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Swami Chinmayananda, his Vision and the Mission

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Introduction

Hinduism is an ancient religion which has gone through several phases of glory and doom, from widespread following to states of dejection. Time and again, reformers have taken birth into the religion to restore it to its glory or back to its "golden era". Śaṅkara can be called as one such reformer who took it out from the bondages of ritualistic adherence and ushered it into the realms of aspiration for *Advaita Vedāntic* knowledge. Thereafter came the onslaught of Mughal emperors and their reign during which Hinduism saw a steep decline. This was followed by the invasions from West and the establishment of British Empire. By this time, Hinduism had already been characterised by empty rituals and social evils like *satī*, child marriage and caste based discrimination. Some Hindu religious leaders and intellectuals became sensitive to this degeneration of the religion. Swami Vivekananda characterised this degeneration as the symptom of a disease caused by a lack of knowledge of the scriptures (Thapan 2004: xxix). The Hindu spiritual leaders of that time started several religious reform movements. One such Hindu religious leader was Swami Chinmayananda who started a reform organisation by the name Chinmaya Mission. Greatly inspired by *Advaita Vedāntic* teachers such as Śaṅkarā, Swami Sivananda, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharishi and other great gurus of the past, he undertook a mission to reform Hinduism and bring the ancient knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta* back into the life of modern Hindus.

Object of this research

The focus of my research is to study Swami Chinmayananda's (1916-1993) contribution to the Hindu society.

My main questions are how Swami Chinmayananda revitalized, popularized and spread Hinduism (*Advaita Vedānta* philosophy) and how Chinmaya Mission continues to spread the philosophical knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta* in the contemporary Hindu society?

Reasons for choosing this topic

There are both subjective and objective reasons for choosing this topic. Firstly, during my travels in India, I came across Hindus practising different rituals. However, most of these Hindus did not know why they were practising these rituals as they were just following their traditions. I started searching further and found Hindus who did not give much importance to the rituals. Rather they were searching God within themselves, following *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy. The philosophy interested me and I wanted to know more about it.

Secondly, I came to know of a spiritual organisation Chinmaya Mission which was founded by Swami Chinmayananda. Swami Chinmayananda is known for popularizing the philosophy of *Advaita Vedānta* and Chinmaya Mission is continuing his work after he has passed away. I wanted to study as to how Swami Chinmayananda spread the philosophy of *Advaita Vedānta* and how the mission is continuing the work.

As regards objective reasons, it was difficult for me to find scholarly publications, dedicated to Swami Chinmayananda and Chinmaya Mission that would represent the analytical perspective of religious studies as an academic discipline. Several Indian authors of Chinmaya Mission have discussed the topic but to great extent they represent the religious discourse of the Mission and their goal is to spread the doctrine. This lack of rigorous analytic approach is not surprising as the study of religion as a scientific discipline does not generally exist in Indian universities. Hence, my research is an attempt to apply scholarly methods without any goals of religious argumentation.

Notes on methodology

The purposes of my research are closely connected with its methodological basis. As my approach is historical, I have studied the textual sources of the doctrine of Swami Chinmayananda in order to find out his contribution to *Advaita Vedānta* and his creative role in popularising the teaching. I have also studied the articles written by Swami Chinmayananda and have gathered information from transcripts of his speeches. In addition, I have studied the role of Chinmaya Mission as continuation of the work of Swami Chinmayananda from historical perspective and as a social project. I have critically analysed the works, mainly published by the Mission, in order to study its goals and methods of achieving them. I have complimented this philological research with fieldwork about the current activities of the Chinmaya Mission in Delhi. Thus, I have used the classical method of participant observation and I have taken part in the events (spiritual discourses, festival celebrations, study groups etc.) of Chinmaya Mission, Delhi branch during one year (2013-2014). I have communicated with the leaders of the Mission and with its regular members and I have conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with them¹ (Davidsson Bremborg 2011). This ethnographic part of my research relies on the methodological principles of Leonard N. Primiano to study religion as a vernacular phenomenon "*as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it*". (Primiano 1995: 44) a. Thus, my work represents methodological pluralism (Stausberg, Engler 2011: 4) and combines diachronic approach to religion with its synchronous study.

Difficulties faced in conducting the research

I faced several difficulties while conducting my research. The first difficulty was to try to understand Hinduism and its different principles and paths which seem to be contradictory to each other, yet belong to the same religion.

The second difficulty was to choose the material for my research, from a vast resource of discourses given by Swami Chinmayananda and books published

¹ See appendix I for the selection of the interviewees and the questions that were asked.

by Chinmaya Mission. I chose the material that best answered my questions. I have also relied on his most popular works.

My third difficulty was conducting actual interviews. I informally communicated with many disciples in the Mission, but formal interviews were difficult to manage as disciples had their own busy schedules. Some could find time but some have been unable to find time till the writing of this paper.

In addition, source criticism was a challenging task as many publications of Chinmaya Mission combine religious and scholarly perspectives and it was sometimes difficult to distinguish historical facts from religious argumentation and beliefs.

There was some confusion with respect to formal presentation of Sanskrit words in English language. To overcome this confusion, I have relied on Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism (Johnson 2009).

Main sources of this research

In the first part I study academic literature by Western and Eastern researchers of Hinduism.

I have studied books by Klaus Klostermaier, a renowned German scholar in Sanskrit and Hinduism, who has given a broader introduction to Hinduism (Hinduism: A Short Introduction, 2005; Survey of Hinduism, 1989). Nicolas Sutton² is a researcher in Hinduism. His study book, Understanding Hinduism (2011) is very analytical and comparative. I found access to it after enrolling in one of his courses on Hinduism. It has helped me to develop a better understanding of Hinduism.

T. S. Rukmani is a Sanskrit and Hindu scholar and her primary area of research is *Advaita Vedānta* (Śaṅkarā, The Man and His Philosophy, 1991). S Radhakrishnan, Hindu philosopher and a scholar in comparative religion and philosophy, has written voluminous work on Hindu philosophies (Hindu philosophy II, 2008) which has been another source for my research paper.

In the second part, as mentioned above, I have studied Chinmaya Mission publications. I have analysed the work of few researchers who have briefly written

² Nicolas Sutton is a director of Oxford Centre of Hindu studies.

about Swami Chinmayananda and the Mission. Such researchers are M.L Ahuja (Indian Spiritual Gurus, 2006), J. Mitchiner (Guru. The Search for Enlightenment, 1991) and Reid Locklin and Julia Lauwers (Rewriting the Sacred Geography of *Advaita* Swami Chinmayananda and the *Śaṅkara-Dig-Vijaya*, 2009).

Structure of the research

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part is about Hinduism and *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy which gives foundation to the second part, Revitalizing Hinduism.

The scope of my work revolves around Swami Chinmayananda, who is a Hindu spiritual guru and Chinmaya Mission which is a Hindu spiritual organisation. Therefore in the first chapter of part I, I have tried to find an underlying definition of Hinduism.

Since the religion is so diverse, it has diverse authorities. In the second chapter I have tried to understand what are the different authorities in Hinduism, based on my observations. This approach has helped me to understand the position of Swami Chinmayananda and Chinmaya Mission in the religion.

Thereafter I have given an overview of different philosophies of Hinduism. Chinmaya Mission follows *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy. Therefore, in the next chapter on scriptures of Hinduism, I have focused on the scriptures from which *Advaita Vedānta* was derived.

Finally I have analysed the key concept of *Advaita Vedānta* along with giving a narration on the life of Śaṅkara, its propounder.

In the second part of this research, I have focused on Swami Chinmayananda's life, teachings, vision and mission. In the first chapter, I have given an overview of the earlier part of his life and how he became a guru.

In the second chapter I have tried to find as to what were his reasons and motivations to come out from the Himalayas to the public to share the knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*.

The next chapter is about Swami Chinmayananda's key concepts to enable common man to understand the complex teachings of *Advaita Vedānta*. This chapter also throws some light on his views about paraphernalia of Hinduism.

In the following chapter, I have given an insight into his extensive travels that he undertook to spread the ancient knowledge.

In the next chapter, I have discussed the formation of the Chinmaya Mission and its methods for spreading the teachings.

In the last chapter I have tried to find the impact of these teachings on the disciples of Chinmaya Mission.

1. Hinduism and Advaita Vedānta philosophy

1.1. Defining Hinduism

The word "Hindu" originates in the geographical features of the Indus River. It comes from a word for "river" - Sindhu that the Greeks (in the fifth century BCE), the Persians (in the fourth century BCE) and the Arabs (after eighth century CE) used to refer to everyone who lived beyond the river of the northwest of the subcontinent. Even nowadays, the river is called by locals as Sindhu but for the Westerners it is called as Indus. It is the name which outsiders gave to the people who inhabited around the river. Both, Persians and Arabs called the region "Hindustan". The founder of the Mughal emperor, Babur, wrote in his memories (originated in the sixteenth century CE): *"Most of the people in Hindustan are infidels whom the people of India call Hindu"*. (Doniger 2013: 6-7). In Arabic text, "Al-Hind" is a term for the people of modern day India and "Hindu" or "Hindoo" was used by British, at the end of the eighteenth century, to refer to the people of "Hindustan". Eventually "Hindu" became equivalent to an "Indian" who was not a Muslim, Sikh, Jain or Christian. The "-ism" was added to "Hindu" in around 1830 to refer the culture and religion of the high caste Brahmans in contrast to other religions. Soon after the term became in use as well among Indians to establish their identity opposed to colonialism, though the term "Hindu" was used in Sanskrit and Bengali text about holy men in contrast to Muslims as early as the sixteenth century. (Flood 1996: 6).

John Brockington,(1981) tries to define Hinduism and claims that it has an incredible variety of expressions, to the extent that Hinduism has been suggested that it is not possible to characterise it as a religion in the western terms because it is neither a unitary concept nor a monolithic structure, but it is rather a totality of the Indian way of life. Hinduism has no founder, no common doctrine or universal ritual to it.

Hinduism in the present can at best be described as a religion of diversity. Even the mention of the word brings to mind pictures of different temples decorated with idles of different deities with multitude followers prostrating at their feet. At the same time one may imagine a spiritual guru sitting in ashram at the forest with eyes closed and in science, surrounded by group of disciples either meditating or waiting a spiritual discourse.

Nick Sutton, argues that Hinduism is simply too diverse and too flexible to permit simple descriptions which makes Hinduism to be unique amongst the world's major religions. He adds that "*there is no single Hindu identity but rather a wide diversity of different spiritualities drawn into a loose association under the single non-defining label of "Hinduism". The diversity is probably the single defining characteristic of Hinduism and the tolerance of the diversity is its strength.*" (Sutton 2013: 12).

This can be explained further by considering *Dvaita Vedānta* philosophy which sets God to be separate from devotee, where God acts upon our prayers and worship. Even the main God they follow can vary - *Viṣṇu*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Śiva* etc. All these and many other ways of Hinduism coexist without any major tensions. There are devotional movements with various rituals or more inner looking practises like yoga. However, at the same time, we find in Hinduism the *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy, which carries the concept that God is in all of the beings, just the ignorance is keeping us from realising it and can be realized by listening, contemplating and meditating on the teachings given in the scriptures.

Swami Chinmayananda's argued that "*Adaptability has always been the quality of Hinduism. Hinduism has constantly changed, has always embraced the new dimensions and demands of society*" (Chinmayananda 2010: 30).

A logical conclusion would be that a religion with such diversity should have several authorities. These are briefly discussed in the next chapter. Study of these authorities can help us to understand the position of Swami Chinmayananda and Chinmaya Mission in the broad spectrum of Hinduism.

