

The purpose of non-theistic devotion in the classical Indian tradition of Sāṃkhya-Yoga

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ABSTRACT

The paper starts with some textual distinctions concerning the concept of God in the meta-physical framework of two classical schools of Hindu philosophy, Sāṃkhya and Yoga. The author then focuses on the functional and pedagogical aspects of prayer as well as practical justification of “religious meditation” in both philosophical schools. Special attention is given to the practice called *īśvarapraṇidhāna*, recommended in the Yoga school, which is interpreted by the author as a form of non-theistic devotion. The meaning of the central object of this concentration, that is *puruṣa-viśeṣa*, is reconsidered in detail. The subject matter is discussed in the wider context of yogic self-discipline that enables a practitioner to overcome ignorance (*avidyā*) and the narrowness of egotic perspective (*asmitā*), recognized in the Hindu *darśanas* as the root-cause of all suffering or never-fulfilled-satisfaction (*duḥkha*). The non-theistic devotion and spiritual pragmatism assumed by the adherents of Sāṃkhya-Yoga redefines the concept of “God” (*īśvara*) as primarily an object of meditative practice and a special tool convenient for spiritual pedagogy.

KEYWORDS

Indian philosophy; non-theism; atheism; religious practice; meditation; *īśvara*; *svābhāvika*; Sāṃkhya; Yoga; God in Yoga

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SĀṂKHYAS' REJECTION OF GOD (*ĪŚVARA*)

The classical school of Sāṁkhya is commonly thought to be atheistic or non-theistic, or perhaps anti-theological, and dualistic in character.¹ In fact, *Sāṁkhyakārikā* (c. fifth CE), the oldest preserved treatise of this school, speaks no word about God and neither the concept of *īśvara*² nor *pranīdhāna*³ appears in the treatise of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, apart from the occurrence of the former one in the *kārikā*-s author's name itself. However, we should keep in mind that *Sāṁkhyakārikā* does not clearly deny God's existence either.

The non-theistic attitude of Sāṁkhya may have been inspired by or, perhaps, congenial with the ancient materialist movement of the Cārvākas and that is why the epithet of *svābhāvika*⁴ has been used, among others by the Vedāntins, for denotation of both the Cārvākas and Sāṁkhyas (Johnston, 1974: 67ff.; Kunst, 1976: 54). Sāyaṇamādhava in his *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (fourteenth century) calls the Sāṁkhyas *nirīśvara*, which in the context of his work clearly means "atheist" or "denying the existence of God" (*Sarvadarśanasamgraha* XIV.12). But the same distinction between theistic (*śeśvara*) and atheistic (*nirīśvara*) schools of Sāṁkhya made six centuries before by Haribhadra in his *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* (eighth century AD) may be understood differently. As Johannes Bronkhorst suggests (Bronkhorst, 1983: 157), it is likely that the word *īśvara* is used here in the sense "Creator God" whereas *nirīśvara* refers to those who refuse to identify God with the fundamental substantial cause of the world but do not reject the existence of God as such. This interpretation finds some support in the Bud-

¹ Since the time Sāṁkhya became the subject of detail studies by modern scholars, like Richard Garbe, Paul Oltramare, Arthur Berriedale Keith, Englefield Henry Johnston and others, there has been a good deal of discussion as to whether this system of thought was doctrinally theistic or atheistic. Some scholars distinguish several stages of Sāṁkhya development when it was subsequently undergoing the theistic, atheistic and again theistic influence. A strong defense of theism in pre-*kārikā* Sāṁkhya was offered by Rao (1966), and an even more radical theist interpretation of *Sāṁkhyakārikā* was given by Majumdar (1930), but none of them gained considerable approval among the contemporary Sāṁkhya researchers.

