers in various ways depending on their respective backgrounds, temperaments, and capacities."⁷⁸

As stated by the Principle of Equifinality, "Similar results may be achieved with different initial conditions and in many different ways." The same goal can be reached from different initial conditions following a variety of different paths. Equifinality applies to an open system where a number of choices can be made, not to a closed system of action. Likewise in history, sociology, archeology, or psychology similar outcomes can be reached for different reasons following different trajectories.⁷⁹ Similarity, beginning in different religions one can reach the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of God through different paths. Each of the four yogas properly performed can lead to Brahman-God.

According to the "Principle of Polarity" contraries are correlative and interdependent, so if one exists its opposite must also exist. This principle assumes the contraries are on the same ontological level or two aspects of the same entity. This means Brahman-God in one aspect is changeless, and in another is in a state of flux.

5. Infinity (Ananta) of Brahman-God

Indian: "Atman is infinite and all-pervading" (Svet. Up. 1:9; cf. 5:1; Chan. Up. 7:25). "Brahman which is Reality, Knowledge, and Infinity" (Tait. Up. 2:1.3). "Of my [Lord Krishna] Divine attributes ... There is no limit to My extent" (BG 10:19). "There is no limit to my Divine manifestations, nor can they be numbered" (BG* 10:40, p. 117).

Old Testament: "Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee" (1 Kings 8:27; cf. Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:24). New Testament: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24).⁸⁰

During the Middle Ages, Madhva (1199/1238-1278/1317) the founder of Dvaita (Dualistic, Theistic) Vedanta revealed, "The one supreme Brahman has many

forms or manifestations, identical with one another.” “Brahman has infinite attributes, is a being of infinite perfection, who is identified with Vishnu or Narayana [two deities]. Such a Brahman is independent and is different from a jiva [individual soul] who is finite and dependent.” This is because, “Brahman ... is free from the limitations of space, time and qualities.” The Lord “should not be worshipped as a finite being.”⁸¹ “Among all the attributes of Brahman, to be meditated upon, the attribute of ‘Bhumatva’ or infinitude is the chief one which is to be meditated upon in unison with the other attributes like ananda [bliss].” Each of the Divine attributes is infinite in range and content.⁸² One infinite Brahman-God manifests as: both transcendent and immanent; as an Avatara [Divine Incarnation]; and is responsible for “the creation, sustenance, and destruction” of the universe. “Apart from the Lord, there is no universe anywhere.”⁸³

Jiva Goswami the Bengal Vaishnavist and follower of Sri Chaitanya, conception as presented by Sudhindra Chakravarti is, Bhagavat [God] is “unlimited and ubiquitous.... He can manifest Himself in all kinds of limited and clearly defined figures and yet remain unlimited and unconditioned in His essential nature as Pure Consciousness and bliss. It is one of the unthinkable attributes of Krishna that He can manifest His body together with His dress, ornaments and residence etc. as well as with His playmates, cowherds and cowherdresses in clearly defined limited physical forms and also retain their unlimited and spiritual forms in His intrinsic nature.... All-pervasiveness being one of the essential attributes of the Bhagavat. He can pervade the universe and simultaneously appear in the same form in different places.”⁸⁴

According to Sri Ramakrishna, “On attaining the Knowledge of Brahman and communing with It in nirvikalpa samadhi, one realizes Brahman, the Infinite, without form of shape and beyond mind and words. The nature of Brahman cannot be described. About It one remains silent. Who can explain the Infinite in words?” “Under the cooling influence, so to say, of the deep love of Its worshipper, the Infinite reduces Itself to the finite and appears before the worshipper as God with form. Again, as, on the rising of the sun, the ice melts away, so, on the awakening of Knowledge, God with form melts away into the same Infinite and Formless.”⁸⁵

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples that, “This one Godhead, whose name is Silence, comprises all Divine forms and aspects, yet is beyond form and definition. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: ‘Never set a limit to the Infinite by trying to define it.’ And indeed, it is evident that

the infinite God must have infinite forms of expression.” “Who can fathom the mystery of God? He is infinite and formless, and yet he is also with form.”⁸⁶

Thomas Aquinas explains our attempt to define God. “Divine things are named by our intellect, not as they really are in themselves, for in that way our intellect does not know them, but in a way that belongs to created things.” “Names signify the Divine Substance, and are predicated substantially of God, although they fall short of representing Him. Which is proved thus. For these names express God, so far as our intellects know Him. Now since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him. But it was shown above that God prepossesses in Himself all the perfections of creatures, being Himself absolutely and universally perfect. Hence every creature represents Him, and is like Him, so far as it possesses some perfection: yet not so far as to represent Him as something; of the same species or genus, but as the excelling source of whose form the effects fall short, although they derive some; kind of likeness thereto, even as the forms of inferior bodies represent the power of the sun.”⁸⁷

Concerning infinity Aquinas remarked, “God the infinite is understood only in a negative way, because there is no terminus or limit to His perfection.” “That being whose duration is infinite must have been from a cause of infinite efficaciousness. But the duration of God is infinite; for we have shown above that He is eternal. Since, then, He has no other cause of His being than Himself, he must be infinite.”⁸⁸ “Absolutely infinite being cannot be twofold, for being that is absolutely infinite comprises every perfection of being; hence, if infinity were present in two things, in no respect would they be found to differ.”⁸⁹

For the Lutheran and Reformed Scholastics (16th-17th centuries), infinitude is an immanent essential attribute of God. It implies “the limitlessness of the Divine Essence with regard to two species in particular, eternity and immeasurability.... It is not an infinity of corporeal quantity or extension but rather an infinity defined by the absence of limits; positively it is an infinite superiority over all things ... [Infinity] ought not to be viewed as an isolated attribute but as a property of the Divine Essence that extends to each and every one of the Divine attributes,” such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and omnibenevolence.⁹⁰ God in His essence is eternal not bound by time, and immeasurable being free from the boundaries of space.⁹¹

For more on this subject see: SVRP, Ch. III. The Nondualistic Intrinsic Nature of Brahman-God, Section 4. Infinity (Ananta).

6. Transcendence (Alaukika, Vishvatiga) of Brahman-God

Indian: “Brahman is beginningless, transcendent” (BG* 13:12, p. 135; cf. 7:24).

Old Testament: “God is in heaven, and you upon earth” (Eccl. 5:2). “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth” (Is. 40:22). New Testament: Give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:16). “Our Father who art in heaven” (Mt. 6:9).

