

**Sri Aurobindo's Contextual Justification of His Ramakrishnan Interpretation
of the Terms "Jñāna" and "Vijñāna" in the *Bhagavad Gītā***

Class on Bhagavad Gita in the Light of Sri Ramakrishna
Swami Medhananda

Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings on *Jñāna* and *Vijñāna*

Dec. 16, 1883:

M: "Is the world unreal?"

MASTER: "Why should it be unreal? That is how Advaitic jñānīs reason.

"In the beginning, when a person reasons following the Advaita Vedāntic method of 'Not this, not this', he realizes that Brahman is not the living beings, not the universe, not the twenty-four cosmic principles. All these things become like dreams to him. Then evolution follows involution, and he feels that God Herself has become the universe and all living beings.

"Suppose you are climbing to the roof by the stairs. As long as you are aware of the roof, you are also aware of the stairs. He who is aware of the high is also aware of the low. But after reaching the roof you realize that the stairs are made of the same materials—brick, lime, and brick-dust—as the roof.

Apr. 5, 1884:

"But vijñana 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 vijñana, 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 vijñana."

June 30, 1884:

"The rishis of old had timid natures. They were easily frightened. Do you know their attitude? It was this: 'Let me somehow get my own salvation; who cares for others?' A hollow piece of drift-wood somehow manages to float; but it sinks if even a bird sits on it. But Narada and sages of his kind are like a huge log that not only can float across to the other shore but can carry many animals and other creatures as well. A steamship itself crosses the ocean and also carries people across.

"Teachers like Narada belong to the class of the vijñani. They were much more courageous than the other rishis....A mere jnani trembles with fear....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.

"It is a joy to merge the mind in the Indivisible Brahman through contemplation. And it is also a joy to keep the mind on the Lila, without dissolving it in the Absolute. "A mere jnani is a

monotonous person. He always analyses, saying: 'It is not this, not this. The world is like a dream.' But I have 'raised both my hands'. Therefore I accept everything.”

From *Lilaprasanga*:

“How foolish to speak of compassion! Human beings are as insignificant as worms crawling on the earth—and they are to show compassion to others? That’s absurd. It must not be compassion, but service to all. Serve them, knowing that they are all manifestations of God [*śivajñāne jīver sevā*].”

Sri Aurobindo’s Commentary on the Gīta

4.34–4.35

*tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ* (4.34)

Attain that Knowledge through reverential salutations, repeated questioning, and service. These Knowers, **who know the true principles of existence [tattva-darśinaḥ]**, will impart this Knowledge to you.

*yaj jñātvā na punar moham evaṁ yāsyasi pāṇḍava
yena bhūtānyaśeṣeṇa drakṣyasi ātmany atho mayi* (4.35)

Possessing that Knowledge you will not fall again into the bewilderment of the mind’s ignorance and into its bondage to mere sense-knowledge and to the inferior activity of the desires and passions. The knowledge in which all culminates is that by which **thou shalt see all existences (becomings, bhūtani) without exception in the Self, then in Me.**

Commentary:

“For the Self is that one, immutable, all-pervading, all-containing, self-existent reality or Brahman hidden behind our mental being into which our consciousness widens out when it is liberated from the ego; we come to see all beings as becomings, *bhūtani*, within that one self-existence.

But this Self or immutable Brahman we see too to be the self-presentation to our essential psychological consciousness of a supreme Being who is the source of our existence and of whom all that is mutable or immutable is the manifestation. He is God, the Divine, the Purushottama. To Him we offer everything as a sacrifice; into His hands we give up our actions; in His existence we live and move; unified with Him in our nature and with all existence in Him, we become one soul and one power of being with Him and with all beings; with His supreme reality we identify and unite our self-being. By works done for sacrifice, eliminating desire, we arrive at knowledge and at the soul’s possession of itself; by works done in self-knowledge and God-knowledge we are liberated into the unity, peace and joy of the divine existence.” (EG, p. 122)

7.2–7.3

*jñānam te 'ham savijñānam idaṁ vakṣyāmy aśeṣataḥ
yaj jñātvā neha bhūyo 'nyaj jñātavyam-avaśiṣhyate (7.2)*

I will speak to thee without omission or remainder [*aśeṣataḥ*] (for otherwise a ground of doubt may remain), the essential knowledge [*jñānam*], attended with all the comprehensive knowledge [*vijñānam*], by knowing which there shall be no other thing here left to be known.

*manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye
yatatām api siddhānāṁ kaścin māṁ vetti tattvataḥ (7.3)*

Among thousands of men one here and there strives after perfection, and **of those who strive and attain to perfection one here and there knows me in all the principles of my existence [*tattvataḥ*].**”

18.54–18.56

*brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śochati na kāṅkṣati
samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu mad-bhaktiṁ labhate parām (18.54)*

When one has become the Brahman, when one neither grieves nor desires, when one is equal to all beings, then one gets the supreme love and devotion to Me.

*bhaktyā māṁ abhijānāti yāvān yaś cāsmi tattvataḥ
tato māṁ tattvato jñātvā viśate tad-anantaram (18.55)*

Commentary:

“When the soul has lost its separative personality, when it has become the Brahman, it is then that it can live in the true Person and can attain to the supreme revealing bhakti for the Purushottama and can come to know him utterly by the power of its profound bhakti, its heart’s knowledge, *bhaktyā māṁ abhijānāti*. That is the integral knowledge, when the heart’s fathomless vision completes the mind’s absolute experience, — *samagram māṁ jñātvā*. “He comes to know Me,” says the Gita, “who and how much I am and **in all the reality and principles of my being, yāvān yaścāsmi tattvataḥ.**” This **integral knowledge** is the knowledge of the Divine present in the individual; it is the entire experience of the Lord secret in the heart of man, revealed now as the supreme Self of his existence, the Sun of all his illumined consciousness, the Master and Power of all his works, the divine Fountain of all his soul’s love and delight, the Lover and Beloved of his worship and adoration. **It is the knowledge too of the Divine extended in the universe,** of the Eternal from whom all proceeds and in whom all lives and has its being, of the Self and Spirit of the cosmos, of Vasudeva who has become all this that is, of the Lord of cosmic existence who reigns over the works of Nature.” (EG, 537)

***sarva-karmāṇy api sadā kurvāṇo mad-vyapāśrayaḥ
mat-prasādād avāpnoti śāśvataṁ padam avyayam (18.56)***

And by doing also all actions always lodged in Me he attains by My grace the eternal and imperishable status.

Commentary:

“And it then becomes evident how action continual and unceasing and of all kinds without diminution or abandonment of any part of the activities of life can be not only quite consistent with a supreme spiritual experience, but as forceful a means of reaching this highest spiritual condition as bhakti or knowledge. Nothing can be more positive than the Gita’s statement in this matter. “And by doing also all actions always lodged in Me he attains by my grace the eternal and imperishable status.” This liberating action is of the character of works done in a profound union of the will and all the dynamic parts of our nature with the Divine in ourself and the cosmos. It is done first as a sacrifice with the idea still of our self as the doer. It is done next without that idea and with a perception of the Prakriti as the sole doer. It is done last with the knowledge of that Prakriti as the supreme power of the Divine and a renunciation, a surrender of all our actions to him with the individual as a channel only and an instrument. Our works then proceed straight from the Self and Divine within us, are a part of the indivisible universal action, are initiated and performed not by us but by a vast transcendent Shakti. All that we do is done for the sake of the Lord seated in the heart of all, for the Godhead in the individual and for the fulfilment of his will in us, for the sake of the Divine in the world, for the good of all beings, for the fulfilment of the world action and the world purpose, or in one word for the sake of the Purushottama and done really by him through his universal Shakti.” (EG, p. 538)