² The Sanskrit term *īśvara*, often rendered as God, is derived from *īś* — to own, posses, belong to, be valid or powerful, be master of, to command, to rule, to behave like a master. Therefore, this term is not the equivalent of the Greek *théos* as it denotes the one who is capable of, liable, exposed to, someone who is a master, lord, the supreme spirit, king, a rich or great man, husband; in some occurrences it can also mean a mistress or the queen (cf. Monier-Williams, 1979: 171).

³ The word *pranīdhāna* literally means laying on, fixing, applying, as well as access, endeavor, respectful conduct, attention paid to something or to somebody, profound religious meditation, vow, prayer.

⁴ The term *svābhāvika* refers to the cosmogonist idea that the world arises spontaneously from its own inherent nature, therefore the process of the so called creation of the world needs no additional transcendental cause and reason.

dhist texts refuting the Sāṃkhya doctrine of creation, namely in Śāntarākṣita's *Tattvasaṅgraha* 20.3–4 and its commentary *Pañjikā* by Kamalaśīla 21.2–4, both dating from the eighth century AD. Another interesting point shaking the commonly shared opinion on classical Sāṃkhya atheism may be witnessed in Udayana's *Nyāyakusumāñjali* (eleventh century). Udayana enumerates fourteen schools of thought, each of which worship God in their own way, among them the followers of Kāpila, who worship God in the form of "the first knower, the perfect one" (*ādivīdvān siddhah*).⁵

Now, let us take a closer look at the classical commentaries and *Sāṃkhyakārikā* itself. From the passages where *Yuktidīpikā* refers to *īśvara* (e.g. YD 70.22 — 73.9–24) we can conclude at least two things, namely that God is not a cause of the world⁶ and that he is pure awareness, like the selves (*puruṣa*-s). These assumptions, however, do not imply that *Yuktidīpikā* denies the existence of God. On the contrary, the commentary suggests that God sometimes acquires the instrument of understanding (*buddhi*) and even adopts a material body to take over the power which belongs to that body. God takes a bodily form, e.g. the body of a divine warrior, like Śiva (YD 72.9–10), or a body of dignity (*māhātmyaśarīrādīparigrāhāt*; YD 72.13) which is authoritative (*āpta*; YD 45.10–11) like *īśvaramaharṣis*, that is the great seers who are [embodiments of] God, and who are "devoid of blemishes such as passion, whose opinions are free from doubt, who see things that cannot be reached by the senses".⁷

Gauḍapāda and Māthara commenting on SK 61 both reject the idea of the God Creator. The commentary translated into Chinese by Paramārtha, like Gauḍapāda's *Bhāṣya* (on SK 61), claims that God is not the cause of the world since he does not possess three essential constituents (*guṇa*-s) of Nature, whereas the world does, and the fundamental assumption is that the cause and the effect must resemble each other.⁸ Thus in this perspective, cosmological and metaphysical transcendentalism is totally out of question. Vācaspatiśra in

⁵ Recapitulating Udayana's view and Wezler's interpretation of *Nyāyakusumāñjali* Bronkhorst (1983: 159) makes an important remark that Kāpila is here represented as the highest being known to the followers of Kāpila, but not as a God equivalent to the Greek *theos*. By the way, it is worth maintaining that Swāmi Hariharānanda Aranya refers to Kāpila as *ādivīdvān* and to God as eternally liberated *anādimukta*.

⁶ The *Yuktidīpikā* (68.20–74.15) considers the following causes of the world, which all are subsequently rejected: the atoms (*paramāṇu*), the self (*puruṣa*), God (*īśvara*), work (*karman*), fate (*daiva*), time (*kāla*), chance (*yadrchā*) and absence (*abhāva*). God, like the self, is here defined as non-active (*akarṣ*) but His existence as such is not rejected at the same time.

⁷ For a detail analysis of the idea of God in the commentaries to *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (Bronkhorst, 1983: 149–164). Bronkhorst gives three readings of the term *īśvaramaharṣinām* (Bronkhorst, 1983: 152–153): (1) if we read it as a *dvandva* compound, it means "to God and the great seers"; (2) when read as a *karmadhāraya* compound, it means "to the great seers, who are [incorporations of] God"; and (3) "to the seers, who are Gods" (this last option Bronkhorst rightly considers inapplicable).