From his spiritual experiences Sri Ramakrishna conveyed the idea that, “Brahman is beyond vidya and avidya, knowledge and ignorance. It is beyond maya, the illusion of duality ... beyond one’s words and thoughts.” “It is called Brahman in the *Vedas* when It transcends speech and thought and it is without attributes and action.”⁹² “Nothing can be predicated of the Absolute and the Unconditioned. No sooner do you talk of It than you state the Infinite in terms of the finite, the Absolute in terms of the relative, the Unconditioned in terms of the conditioned.”⁹³ “To define God from scriptural knowledge is like defining the holy city of Banaras after getting an idea of it from a map.”⁹⁴ “What is the nature of Brahman? It is without attributes, without motion, immovable, unshakable, firm ... Brahman is above and beyond both knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, Dharma and Adharma. It is indeed beyond all dual throngs. Brahman is beyond mind and speech, beyond concentration and meditation, beyond the knower, the known and knowledge, beyond even the conception of the real and the unreal. In short, It is beyond all relativity.”⁹⁵ Brahman (God) does take various forms and for the sake of His devotees, revealing Himself to humans in an anthropomorphic form. At one time immediately after He had the transcendental experience of Nirguna Brahman, Sri Ramakrishna was asked to describe it. He reentered back into the state of samadhi and was unable to express the sublime experience in any words whatsoever.⁹⁶

As Thomas Aquinas’ stated, “Genus is prior in meaning to what it contains. But nothing is prior to God either really or in meaning. Therefore, God is not in any genus.”⁹⁷ “The relations by which God is referred to creatures, cannot possibly be realities outside Him. Having proved that these relations have no real existence in God and yet are predicated of Him; it follows that they are attributed to Him solely in accordance with our manner of understanding.”⁹⁸ “Since, therefore, God is outside the whole order of creation, and all creatures are ordered to Him, and not conversely, it is manifest that creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas

in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea.”⁹⁹ “Relations of God to creatures are not real in Him. Hence, it follows that real relations in God ... are internal, and not external, processions in God.”¹⁰⁰ “As the creature proceeds from God in diversity of nature, God is outside the order of the whole creation, nor does any relation to the creature arise from His nature; for he does not produce the creature by necessity of His nature, but by His intellect and will, as was above explained. Therefore, there is no real relation in God to the creatures whereas in creatures there is a real relation to God; because creatures are contained under the Divine order, and their very nature entails dependence on God.”¹⁰¹

When Thomas Aquinas writes, “There is no real relation in God to the creatures,” he is referring to the Essence of God (Divine Substance, beyond the intellect), not to the Manifestations of God (e.g., Personal God, Divine Incarnation) in the finite world. God must relate to the world in order to create it.

For more on this subject see: SVRP, Ch. III. The Nondualistic Intrinsic Nature of Brahman-God, Section 9. Transcendence (Alaukika, Vishvatiga).

7. Omnipotence (Ananta-viryā, Sarva-kartriva) of Brahman-God

Indian: “He [Indra] who alone by wondrous deeds is Mighty, strong by holy works” (RV 8:1.27). “Nothing is done, even far away, without thee [Indra]” (RV 10:112.9). “Ishvara omniscient and omnipotent” (Svet. Up. 1:9). “I continue to work.... If I should cease to work, these worlds would perish” (BG 3:22, 24). “I am the birth of this cosmos: Its dissolution also. I am he who causes: No other besides me. Upon me, these worlds are held like pearls strung on a thread” (BG* 7:6-7, p. 89). “Whatever in this world is powerful, beautiful or glorious, that you may know to have come forth from a fraction of my [Sri Krishna] power and glory.... one atom of myself sustains the universe” (BG* 10:41-42, p. 117). “Infinite in might and immeasurable in strength, Thou pervadest all” (BG 11:40; cf. 4:6; 7:7; 9:8; 10:7). “The Lord lives in the heart of every creature. He turns them round and round upon the wheel of his Maya” (BG* 18:61, p. 172).

Old Testament: “Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth” (Ps. 135:6; cf. 103:19). “I will accomplish all my purpose ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it” (Is. 46:10-11; cf. Mt. 10:29-30; Lk. 12:7; Eph. 1:11). “I know that thou canst do all things” (Job 42:2). “Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power ... Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?” (Jer. 32:17, 27). New Testament:

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever” (Mt. 6:13). “With God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26; cf. Mk. 10:27; 14:36; Lk. 1:37; 18:27). “Christ the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). The Son “upholding the universe by His word of power” (Heb. 1:3).

According to the doctrine of omnipotence, there are absolutely no independent external restraints on Divine power, the internal nature of Brahman-God must be capable of maximum power, and It is the only source of all power in the universe. Thus, no person can possibly exemplify or exercise any ability, capacity, or power; whose existence is not ultimately derived from Brahman-God.¹⁰²

Madhva designated, “All imperfection is absent in the all-powerful God. He is said to be ‘endowed with all powers, always and at all times.’” “There is no difference between the powerful and His powers. Though His power is one and immediate it takes additional different forms like will, intelligence and effort so necessary for His creative activity.”¹⁰³ Brahman (God) alone is the supreme all-powerful determining cause, and inner mover of all entities and events. “There is no independent potency anywhere in the Universe (in Prakriti [Primal Nature], Purushas [Individual Souls], etc.). It is Ishvara [Personal God] Himself that directs properly, the various potencies of Nature and of the souls for production, growth, development, etc., which are always dependent on Him. The Prakriti, Purushas and their respective capacities, their very presence, cognizability and functioning, all these are controlled by Ishvara, eternally, through His eternal power.”¹⁰⁴ “The Supreme Being, possessed of infinite powers, enters into various stages of evolution of matter and brings about each and every stage of such manifestation of things, Himself.... The supremacy of God should not be compromised.”¹⁰⁵ Through His cosmic power and will Brahman (God) creates, preserves and dissolves the universe. The Lord is the independent all-doer (sarvakartrtva), while the world is a dependent (paratantra) derived reality. Brahman (God) voluntarily places a limitation on His omnipotence, which allows for the expression of free will by all people, in accordance with their accumulated karmas. All sentient and insentient entities depend on Brahman (God) for their existence, and may cease to exist if He so wills it. To egotistically think that we are an independent doer is the root source of human misery. Spiritual awareness requires that we realize that we are totally dependent on the Lord’s will.¹⁰⁶

Ramakrishna informs us, “But you must remember that everything is possible for God. He is formless, and again He assumes forms. He is the individual and He is the universe. He is Brahman and He is Shakti [Power]. There is no end to Him, no limit. Nothing is impossible for Him.” “He is the Lord of all. He can do everything. He who has made the law can change it.” “All that you see is the manifestation of God’s power. No one can do anything without this power. But you must remember there is not an equal manifestation of God’s power in all things.” “Not even a leaf moves except by the will of God.”¹⁰⁷