1.2. Authorities in Hinduism

What are the authorities for Hindus? Nick Sutton (2013: 59) classifies Hindu authorities as family and community, institutional authority and institutional leaders, individual preachers and charismatic teachers who may lack institutional sanction, scriptures and individual authority.

According to my observations, Hindus generally have following authorities:

Family and community. Normally Hindus follow the deity or the religious philosophy which the family is following. Families may exercise direct pressure, or a lot influence. Similarly, communities exercise influence over their members coupled with the threat of being out casted for not confirming to the set standards. Use of sanctions on erring individuals is not ruled out. Thus, families and communities form an important authority in Hinduism.

Scriptures form an important authority. Hindus have high respect towards the scriptures. Hindus have many scriptures and they do not even attempt to read all of them, rather they choose a few according to their inclination to guide them on the path. The irony is that most of the Hindus do not read their scriptures at all yet treat them as holy. Some mythical scriptures have been converted into comic text or TV serials for example *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. These scriptures have gained popularity as Hindus have more interesting way to know them. *Vedantic* organisations, like Chinmaya Mission treats scriptures forming part of *prasthāna traya* as a highest authority. This is will be discussed in the chapter nr 1.4.

Spiritual gurus and holy persons. Spiritual gurus are very important authority in Hinduism. The guru phenomenon stretches far back into the distant past of Hinduism, and is one of the cornerstones of continuity within the religion. There are cults and organisations built around them. Their discourses are aired on TV through which they reach to a wider audience. They may have followers, ranging from a few hundreds to a million or more. Hindus may follow them because of their vast knowledge of the scriptures or simple because of their charisma as spiritual leaders. Some of these spiritual gurus even use mysticism to attract followers.

In *Advaita Vedānta*, the guru is supposed to be an enlightened teacher who passes on the knowledge to his followers to gain enlightenment. Swami Chinmayananda belongs to this category. His strength were his knowledge of scriptures and his charisma, however he did not propagate mysticism.

Organisations and institutions. There are many religious organisations and institutions in Hinduism. Most of them have been started by spiritual gurus and continue to be in existence even after them. We will see in the chapter how Śaṅkara established the monastic institutions called *maṭhas* in eight century. These *maṭha* have high authority in Hinduism even today. And at the same time, there are many organisations like Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and Yogoda Satsanga Society etc. which influence a sizeable population of Hindus and hold high authority. Chinmaya Mission falls to this category.

Each authority in Hinduism follows or preaches its own philosophy. The next chapter elaborates these Hindu philosophies with focus on *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy which is being preached and followed by Chinmaya Mission.

1.3. Darśanas of Hinduism

It is accepted by Western and Indian scholars that there are six schools of Indian philosophy, each independent of the other although each accepting the

Vedas as the scriptural authority. The Sanskrit terms for "philosophy" or "theology" is *darśana*. The term is derived from a verb root *drs*, "to see". ***Darśana*** is used not only to refer to six orthodox (*āstika*) systems of Hindu belief but also to heterodox (*nāstika*) views of Jainism, Buddhism. (Flood 1996: 224).

It should be said that Indian philosophy differs from the concept of philosophy encountered in the west where the practice of the philosophy is based entirely on reason and is hence notably distinct from theology and textual hermeneutics. The western philosophy does not accept revelation as reliable source of knowledge. Every statement of truth must be applied and approved by test of logic to it. In India there is no such different between philosophy and religion. Revelation is a valid source of knowledge. In Indian philosophy, we find that theology, scriptural exegesis and rational argument are mixed together. The truth can be known by sensory perception, inference and scriptural revelation, especially in *Vedānta* tradition. (Sutton 2013: 89).

Gavin Flood (1996: 230) states that the most distinguished feature of Indian theology and philosophy is that it is expressed primarily through commentaries and sub-commentaries on sacred texts. The commentaries became codified by the medieval period into six orthodox system, *sad-darśanas*. The *darśanas* are:

- *Nyāya* It was compiled by Sage Gautama probably between the 3rd century BCE and the 2nd century CE. *Nyāya* deals with the Hindu system of logic.
- *Vaiśeṣika* It was compiled sometime in the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. Sage Kanada is regarded as the founder of the system. *Vaiśeṣika* is associated with *Nyāya* and deals with the atomic theory and structure of the universe.
- *Sāṅkhya* system is the oldest systematic philosophy to have emerged in the Hindu tradition. The legendary Sage named Kapila is presented as the founder of the system. *Sāṅkhya* deals with the relationship between matter and self as the cause of the world.

- Yoga is closely related to *Sāṅkhya*. The classical rendition of Yoga philosophy is the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali. It deals with gaining mastery over oneself through the transformation of one's inner equipment.
- *Mīmāṃsā* - the primary text is *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* and is probably written in the early centuries by sage Jaimini (student of Vyāsa). It is the tradition of Vedic exegesis. *Mīmāṃsā* is also known as *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* and deals with the procedure and practice of rituals.
- *Vedānta* system developed from the *Upaniṣads* and deals with its philosophical and theological views. *Vedānta* is also known as *Uttar Mīmāṃsā*. (Flood 1996: 232-239; Sutton 2013: 90-96).

Vedānta system is the best known of these and for many centuries, down to the present day, Hindu religious thought has been dominated by the *Vedānta* schools. *Vedānta* tradition is divided into two main schools - *Mīmāṃsā (Pūrva Mīmāṃsā)* and *Vedānta (Uttara Mīmāṃsā)*. The former correspond to action section (*karmakāṇḍa*) of the Vedas and latter to the knowledge section (*jñānakāṇḍa*).

Vedānta is seen as continuity of the tradition of *Mīmāṃsā* and has become the central ideology of the Hindu renaissance in the nineteenth century.

A number of schools developed within *Vedānta* tradition. The most important *Vedānta* traditions are *Advaita* (Non-Dualist) *Vedānta*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (Qualified Non-Dualist) *Vedānta* and *Dvaita* (Dualist) *Vedānta*. After Śaṅkara's theory (*Advaita Vedānta*), most important were the theologies of Rāmānuja (*Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*) and Mādhava (*Dvaita Vedānta*). Rāmānuja (1017-1137) qualified Śaṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta* by holding that salvation is attained neither through ritual nor knowledge but devotion (*bhakti*) to a personal God. More firmly than Rāmānuja before him, Mādhava (1197-1276) contested Śaṅkara's monism by asserting rigid and permanent distinctions between the self, God and matter. (Klostermaier 2005: 95-97).

Chinmaya Mission follows the tradition of Śaṅkarā (*Advaita Vedānta*) and gives utmost importance to the scriptures as the source of knowledge. The

philosophy emphasizes that it is important to use one's intellect and rational thinking but to go beyond what mind can grasp, into the realms of what mind cannot grasp, it is needed to rely on the revelation of the scriptures. The scriptures of *Advaita Vedānta* are discussed in the next chapter, along with other Hindu scriptures.

1.4. The scriptures of Hinduism

The Hindu scriptures are divided into two main parts, called the *śruti*, meaning "that which has been perceived through hearing" and *smṛti*, meaning "that which has been remembered".

Śruti part was received, heard or seen by the ancient seers (*ṛṣis*) and comprises of the Vedas. The word "Veda" literally means knowledge. The text was passed down with care and accuracy through generation and was put together in its present form by the sage Vyāsa (Flood 1996: 35) hence called as well Veda Vyāsa. It comprises the scriptures with the highest theological value (Klostermaier 1989: 62). Therefore traditional Hindu teaching insists that the Vedas are timeless and do not have human authorship. Some of the other branches regard it to be the revelation of God, Supreme Deity (Sutton 2013: 15). But majority of the orthodox would maintain that the Veda is "impersonal", not "Word of God" for example what Holy Book is for Christians. They believe that the revelation is eternal and have no point of origin and exists beyond and above any personal law-giver.

Vedas are divided into four divisions:

- the *Ṛg Veda* is a collection of more than thousands hymns to various gods;
- the *Yajur Veda* contains Vedic ceremonies. It is like a handbook for priests in their performance of *yajñas* (sacrifices) and has two parts;
- the *Sāma Veda* is a collection of chants and melodies for use during *yajñas*;

- *Atharva Veda* is a heterogeneous collection of hymns and spells.

Each Veda encloses four sections:

- the *Samhitās* contain hymns and mantras in praise of various Vedic deities;
- the *Brāhmaṇas* contain sacrificial text for priests, dealing with meaning and technicalities of rituals;
- the *Āraṇyakas*, literally "forest books" are philosophical treatises for hermits and saints (*Atharva Veda* doesn't have *Āraṇyaka* portion);
- the *Upaniṣads* contain philosophical and mystical texts dealing with the quest to realize the ultimate reality. (Klostermaier 2005: 16-19).

The Vedas are also divided into two main divisions - *karmakāṇḍa*, dealing with rituals and actions and *jñānakāṇḍa*, philosophical text aimed at knowledge. For most of the Hindus, the *karmakāṇḍa* and the *jñānakāṇḍa* are complementary to one another because one section prescribes the rituals for achieving good life and the other part gives the knowledge of how to liberate from the *saṃsāra* (the cycle of births and deaths) and reach to *mokṣa* (liberation). However, *Vedānta* schools, including Chinmaya Mission, emphasize that the path of knowledge is superior to the path of rituals.

The second part of the Hindu scriptures, called *smṛti*, holds a large number of books, which are not considered as revealed in the sense of the Vedas (Flood 1996: 36). Although there are division between *śruti* and *smṛti* in which *śruti* formally holds higher status but Hindus know more of the texts which are in *smṛti* part, like the stories of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Bhagavadgītā*.

Main *smṛti* texts are:

- the *Brahmasūtra (Vedāntasūtra)* - codes of philosophy, the essence of Hindu theology;
- the Epics: the *Rāmāyaṇa* - the journey of Rāma,
 the *Mahābhārata* - the history of Greater India;
- *Bhagavadgītā* - philosophical part of the *Mahābhārata*;
- *Purāṇas* - old stories and myths;

- *Dharmaśāstra* - law books and moral codes. (Klostermaier 2005: 19-20).

From eight century onwards, after Śaṅkarā (propounder of the *Advaita Vedānta* school), the *Vedāntins* regard the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Bhagavadgītā* collectively known as ***prasthāna traya*** as their primary scriptures. (Klostermaier 1989: 62). *Vedāntic* schools should study and comment on these scriptures and have a different interpretation. The scriptures of *prasthāna traya* are discussed below, from the point of view taken by *Advaita Vedānta* school.

The *Upaniṣads* date back to 500 BCE till around 700 BCE, and include some of the fundamental tenets of Hindu doctrine such as the ideas of rebirth, *karma*, and liberation from rebirth (*mokṣa*) (Sutton 2013: 28-29).

In *Upaniṣadic* thought, the goal of religion is seen not as making life better but seeking liberation from the cycle of birth and death. *Upaniṣads* which literally mean "near-below-sit", indicate to the ancient times when student sat at their guru's feet and received the higher knowledge. There are many *Upaniṣads* known to exist but the number of "genuine" *Upaniṣads* is debatable. Modern scholars tend to count ten to fifteen major *Upaniṣads*. (Klostermaier 1998: 18). Chinmaya Mission (*Hinduism* 2011: 40) considers the following ten *Upaniṣads* as the most important ones: *Aitareya*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Isāvāsyā*, *Kaṭha*, *Kena*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Praśna* and *Taittirīya*. These *Upaniṣads* have been commented by Śaṅkarā also.

The *Upaniṣads* are the first source of scriptural authority in the *prasthāna traya* and deal with the highest knowledge - the knowledge of the pure self.

The *Upaniṣadic* teachings explore the relationship between *ātman* and Brahman. Brahman is defined as the universal spirit which is the essence of everything that exists. It is the absolute reality that is the true identity of all things. The *ātman* is defined as individual self or soul in each being. For *Advaita Vedānta*, *ātman* and Brahman are absolutely identical. (Sutton 2013: 76).