⁸ Gauḍapāda on SK 61 says: *nirguṇa īśvara, saguṇānām lokānām tasmād utpattir ayukteṭi*.

Tattvakaumudī (on SK 56–57) offers two more arguments against God’s creative power. He says that only Nature itself (*prakṛti*) is the material and efficient cause of manifestation and God cannot be a superintendent of this process. Even if *īśvara* had been able to create the world, he would have acted either out of self-interest (*svārtha*) or out of compassion (*kāruṇya*), which is not the case because both motivations are inappropriate for God. Why so? Vācaspati explains that God, the exalted one (*bhagavat*), is the one who has obtained all that is desired, so he has no wish whatever to engage in an action to create the world. After all, the process of creation does not need any extra doer to bring it about because it is spontaneous, self-acting and unconscious.⁹

WHY DO THE SĀṂKHYAS PRAY, AFTER ALL?

Now, keeping the above arguments in mind we may consider whether Sāṁkhya regards prayer and worship as a beneficial or useless activity and why. First, we should make clear two points that are crucial for the present topic. We should define the meaning of “worship” and evaluate its efficiency as a means to achieve the objectives of this system of thought. We should also try to specify the nature of its object and the purpose of the possible Sāṁkhyan religious affection.

Because neither *Sāṁkhyakārikā* nor its early commentaries give the characteristics of prayer or clear arguments in favour of worship, classical definitions of these activities are simply lacking. Does it mean that the Sāṁkhyas do completely and perfectly without any form of prayer or worship? Well, not quite. In most of the classical Sanskrit texts of this tradition, including the work of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, we can find some affectionate openings or concluding prayer-like invocations addressed to the greatest Sāṁkhya teachers, like Kāpila, Asuri, Pañcaśikha, Vārṣagaṇya or Vindhyavāsin. They are called the “great sages”, or “self-existent” (*svayambhā*). Such a deep quasi-religious respect to these historical or legendary authorities seems to be both natural and very important for all Sāṁkhya exponents across the centuries.

Now, given the lack of a classical definition of prayer or worship we can refer to the characteristics of *bhakti* offered by Swāmī Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947), a contemporary Bengali scholar-monk (*sannyāsin*), a reviver Sāṁkhya-Yoga philosophical tradition,¹⁰ whose remarks seem to remain in ac-

⁹ While describing the Nature (*prakṛti*) SK 57 uses a metaphor. The Nature is said to act for the sake of the self (*puruṣa*) like the unknowing cow’s milk which functions for the sake of the nourishment of the calf.

¹⁰ He founded the Kāpil Math, an *āśrama* in Madhupur (state Jharkhand, India), in the early twentieth century. To learn more about the meaning and historical context of the ascetic cave tradition in India and about the figure of Hariharānanda Āraṇya, cf. Jacobsen, 2005: 333–349.

cord with the spirit of Sāṃkhyan philosophy as a whole. This reference can be made here as the result of a general assumption that Sāṃkhya is not just a historically finite doctrine but is a still vital and evolving philosophical current of thought, however marginal it might seem when compared to the popularity of Advaita Vedānta.

In his twenty six *Aphorisms on Sublime Devotion* (*Parabhaktisūtra* = PBhS), Āraṇya discusses *bhakti* and gives simple and persuasive definitions of worship or devotion (Āraṇya, 2007a: 59–93). *Bhakti* is understood as keeping one's mind fixed on a saintly being whom one adores or abides in such a Being (PBhS 2). The object of devotion, stresses Āraṇya, may be either the ultimate Being — God, or a human being superior to oneself, e.g. a saintly person or a common man held in high esteem, like one's parents. Āraṇya ensures that *bhakti* is not the monopoly of devotees of *īśvara* and all worshipful people irrespective of whether they believe in an *īśvara* with or without form, or are atheist are included in its ambit.