In addition, Sri Ramakrishna supports omnipresence when stating, “One who thinks of God, day and night, beholds Him everywhere.” “But on attaining Perfect Knowledge he sees only one Consciousness everywhere. The same Perfect Knowledge, again, makes him realize that the one Consciousness has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. But the manifestations of Divine Power are different in different beings. It is He, undoubtedly, who has become everything; but in some cases there is a greater manifestation than in others.” “God is everywhere. But then you must remember that there are different manifestations of His power.” “What is knowledge and what is ignorance? A man is ignorant so long as he feels that God is far away. He has knowledge when he knows that God is here and everywhere.”¹⁰⁸

Swami Abhedananda emphasizes the practical aspect of these teachings, “As long as we think that our individual will is a separate will and is not related to the universal Cosmic Will, and believe that by following our imperfect will, we shall gain the highest benefit, the result of this benefit is suffering, misery, and sorrow, which we experience in our everyday life.”¹⁰⁹ “If we once understand that God is the source of all existence and power and is the one Reality, that outside of God no existence is possible, then we begin to feel the presence of divinity everywhere. In every action of our lives we realize that the power is working through us, and at every moment of our earthly existence we feel ourselves to be like so many instruments through which the Divine Will is manifesting Itself and doing whatever He ordains. All the actions of our lives are then turned into acts of worship of the Supreme Deity.”¹¹⁰ Freed from the bondage of ignorance, all fear and selfishness vanish and all sins are absolved. The soul realizes its spiritual unity with the Divine and attains to Brahman-God consciousness, becoming one with the Universal Spirit.

For Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Brahman the Absolute is pure freedom that creates the universe and is not determined by anything else. There is nothing outside of the Absolute that can limit Its omnipotence. “The Absolute has an

infinite number of possibilities to choose from [when creating the world], which are all determined by Its nature. It has the power of saying yes or no to any of them. While the possible is determined by the nature of the Absolute, the actual is selected from out of the total amount of the possible, by the free activity of the Absolute without any determination whatsoever. It could have created a different world in every detail from that which is actual.”¹¹¹

Omnipotent Brahman-God creates the laws of nature and works through them to govern the universe.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) the Jewish thinker born in Spain who migrated to Egypt in 1160 stated, “Everything that passes from potentiality to actuality has something other than itself that causes it to pass, and this cause is of necessity outside the thing.” “This series of cause or factors cannot continue on to infinity. There is no doubt that, in the last resort, one must come to something that causes the passage from potentiality to actuality, that is perpetually existent in one and the same state, and in which there is no potentiality at all. I mean to say that in it, in its essence, there is nothing in potentia.... Now the being that is separate from matter, in which there is no possibility whatever, but that exists in virtue of its Essence, is the Deity.”¹¹² The causal series begins with God the first mover who is unmoving, unchanging, one, eternal, undivided, and incorporeal. He exists necessarily while everything else is only possible and requires an external cause in order to come into being. “This first cause does not fall under time because it is impossible that there should be movement with regard to It ... the first cause to which its being set in motion is due, is not a body or a force in a body; and that this first cause is one and unchangeable because its existence is not conjoined with time.”¹¹³ Since God is the first cause of all existence, if He came to an end, all things would immediately cease to exist. On the other hand, if the created world terminated, God would remain and would not be diminished one iota.¹¹⁴

Thomas Aquinas explains that a natural agent like humans are secondary causes that act through God's power as the instrument of the first cause. They participate to some degree in the power of the first cause. By analogy we are like an axe that operates not by its own power, but from the power of the artisan who moves it. God is the cause of every action inasmuch as every agent is the instrument of the Divine powers operating through it. As he explains it, "Since we hold that God is the immediate cause of every single thing inasmuch as He works in

all secondary causes and inasmuch as all secondary effects originate from His predefinition.”¹¹⁵ “For we pray, not that we may change the Divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers.”¹¹⁶ Human acts are true causes, and therefore certain actions are performed not to change the Divine providence, but to obtain certain results in the manner determined by God.¹¹⁷

Ramakrishna’s statement that “God is the Doer” is well supported by the insights of Meister Eckhart’s religious experiences. Eckhart revealed, “It should be understood that to know God and to be known by God, to see God and to be seen by God, are one according to the reality of things. In knowing and seeing God, we know and see that He makes us see and know.” “God Hence, His knowledge is mine, quite as it is one and the same in the master which teaches and in the disciple who is taught.”¹¹⁸

In relation to Divine omnipotence the German Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) stressed, “The almighty power of God ... must be essentially present at all places, even in the tiniest tree leaf. The reason is this: It is God who creates, effects, and preserves all things through his almighty power ... He must be present and must make and preserve His creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects.”¹¹⁹ God is the primary causal agent who determines all events. Personal and impersonal forces are the secondary causes, the tools through which God works in the world. He is not subject to another authority that is above Him, and consequently is not governed by any form of law. “All creatures are God’s masks and disguises; He permits them to work with Him and help Him create all sorts of things-even though He could and does create without their cooperation.” God is under no law and is not subject to any authority over Him. He is His only authority and so whatever He wills must be good since He wills it out of His Own being and holy nature.¹²⁰

Following the idea of Occasionalism developed by the French Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), God is the only true efficient cause of every event. “God wills without cessation, but without change, succession or necessity, all that will take place in the course of time.” It is God who moves my arm on the occasion that I will to do it. No power can place the arm “where God does not place it.” Concerning the laws of physics that follow a natural order, on the occurrence of event x God always causes event y to follow, but x is only the occasion not the true cause of y. Similarly the soul (mind) and body of a person cannot directly act on each other. Natural causes are only occasional causes brought on by the power

of God's will.¹²¹

The property of being all-powerful according to Augustus Strong (1836-1921) the American Baptist theologian implies that God possesses the power to restrict His own activity. "His power is under the control of wise and holy will. God can do all He wills, but He will not do all He can. Else His power is mere force acting necessarily, and God is the slave of His own omnipotence. All-powerfulness in God does not exclude, but implies, the power of self-limitation."¹²² By means of His "permissive will," God provides humans with free choice and allows (permits) them to sin. Morality is grounded in the nature of God and is not something apart from Him. Consequently, "He is subject to no law but the law of his own nature." "The ground of moral obligation is the holiness of God, or the moral perfection of the Divine nature, conformity to which is the law of our moral being."¹²³ "By the decrees of God we mean that eternal plan by which God has rendered certain all the events of the universe, past, present, and future." "Providence is that continuous agency of God by which He makes all the events [group and individual] of the physical and moral universe fulfill the original design [decrees] with which he created it. As Creation explains the existence of the universe, and as Preservation explains its continuance, so Providence explains its evolution and progress."¹²⁴

For more on this subject see: SVWT, Ch. IV. The Dualistic Extrinsic Nature of Brahman-God, Section 3. Omnipotence (Ananta-virya, Sarvakartriva, Sarvasakti).