Chinmaya Mission considers *Upaniṣads* as the essence of Vedic teachings which is the foundation on which most of later philosophies of India rest.

Brahmasūtras, also called *Vedāntasūtras*, are the second source of scriptural authority in the *prasthāna traya*. Even so the majority of Hindus have not read the *Brahmasūtras*.

The *Brahmasūtras* are said to be the work of Veda Vyāsa. The text is relatively short but the commentaries by the main *Vedānta* teachers tend to be many times longer. (Klostermaier 1989: 371) The main text is written in a very difficult language and presents, in concentrated form, the entire philosophy of the *Upaniṣads*. Commentators of different schools have been giving to the text radically different interpretation. (Sutton 2013: 85).

The *Brahmasūtras* is divided into four chapters, each subdivided into parts, which consist varying number of sutras or aphorisms.

The first chapter is about Brahman and its relation to the world and the individual soul (Radhakrishnan 2008: 402). It is stated that the Brahman is the sole and supreme cause of all things. Interpretations that teach otherwise are rejected as heretical (Klostermaier 1989: 372). The second chapter contains criticism of rival theories which do not support the thought in chapter one. It also gives an account of the nature of the dependence of the world on God and the gradual evolution from Brahman and reabsorption into Brahman. In the latter part of the second chapter, there are physiological discussions about the nature of the soul, its attributes, its relation to God, body and its own deeds (Radhakrishnan 2008: 403). This part gives wide interpretational opportunity. The third part discusses the ways and means of attaining the knowledge of Absolute (*Brahmavidyā*). It is about individual living being (*jīva*) and circumstances of the soul after death, as well about different states of dream, dreamless sleep etc. It includes sutras of meditation and the types of Brahmanical knowledge. This part has many exegetical comments. The fourth chapter deals with the fruits of *Brahmavidyā*. It takes up the topic of meditation and ends with a description of the Brahman knower's fate after death. (Radhakrishnan 2008: 403).

In the book, *Hinduism, Frequently asked questions* (published by Chinmaya Mission), it is stated that *Brahmasūtras* is like a textbook for postgraduate *Vedantic* studies. In that book sage *Vyāsa* leads the student into the inquiry of the nature of the Supreme Reality, the relationship between the human

being and the Supreme Reality, the ultimate fulfilment of human birth and existence, and the means to realize this fulfilment. (*Hinduism* 2011: 42).

Bhagavadgītā is the third source of scriptural authority in the *prasthāna traya*. The *Bhagavadgītā* is part of *Mahābhārata* and is very much loved all over India. Klostermaier (1989: 94) claims that many are convinced that the *Bhagavadgītā* is a key book for the respiritualisation of humankind in our age. However it is by no means an easy book. Many Indian scholars have grappled with the historical and philosophical problems it presents.

Bhagavadgītā begins with prince Arjuna being in the middle of the battlefield and must fight against an army which is full of his own relatives. He is in despair, confused and does not know what to do. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* advises and guides him as to what is the right thing to do, as to what *dharma* (duty) is and how it should be followed. The discussion then goes far beyond the dilemma, into the realms of *atman* and Brahman. The setting of the *Gītā* in a battlefield can be seen as an allegory for the ethical and moral struggles of the human life.

Bhagavadgītā has two broad approaches, one looking back to the *Upaniṣads* and other focusing on the worship of a gracious God. In *Upaniṣads* there is little about theism and devotional religion but *Bhagavadgītā* has as well monotheistic theology, worshipping a personal deity. These may seem to be very different forms of religion but somehow *Gītā* weaves them together and also manages to include a constant emphasis on *dharmic* duty. (Sutton 2013: 85).

Swami Chinmayananda (2008: 58) praised *Bhagavadgītā* and said: "Here in the *Bhagavadgītā*, we find a practical handbook of instruction on how best we can re-organise our inner ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in our everyday life and draw from ourselves a larger gush of productivity to enrich the life around us, and to emblazon the subjective life within us."

As already discussed, *prasthāna traya* scriptures gained importance in Hinduism after Śaṅkarā and his *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy. Swami Chinmayananda followed this school of thought and built Chinmaya Mission on this philosophy. He was also inspired by Śaṅkarā to undertake extensive travels in

the East and the West to spread the knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*. Therefore, a closer look is taken on the life and philosophy of Śaṅkara, in the chapter below.

1.5. Śaṅkara and Advaita Vedānta

Śaṅkarā is perhaps one of the greatest Indian philosophers. His philosophy, *Advaita Vedānta*, is one of the most discussed philosophies and is as relevant today as it was in the years when Śaṅkara propounded it. Radhakrishnan (2008: 414) appreciating Śaṅkara, says *"It is impossible to read Śaṅkara's writings, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality. With his acute feeling of the immeasurable world, his stirring gaze into the abysmal mysteries of spirit, his unswerving resolve to say neither more nor less than what could be proved. His philosophy stands out complete, needing neither a before nor an after."* Angelika Malinar (2007: 129, 143) points out that Śaṅkara is regarded as a *jagadguru* - "teacher of the world" with so many different elements: being an incarnation of all-knowing Śiva, fulfilling the royal duties ascribed to Viṣṇu, revelling the true importance of the Veda, personifying the power and truth of ascetic values and accepting the necessity of theism. There is no doubt that Śaṅkara exists as a key figure and propounder of the *Advaita Vedānta* school of philosophy.

There are number of biographies of Śaṅkara which are half-historical and half-legendary stories about his victories in debating campaigns. The best known biography is the *Śaṅkara-digvijaya*, written by Mādhava Vidyāranya in the 14th century CE. (Sutton 2013: 97). All these books were composed hundreds of years after Śaṅkara's death and therefore must be treated with some reservation.

There is some dispute about when Śaṅkara lived. The dates of Śaṅkara's life are usually given as 788 to 820 CE (Sutton 2013: 97). Group of Hindus, in *Kāñcīpuram maṭha* (claimed by the followers of the *maṭha* to be fifth *maṭha* established by Śaṅkarā but disputed by majority of the scholars) are convinced that he was born pre-Buddhist period. However, most of the scholars have

common agreement that Śaṅkara's life's work was to consolidate Hinduism in a period when Buddhism was a dominant religion. (Klostermaier 2005: 106).

Śaṅkara was born at Kaladi, small village in Kerala, India to the simple, learned and hardworking *Nambūdiri* Brahmins (Sutton 2013: 97). His father died when Śaṅkara was only three. At the age of five he was sent to a Vedic school (*gurukula*) to study Vedas and within two years he had devoured with avidity and delight all the Vedas. (Radhakrishnan 2008: 416). Śaṅkara gained permission from his mother to take *sannyāsa* and left home at the age of twelve to seek spiritual realisation. He went to the *āśrama* of Govinda Bhagavatpāda in the Narmanda forest who formally ordained him as *sannyāsī*. (Sutton 2013: 98).³

Śaṅkara's teacher Govinda is said to have been identical with his own teacher Gaudapada in terms of scriptural knowledge. Sage Gaudapada has had greatest influence on Śaṅkara's work. (Klostermaier 2005: 106). Śaṅkara constructed his *Advaita Vedānta* principles based on the teachings set forth by Gaudapada (Klostermaier 1989: 373).

After staying in the his Guru's *āśrama*, Śaṅkara set off to Kāśī (Varanasi) and by the age of sixteen he began to give instructions to disciples and worshipped in the city's numerous temples and also wrote commentaries on the *prasthāna traya*. A total of seventy two minor works, in addition to the major commentaries on *prasthāna traya* are attributed to Śaṅkara, including many hymns to *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu* and *Devī*. (Radhakrishnan 2008: 416-418).

Śaṅkara, after having established himself in Kāśī as *ācārya* (master), went on a *digvijaya* (victory tour) to spread his message (Klostermaier 2005: 107). *Digvijaya* is a term used in politics and warfare to refer to king's victory over other kings. But in Śaṅkara's context it is used to refer to victory in various debates he held with those who were opposed to the philosophy of *Advaita Vedānta* or considered their own philosophy superior to *Advaita Vedānta*.

Śaṅkara's main opponents whom he defeated in debates were the *Mīmāṃsākas*, traditional Vedic scholars, who believed that Hindu tradition is restricted by Vedic rituals and that the *Upaniṣads* did not form an essential part of

³ *Sannyāsa* is the renunciation of the ego and desires for the world and implies self-knowledge and awakening to the knowledge that the world is an illusion. It is taken to reach the only goal - Self-realisation. (Olivelle 2005: 281).

religion. Therefore a major event in Śaṅkara's life was his debate with Maṇḍana Mīśra, one of the leading head of *Mīmāṃsāka*. The debate lasted eighteen days. Śaṅkara's victory of the debate helped him to establish the superiority of realised knowledge over ritual acts, hence establishing that it is knowledge alone which leads to *mokṣa* and ritualistic acts are useful only if they lead to pursuing the higher knowledge. At the end of the debate, Maṇḍana Mīśra became one of the well known disciples of Śaṅkarā under the name of Sureśvara. (Klostermaier 2005: 107).

Śaṅkara travelled through India to propagate his philosophical insights and he brought heretic teachers into his fold. He found *Daśanāmis sampradāya* (tradition of ten names), which are the ten different monastic orders - *Aranya*, *Asrama*, *Bhāratī*, *Giri*, *Parvata*, *Puri*, *Saraswatī*, *Sagara*, *Tīrtha* and *Vana*. Śaṅkara wanted his orders to become the vanguard of orthodoxy. (Malinar 2007: 129-131).

Further, Śaṅkara established four *maṭhas* (monastic establishments) in four direction of India. Each *maṭha* had a *sannyāsī* disciple chosen by Śaṅkara as a head of the *maṭha*. In these *maṭhas*, disciples could live and pursue their quest for knowledge and realisation. Each *maṭha* was assigned a Veda as its principal scripture and the ten monastic orders created by Śaṅkara were divided in these four *maṭhas*. The names of the *maṭhas*, their first head, the monistic orders assigned to them and their primary Veda are given below:

1. **Śṛṅgeri Śārādā Pīṭham** which is situated in south India. Sureśvarācārya was the first head of the *maṭha*. Monastic orders assigned to the *maṭha* are *Saraswatī*, *Puri* and *Bhāratī* lineage. The primary Veda is *Yajur Veda*.
2. **Dvāraka Pīṭham** situates on the west coast. Hastāmālakācārya was the first head of the *maṭha*. Monastic orders assigned to *maṭha* are the *Tīrthas* and *Asramas*. The primary Veda is *Sama Veda*.
3. **Govardhana maṭha** on the east coast of India. The first head of the *maṭha* was Padmapādācārya. Monastic orders assigned to the *maṭha* are *Aranyas* and *Vanas*. The primary Veda is *Rg Veda*.
4. **Jyotirmāṭha**, near Badrinath in the Himalayas in North India. The first head of the *maṭha* was Totakācārya. Monastic orders assigned to the

maṭha are *Giri*, *Parvata* and *Sagara*. The primary Veda is *Atharva Veda*. (Sutton 2013: 99; Klostermaier 2005: 107).

These *maṭhas* exist today also and the head of each of them has the title of Śaṅkarācārya. Therefore, Śaṅkara is often called Ādi Śaṅkara "the First Śaṅkara". Nick Sutton (2013: 99) highlights that the *Śṛṅgeri maṭha* has the highest status and its Śaṅkarācārya is well respected spiritual leader who is sometimes regarded as having the authority to speak for Hinduism as a whole. Swami Chinmayananda's belongs to *Saraswati* monastic order of *Sṛṅgeri maṭha*⁴.