Parabhaktisūtra makes a basic distinction between sublime devotion to genuinely supra-phenomenal objects, which is called *parābhakti*, and ordinary devotion to all other objects that can be apprehended by the senses, called *aparābhakti* (PBhS 4).¹¹ What is important is that abiding in the object of devotion must not be just attachment to the object itself. Attachment and love are but modifications of the mind applicable up to the stage of devotion to God with attributes. Whereas, sublime devotion, whose highest object is one's true self or pure consciousness (*pratyagātma*), may only be practiced by the one who has firmly controlled his body and organs, who has abandoned all the objects of senses and attachment (both hatred and love), who is always engaged in meditation and indifferent to worldly enjoyments, who abandoned a delusive sense of self (*ahaṃkāra*) being the root cause of egotism, vanity, violence, arrogance, lust, anger and all possessions, who is free of self-interest and has attained tranquility (PBhS 5). In such a perfect peace (*śānti*), achieved in *parābhakti*, all knowledge of the phenomenal world vanishes together with the sense of time and only an awareness of the pure self remains (PBhS 9). This state, notes Āraṇya, is beyond all pleasure and pain, and beyond the reach of words or the mind (PBhS 6). However, the lower, ordinary devotion (*aparābhakti*) may be accompanied by the wave of happiness, a pleasant state of mind, called *bhaktirasa*, which causes some subtle attachment arising from a remembrance of the past pleasant experience of the devotee (PBhS 8).

Due to variations in the devotees' individual inclinations, caused by the past latencies (*saṃskāras*), there cannot be one form of worship suitable and recommended for all. Therefore, Āraṇya distinguishes two general forms of worship. The first one, which may be called external, includes offerings, singing hymns of

¹¹ Here *parā* and *aparā*, which normally denote the supreme and ordinary respectively, are distinguished by the object of devotion.

praise, and personal service to the master or his emblem without any physical or financial reward (PBhS 15). This ritualistic worship is prescribed and considered particularly advantageous for people whose minds are always fluctuating, and who cannot hold on happily to recollection of their object of worship without external aid or support.

A higher or internal form of worship consists in a deep meditation and remaining in the state of an undisturbed mind or uncontrolled bliss. The practitioner should retreat to and stay speechless at the speech centre of the mind in his brain. Then by inhibiting conative impulses he should stay in the cognitive I-know feeling or the sense of self (*abamkāra*), and next having softened the effort involved in knowing he should merge in the Great Self or “pure I-sense” (*buddhi*). Only then by abolishing all phenomenal knowing is he or she able to realize the true self (*puruṣa*) (PBhS 14). In other words, a typical ritualistic activity and prayer is a means of devotion and self-discipline which is more common and easier to practice than meditation with a tranquil frame of mind. The latter is considered to be higher because it is a direct and more powerful or efficient means which allows the practitioner to achieve the ultimate objective, namely liberation (*kaivalya*).

WHO IS THE GOD THAT YOGA PRACTITIONERS MEDITATE ON?

The distinction between Sāṃkhya with God (*seśvara*) and without God (*nirīśvara*) is made, among others, in Haribhadra’s *Ṣaḍdarśanamuccaya* and in Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasaṅgraha* together with Kamalaśīla’s *Pañjikā*. Most commentators since Śāṅkara (eighth century) have identified the term “Sāṃkhya with God” with Patañjala *darśana*.¹² Indeed, *Yogasūtra* refers to *īśvara* or *īśvarapranīdhāna* in eleven aphorisms (YS I.23–29; II.1–2, 32, 45). In the first *pāda*, where the dynamics of yogic practice (*abhyāsa*) is elucidated, meditation on *īśvara* seems to be a means to *samādhi* itself. Whereas in the second *pāda*, both in the context of the three-step *kriyāyoga* and as one of the five *niyama*-s included in the main practice of *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, it is just a means to purification of