8. Love of Brahman-God

Indian: "Of those who love you [Lord Krishna] as the Lord of Love, Ever present in all.... And without doubt you shall be united with me, Lord of Love, dwelling in your heart (BG 12).¹²⁵ "Exceedingly dear to Me are those who regard Me (Lord Krishna) as the Supreme Goal" (BG 12:20). "And you shall find me (Lord Krishna): This is my promise Who love you dearly" (BG* 18:65, P. 172).

New Testament: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (Jn. 3:16). "He who does not love does not know God. For God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8). "So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him" (1 Jn. 4:16).

Ramakrishna reveals, "The nearer you approach to God, the more you feel His love." "It is just for this love of the devotees that God contracts Himself into human form and descends to earth" "Just fancy, to describe God, who is of the

very nature of Love and Bliss, as dry! It only proves that the man has never experience what God is like.” “Now it is your bounden duty to give your entire mind to God, to plunge deep into the ocean of His Love.”¹²⁶

Augustus Strong tells us, “The immanent love of God therefore requires and finds a perfect standard in his own holiness, and a personal object in the image of his own infinite perfections. As there is a higher Mind than our mind, so there is a greater Heart than our heart. God is not simply the loving One—he is also the Love that is loved. There is an infinite life of sensibility and affection in God. God has feeling, and in an infinite degree. But feeling alone is not love. Love implies not merely receiving but giving, not merely emotion but impartation. So the love of God is shown in his eternal giving. Giving is not an episode in his being—it is his nature to give. And not only to give, but to give himself.”¹²⁷

There is no better way to realize what the love of God is, than in a religious experience.

9. Omnibliss (Ananda) of Brahman-God

Concerning Ananda the bliss of Brahman Sri Ramakrishna states, “The description of Brahman in the sacred books is like that. It is said in the *Vedas* that Brahman is of the nature of Bliss—It is Satchidananda.” “The whole thing is to love God and taste His sweetness. He is sweetness and the devotee is its enjoyer. The devotee drinks the sweet Bliss of God.” “The vijñani retains the ‘I of the devotee,’ the ‘I of the jñani,’ in order to taste the Bliss of God and teach people.... But a vijñani isn't afraid of anything, He has realized both aspects of God: Personal and Impersonal. He has talked with God. He has enjoyed the Bliss of God.”¹²⁸ “Through worship devotees receive the grace of God, and then His vision. Then they enjoy, Brahmananda, the Bliss of Brahman.” “Worship Him through the bliss of your love and devotion.’ Just see, he thus described God, whose very nature is joy and Bliss.” “A jñani lives as a devotee, in the company of bhaktas, in order to enjoy and drink deep of the Bliss of God.”¹²⁹

Swami Vivekananda indicated, “The concept of God is a fundamental element in the human constitution. In the Vedanta, Sat-chit-ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss) is the highest concept of God possible to the mind.” “When the consciousness rises still higher, when this little puny consciousness is gone for ever, that which is the Reality behind shines, and we see it as the One Existence-

Knowledge-Bliss, the one Atman, the Universal. ‘One that is only Knowledge itself, One that is Bliss itself, beyond all compare, beyond all limit, ever free, never bound, infinite as the sky, unchangeable as the sky. Such a One will manifest Himself in your heart in meditation.’” “Just as the "One only" Brahman, the Akhanda-Sachchidananda, the undivided Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.”¹³⁰ “From where the mind comes back with speech, being unable to reach, knowing the Bliss of Brahman, no more is fear.” “Does not the Vedanta say that Brahman is Sat-Chit-Ananda--the absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss? The phrase Sat-Chit-Ananda means--Sat, i.e. existence, Chit, i.e. consciousness or knowledge, and Ananda, i.e. bliss which is the same as love. There is no controversy between the Bhakta and the Jnani regarding the Sat aspect of Brahman. Only, the Jnanis lay greater stress on His aspect of Chit or knowledge, while the Bhaktas keep the aspect of Ananda or love more in view. But no sooner is the essence of Chit realised than the essence of Ananda is also realised. Because what is Chit is verily the same as Ananda.” “The aim is ultimately to attain to that Supreme Bliss of Brahman.”¹³¹

Swami Shivananda (1854-1934) a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna expresses the Lord’s bliss this way, “All doubts have their lodgment in things outside. The more the mind becomes indrawn, and the more it approaches the innermost core, the more free it becomes from doubts. Then pure bliss reigns supreme; the mind becomes suffused with divine love.” “You have to spend your time in meditating on Him, repetition of His name, recollection of Him, reading about Him, reflecting on Him, and prayer to Him. Then only will you get real bliss and peace in life, and your taking refuge in Him will be fruitful.” “He is full of love, full of bliss; the more you can think of Him, the more blissful you will be.”¹³²

His brother disciple Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) adds, “Ananda or bliss is the best definition of God.” “When you have altogether resigned yourselves at the feet of the Lord, you have known the secret of a peaceful, blissful life.” “God is infinite bliss and all other happiness is finite and perishable. Hence nowhere but in Him can true happiness be found, a happiness that has no break.”¹³³

10. Realizing Our Oneness with Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God

Based on his own spiritual experiences, Sri Ramakrishna revealed, “Brahman, the absolute and the unconditioned is realised in Samadhi alone. Then it is all silence—all talk of reality and unreality, of Jiva and Jagat, of knowledge and ignorance, is hushed. There remains then, only 'Is-ness' (Being), and nothing else.