Ādi Śaṅkara passed away at the age of thirty two years in the Himalayas at Kedaranath where a *mandir* (temple) is dedicated to him. The impact what Śaṅkara left on Hinduism during his short life is very profound and he can be considered to be one of the major figures in the world religions.

Śaṅkara, like all other Hindu thinkers, does not claim the originality of his thought but considers it the correct interpretation of *śruti*. However, there are ideas which belong to him and are distinctive from other schools.

Śaṅkara developed the theory of *adhyāsa* or superimposition. He explained the principle of *adhyāsa* in his preamble to the *Brahmasūtras* in the following words: "*It is a matter of fact that the object and subject, whose respective spheres are the notion of the "you" and the "I", and which are opposed to each other as much as darkness and light, cannot be identified, and nor can their respective attributes. Hence it follows that it is wrong to superimpose upon the subject, whose nature is awareness (cit) and which has for its sphere the notion of "I". And vice-versa [it is wrong to] superimpose the subject and its attributes on the object.*". (Flood 1996: 241). The two key words he uses there are the subject and the object. Subject is characterised by awareness and its sphere is the notion of "I", everything else is object. Superimposing of the self on what is not self and the other way around, is the natural tendency of ignorant consciousness. The

⁴ However Swami Chinmayananda refrained from using *Saraswati* in his for the sake of brevity and humility, as his guru (Patchen 1994: 70).

standard example is when one mistakes a rope for a snake. The snake is superimposed on the rope which is the underlying reality. It is due to *avidyā* (ignorance) that the rope is confused for a snake and it is realised the moment *vidyā* (knowledge) dawns that this is not a snake but just a rope (Rukmani 1991:9). Every perception needs a perceiver. The *ātman*, (the subject, the self, pure consciousness) is different from all objects (including sense-organs and rational mind (*manas*)). All knowledge is distorted by superimposition which prevents us from seeing our true nature (*ātman*) which is being, ontologically identical with the Absolute (Brahman). *Ātman* is pure consciousness, it is ultimately *sat-cit-ānanda* (being-consciousness-bliss) (Klostermaier 1989: 373) which is also the essential nature of Brahman.

Rukmani (1991: 10), as many other scholars, argues that *Advaita* has received criticism due to the misinterpretation of Śaṅkara's *māyā* (illusion) concept. *Advaita* philosophy states that the world has no reality only from the standpoint of Brahman, as the ultimate reality belongs only to Brahman. As long as there is no Self-realisation, the world of experience has all the reality in worldly sense. It means that when one is under the influence of *avidyā*, the world has all the reality that one sees it to have. But once one gains Self-realisation, then he realises that it was just an illusion (*māyā*) and not the true reality. The thought process can be explained with an example of a dream state. If one sees in his dream that he is eating a strawberry ice cream, then while he is still dreaming it seems like real. He can feel the taste of the ice cream, the texture, the smell of the strawberries but when he wakes up, he realizes that it was just a dream.

According to *Advaita Vedānta*, *avidyā* (ignorance) of the truth keeps us in the circle of births and deaths. This cycle can be stopped through true knowledge (*jñāna*) resulting in Self-realization, knowing who you are and who you are not. Through scriptures, it is possible to attain the Self-realisation first by listening (*śravaṇa*) the message, then thinking (*manana*) about it and finally meditating (*nididhyāsana*) upon it. (Flood 1996: 241-242).

Advaitic central doctrine of the true knowledge is the perception of oneness. Śaṅkara finds the support from the *Mahāvākyas* (Great Sayings) in the *Upaniṣads*. The four *Mahāvākyas* are:

- **sarvam khalv idam brahma:** *sarvam* - all; *khalu* - certainly; *idam* - this; *brahma* - Brahman (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1). The meaning is "all this is certainly Brahman" or "everything indeed is absolute";
Swami Chindmayananda and some other scholars of Hinduism treat **prajñānam brahma** (*Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.1.13) as a *Mahāvākyas* in place of *sarvam khalv idam brahma*. The meaning is "Brahman is wisdom" or "Consciousness is Brahman" (Klostermaier 2005: 94; Chinmayananda 2013: 98);
- **tat tvam asi:** *tat* - that; *tvam* - you; *asi* - are (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7 et al.). It can be translated as "you are that".
- **ayam ātmā brahma:** *ayam* - this; *ātmā* - ātman; *brahma* - brahaman (*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, v. 2) The meaning of the phrase is "this ātman is Brahman" or "this self is absolute";
- **aham brahmāsmi:** *aham* - I; *brahma* - Brahman; *āsmi* - am (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10). The translation is "I am Brahman" or "I am absolute" . (Sutton 2013: 106; Flood 1996: 242).

Śaṅkara affirmed that only an insight of the *Mahāvākyas* brings *mokṣa*. Here, insight means more than mere literal sense and could be treated as an awakening to the meaning of the *Mahāvākyas*. It is said that liberation from *saṃsāra* is not a future state which can be achieved, it can only be woken up to. Śaṅkara also said that the attainment of *mokṣa* is as well divine grace and therefore encourages devotion (*bhakti*) to God. As mentioned above, he is known as a composer of various hymns in praise of traditional gods (*Viṣṇu*, *Śiva*, *Devī*). He taught his disciples that as long as one is in physical body, one should worship the *devas* (gods). The relations between *devas* and *jivas* (living beings) is like that of kind and his subjects. By the practise of *upasana* (worship of *devas*) the mind gets purified. According to him, devotion to God is necessary stage in order to ultimately realise Brahman, the quality-less reality.

This brings to Śaṅkara's controversial distinction between a *saguṇa* and a *nirguṇa* Brahman, the Supreme with qualities and without qualities. His distinction is based upon *Upanisadic* passages which speaks of a "lower" and

"higher" Brahman. Śaṅkara interpreted the "lower Brahman" as *Īśvara*, the God of religion who is worshipped as creator, sustainer and destroyer of this world and the "higher Brahman" which he taught to be the unqualified reality, a no-thing, cosmic principle of all. Śaṅkara said that *Īśvara* (the Creator) is connected with this creation but with the dissolution of the universe, he too disappears. He is only a temporal manifestation of Brahman, but Brahman (understood as *nirguṇa*) remains forever, it has no beginning and has no end. (Klostermaier 1989: 108-109; 2005: 375).

Śaṅkara gave the following prerequisites that a seeker should have prior to his starting the inquiry into the nature of Brahman:

- ✓ Discrimination between the real and the non-real. This discrimination could also be explained as knowing the distinction between eternal and non-eternal. Everything in this world of matter is changing and nothing is permanent - name, fame wealth - all are temporary.
- ✓ Renunciation of the unreal. A seeker who understands the distinction between the real and unreal starts losing his desire for the unreal. A natural consequence is the giving up of the enjoyment of unreal. Radhakrishna (2008: 414) describes this contempt to mean that in the empirical world and ones' temporal life within it, there is little to satisfy the aspirations of the spirit.
- ✓ Six qualities of self-control which are necessary for moral preparation of the seeker. These virtues are: a) control of the mind; b) control of the senses; (c) equanimity of mind; d) patient; e) concentrating the mind on truth and f) active faith in the teacher and scriptures.
- ✓ Longing for liberation. This longing should be so strong that it overtakes and consumes all other longings of the seeker. Only such a longing can help a seeker in Self-realisation. (Radakrishnan 2008; Rukmani 1991).

Śaṅkara summarised his whole philosophy into one sentence - *Brahma satyaṃ jagat mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nāparah* — "***The only Truth is Brahman and the world is an illusion. The self is none other than Brahman itself.***" (Rukmani 1998: 6).

Swami Chinmayananda (2011: 130) describes Śaṅkara as *Avatāra* (divine incarnation): *"Śaṅkara is not an individual, Śaṅkara is an institution. No single person could ever have achieved what he had achieved in his short span of life. No Master or Prophet had ever achieved so much, for so many, in so short a time. Very often this tempts us to consider that Śaṅkara was an Avatāra"*.

Śaṅkara no doubt was a learned scholar and a Vedic prodigy who re-established the importance of the *Advaita Vedantic* philosophy in the Indian subcontinent. He helped people realise that rituals were not as important as the knowledge itself. He sought to bridge the gap between worship of Puranic gods and the knowledge of Brahman itself by setting an example through his personal life whereby he wrote several hymns in praise of Puranic gods and at the same time practising and preaching the knowledge of Brahman. *Śaṅkara* exercised a great influence on the scriptural scholars and the *general* public of his time and this influence continues till now.

2. Re-vitalizing Hinduism

2.1. Transition from Balakrishnan Menon to Swami Chinmayananda

Swami Chinmayananda's given name was Balakrishnan Menon. He was born in the city of Ernakulam in Kerala on May 8, 1916. According to biographies of Swami Chinmayananda, *Journey of a Master, Swami Chinmayananda* written by Patchen (1994) and *He did it. Swami Chinmayananda. A legacy* edited by disciples of the Chinmaya Mission (Dukes et al. 2011a) Balakrishnan during his childhood was rather lively child, playing pranks on teachers but always found his way out. It is also mentioned that he thought that religious ceremonies were boring and therefore often tried to escape going to the temples.

Balakrishnan got his higher education from Madras University, in the field of political science. Few years later, he enrolled in Lucknow University to obtain a master degree in English literature and also took a secondary course in law. During his youth, Balakrishnan, is described as an arrogant young man who considered himself to be quite an intellectual. He also used to ridicule Hindu rituals, specially superstitious ones and he used Hindu concepts to rationalise his position as an agnostic. (Dukes et al. 2011a: 16-24).

In 1942, when Indian independence movement was at its heights, Balakrishnan joined the "Quit India" movement and was a local successful agitator and propagandist. During massive lock-ups, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Balakrishnan Menon. He absconded but was finally found by British officers and was imprisoned. In the prison he had a time to reflect on his life in

general. According to his biographies, the first spiritual texts which he happened to read was written by Swami Sivananda (who later gave him *sannyāsa*). Several months later, he caught typhus fever and instead of getting medical help, the British guards threw him on the street to die. He was saved by an Indian Christian lady (Ahuja 2006: pg 49) who took him to her home and gave him cure. (Dukes et al. 2011a: 25-27; Patchen 1994: 8-14). It could be that the time in prison started to lay foundation to a different path for his life.

After his recovery, Balakrishnan continued his studies and graduated in English literature with honours and became a journalist in The National Herald, the newspaper which was started by Jawaharlal Nehru. He has been described as an ambitious colleague with extroverted personality and an avid follower of fashion. One day, he got an invitation to a grand ball, to celebrate together with elite crowd. In that evening, while he was observing the crowd, something changed in him. Balakrishnan later described:

"A roaring welter of unnatural values! Impossible behaviours! Sick and suffering was this generation of hollow, lifeless creatures in the hustle and bustle within those stuffy palace walls. In their studied smiles were dormant tears; in their insincere, made-to-order laughter were sighs of voiceless, deep regrets. Their heartless love concealed stormy hatreds, grudging sympathies and poisonous rivalries. Each suffered and contributed lavishly to the suffering of others." (Dukes et al. 2011a: 31- 32).

In my opinion, this is the incident which made him to question about the meaning and the values of life. I think that the rough environment of the prison, coupled with the scriptural texts he was reading there, lead him to think more about the higher meaning of life. This incident must have been a turning point in his life as his focus had shifted from material pursuits as he found them to be empty shells.

Balakrishnan started studying philosophy, mainly European thought, but he could not find what he was looking for in western philosophy. Therefore, he turned Indian philosophy.

His spiritual quest led him to Rishikesh, a well-known holy place for many *sādhus* and yogis of Himalayas. In the summer of 1947, Balakrishna arrived to

Rishikesh and choose to stay at the *āśrama* of Divine Life Society, built by Swami Sivananda⁵ who was a teacher of yoga and *Advaita Vedānta* (Dukes et al. 2011a: 36-38).