¹² Patañjali’s philosophy has been called “Sāṃkhya with God” at least since Sāyaṇamādhava’s *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* and the *Sarvasiddhāntasaṅgraha* (fourteenth century). However, Edgerton (1924: 38) argues that the term *yoga*, originally, did not refer to Patañjali’s philosophy, because it is not a system of belief or of metaphysics, and it was always just a way, a method, of getting something, and not one of the Sāṃkhya schools. Moreover, as Bronkhorst (1981) tries to convince us that *yoga* in an early date referred rather to Nyāya and/or Vaiśeṣika instead of Patañjali’s views presented in *Yogasūtra*, therefore, the expression *seśvara sāmṅhya* may have referred to the Pāncarātra system.

the *sattvic buddhi*.¹³ Besides, *īśvarapranidhāna* is mentioned while the alternative methods of inducing the supernatural powers (*siddhis*) are discussed.

But who, after all, is *īśvara*? In *Yogasūtra* I.24 *īśvara* is identified with *puruṣaviśeṣa*. Nearly all commentators since Vyāsa's *Bhāṣya* have understood this key term as "a special self", that is not only a distinguished one but the most important of all. Because of his purely *sattvic* nature, *īśvara* is believed to have the power to remove all obstacles rising in front of the meditators devoted to him. According to Vijñānabhikṣu meditation on *īśvara* is the most noble form of all spiritual practices (*Yogasārasaṃgraha* I). From the *Yogasūtra* itself we can imply only that *īśvara* is free from *avidyā* which is the cause of every affliction (YS II.3); in him there is the seed (*bīja*) of omniscience which is typical of the highest state of concentration with consciousness, *sabījasamādhi* (YS I.46). However, this meditative state is not considered to be the highest of all as it is followed by the terminal liberating absorption called *nirbījasamādhi* or *asamprañītasamādhi* (YS I.51). Therefore, *īśvara* is the subject of discriminative discernment (*vivekakhyāti*) which can be achieved by the empirical seer, not the absolute one, or the true self. And the empirical seer is only a relative aspect of subjectivity originated just by reflection of the absolute seer in the purest *sattvic buddhi*. Moreover, Patañjali calls *īśvara* the master (*guru*) of all, even of prior teachers, who can be discovered in ourselves thanks to the contemplation of the mystical syllable OM. Finally, this omniscient master proves to be our inward consciousness (*cetana*) or the light of *puruṣa* (*citiśakti*) being another synonym to the empirical seer entirely devoid of ignorance.

Some noteworthy and insightful comments on *īśvarapranidhāna* are offered by Hariharānanda Araṇya. When considering how to distinguish *īśvara* defined as a special *puruṣa*, or eternally liberated self, from the *puruṣa* principle, he makes two interesting points. Firstly, he notices that the two cannot be equated because *īśvara* is *puruṣa* necessarily possessing a mind, while the existence of *puruṣa* as the principle does not require being accompanied by a mind of any sort (Āraṇya, 2007b: 127). To put it in other words, what differs the two is the fact that proximity (*saṃyoga*) of *puruṣa* to the mind-and-body complex that belongs to the realm of *prakṛti* is recognized as the root cause of suffering, whereas *īśvara* is understood as a personified *puruṣa* whose contact to mind does not bring any sorrow due to a unique quality of his mind, namely being eternally free from affliction and from the *kleśas*. Another justification of distinguishing *īśvara* from the *puruṣa* principle Araṇya suggests is that from the point of view of the spiritual aspirant. Referring to the two lines for advancement of aspirants recommended in *Bhagavadgītā* — *jñānayoga* and *karmayoga*, he claims that

¹³ These two readings of *īśvarapranidhāna* are also clearly distinguished by Rukmani, 1999: 738.

only the *karmayogin-s* need the “I-Thou” concept in their devotional practice. He also says:

They are inclined to accept a liberated Being as their ideal and through devotion to Him they endeavour to mould themselves to that ideal. Devotion to an anticipatory conception of their ideal guides them on the path (Āraṇya, 2007b: 128).