For verily the salt doll tells no tale when it has become one with the infinite sea. This is Brahma-jnana.... When all personality is effaced, one realises the knowledge of the Absolute in Samadhi. Then alone are set at rest forever all such questions of delusion and non-delusion, fact and fiction.... For your absolute, until realised in Samadhi, is at best the correlative of the relative, if not indeed a mere empty word. You cannot possibly put It as It is; for in doing so you cannot but enamel It with a foreign element, that is, with your own personality.... There is the highest Samadhi. No one can say what that state is—it is the absolute transformation of one's own self into His.”¹³⁴

Ramakrishna explains his spiritual experiences. “There is another state in which God reveals to His devotees that Brahman is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. It cannot be described in words.” “God has revealed to me that only the Paramatman, whom the *Vedas* describe as the Pure Soul, is immutable as Mount Sumeru, unattached, and beyond pain and pleasure.” “I have clearly perceived all these things. It has been revealed to me that there exists an Ocean of Consciousness without limit. From It come all things of the relative plane, and in It they merge again.” “Instantly I had revelation. I saw Consciousness—Indivisible Consciousness—and a Divine being formed of that Consciousness.”¹³⁵

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan adds, “Shankara admits the reality of an intuitional consciousness, Anubhava, where the distinctions of subject and object are superseded and the truth of the supreme Self realized. It is the ineffable experience beyond thought and speech, which transforms our whole life and yields the certainty of a Divine presence. It is the state of consciousness which is induced when the individual strips himself of all finite conditions, including his intelligence.... It is saksatkara or direct perception, which is manifested when the avidya [misconceptions] is destroyed and the individual knows that the Atman and the jiva [individual soul] are one. It is also called samyagjnana (perfect knowledge) or samyagdarshana (perfect intuition). While samyagjnana insists on the reflective preparation necessary for it, samyagdarshana points to the immediacy of intuition, where the ultimate reality is the object of direct apprehension as well as meditation (dhyana).”¹³⁶ Supersensuous consciousness carries the highest degree of certitude when a person realizes that everything abides in Brahman-Atman, which is the origin of all things. “Religious experience is “an integral, undivided consciousness in which not merely this or that side of man's nature but his whole being seems to find itself. It is a condition of consciousness in which feelings are fused, ideas melt into one another, boundaries broken and ordinary distinctions transcended. Past

and present fade away in a sense of timeless being. Consciousness and being are not there different from each other. All being is consciousness and all consciousness being. Thought and reality coalesce and a creative merging of subject and object results. Life grows conscious of its incredible depths. In this fullness of felt life and freedom, the distinction of the knower and the known disappears.... It is sovereign in its own rights and carries its own credentials. It is self-established, self-evidencing, self-luminous. It does not argue or explain but it knows and is.... Doubt and disbelief are no more possible. He speaks without hesitation and with the calm accents of finality.”¹³⁷

From his own profound spiritual experiences Meister Eckhart wrote, “There is something in the soul which is so akin to God that it is one [with God] and not [merely] united with Him.... this ground of the soul is distant and alien from all created things.”¹³⁸ “There is something in the soul which is above the soul, Divine, simple, an absolute nothing ... It is higher than knowledge, higher than love, higher than grace, for in all these there is still distinction.... It is bent on entering into the simple ground, the still waste wherein is no distinction, neither Father nor Son nor Holy Ghost; into the unity.” “God by his grace would bring me into the Essence; that Essence which is above God and above distinction.”¹³⁹ “When I stood in my first cause, there I had no God and was cause of myself.... My Essential Being is above God insofar as we consider God as the origin of creatures. Indeed, in God’s own being, where God is raised above all being and all distinctions, there I was myself, there I willed myself, and I knew myself to create this person that I am. Therefore I am the cause of myself according to my being, which is eternal, but not according to my becoming, which is temporal. Therefore also I am unborn, and following the way of my unborn being I can never die. Following the way of my unborn being I have always been, I am now, and shall remain eternally. What I am by my [temporal] birth is destined to die and be annihilated, for it is mortal; therefore it must with time pass away. In my [eternal] birth all things were born, and I was cause of myself and of all things.... I discover that I and God are one. There I am what I was.”¹⁴⁰

Thomas Aquinas realized that God is Simple meaning undivided (comparable to the Indian nondual). Meister Eckhart’s great discovery based on his spiritual experience is that in our Essential Being we are also Simple meaning changeless, timelessly eternal, infinite. His views were considered to be heretical and were not incorporated into Christianity.

Another medieval thinker Jan Ruysbroeck (1294-1381) the Flemish (Dutch) mystic reported, “(In the Reality unitively known by the mystic), we can speak no more of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, nor of any creature, but only one Being, which is the very substance of the Divine Persons. There were we all one before our creation, for this is our super-essence. There the Godhead is in simple Essence without activity.”¹⁴¹

Once a person has attained the nondual nirvakalpa samadhi that is the end of the line for them unless they are Isvarakotis (Avataras and their inner circle of disciples) which is very rare. As Ramakrishna stated, “None but the Isvarakotis can return to the plane of relative consciousness after attaining samadhi. Some ordinary men attain samadhi through spiritual discipline; but they do not come back.”¹⁴²

For more on this subject see: SVWT, Ch. 1. Advaita Vedanta and Nirguna Brahman, Section 5. Realizing Our Oneness With Nirguna Brahman (Atman) and the Godhead.

11. Wisdom as Feminine

Indian: “When uttering words which no one comprehended, Vac [Goddess of wisdom and speech], Queen of Gods, the Gladdener was seated” (RV 8:89.10). “I [the goddess Vac] make the man I love exceedingly mighty, make him a sage, a Rishi” (RV 10:125.5).

Old Testament: “Does not wisdom [Hokmah] call, does not understanding raise her voice” (Prov. 1:1). “For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her” (Prov. 1:11). “Though I knew not that she [Wisdom, Sophia] was the mother of them” (Wisd. 7:12; cf. ch. 6-7; Sir. 1:9).

Sri Ramakrishna revealed, “It is my nature to believe that my Mother [Kali] knows everything.... One ray of light from the Goddess of Wisdom stuns a thousand scholars.” “Getting a ray of light from the goddess of learning, a man becomes so powerful that before him big scholars seem like earthworms.” “I wept before the Mother and prayed, ‘O Mother, please tell me, please reveal to me, what the yogis have realized through yoga and the jnanis through discrimination.’ And the Mother has revealed everything to me. She reveals everything if the devotee cries to Her with a yearning heart. She has shown me everything that is in the *Vedas*, the Vedanta, the *Puranas*, and the Tantra.” “I do not accept anything unless it agrees

with the direct words of the Divine Mother.” “It is the same with my words. No sooner are they about to run short than the Divine Mother sends a new supply from Her inexhaustible storehouse of Knowledge.”¹⁴³

The Indian female Goddesses Vac and Saraswati resemble the Biblical Hokmah (Jewish) and Sophia (Greek) in many ways. In the *Vedas* it is stated that in the beginning was Vac, the sacred Word. She is second to Brahman, appearing as Shakti, the potency of Brahman. Vac dwells in Brahman and manifests as the universe, while at the same time She remains as the supreme transcendent Shakti power. She is the Mother of the Trimurti (Hindu Trinity) and of the universe. As the consort of Indra, She contains the universe within Herself. In the *Rig Veda*, Vac is speech personified, the agent by whom learning was communicated to humanity. Vac as speech is personified as the “Queen of the Gods” (RV 8:89.10), and as the “Mother of the *Vedas*” the vehicle of knowledge (*Taittiriya Brahmana*, *Mahabharata*). “She entered into the Rishis [Sages].”¹⁴⁴ In the post-Vedic period Saraswati took on many of the characteristics of Vac, being “the Goddess of Wisdom.” She is the Mother of the *Vedas*, “the Goddess of speech and learning, inventress of the Sanskrit language and Deva-nagari letters, and patroness of the arts and sciences.” Saraswati is the source of the “creation by the Word,” through which speech manifests itself in action.¹⁴⁵