In the spring of 1948, Balakrishnan together with his cousin undertook a pilgrimage - the *Chār Dhām Yātra*⁶. During his pilgrim he had many profound encounters. He first met Swami Tapovanam⁷ who was a master of the scriptures. Patchen brings out in the biography that Balakrishnan also met Śrī Phalahari Baba, a renunciate who dressed only in a loin cloth and who stayed in continuous meditation and observed silence. After asking about his health, Baba wrote in the sand: *"It's the nature of all flesh to be now healthy, now sick, now fat, now lean. We are not to be concerned by transformations of the body, for we are the indestructible supreme Spirit."* He met many such ascetics during his pilgrimage. According to his words, one of the most memorable spiritual practitioner on that journey was an aged *sādhū*. The *sādhū* was in poor health and he had wound in his leg which had maggots on it. Just when one maggot fell off, the *sādhū* picked it up and placed it back on his leg. *"There, my son"* he said to the maggot. Then he told to Balakrishnan, *"Don't you know that it is all only matter - matter feeding matter."* (Patchen 1994: 60-64).

Walking on his foot on the hills of Himalayas, following ascetic lifestyle and meeting holy men must have left a strong impression on Balakrishnan. During the pilgrimage he kept a journal and the best words that describe his inner joy are:

"Wonderful! No words to describe the inner peace I enjoyed, the concentration I achieved, the entire world forgotten. Forgotten are all worldly contacts for I have come to live in myself. For the first time, I tasted a bliss in meditation, which I know is but an iota of what one can have from deep, long, steady and powerful meditation. My only prayer to my divine Guru and to the divine Lord is that by their grace I may never fall and that I may drink deeper at the fountain of the Eternal Divine Nectar." (Dukes et al. 2011a: 48-49).

⁵ Swami Sivananda belongs to Saraswati lineage of *Sringeri matha*. In present India, his *āśramas* are well-known among local and foreign spiritual seekers. He was a karma yogi, former medical doctor and followed the ideology to serve, love, meditate and realize.

⁶ A visit to the four great Himalayan temples in Yamnotry, Gangotri, Kedranath and Badrinath.

⁷ Swami Tapovan later became Balankrishnan's spiritual guru.

By the time the pilgrimage was over, Balakrishnan had the desire to become a *sannyāsī*. On the 25th of February 1949, on *Mahā Śivarātri* which is an auspicious day for Hindus, Balakrishnan was initiated into *sannyāsa* by Swami Sivananda and was given a new name - Swami Chinmayānanda Sarasvatī⁸ - *cit-maya-ānanda* which has a meaning "one who revels in bliss which is full of pure consciousness". (Ahuja 2006: 49). It is important to mention here that in *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy, a guru plays a very important role. The scriptures provide that the higher knowledge can only be received through a guru. Through the process of initiating Balakrishnan into *sannyāsa*, Swami Sivananda had become his Guru.⁹

Swami Chinmayananda was a person who did not accept anything just on pure faith. He wanted to know the reason behind every word and therefore his guru Swami Sivananda suggested him to study under *Vedantic* master, Swami Tapovan. Swami Chinmayananda then underwent a training in the main scriptures of the *Advaita Vedānta* under Swami Tapovan who was an extremely strict teacher. (Patchen 1994: 82-90).

I interviewed *Brahmacārin* Prarthana¹⁰ (who had studied under Swami Chinmayananda and travelled with him in some of his tours) to know about which guru had more influence over Swami Chinmayananda to shape him to be a spiritual guru as he was, to which she replied that both had. She said that according to Swami Chinmayananda, "*Swami Sivananda had taught him how to see god in the people around, but Tapovanji was the one who pushed him to the realms unknown, to experience the God. The teachers were like left and right eye, both had equal importance.*".

⁸ Swami Chinmayananda did not use the name Saraswati for the sake of brevity and humility, as his guru (Patchen 1994: 70).

⁹ Insight to the *guru - śiṣya relationship* is given in **appendix II**.

¹⁰ *Brahmacārin* Prarthana has been collecting the letters written by Swami Chinmayananda to his devotees and has collected 15000 letters so far. Based on her research results, she wants to give out a book, hopefully within 2 years.

2.2. *Desire to re-vitalise Hinduism*

Swami Chinmayananda saw religion and life to go hand in hand, one without the other gets destroyed. He treated Hinduism as having reached its pinnacle at one point of time where deep religious thought had developed several techniques for Self-realization, leaving no logic untouched or unexplained. According to him, that period was a golden era for Hindu culture, at all level. For Hindus, religion guided the path of life and that resulted in great power. Swami Chinmayananda found that Hinduism has fallen, as life has lost touch with religion. (Chinmayananda 01.2014: 10). As told by *Brahmacārin* Prarthana, Swami Chinmayananda had been meditating on the bank of the Ganges river when he felt a very strong intuition for going and sharing the knowledge of Hinduism that he had gained, with others and bring religion back in their life. He sought permission from his guru Swami Tapovan for the same. However Swami Tapovan was hesitant. He felt that the ordinary crowd would not understand the teachings. According to Swami Tapovan, a man should come naturally to the phase in life when he is ready to learn *Advaita Vedānta*. The ordinary man who has many desires, lacks the subtle mind with which he can understand the paradoxes of the scriptures correctly. Moreover, Swami Tapovan felt that those who want the knowledge should come to the master and not the other way round. (*Brahmacārin* Prarthana, personal communication, 2014).

However, the desire to share and spread the knowledge continued to grow in Swami Chinmayananda. Therefore Swami Tapovan suggested that before Chinmayananda takes teachings to the countrymen, he should take a trip down to the plains and wander around as a renunciate, living as a beggar among those he had once emulated. This would also help to rub his ego.¹¹ Respecting the advice by his guru, Swami Chinmayanada started the journey on foot in May 1951. He later wrote: "*I travelled on foot some six months, living on bhikṣā (begged food), sleeping in āśramas, temples, under wayside trees. When people do not know who you are, they consider you to be an inconvenient beggar, a worthless monk, an*

¹¹ Swami Tapovan used to say: "*God shines everywhere - in stones, in plants, in water, in the sky - but those who have not overcome their ego fail to find God anywhere.*" (Patchen 1994: 63).

unproductive member of the community. Education, social status, family connections, prejudices, sham values - these were no longer mine. If you ask me, this kind of discipline is the best cure for the ego-disease." (Dukes et al. 2011a: 74).

During his six months journey all over India, he found that people in the cities were as an aimless crowd, out of contact with the values in their own traditional culture. They observed some of the religious rituals and disciplines but without discernment of the meaning of their actions. (Dukes et al 2011a: 74-76). He felt that religion had lost its purpose. People were following a dead religion as they did not know the meaning and the purpose of the rituals they performed. (Chinmayananda 01.2014: 13). *Brahmacārin* Prarthana said: "*Swami Chinmayananda saw clearly how unsettled India was. After the British had gone, all this had created a great confusion in modern Hindu mind. He used to say that Hinduism will die if Hindus do not change their attitude and turn back to the teachings of [Advaita] Vedanta.*" (personal communication, 2014). Many of the rituals or prayers were performed for material benefits and fulfilment of desires and majority were attracted to materialism. Swami Chinmayananda felt that the society had more comforts to offer to humanity but happiness was fleeting away. He reasoned that the substratum of all desires is desire for happiness but fulfilment of desires does not give happiness as this fulfilment gives birth to new desires. These unfulfilled new desires bar us from enjoying the happiness that we should get from the fulfilled desires and our life becomes more miserable. Swami Chinmayananda found the Hindu society to be in the shackles of such desire fulfilling bondages. (Chinmayananda 01.2014: 14). This state of affairs strengthened in him the urge to share the knowledge of Vedanta, which helps the individual to gain inner freedom, and also to re-vitalise Hinduism.

When he arrived back to the Himalayas, both of his gurus, Swami Tapovan and Swami Sivananda saw the conviction in him and gave their blessings. According to the biographical books, the latter said: "*Go roar like a Vivekananda!*" (Patchen 1994: 188; Dukes et al. 2011a: 77).

Swami Chinmayananda has been described to me by some of his devotees as an outgoing and fearless person. Probably, this was the reason why he was not

afraid to experiment and undertake such an assignment. He arrived to Pune where he gave his first *pravachan* (religious discourse) under the name of *jñāna yajña* on December 31, 1951. He had taken the words "*jñāna yajña*" from the *Bhagavadgītā*, wherein Lord *Kṛṣṇa* praises both the teacher and student of the *Gītā* by saying that he who studies the sacred dialogue or shares this knowledge is performing a worship of knowledge and hence is very dear to *Kṛṣṇa*. Swami Chinmayananda wanted to recast the ancient *yajña* (fire sacrifice) as a *jñāna yajña* "knowledge sacrifice", wherein the *yajña* becomes the symbolic burning of one's ignorance in the fire of knowledge, while listening to the teacher unfolding *Vedānta* as revealed in the sacred texts. (Ahuja 2006: 50).

His first day introductory talk was titled "Let us be Hindus" (appendix III) where Chinmayananda outlined his plan for the spiritual revival of the Hindus. (Krishnakumar 2011: 111-117). In this lecture, he pointed that Hinduism had fallen to a level of a useless religion because the priestly class (*brāhmaṇa*) and the ruler class (*kṣatriya*) have addicted themselves to power and luxury rather than following their duty. He pointed out that Hindus have forgotten what their religion actually is and misunderstand it to be a desire fulfilling mechanism with the help of the gods and subject to paying a fees to the priest. Therefore, a revival was needed according to him.

Swami Chinmayananda desired to reach out to the English-educated masses who had lost their appreciation of their religion and scriptures. This is the reason for holding the *jñāna yajñas* in English, as it was a common bond between educated classes. I assume that Swami Chinmayananda's wanted to reach to the educated classes because he knew that they are the ones who are in governance and by reaching them, a greater influence can be created.

Chinmayanada wanted to spread his talks to the wider public. Therefore, his talks were recorded, then transcribed and were ready for distribution within 24 hours. Three or four day *pravachans* were made into booklets under the name of *Yajña Prasad* and mailed to the relatives and the friends of the audience. Soon, the demand of the copies grew. (Patchen 1994: 195-197).

During his lifetime, he undertook several international tours to spread the knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta* in the west. The longest of these tours lasted for

170 days. (Dukes et al. 2011b: 387-421). These tours have been discussed in chapter 2.4. Thus, it was his constant endeavour to acquaint the west with the ancient knowledge which, at one point of time, was secretly transferred by realized masters to initiated disciples only.

2.3. Some key concepts

Swami Chinmayananda said "*one of our noblest duties in life is to grow [spiritually]. This is the screaming cry of all evolution.*" (Chinmayananda 05.2013: 9). Swami Chinmayananda gave extensive discourses on various ancient Hindu scriptures. He was a scholar in Sanskrit language and taught Sanskrit scriptures of the *prasthanā traya*, first explaining the literal meaning in English and then giving his own commentaries.

He wrote commentaries to eight *Upaniṣads* in his lifetime - *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Praśna*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Taittirīya*, *Aiterya* and *Isāvāsyā*, beside writing a commentary to *Bhagavadgītā*. However, he did not write commentaries to *Brahmasūtras*, although *Brahmasūtras* are part of *Advaita Vedānta* school. (Dukes et al. 176-177).

His earlier days of life were packed with activities. He used to wake up at 3 AM in the morning to start the day. There were morning and evening lectures, group meditation classes, sessions, *satsaṅgs*, *pūjās*, *bhikṣās* and book projects. He used to spend as well three hours in a day to answer to the letters from devotees. (Dukes et al. 2011: 110-112). In an interview with a *Brahmacārin* Prarthana, I was informed that Swami Chinmayananda wrote 150 letters a day, on an average either to answer to the query of a devotee or to offer a solution to the devotee's problems and at the same time sharing his teachings with the devotee. He has authored around ninety books.