Although to *karmayogin-s* this method appears the easiest, “their ideal whom they hail as Thou, cannot be realized directly because «Thou» brings in somebody who is not I” (Āraṇya, 2007b: 128). Thanks to continued practice of devotion the *karmayogin*’s feeling of dependence is generated and gets intensified so that, ultimately, the devotee comes to regard the object of his devotion as the dispenser of all his needs. If *īśvarapranidhāna* matures properly, the successful devotee does imbibe some divine qualities of the object of his devotion which naturally leads to fulfilment of his needs, however, it should not allow him to slacken his spiritual practice in any respect. Whereas the method of *jñānayogin-s*, who take a direct path of apprehension of the principles underlying the world, when they form a cogent anticipatory conception of *puruṣa* principle, requires to purify and refine their sense of self. Doing so they proceed until they realize the true self (*puruṣa*). A *yogin* belonging to this group of practitioners, who do not need devotion to *īśvara*, has to build for himself a rational concept of liberated *puruṣa* being the ultimate Seer or Knower within oneself.

To summarize, yogic God, or *puruṣaviśeṣa* may be understood as: “distinguished *puruṣa*”, or the self distinguished by the empirical consciousness in the course of discriminative discernment (*vivekakhyāti*), and also as a “*puruṣa*’s sign” marked on *liṅga*, and as “peculiarity” or “secondary-ness of the self”, that is the reflection of the self in *sattvic buddhi*. Hence, *īśvara* is not another, the third aspect of subjectivity, apart from the self (*puruṣa*) and the empirical seer (*citta*), but rather an ideal model of the empirical seer present permanently in ourselves in the form of inward consciousness (*citi*), but accessible only through the meditative effort and one-pointed, intentional *samādhi* (*ekāgra*). Such a concept of the ideal preceptor, or the perfect inner *guru*, lets us suppose that *īśvara*, in the context of yogic pedagogy, is a counterpart of *jīvanmukta* whose doctrine has not been developed in *Yogasūtra* otherwise. Though *īśvara* is called the teacher of all sages and *guru-s* (YS I.26), he cannot be identified with any of them. We should rather identify yogic God with the impersonal “eternal excellence” or exemplum of the presence of *puruṣa* and *cittasattva* in any and all realms of becoming.¹⁴

¹⁴ The phrase “eternal excellence” was suggested by Gerald J. Larson in his paper “The eccentric God of Yoga: a new approach to worship and prayer” presented at 4th DANAM Conference, Washington, DC, USA (19 November 2006). Larson argues that *īśvara* for the classical Yoga is countless consciousness that can only manifest or reveal itself in the presence of perfectly pure *sattva* (*prakṛṣṭa-citta-sattva*), therefore “worship” or “prayer” in the Yoga system

THE FUNCTION OF NON-THEISTIC DEVOTION

Since what is commonly called “*śeṣvara* Sāṃkhya” proves to be lacking the idea of God in the strong sense — as the Creator, independent entity, more powerful and knowledgeable being than a man, including the wisest ones — what might be, actually, the reason why Patañjali recommends *īśvarapranīdhāna* so firmly?