A number of remarkable resemblances were discovered by Edward Conze (1904-79) between the Judeo-Christian conception of Wisdom (Hokmah-Sophia) and the Indian Buddhist texts dealing with perfect Wisdom (Prajna-paramita). “Both are feminine, and called ‘mothers’ and ‘nurses.’ They are equated with the Law (Torah and Dharma), have existed from all times, are the equivalent of God or the Buddha, the consort of Jahve or Vajradhara; extremely elusive, respectively a gift of God or due to the Buddha’s might, dispense the waters of knowledge and the food of life, are extremely pure, related to the sky or ether, connected with trees and compared to light.” In the Buddhist Tantric philosophy Prajna (Wisdom) gave birth to the world, just as Wisdom “is the artificer of all things” (Wisd. 7:22).¹⁴⁶

In the *Old Testament*, Wisdom is depicted as: feminine (Prov. 8:1; Sir 1:6, 9-10), a mother (Wisd. 7:12), created before heaven and earth (Prov. 8:22-30; Sir. 1:4), loving and all-powerful (Wisd. 7:23, 27), “she pervadeth and penetrateth all things” (Wisd. 7:24), “a breath of the power of God” (Wisd. 7:25), “an effulgence from everlasting light” (Wisd. 7:26) and “an image of His goodness” (Wisd. 7:26).¹⁴⁷

Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (c. 30/20 B.C.-45/50 A.D.) writes of Wisdom as, “the Mother and nurse of the All... through which the world came into existence.” It is “all-powerful, all-surveying and penetrating through all intelligent, pure, most rare spirits.” Harry Wolfson explains, For Philo, “Wisdom, then, is only another word for Logos, and it is used in all the senses of the term Logos. Both these terms mean, in the first place, a property of God, identical with His Essence, and, like His Essence, eternal. In the second place, they mean a real, incorporeal being, created by God before the creation of the world.... becoming the source of human knowledge and wisdom.”¹⁴⁸

In the West, contemporary feminist theologians have been struggling with the patriarchal nature of religions that consider God only as Father and the Divine Incarnation only as male.¹⁴⁹ They believe that Mother Goddess worship and imagery embodies a new power for women, partially expressed through the modern women’s liberation movement. Not only the maleness, but also the femaleness of the Supreme Being should be deified. The Goddess symbolizes the creativity, strength, and beauty manifesting through women. The Vedanta of Sri Ramakrishna teaches that Brahman-God also manifests as Mother, and his chaste wife Holy Mother is revered as a female Divine Incarnation (Avatara).

In the past, goddesses were worshiped in most polytheistic societies in the world. With the rise of monotheism the one God was considered to be male and goddess worship declined considerably. In these ancient societies the goddess was often a mother or a consort of a male god. Goddesses were invoked in prayer and ritual and often associated with Mother Earth, Mother Nature, fertility that gives birth to and nourishes life, wisdom, and the moon rather than the sun. It is polytheistic unless one stresses the unity of the many goddesses. In a sense, the modern Goddess movement is a continuation of ancient Goddess worship. It gives a female image of the Divine with which to identify and is associated with female power, gender equality, empowering women, and women’s liberation.¹⁵⁰

Today we are noticing in North America and Western Europe a revival of the worship of Goddesses. The female deities originated in different cultures and time periods of the world. Many of them have specialized functions. Female deities unlike their male counterpart are associated with the sacredness of motherhood and the personification of the energy involved in fertility and nourishment. The Goddess movement supports ecofeminism, being concerned with environmental and ecological issues. As a symbol of purity and piety, Goddesses are often viewed as resolvers of human problems, protectors of the community, and a source for

healing. They are connected to the fertility of human beings and crops, an original source of life, and mediators between humans and male divinities. Creation myths are interpreted as compatible with contemporary science illustrating in a metaphorical way the ideas of modern evolution, cosmology, and physics.¹⁵¹

In the following examples, it appears that in many cases the same Goddess was worshiped in different societies under similar sounding names.

In the Near Eastern and Indo-European Pantheon:

Mother deity: Matri, Mah (Indian), Mut (Egyptian), Mami (Sumerian), Mah (Babylonian); Mati (Slavic), Mater Matuta (Roman-Latin), Matres (Gaul), Modron (British-Anglo-Saxon).

Female dawn deity: Ushas-(taraka) (Indian), Aset (Isis) (Egyptian), Ishtar (Babylonian), Ashtarte (Phoenician), Ashdar (Abyssinian); Eos (Greek), Ausera (Lithuanian-Baltic), Aurora (Roman-Latin), Ostara (Nordic), Uathach (Celtic), Eostre (British-Anglo-Saxon).

Female moon deity: Sinivali (Indian); Selene (Greek).

In the Near Eastern Pantheon:

Mother deity: Amma, Amba (Durga) (Indian), Ama (Sumerian), Amma (Syria, Greek).

Female deity who invented alphabet: Saraswati (Indian), Sechat (Egyptian).

In the Indo-European Pantheon:

Group of female deities: Devi (Indian), Dea (Roman-Latin), De (Celtic), Dewis (Welsh).

Group of gigantic demons: Diti mother of Daityas (Indian), Titaia mother of Titans (Greek).¹⁵²

12. Seven Sages

Indian: “The seven Rishis who have become the mighty one’s protectors [guardians of the world]” (AV 10:8.9; 19:17.7). “Seven Rishis, World -creators, rub thee into existence here with gift of offspring [a religious sacrifice]” (AV 11:1.1; cf. BG 10:6).

Old Testament: “I am Raphael, one of the seven angels, which stand and enter before the glory of the Lord” (Tob. 12:15; cf. 1 Enoch 20; 81:5; 87; 91:21-22). “Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God” (Rev. 8:2).