Brahmacārin Prarthana explained that initially Swami Chinmayananda only taught *Upaniṣads*. She told that during the 100 days¹² of *jñāna yajñas* "he never came down to the level of the common person. He was a man of experience and he was talking absolute [Advaita] *Vedānta*". Later on, he diluted the teachings so that a common person would understand it. He tried to give examples, formulas and suggestions to make the teachings more lucid and easier to understand. (*Brahmacārin* Prarthana, personal communication, 2014).

Swami Chinmayananda expounded that *Advaita Vedānta* is a philosophy and not a religion. Hence it is available to everyone irrespective of what religion a person follows. To study Vedānta, one need not convert to Hinduism. One can practice one's own religion and still study the philosophy. Swami Chinmayananda claimed that he did not teach anything new or anything which was his own creation. He was simply teaching principles of *Advaita Vedānta*. (Chinmayananda, video file, 1985). However, his contribution cannot be undermined for the simplistic way in which he communicated the *Advaitic* principles in order to make it easier for the contemporary mind to understand.

Swami Chinmayananda explained that according to *Advaita Vedānta*, human beings are composed of five sheaths or layers of matter. These sheaths are:

- i) The food sheath (*Annamaya Kosa*)
- ii) The vital air sheath (*Pranamaya Kosa*)
- iii) The mental sheath (*Manomaya Kosa*)
- iv) The intellectual sheath (*Vijnanamaya Kosa*)
- v) The bliss sheath (*Anandamaya Kosa*)

The food sheath is our physical body. It is called so because it comes into existence due to the essence of food which is assimilated by the father (semen), it is nurtured in the mother's womb by the food digested by her and it survives with the food taken by the person and goes back to earth and becomes food for other organisms after death. It comprises of five sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin) and five organs of action (speech, hands, feet, the genital organs and the

¹² Later the *jñāna yajñas* changed to weeklong sessions per month.

organs of evacuation). This food sheath is supported by the vital air sheath, which is a result of the air we breathe in. The vital air sheath is subdivided into five parts and result in activities which support the body. These are *prāṇa* (which supports faculty of perception), *apāna* (which supports faculty of excretion), *samāna* (faculty of digestion), *vyāna* (faculty of circulation) and *udāna* (faculty of thinking). The vital air sheath is regulated by the mental sheath which is in turn regulated by the intellectual sheath. The innermost of all these sheaths is the bliss sheath. It also houses *vāsanās* (explained in next sub-chapter) and is the state in which we exist in the deep sleep state of consciousness. It is the same for all human beings irrespective of their age, geographic location, state of mind etc. This bliss sheath controls the intellectual sheath. These five sheaths are like layers over the innermost core essence of human beings called the *ātman* or self or pure consciousness. (Chinmayananda 2013: 76-90). Swami Chinmayananda elaborated that the *ātman* is the sentient principle in all human beings which gives consciousness to the five sheaths of matter. It is a witness to the waking, dream and sleep states. (Chinmayananda 2013: 91)

When a human being forgets his true, eternal nature of being pure consciousness, he gets deluded into the world of plurality of objects (Chinmayananda 2013: 7). This delusion is called *māyā* as discussed in the chapter 1.5. Swami Chinmayananda noted that earlier *Advaita Vedānta* considered that there has been no creation, everything is just a projection of mind. Later *Advaita Vedānta*, led by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, considered the world to have a relative reality. Swami Chinmayananda clarified that "*there is no fundamental difference between the two theories.*". This can be described by giving an example of dream state whereby we feel that the dream is real but when we wake up, we find that it was just a creation of our own mind. Similarly, when we wake up to a higher state of consciousness, we may find this world to be unreal. (Chinmayananda 2013: 10)

Swami Chinmayananda considered the four *Mahāvākyas* (see chapter 1.5) to be the quintessence of *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy (Chinmayananda 2013: 98). These *Mahāvākyas* are not merely given for intellectual understanding but a disciple has to meditate after understanding the meaning, in order to realize the truth behind these *Mahāvākyas*.

In the following sub-chapters I have tried to give an insight into some of Swami Chinmayananda's key concepts.

2.3.1. Body-mind-intellect and vāsanās (BMI chart)

Swami Chinmayananda invented a chart to explain the esoteric teachings of *Advaita Vedānta* to the modern world in an easily understandable form. The chart describes the complex existence of human beings, as per *Advaita Vedānta*. The chart is popular amongst his disciples as BMI chart. It became so central to his teachings that in most of his discourses, the chart was placed next to him. As a prelude to the explanation of this chart, he said that science has made considerable progress in the objective world (outside world) and must turn now to the subjective world (individual) (Chinmayananda 1975: 81). To further explain these concepts, a chart formulated by him, is given below:

ॐ		
V(<i>Vāsanās</i>)		
B(Body)	M(Mind)	I(Intellect)
P(Perceiver)	F(Feeler)	T(Thinker)
O(Objects)	E(Emotions)	T(Thoughts)

In this chart, the symbol ॐ (OM) is referred as "symbolic of existence" or "spring of consciousness" in humans or "touch of life" in all living beings or the "divine principle" (Chinmayananda 1975: 84). Just like in science and mathematics, the mark "x" is used for an unknown figure, similarly OM symbol is used to depict the actual life giving principle in existence and the goal of spiritual enquiry is to realize it. Chinmayananda (1975: 85) explains that OM is considered to enliven every being, including plants, animals and human beings. Different religions may refer to it by different names but the Divine Principle remains the same. It is timeless and changeless but it is the one behind all changes and is the consciousness by which we experience this world of ever changing phenomenon.

He explains it as existing in the form of consciousness in every being. According to Swami Chinmayananda (Dukes et al 2011b: 15), OM alone is reality and everything else other than it is relative reality. The BMI chart depicts the relationship between reality and relative reality.

Explaining the chart further, he states that every human being is equipped with three instruments, the body, the mind and the intellect. Every living being experiences life through these instruments. The higher the state of existence a living being has, the more developed are the set of these instruments in it. Non living beings (like stones, minerals and the like) have only a body. Plants have a body and a beginner state of mind as they respond to light, water, soil conditions etc. Sir Jagdish Chander Bose and few other researchers have concluded that plants can respond to music also. Animals have a body and a more developed mind as they show emotional behaviour. Human beings have a fully developed body, mind and intellect. But body, mind and intellect cannot function on their own. Else they would function in a lifeless body also. Swami Chinmayananda (1975: 86) explained that it is OM that makes them come to life. He has often used examples to express the relationship between ॐ and body-mind-intellect. He described it like the electricity which is one but manifests itself in different ways depending on the instrument it is used for. Similarly the Divine Principle is one but it manifests itself in different ways and also gives life and sentiency to body, mind and intellect. To explain this concept, he gave an example of an engine which does not have a capacity to move of its own but when the energy passes through it, it starts functioning.

Swami Chinmayananda (1975: 87-90) explained that human beings gain all their experiences through the medium of these three instruments. The body perceives the objects of the outside world. Form is perceived through the eyes, sound through the ears, smell through nose, taste through tongue and touch through the skin. The mind is the feeler of the emotions within one self and the intellect is the thinker of the thoughts that a person has. A human being entertains his ideas and ideals through his intellect. The complex of perceiver-feeler-thinker forms the individual ego. And the objects, emotions and thoughts comprise the sum total of world of experiences an individual has. However, the individual is

different from the three instruments he is endowed with or the experiences arising from them or the ego. He is that principle (OM) by whose mere presence the body perceives, the mind feels and the intellect thinks. (Chinmayananda 1975: 87-90).

Between the OM and the BMI complex, Swami Chinmayananda placed the *vāsanās* in the BMI chart. He defined *vāsanās* as "the unseen psychological predispositions in a personality" (Dukes et al. 2011b: 24). In the interview, conducted by Pritish Nandy, he further defined *vāsanās* as fragrance - *"the fragrance of what we have done and thought of. Whatever we do - karma - and whatever we think of, they all leave impressions on us, they pressurize us to repeat ourselves. Unless these past pressures are eliminated, we cannot rethink and review the world we are seeing around us."* (Chinmayananda, audio file, 1980).

These *vāsanās* exist as channels of thoughts and determine our present behaviour. They shape our physical, emotional and intellectual personality. They form an individual's innate urges and manifest themselves through the body-mind-intellect and determine the kind of activities an individual will engage in. They first manifest themselves through the intellect in the form of a desire, then as an emotion in the mind to achieve that desire and then as an action at the body level. (Chinmayananda 05.2012: 42). They give result to repeated actions and thus formation of habits in an individual. An individual normally is a slave to these *vāsanās* unless he overcomes them and establishes control over the body-mind-intellect complex.

The concept of *vāsanās* explains compulsive behaviour in human beings. There are tendencies in all of us which have so much force and power over us that we engage in action without even exercising conscious decision making. For example, habitual smokers cannot stop smoking even when they know that it is harming their body.

Chinmayananda says that the root cause for *vāsanās* is ego (perceiver-feeler-thinker) centric action for happiness in the world of experiences (objects-emotions-thoughts). The individual identifies himself with the ego and maintains his attitude in the sense of doership (I do) and a sense of enjoyership (I enjoy). This attachment gives strength to the *vāsanās*. Swami Chinmayananda taught that the method for overcoming *vāsanās* has been given in the third chapter of

Bhagavadgītā and is known as "*Karma Yoga*" which means selfless action or service for a higher ideal. In other words, it means to act with a spirit of surrendered ego and selfless service. As opposed to actions done to fulfill desires, *karma yoga* preaches action that springs from one's own sense of duty. This method is explained in *Bhagavadgītā* verse 3.7 "*Controlling the senses by the mind, unattached, he employs his organs of action in karma yoga – "service of all" he O, Arjuna indeed excels*". To explain it further, Swami Chinmayananda gave an example: a man who kills for a personal motive (controlled by ego) is called a murderer but a man who is in the army and has killed many for his country is not called a murderer because he didn't kill for his ego-satisfaction but in the defence of his own country. (Chinmayananda 1975: 57-59). Thus, *karma yoga* prescribes action for a higher sense for duty or in service of the divine.

The secret of *karma yoga* is to get established in equanimity, renouncing all egocentric attachments and forgetting to worry about our success and failures. (Ahuja 2006: 52). *Karma yoga* calms the mind, helps an individual to go beyond the ego and thus overcome *vāsanās*. It purifies the mind and makes it ready for understanding the ultimate teaching of *Advaita Vedānta* which is Self-realization.

The mind, intellect and ego are like walls around the pure consciousness (*cit*) or Self and have to be pulled down for realizing the self. The mind is pulled down by *bhakti yoga* (devotion to a higher self or God with form or formless), intellect can be pulled down by *jñāna yoga* and the ego can be pulled down by *karma yoga*. He said that an individual need not practice all three yogas. Practicing any one yoga will help because if one wall is pulled down, other will also start falling. They are interdependent on each other. When these walls fall down, the self is revealed to the seeker. (Chinmayananda 05.2012: 39).

Swami Chinmayananda (1975: 178) further explained that: "*if the body-mind-intellect (BMI) can be "tuned up" properly and the mind-intellect can be "stilled" or "quietened", there is a stage of "contemplative-ness" reached. The mind-intellect, in such a state of contemplation, can realise the Divine state – OM. In fact, the Divine, then becomes self-evident!*".