First of all, the significance of, so called prayer and worship in classical Yoga comes from its practical or therapeutic usefulness in the process of meditation. What does devotion to *īśvara* consist in? Since *īśvara* is denoted by *praṇava* (YS I.27) *īśvarapranīdhāna* mainly involves the practice of repetition (*japa*) of the mystical syllable OM with a focused one-pointed mind (*ekāgratā*).¹⁵ And, naturally, such repetitive actions become a means to produce the good habits, which seem to play equally an essential role both in the social and spiritual formation. (One can say that Patañjali’s concept of *kriyāyoga*, and *īśvarapranīdhāna* in particular, aims at perfection achieved through creating morally pure and beneficial habits (*sattvic sāmśkāra-s*), or right dispositions, that predispose the mind to the calm of deep contemplation (*samādhi*) and ultimately the complete cessation of all fluctuations of mind (*cittavṛtti nirodha*).¹⁶

Another advantage one may get from concentrating on *īśvara* is that during this practice one occupies one’s mind with a very subtle object and, at the same time, avoids being mentally and emotionally agitated and engaged in other objects which are likely to cause dispersion and suffering. What is more, as long as the prayer remains genuinely sincere and practiced with a pure mind, it helps us to weaken the fivefold ignorance (*avidyā*, or the five *kleśa-s*), being the root cause of all false perceptions and wrong-doing. This close connection between ethics and knowledge is also emphasized by Swāmī Hariharānanda Āraṇya who regards *īśvarapranīdhāna* to be the equivalent of *karmayoga* and an alternative yogic path besides *jñānayoga*. Both paths prove to be complementary as the ultimate knowledge or enlightenment may come through the devotion and dedication of oneself to the higher being. Āraṇya clearly recognizes the mutual interrelationship between worship and gnosis gained through meditation: the better the one is, the more efficient becomes the other, and vice versa (Āraṇya, 2003a; Āraṇya, 2003b).

Moreover, surrendering oneself to the deity whom one adores may become a highly beneficial practice due to the unique psychological quality it evokes.

should be understood as a profound meditation and longing (*bhakti-viśeṣa*) for the “eternal excellence” (*śāśvatika utkarṣa*) of that “perfect embodiment” (*prakṛṣṭa-sattva*).

¹⁵ As Rukmani notices the connection of *īśvara* with *praṇava* points to the *mantra/śabda/sphota* aspect of Yoga (Rukmani, 1999: 737).

¹⁶ Carpenter (Whicher & Carpenter, 2003: 35) argues that *kriyāyoga* consists of practices being continuity with mainstream post-Vedic Brahmanical rituals and as repeated practice, or repetitive activity it leads beyond activity, which is *nirodha*.

Complete surrender to God, claims Āraṇya, consists in holding on to the recollection: “God resides in my heart and is directing me in all my actions” (Āraṇya, 2003b: 65). But such devotion to *īśvara* is recommended by Āraṇya only to help a *karmayogin* to give up hankering after the fruits of actions, because “the notion «I am the performer of actions» brings in bondage” (Āraṇya, 2003b: 65). Here the author refers to the authority of *Bhagavadgītā*, another highly popular Hindu script. Certainly, one must not take this comment literally or blindly and conclude that since God is directing all our actions we have no responsibility and may remain as self-centred and selfish as we like. On the contrary, devotion and self-sacrifice to God favours overcoming the narrowness of egotism (*asmitā*), or I-sense (*ahaṃkāra*) being the key aspects of the metaphysical nescience (YS II.3). The power of self-surrender seems to be unsurpassed, even though it may not be guaranteed by mercy of any gracious God or almighty superbeing. Here, we could cite Śāntideva, a Buddhist philosopher (eighth century) who notes in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that the effect of self-surrender is fourfold: (1) the practitioner becomes without fear of being or becoming (*bhāva*), that is existing within the wheel of *samsāra*: (2) he works for the advantage of other beings, which marks entering the Bodhisattva Path; (3) he leaves behind former wrongdoing completely; (4) he will do no further evil.¹⁷