1 Enoch (20:1-8) lists the names of the seven archangels. Some scholars

believe that the seven Jewish holy angels were derived from the Zoroastrian seven Immortals or Holy Ones, who are Ahura Mazda and the six Amesha Spentas.¹⁵³

In a very high spiritual state Sri Ramakrishna realized that Swami Vivekananda was one of the “seven venerable sages.”¹⁵⁴ In traditional Indian thought, the seven Rishis (Sapta-rishis) are the mind born sons of the creator God Brahma, who emanate from the Divine Mind. They create the world through a religious sacrifice, are the guardians of the universe, induce the dawn to rise and the sun to shine, and are the authors of the Vedic hymns and scriptures that they impart to the earthly sages. Both the Indian and Mesopotamian seven sages are identified with a group of seven stars, and both survived the flood. According to the *Mahabharata* they are cosmic principles.¹⁵⁵

The idea of seven sages is a universal religious theme as exemplified by the seven: Babylonian Gods and Ancient Elders, Egyptian Heavenly Sages (Nefer-hat), Greek Sages, Judeo-Christian Angels in the Book of Enoch, Indian Rishis (Sages), Indian Mahayana Buddhist Sapta Tathagatas, Japanese Primeval Deities and the Deities of Good Fortune (Schichi Fukujin), Persian Zoroastrian Holy Ones, and the Taoist Sages of the Bamboo Grove.¹⁵⁶

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- ³ SSR, pp. 270-72; Ayon Maharaj, *Infinite Paths To Infinite Reality: Sri Ramakrishna and Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018) is an excellent source for Ramakrishna’s Vijnana philosophy of religion, particularly pp. 27-50. For a shorter article version see, Web: <https://philpapers.org/archive/MAHRRP.pdf> and for Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df1ilsosg4g&t=2s>
- ⁴ Katherine Whitmarsh, *Concordance to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1985), p. 30.
- ⁵ GSR, pp. 802d, 370d, 148d, 479g, 851c.
- ⁶ GSR, pp. 134f-35. Maharaj (2018), pp. 37-38.
- ⁷ GSR, pp. 1012e, 277g.
- ⁸ GSR, pp. 103h, 192b.
- ⁹ GSR, p. 858l.
- ¹⁰ SSR, p. 149.
- ¹¹ GSR, pp. 134g, 277g, 287k.

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- ¹² GSR, pp. 191g, 477i.
- ¹³ GSR, p. 290c.
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- ³³ Moulvi S.A.Q. Husaini, *Ibn Al-'Arabi* (Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), pp. 58, 60, 63.
- ³⁴ William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), pp. 41, 49; al-'Arabi (1911), III, 316.27. For twenty-nine similarities comparing the philosophical ideas of Shankara and Ibn al-'Arabi see: Gopal Stavig, "The Supreme Atman of Shankara's Advaita and the Absolute Essence in the Philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabi," *Journal of Dharma* 23 (July-Sept. 1998), pp. 303-26. For more on the subject see, Gopal Stavig, "Advaitists In Other Lands: Ibn Al-'Arabi," *Vedanta Kesari* 86 (Feb. 1999), pp. 67-71.

The Ibn al-'Arabi school dominated Sufism in India from about 1400 until 1829 and in Iran. It is most unfortunate that these Vedantic ideas have been so neglected. William Chittick the greatest Western expert on Ibn al-'Arabi mentioned that these books in Indian libraries “remain almost completely unstudied.” Examination of these writings could strengthen Muslim-Hindu relationship in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan and they would add too our understanding of Indian philosophy. Vivekananda stated, “Educated Mohammedans are Sufis, scarcely to be distinguished from Hindus. Hindu thought has permeated their civilization; they assumed the position of learners. The great Akbar, the Mogul Emperor, was practically a Hindu”(CW, V:190). The Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) was influenced by Taj al-Din Ajodhani, a member of the Ibn 'Arabi school whom he met in 1578. Vedantic ideas were taught in Iran by Mulla Sadra's (c. 1572-1640) such as Ibn al-'Arabi's “the unity of being” (wahdat al-wujud) and are held today by some philosophers in Pakistan (Gopal Stavig, “Ibn 'Arabi's Influence in Muslim India,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* (Oxford University) 45 (Summer 2009), pp. 121-32).

³⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), pp. 41, 43, 154.

³⁶ Christian Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah* (London: Routledge & Kegan Oaul LTD, 1863, 1956), pp. 87-89; Web; www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ein-sof

³⁷ Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), pp. 28-29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61; cf. Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shekhinah;
www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-divine-feminine-in-kabbalah-an-example-of-jewish-renewal

³⁹ Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Master Eckhart and the Rhineland Mystics* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), pp. 53-55, 66-67, 74; John Caputo, *The Mystical Element on Heidegger's Thought* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978), pp. 105-07, 116-17, 130; Web
www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/eckhart-meister-c-1260-13271328; www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/20465726.2016.1163928

⁴⁰ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essence-energies_distinction;
www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/uram.21.1.56

⁴¹ Basil Krivoshein, “The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas,” *Easter Church Quarterly* (1938-39), p. 144.

⁴² Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, tr. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 120-21, 124. For an excellent review see, Ayon Maharaj, “Sri Ramakrishna's Philosophy of Vijnana Vedanta, Web: <https://philpapers.org/archive/MAHRRP.pdf>

⁴³ Saradananda, II:1.9, p. 156.

⁴⁴ Bavinck (1977), pp. 120-21, 123-24, 126. For an excellent presentation see, Ayon Maharaj, “Sri Ramakrishna's Philosophy of Vijnana Vedanta,” Web: <https://philpapers.org/archive/MAHRRP.pdf>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df1ilsosg4g&t=2s> and Ayon Maharaj, *Infinite Paths To Infinite Reality: Sri Ramakrishna and Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴⁵ J. Norman King, and Barry L. Whitney, “Rahner and Hartshorne on Divine Immutability,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* (1982), pp. 197-99; cf. Web: iep.utm.edu/hart-d-t/