2.3.2. Japa yoga and meditation

Swami Chinmayananda (1975: 132) prescribes *japa*¹³ as an important tool for developing concentration which is necessary to go into the deeper realms of *Advaita Vedānta*. He compares the power of *japa* oriented mind to sun's rays which can burn an object when converged at a point with the help of convex lens. *Japa yoga* is a technique of the rosary. It is a method of mental training by which the dissipating rays of the mind are compelled to behave in order and rhythm through the continuous chanting of a chosen mantra or name of God. (Ahuja 2006: 59). It helps in attaining single pointedness of the mind. *Japa* is helpful in meditation also as a *japa* oriented mind experiences results of meditation in a shorter time. The importance of *japa* can also be seen in *Bhagavadgītā* (chapter 9, verse 25) in which Śrī Kṛṣṇa says "*I am, among the yogas, japa yoga*" (Chinmayananda, 1975: 131).

Swami Chinmayananda taught a particular method of *japa yoga*. He advised the disciples to maintain a special place for their prayers. It could be a corner of a room also. The disciple should fix the picture of his lord over there in such a way that when he sits, the feet in the picture are at the level of his eyes. He should then gaze at the form of his lord, close his eyes and try to visualize the form of the lord within, exactly like the one in the picture. The disciple should then take a *mālā* (rosary) of 108 beads with a *meru* (connecting bead). There is a special way to hold the mala and turn the beads. The *mālā* is held between the tip of the index finger and the thumb. The disciple may then choose his own mantra¹⁴ or he may get a mantra from his guru. This mantra has to be repeated while turning the beads of the *mālā*, one bead each per mantra. *Japa* is started with the bead next to the *meru*. The disciple reaches the *meru* again after he has repeated the mantra 108 times. At this point, if the disciple wants to do more *japa*, he should be careful not to cross the *meru*. The *mālā* has to be turned in such a

¹³ *Japa* "muttering" is the constant repetition of a mantra, or of the name of God.

¹⁴ *Mantra* is a sacred verbal formula repeated in prayer, meditation, or incantation, such as an invocation of a god, a magic spell, or a syllable or portion of scripture containing mystical potentialities.

way that the 109th mantra is counted on the bead on which the 107th mantra was counted. (Chinmayananda, 1986a: 10-13).

Disciples who have been practicing *japa* told me that initially it was difficult to remain concentrated on the mantra as the mind kept entertaining different thoughts. Some used to feel sleepy during their initial practice. But with gradual practice, the mind is becoming more and more concentrated.

Swami Chinmayananda taught **meditation** as a means to integrate and balance an individual's personality as a whole. He said that a mind in meditation can experience pure devotion and higher love. However, the mind needs to be peaceful and tranquil to be fit for meditation. Therefore, he suggested that one should pray before meditation and advised every seeker to invoke the blessings of the lord of his heart. (Ahuja 2006: 58).

He gave the following process for meditation: the seeker should have a comfortable posture with the vertebral column erect. Then he should massage the various parts of the body mentally (thought massage). Then the seeker should chant OM audibly and vibrantly from deep within. After chanting for five or ten times, he can close the eyes, but not so tightly. Then he should begin mental chanting of OM with eyes closed. Thereafter he should stop chanting OM. Immediately after that comes a thoughtless state and the seeker should hold on to the thoughtless state as long as he can. If thoughts come again, the seeker should start chanting OM again to be able to experience the thoughtless state again and hold on to it as long as he can. This process should be repeated for three times in one sitting but without any strain. Continuous practice will help the seeker to be in thoughtless state for longer times. (Chinmayananda 1975: 160-161).

This process helps a seeker to detach from the flux of thoughts created by *vāsanās* and to be in the present moment, which is silence and gateway to the Infinite. Swami Chinmayananda has said that this a moment in which one can know one's own Self. (Chinmayananda 12.2012: 7).

In my opinion, Swami Chinmayananda, considered these spiritual practices as a great aid to the seekers on the path of *Advaita Vedānta*, as a disciplined and concentrated mind is a must to progress on the path.

2.3.3. Temples, idols and bhakti

Aubrey Menen in his book (*The Mystics*) quoted Swami Chinmayananda's words: "*Bhakti as it has come down to us today, represents almost a superstitious conception, stinking in its decadence, a moral dread, a disgusting intellectual slavery, a crawling mental attitude, a blind dependence on Supreme God, to take us away from all our self-created mischiefs. So we find a self-ruined society being courted by a profit-seeking priest-class, functioning generally from spiritually-polluted centres which have come to be called "temples". Those who visit these polluted centres are found to be a set of helpless personalities with neither the courage to face life nor the conviction to renounce...*" (Menen 1974: 215-216). From these words it seems that Swami Chinmayananda was against the *bhakti* movement of his time. It seems that he did not approve of the system being followed in temples, administered by the priests. His general contempt for the people visiting these temples can also be found in the way he describes them. However, it cannot be said that he was against "*bhakti*" or temples as such. Many centres of Chinmaya Mission have temples as their prominent feature. These temples are dedicated to *Śiva* or *Kṛṣṇā*, amongst others and host *mūrtis* (idols) of different Hindu gods. From a very different perspective, praising *bhakti* and highlighting its position as indispensable for *Advaita Vedānta*, Swami Chinmayananda has said: "*[Advaita] Vedānta is no annihilator of bhakti. No bhakta can be a true unless he be a Vedāntin; and no Vedāntin is perfect unless he be a lover of the lord. Philosophy without love is madness; love without philosophy is superstition.*" (Mitchiner 1991: 49).

Both views appear contradictory. At the face of it, it appears to be a practice of double standards, or as John Mitchiner (1991: 51) criticizes that at the heart of his teachings lies an element of "double-think" or that he is using temples to attract wider audience of devout Hindus. I found myself caught in between these two views which are opposite to each other yet describing the same subject. Therefore, I directed my research to find what *bhakti* means according to Swami Chinmayananda. I found that *bhakti* means devotional love for God. Love is measured by one's identification with beloved. The more the identification, the

more the love. Therefore, *bhakti* is measured by one's identification with the Lord. Prayers, chanting, singing and various rituals are meant to cultivate of sincere feeling of oneness of the devotee with the Lord of his heart. (Chinmayananda 02.2012: 12). Thus, in my opinion, there is no inconsistency or double-think. Swami Chinmayananda was not anti *bhakti*. Rather his criticism is for those temples in India which have started functioning in a businesslike manner and the priests have turned into businessmen offering quick solutions to the problems that people face, through portrayed divine intervention and charge the gullible devotees a heavy price for their services¹⁵ which is a total derogation of the concept of *bhakti*. However, it can be said that he never undermined the importance of true *bhakti*.

Describing the importance of *bhakti* and *mūrtis*, Swami Chinmayananda said that the divine forms described in Hinduism are all symbols of deep significance described in *Advaita Vedānta*. According to him Hinduism gives choice to its followers to chose one's own path, one's own form of God. (Chinmayananda 2002: 28). He has explained that "*These forms [mūrtis] have been provided to suit the different needs of individual at different stages of their Spiritual evolution.*" (Chinmayananda1986a: 15). It is like a student has to go through smaller classes before learning the higher and more complex concepts of any field of study. Similarly, a seeker may first have to learn to concentrate his mind on a God with form before he can contemplate on the formless Brahman. Swami Chinmayananda advised that the mind, after resting upon the form of lord that it likes becomes calm and serene and the intellect becomes sharp and vibrant (Chinmayananda 2002: 30).

Swami Chinmayananda said that when our mind is in love with higher altar, we experience an expansion of our own powers, a greater brilliance to our own faculties, and joy, peace and satisfaction within. In the highest form of *bhakti* the devotee surrenders his ego to the Lord and in turn comes to experience his own universality. (Chinmayananda 02.2012: 13).

¹⁵ from Swami Chinmayananda's speech "Let Us be Hindus" appendix IV

2.4. Expanding the horizons

Very few Hindu spiritual masters from India had ventured into the international territory on such a vast scale before Swami Chinmayananda. The most known is Swami Vivekananda who gave a speech about Hinduism at the Parliament of The World's religions in Chicago in 1893.

Hailed as the second swami Vivekananda (as addressed by his disciples), Swami Chinmayananda's ambition to spread the ancient knowledge outside India seems to be even higher as can be understood by his wide ranging travels. He addressed the United Nations in 1992. A year later, he was selected as the president of Hindu religion at the "Parliament of World Religions" in Chicago and was to be honoured in Washington D.C. in at "World Vision 2000" (a conference of religious leaders) for his selfless service to humanity. (Dukes et al. 2011b). But he could not attend these events as he passed away (August 1993) before they were held.

In his address to the United Nations in 1992, Swami Chinmayananda theorized that the world is constantly changing and until and unless man learns to adapt to the new changes he will be wiped off. He reasons out that many plants, many animals, many civilizations have disappeared because they were unable to adapt to the changing circumstances. He also suggested that human beings are suffering with so many problems and when one problem is solved, ten new problems arise. The cause of these problems is that every individual has a different perception of the world outside. This perception is different due to different attitudes and which may lead to conflict. Therefore, the only solution is perfection of the individual and through perfection of the individual, world perfection can be achieved. (Chinmayananda, audio file, 1992). Swami Chinmayananda used to say: *"World transformation through Individual Transformation! The world can only be changed by the spiritual unfoldment of each individual – not by political revolution, but by spiritual evolution."* (D'Mello 2006: 142).

Swami Chinmayananda shared his ideas on individual improvement in his discourses in India and abroad. He undertook 26 international tours and some short trips to spread the message of *Vedānta* in the far east and west, while he continued to give discourses in India as well. Given below is a part of a table that shows the periods of his travels, the countries he travelled to and the topics he wanted to share with the world. This part presents only his first journey and his longest journey. (Dukes et al. 387-421).

Period	Countries	Topics
March 7 – June 24, 1965	Thailand, Japan, United States of America, Mexico, Trinidad, Jamaica, England, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, Syria	Various Topics including: i) <i>Vedānta</i> , <i>Upaniṣads</i> , <i>Gītā</i> ii) Hinduism, Indian culture iii) Science and Religion iv) Religion in Life v) Yoga and Science vi) Art of Meditation vii) Secret of Action viii) Self Unfoldment through Love ix) Life and Matter x) Logic of Spiritual Life xi) Religion and Modern Man xi) Spiritual Life through Yoga
August 3, 1971 – February 9, 1972	UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Switzerland, United States of America, Nigeria, Ghana, Hawaii, Canada, Spain, Hong Kong, Bahrain, Thailand	As mentioned above and many other topics on the field of spirituality and self-unfoldment.

In these world tours, he spoke on diverse topics. However, a common thread of knowledge preached by him was *Advaita Vedantic* in nature. A point worth mentioning is that he gave many discourses in various elite colleges and universities that include Oxford, Harvard, Yale, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, amongst others. Thus he was trying to reach out with his teachings to the youth of the most prestigious colleges of the west. In his own words, "*Chinmaya Mission is in a big way now entering into a very tender and delicate arena of work. To impart ideas and ideals of [Advaita] Vedānta, in all their*

uncompromising mysticism to the modern educated teenagers is a highly sensitive and supremely delicate art." (Chinmayananda 1975: 10). To engage the youngsters in his work, he used trendy words to attract their attention. The youth camps had cool-sounding names like "Yo!" (Youth Online) and "Dip in Scrips" (an introduction to scriptures) (D'Mello 2006: 139).

Reid Locklin and Julia Lauwers (2009) of Oxford University in "*Rewriting the Sacred Geography of Advaita*" have compared Swami Chinmayananda's extensive travels to Ādi Śaṅkara's *digvijaya*. This analogy is derived from Swami Chinmayananda's reference to Ādi Śaṅkara's hagiography as an inspiration for his work as founder of Chinmaya Mission.