Finally, one more important argument in favour of *īśvarapraṇidhāna* should be pointed out. What we cannot miss is that this particular practice requires quite a different psychological technique or strategy being, in a sense, untypical of the yogic process of the transformation of consciousness. The dynamics of yogic aspiration to discriminative knowledge (*vijñāna, vivekakhyāti*), which enables us to unmask and transcend the delusive identity of the empirical self, or pure I-sense (*buddhi*), with the absolute self (*puruṣa*), or immutable principle of consciousness (*cit*), is generally based on the progressing gradual dis-identification: “I have to get rid of my present self-identification to make spiritual progress, to cross over my present false self-image, and succeed in realizing my true nature (*svarūpa*)”. And that is what eradicating *avidyā* is about. Whereas, meditation on *īśvara* enables us to make progress while evoking a positive or affirmative attitude which stands for identifying or getting alike *puruṣaviśeṣa*, the inner teacher (*guru*).

¹⁷ Cf. Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* II.9 (1995; 1970). Śāntideva also gives himself to all Buddhas or Thatāgatas who are “oceans of virtue” (*Bodhicaryāvatāra* II.1). He offers his entire self wholly because, as he admits, he has no sufficient merit and feels completely destitute: “I give myself to the Jains completely, and to their sons. Pre-eminent Beings! Take possession of me! In you, because of loving devotion (*bhakti*), I go into servitude” (*Bodhicaryāvatāra* II.8).

CONCLUSION

Before we conclude, let us refer to the anecdote cited by Hariharānanda Āraṇya. In his *Unique travelogue* (Āraṇya, 2003b: 65; Āraṇya, 2001), a fascinating story of his spiritual quest and growth, he says:

Once two sages had some differences of opinion on religious matter. They sat on meditation and invoked Lord Viṣṇu for intervention. Viṣṇu approved the ideas of one of them. The other one would not listen to it and said that a demon had come in the disguise of Lord Viṣṇu (Āraṇya, 2001: 26).

Apparently in the sphere of religion, concludes Āraṇya, we are by and large sectarian and believe that we are God's only favourites. Hardly ever we are ready to accept religious ideas propagated by other people unless we identify with them ourselves. An important message behind this anecdote is that the problem with God consists in referring to my God, or, in other words, trouble comes up when the particular "I" (*aḥam*) begins worshipping the Devine considered to be mine or ours. This sense of belonging or ownership, more or less subtle, that is named *mamakāra* or "mineness" in Yoga terminology, evokes the very central problem one must refer to when analysing the significance and usefulness of prayer and worship for the follower of Sāṃkhya-Yoga. And that is why the predominant perspective on the issue one should take according to this tradition is subjective rather than objective, and epistemic rather than an ontological or theological one.

Taking into account all the above arguments of Sāṃkhya and Yoga against the idea of God-Creator as well as the points in favour of meditation on *īśvara*, being the perfect inner teacher or the "eternal excellence", we should realize the great paradox of every devotional endeavour. The purest and most valuable intention and purpose of worship is, at least in the context of these two Indian philosophical systems, to overcome the limits of ego or transcend the egocentric perspective which disables the worshipper to identify himself or herself with one's true and radically ego-free self. The most attainable and highly efficient means to gain this aim, however, is to recognize and focus firmly on one's inner *guru*, the seed of wisdom. What makes this pursuit extremely difficult and risky is that the inner "eternal excellence" tends to be identified by the devotee with his or her present ideal self-image commonly marked by the egocentric needs and expectations. In practice, this premature self-identification fatally reverses the fundamental precept to eradicate *mamakāra* or "mineness" — the evidence of ignorance and the omen of continued suffering. Moreover, the devotional practice (*īśvarapranidhāna*) recommended by Patañjali may be interpreted as a means of the spiritual pedagogy serving four crucial goals: (1) prevention from mental scattering and dispersion, (2) self-therapy allowing to form some positive

perceptual habits and the right cognitive approach, (3) enhancement of morally and spiritually required qualities, and (4) reinforcement of the sense of subjective identity being a complementary method of self-development.

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PBhS — *Parabhaktisūtra*

SK — *Sāṃkhyakārikā*

YD — *Yuktidīpikā*

YS — *Yogasūtra*

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