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- ⁴⁶ J. Norman King, and Barry L. Whitney, "Rahner and Hartshorne on Divine Immutability," *International Philosophical Quarterly* (1982), pp. 197-99; Web: iep.utm.edu/hart-d-t/
- ⁴⁷ W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 184.
- ⁴⁸ Keith Ward, *Religion and Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 30-35.
- ⁴⁹ Philip Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit*, ed. Z. Simpson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), pp. 127, 180.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- ⁵¹ A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 80-81; Arthur Peacocke, *Theology For a Scientific Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 128.
- ⁵² GSR, pp. 265i, 345gl, 133e, 648d, 688a, 568a; cf. 818b.
- ⁵³ GSR, pp. 803e, 208j, 320f, 342i, 822g; cf., pp. 287f; 326c, 357c, 395f, 396c, 400f, 418a, 478a 551a 643c, 652d, 678g, 776c, 779k, 782k, 818b, 836gj, 837d, 843j, 909p-10 and in all women 392c, 393b, 593r, 595d, 710b, 965f.
- ⁵⁴ GSR, pp. 732p, 255m.
- ⁵⁵ Bradley, p. 364.
- ⁵⁶ GSR, pp. 345-46.
- ⁵⁷ GSR, pp. 300c, 382o.
- ⁵⁸ Saradananda, p. 446.
- ⁵⁹ CW, I, p. 375.
- ⁶⁰ CW, II, p. 146.
- ⁶¹ Copleston, I, pp. 166-75, 179, 202-03.
- ⁶² Copleston, II, pp. 59-60, 73.
- ⁶³ CG, I, 29.2; 32.2.
- ⁶⁴ Web: <https://amymantravadi.com/2020/03/26/the-analogy-of-being-in-the-works-of-thomas-aquinas>
- ⁶⁵ GSR, pp. 116e, 136d, 257c, 436f.
- ⁶⁶ John Polkinghorne, *Theology in the Context of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 109-10.
- ⁶⁷ *Drg-Drshya-Viveka*, #1, 4-8, 15-17, 19, 24-26, 30, 33-34; Swami Sarvapriyananda's commentary; Web: www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5BEuDPDUFc
- ⁶⁸ GSR, p. 916l.
- ⁶⁹ The best source on Sri Ramakrishna's support of Vijnana philosophy is, Ayon Maharaj, *Infinite Paths To Infinite Reality: Sri Ramakrishna and Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), particularly pp. 27-50.
- ⁷⁰ Sri Ramakrishna, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, comp. M. Gupta, tr. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), pp. 103-04, 417, 479, 523, 598-99.
- ⁷¹ GSR, pp. 134h, 290e.
- ⁷² CW, III:37.

⁷³ Ayon Maharaj, "Toward a New Hermeneutics of the *Bhagavad Gita*: Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, and the Secret of Vijnana," *Philosophy East and West* (Oct. 2015), pp. 1209-33.

⁷⁴ Medhananda, pp. 45, 51-54.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ M. P. Pandit, *Shining Harvest* (Madras, Ganesh & Co. Private Ltd., 1966), pp. 208-10.

⁷⁷ BRMIC (Aug. 2004), p. 369; *WARHD*, p. 561.

⁷⁸ Maharaj (2015). The quotes are abbreviated since I consider the jnana spiritual experiences to be equal to the vijnana ones.

⁷⁹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equifinality

⁸⁰ To create a list of parallel Indian-Christian scriptural passages used in this book the most used sources were: F. Lorinser, *Die Bhagavad-Gita* (Breslau: G. Porsch, 1869), pp. 273-85; Adolf Kaegi, *The Rigveda* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1886), pp. 197-98; E. Washburn Hopkins, *India Old and New* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), pp. 149-57; George Haas, "Recurrent and Parallel Passages in the Principal *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 42 (1922), pp. 1-43; Wade Hatcher, ed., *The Bhagavad Gita and the Bible* (Seattle: Peanut Butter Publishing, 1992); Andrew Wilson, ed., *World Scripture* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1995).

⁸¹ BSM, I:1.2, p. 7; I:1.13, p. 19; III:3.59, p. 152.

⁸² B. N. K. Sharma *Madhva's Teachings in His Own Words* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1979), pp. 117, 126, 155; B. N. K. Sharma, *Philosophy of Sri Madhvacarya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), pp. 329-30, 353, 413-14.

⁸³ BSM, I:1.2, p. 8; II:2.5, p. 121.

⁸⁴ Sudhindra Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism* (Calcutta: Academic Publishers, 1969), p. 69.

⁸⁵ GSR, pp. 218a, 802d.

⁸⁶ Prabhavananda3, pp. 92, 192.

⁸⁷ ST, I, 13.2; cf. CG, I, 29.2, 30, 32-34; II, 13-14; ST, I, 39.2; 13.5-6.

⁸⁸ CG, I, 43; cf. ST, I, 7.1-2. For another translation see, Web:

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⁸⁹ CG, II, 52; Gopal Stavig, "Thomas Aquinas on the Nonduality of God," *Vedanta Kesari* 88 (2001), pp. 73, 112-13.

⁹⁰ Muller, p. 154.

⁹¹ Muller, pp. 147, 263.

⁹² GSR, pp. 101k-02, 434e.

⁹³ SSR, p. 385.

⁹⁴ Chidbhavananda, p. 546.

⁹⁵ SSR, pp. 261-62.

⁹⁶ Prabhavananda4, p. 123.

⁹⁷ ST, I, 3.5; cf. CG, I, 25.

⁹⁸ CG, II, 13.

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- ¹⁰² Thomas Morris, "Perfection and Power," *International Journal For the Philosophy of Religion* (1986), pp. 165-68.
- ¹⁰³ BSM, II:3.9, p. 143.
- ¹⁰⁴ Sharma (1979), pp. 123-24; HT, p. 136; BSM, II:1.31, p. 114.
- ¹⁰⁵ Sharma (1979), BSM, II:3.11, pp. 126, 128.
- ¹⁰⁶ CHI, III, pp. 314-16, 326, 330.
- ¹⁰⁷ GSR, pp. 920e, 817n, 211d, 159g.
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- ¹⁰⁹ Abhedananda (1968), pp. 51-52.
- ¹¹⁰ Abhedananda (1947), pp. 56-57
- ¹¹¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932, 1964), p. 272; cf. Lal, pp. 262-64, 269.
- ¹¹² GTP, II, pp. 238, 249.
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- ¹¹⁴ GTP, II: Introduction, pp. 235, 243-47.
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- ¹¹⁶ ST, II-II, 83.2. For another translation see, Web: www.newadvent.org/summa/3.htm
- ¹¹⁷ Dan Kaufman, "God's Immutability and the Necessity of Descartes' Eternal Truths," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (Jan. 2005), pp. 1-19.
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- ¹¹⁹ *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XXXVII, pp. 57-58.
- ¹²⁰ Althaus, pp. 107-08, 282.
- ¹²¹ Copleston, IV, pp. 188-90.
- ¹²² Strong, pp. 287-88.
- ¹²³ Strong, pp. 301-02, 365-66.
- ¹²⁴ Strong, pp. 353-54, 419.
- ¹²⁵ *Bhagavad Gita*, tr. Eknath Easwaran.
- ¹²⁶ GSR, pp. 277e, 382s, 454i, 455c.
- ¹²⁷ Strong, p. 265.
- ¹²⁸ GSR, pp. 102g, 305e, 479gj.
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- ¹³¹ CW, V:303-04, 385, 393.
- ¹³² Tipple, p. 42.
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