

Chapter Seven Is Shakti Force?

There are some persons who have thought, and still think, that Shakti means force and that the worship of Shakti is the worship of force. Thus Keshub Chunder Sen (New Dispensation, p. 108), wrote:

Four centuries ago the Shaktas gave way before the Bhaktas. Chaitanya's army proved invincible, and carried all Bengal captive. Even to-day his gospel of love rules as a living force, though his followers have considerably declined both in faith and in morals. Just the reverse of this we find in England and other European countries. There the Shaktas are driving the Bhaktas out of the field. Look at the Huxleys, the Tyndalls and the Spencers of the day. What are they but Shaktas, worshippers of Shakti or Force? The only Deity they adore, if they at all adore one, is the Prime Force of the universe. To it they offer dry homage. Surely then the scientists and materialists of the day are a sect of Shakti-worshippers, who are chasing away the true Christian devotees who adore the God of Love. Alas! for European Vaishnavas; they are retreating before the advancing millions of Western Shaktas. We sincerely trust, however, the discomfiture of devotion and Bhakti will be only for a time, and that a Chaitanya will yet arise in the West, crush the Shaktas, who only recognize Force as Deity and are sunk in carnality and voluptuousness, and lead natures into the loving faith, spirituality, simplicity, and rapturous devotion of the Vaishnava.

Professor Monier Williams ("Hinduism") also called it a doctrine of Force.

Recently the poet Rabindranath Tagore has given the authority of his great name to this error (Modern Review, July, 1919). After pointing out that Egoism is the price paid for the fact of existence and that the whole universe is assisting in the desire that the "I" should be, he says that man has viewed this desire in two different ways, either as a whim of Creative Power, or a joyous self-expression of Creative Love. Is the fact then of his being, he asks, a revelation of Force or of Love? Those who hold to the first view must also, he thinks, recognize conflict as inevitable and eternal. For according to them Peace and Love are but a precarious coat of armor within which the weak seek shelter, whereas that which the timid anathematize as unrighteousness, that alone is the road to success. "The pride of prosperity throws man's mind outwards and the misery and insult of destitution draws man's hungering desires likewise outwards. These two conditions alike leave man unashamed to place above all other gods, Shakti the Deity of Power -- the Cruel One, whose right hand wields the weapon of guile. In the politics of Europe drunk with Power we see the worship of Shakti."

In the same way the poet says that in the days of their political disruption, the cowed and down-trodden Indian people through the mouths of their poets sang the praises of the same Shakti. "The Chandi of Kavikangkan and of the Annadamangala, the Ballad of Manasa, the Goddess of Snakes, what are they but Paeans of the triumph of Evil? The burden of their song is the defeat of Shiva the good at the hands of the cruel deceitful criminal Shakti." "The male Deity who was in possession was fairly harmless. But all of a sudden a feminine Deity turns up and demands to be worshipped in his stead. That is to say that she insisted on thrusting herself where she had no right. Under what title? Force! By what method? Any that would serve."

The Deity of Peace and Renunciation did not survive. Thus he adds that in Europe the modern Cult of Shakti says that the pale anaemic Jesus will not do. But with high pomp and activity Europe celebrates her Shakti worship.

"Lastly the Indians of to-day have set to the worship Europe's Divinity. In the name of religion some are saying that it is cowardly to be afraid of wrong-doing. Both those who have attained worldly success, and those who have failed to attain it are singing the same tune. Both fret at righteousness as an obstacle which both would overcome by physical force." I am not concerned here with any popular errors that there may be. After all, when we deal with a Shastrik term it is to the Shastra itself that we must look for its meaning. Shakti comes from the root Shak "to be able," "to do". It indicates both activity and capacity therefor. The world, as word, is activity. But when we have said that, we have already indicated that it is erroneous to confine the meaning of the term Shakti to any special form of activity. On the contrary Shakti means both power in general and every particular form of power. Mind is a Power: so is Matter. Mind is constantly functioning in the form of Vritti; Reasoning, Will and Feeling (Bhava) such as love, aversion and so forth are all aspects of Mind-power in its general sense. Force is power translated to the material plane, and is therefore only one and the grossest aspect of Shakti or power. But all these special powers are limited forms of the great creative Power which is the Mother (Ambika) of the Universe. Worship of Shakti is not worship of these limited forms but of the Divine will, knowledge and action, the cause of these effects. That Mahashakti is perfect consciousness (Cidrupini) and Bliss (Anandamayi) which produces from Itself the contracted consciousness experiencing both pleasure and pain. This production is not at all a "whim". It is the nature (Svabhava) of the ultimate.

Bliss is Love (Niratishayapremaspadatvam anandatvam). The production of the Universe is according to the Shakta an act of love, illustrated by the so-called erotic imagery of the Shastra. The Self loves itself whether before, or in, creation. The thrill of human love which continues the life of humanity is an infinitesimally small fragment and faint reflection of the creative act in which Shiva and Shakti join to produce the Bindu which is the seed of the Universe.

I quite agree that the worship of mere Force is Asurik and except in a transient sense futile. Force, however, may be moralized by the good purpose which it serves. The antithesis is not rightly between Might and Right but between Might in the service of Right and Might in the service of Wrong. To worship force merely is to worship matter. He however who worships the Mother in Her Material forms (Sthularupa) will know that She has others, and will worship Her in all such forms. He will also know that She is beyond all limited forms as that which gives being to them all. We may then say that Force is a gross form of Shakti, but Shakti is much more than that "here" (Iha) and the infinite Power of Consciousness "there" (Amutra). This last, the Shakti of worship, is called by the Shastra the Purnahambhava or the experience "All I am".

Next: Chapter Eight: Cinacara (Vashishtha and Buddha)