Reid Locklin and Julia Lauwers state that Swami Chinmayananda was motivated by Śaṅkara's *digvijaya* to propagate his own Mission and to spread *Advaita Vedānta*. They remark that Swami Chinmayananda can be characterized as a missionary, spiritual general, cultural warrior, and, at least from a perspective within the tradition, world-teacher (*jagadguru*), and world-conqueror (*digvijayin*). They remark that Chinmaya Mission has given full-colour illustration of the global tours under the label "*Dik-Vijay Yatra*" characterising the journey as a modern pilgrimage and conquest of these new quarters. (Locklin and Lauwers 2009: 180). Therefore, there can be drawn some parallels between Swami Chinmayananda and *Adi Śaṅkara*. Like *Śaṅkara* travelled and established four *maṭhas* in the four directions of India, Swami Chinmayananda travelled and opened learning centres, educational institutions and social service organizations in different parts of the world for similar reasons.

2.5. Formation of Chinmaya Mission and its purpose

Swami Chinmayananda started giving his discourses without any of his own organization in place. But soon a need for more organized activity was felt, resulting in the formation of an organization.

After the second *jñāna yajña* in the summer of 1953, a group of people in Chennai decided to form a society and call it by the name of Chinmaya Mission.

Swami Chinmayananda, who was at that time in the Himalayan mountains, was hesitant. He wrote: *"Don't start any organisation by my name. I have not come here to be institutionalised. I have come here to give the message of our ancient sages which has benefited me. If it has benefited you, pass it on."* However, the group of people persuaded Swami that the name Chinmaya means "pure knowledge" and they are the seekers of the pure knowledge (Dukes et al 2011a: 120-121) and so the name Chinmaya Mission was given to the organization.

Although Swami Chinmayananda passed away on August 3, 1993 Chinmaya Mission continues to grow¹⁶. Over the years, it has grown into a worldwide organisation. It has around 300 regional centres in India and 50 centres around the world (in 22 countries). The headquarter of the Mission is situated in Mumbai and is administrated under Central Chinmaya Mission Trust (CCMT). Local centres organise and coordinate the activities of the Mission in their area. The organization also has hundreds of temples, shrines and a few *āśramas*.

Chinmaya Mission's vision statement is *"The inner transformation of individuals through knowledge of [Advaita] Vedānta, spiritual practices and service to society, resulting in a happy world around them."* Its mission statement says: *"To provide individuals from any background, the wisdom of Vedānta, and the practical means for their spiritual growth and happiness, enabling them to become positive contributors of society."* and its motto is: *"To give maximum happiness to the maximum number for the maximum time is our religion."* (Dukes et al. 2011: 357).

To achieve its vision and fulfil its motto, Chinmaya Mission has basically three purposes: *"to spread the knowledge of Advaita Vedānta"*, *"invigorating Indian culture"* and *"doing extensive social service"*. However the main focus of this work is to study how Chinmaya Mission spreads the knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*.

¹⁶ The present head of Chinmaya Mission is Swami Tejomayananda

2.5.1. Spreading the knowledge of Advaita Vedānta

Swami Chinmayananda emphasised that inner transformation can happen to individuals only if the teachings go deep within. This can happen only through analytical thinking, discussions and understanding. Therefore he devised and incorporated many methods to facilitate the same.

In this chapter I have tried to find how these methods actually function. I have personally observed some of these methods and I have interviewed disciples of the Mission and present head of National Capital Region and Delhi branch of Chinmaya Mission, to understand their perspective on these methods.

2.5.1.1. Residential Vedānta course

Swami Chinmayananda had a dream to open up modern day *gurukula* (school) where students can learn the philosophy of *Advaita Vedānta* and later take the knowledge back to their communities. The first *gurukula* was opened in 1963 and was named Sandeepany Sādhanaśāla¹⁷. It got its name after Lord *Kṛṣṇa*'s Guru, *Saṁdīpanī Muni*. It is Chinmaya mission's residential training academy where students study various spiritual texts over two years period, primarily *prasthāna traya*. Students learn as well Sanskrit grammar, Vedic Chanting and devotional *bhajans* (songs). The Sandeepany students were called *ṛṣi putras* (sons of seers) by Swami Chinmayananda (Dukes et al. 2011b: 154-171).

In an interview conducted by professors of the Deakin University in Australia, Swami Chinmayananda explained that for over 800 years the philosophical part of Hinduism has been neglected. Therefore Chinmaya Mission has established an institution (*gurukula*) which is working as a Hindu seminary - training young seekers to understand the scriptures. (Chinmayananda, video file, 1985).

¹⁷ As of now, the organization runs several Sandeepanies. The oldest is the Sandeepany at Mumbai.

There are criteria set by the Mission for those who wish to apply for this course.¹⁸ The candidates should be graduates, below thirty years of age, single, with a good proficiency in English language. The selected students are given white robes and they are supposed to wear these cloths throughout their course. They cannot leave the *gurukula* for two years. There are no holidays. The residential course is free of cost for Indian students (foreigners are expected to pay some fees). Food and clothing are provided by the a trust. These seekers can later on go back to their worldly life or they can chose to serve Chinmaya Mission full time. (Dukes et al. 2011b: 154-171).

If they chose the latter, they are given the yellow robes and become *brahmacāris* (males) and *brahmacārins* (females), referring to the celibate monastic order. Their life expenses are borne by the mission. They are sent to different parts of India or even abroad, according to the languages they know, characteristics and preferences, to preach and spread the knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*, what they had learnt in the Sandeepany *gurukula*. (Chinmayananda, video file, 1985).

Some of these *brahmacāris* and *brahmacārins* are later initiated into *sannyāsa*, the highest monastic order. The decision whether to initiate someone into *sannyāsa* or not, is taken by the head of the Chinmaya Mission worldwide. They are given the orange robe, the title of Swami, a new name ending with "*ananda*" and the last name "Saraswati".

The first *gurukula* started with thirty students, only four remained as *ācāryas* (teachers/masters). Nowadays the number has grown to around three hundred.

In an interview with Swami Nikhilananda Saraswati, present head of Chinmaya Mission, Delhi branch he told that his motive to join this residential course was to gain knowledge about the world, about himself and about God. He mentioned that his stay in the ashram was a pleasant, without any difficulties and the teachings were very systematic. He explained that student may study scriptures by himself but a guidance of a guru is needed. One may also read books by spiritual masters but if one relies on books only, it may lead to confusion

¹⁸ Those who are interested in to attend the *gurukula* but do not qualified the eligible criteria, can become guest students, subject to payment of fees.

because each book tells different things. Therefore, a guru is necessary because he can clear all your doubts and can tell you the whole path, till the end, rationally. *Gurukula* is the place where one gets to learn the scriptures in a systematic way under the guidance of able gurus. (Swami Nikhilananda, personal communication, 2014).

I interviewed a western disciple (from Brazil) who felt really benefitted by the two year residential course. Marcia explained that the difference in studying part time or studying in the residential course is like the difference between taking French classes once a week or spending one week in Paris, studying and living in that appropriate environment. The net effect is that one learns faster. She felt that studying two years in the *āśram*, where everything was conducive for learning definitely had a very high impact on her. Marcia said *"It has changed the way I see life as a whole, the way I see God, the world, others and myself also. It has given me a lot of peace which in turn becomes a subtle joy. When we learn about how our mind works, we become more compassionate towards others."* She explained that when one looks at the world and thinks that this is all God, there is even more beauty to everything. She commented that it is difficult to explain what she actually felt by doing the course but it was the best thing she ever did in her life. Marcia has chosen to continue with the white robe for one year. (Marcia, personal communication, 2014). In this one year, she will have to decide whether she wants to be a *brahmacārin* or not.

Brahmacārin Prarthana said that any person should do this course if one wants to have a clear and focused life. During the two years one learns one's own personality. One gains the vision how to lead one's life and what attitude one should have towards life. She added that the course is so good that when the course ended she was in tears. She did not feel like coming out of it. Right after the course she decided to become *brahmacārin*. She told that by contemplating on what she had learnt in the residential course, she has experienced a glimpse of inner bliss and inner joy. It could be for just a fraction of a second and took years and years of contemplation, but that fraction of second's joy is what she wants to experience more and more, and the long lasting peace which comes with it. This is

what keeps her on track. (*Brahmacārin* Prarthana, personal communication, 2014).

2.5.1.2. *Jñāna yajñas*

The meaning of *jñāna yajñas* has already been elaborated in the chapter on Swami Chinmayananda's life. After the first *jñāna yajña* in 1951, Swami Chinmayananda performed many *jñāna yajñas*. During these *jñāna yajñas*, strict discipline was followed and punctuality, orderliness and silence were highly respected. (Dukes et al. 2011b).

After he passed away, Chinmaya Mission has continued to organize *jñāna yajñas* and the teachings are done by local *ācāryas* (swamis/swamini or *brahmacāri/ brahmacārin*). According to the conversations with some local *ācāryas*, the standards set by Swami Chinmayananda are actually followed as well today.

The *jñāna yajñas* are advertised through mass media and social media and posters are put up on the notice board of the centre. Additionally, for example in Delhi centre, a bulletin (published by the centre) has information about upcoming *yajñas*.

I have attended several *jñāna yajñas* in the Delhi branch of Chinmaya Mission which is being headed by Swami Nikhilananda Saraswati. *Jñāna yajñas* are conducted in the evening with each session lasting for one and a half hours. A *jñāna yajña*, on an average, attracts around 50 to 250 persons desirous of learning the ancient scriptures. *Yajñas* on *Upaniṣads* attract less persons and those on *Bhagavadgītā* attract more persons. The atmosphere is congenial to learning and moderns methods of media and communication (microphones, speakers, audio recorders) are used to reach the audience. All sessions are reduced to video recordings which are available later for personal use. Each session is also transcribed and uploaded the following day on facebook account of Swami Nikhilananda. Swami Nikhilananda makes extensive use of social media to reach wider audience.

The *jñāna yajña* explain the spiritual text in a detailed and deep manner. However, there is no interactive session in the *yajñas*, this means that if anyone in the audience is still left in doubt or query he cannot ask during the *yajña*. In order to clear the doubts the disciples have to seek a personal appointment with *ācārya* or they can post their queries on facebook under the transcript of *jñāna yajña* and get the reply by *ācārya*.

The *yajñas* are attended by regular disciples and by others who want to learn more about the topic of the *yajña*. Most of those attending are in their middle ages or older and seemingly belong to the educated class. The reason for reaching this assumption is that the *yajñas* are conducted in good English and the uneducated class of India does not understand higher level of English. However, the *yajñas* are open to everyone irrespective of the background. Conducting *yajña* in English also goes in line with Swami Chinmayananda's desire to reach out to the English-educated masses. I have seen few western people coming to attend these *yajñas*.

The *yajñas* in the Delhi Centre are conducted in an auditorium which can seat around 300 persons. The auditorium has bigger than life size photographs of Swami Chinmayananda and Swami Tapovan. The stage is decorated with pots of plants, flowers and oil lamps. In *Bhagavadgītā jñāna yajña*, a *mūrti* of lord Kṛṣṇa is also placed on the stage, garlanded, with opened *Bhagavadgītā* placed in front of the *mūrti*.

The *yajñas* are normally preceded by half an hour performance of Indian classical music and *bhajans*. Thereafter, the main disciples welcome the *ācārya* and garland him. The *yajñas* are started exactly on time and punctuality is expected from the audience. The *ācārya* lights a lamp (symbolic of lighting the lamp of knowledge) and goes to the stage. *Ācārya's asana* (seat) is placed higher than the chairs of the audience attending the *yajña*. The discourses of *yajña* begin with chanting of *Vedic mantras*: mantra in praise of Supreme Being like *Śānti mantra* (from *Ishavasya Upaniṣad*), mantra in praise of guru like *Guru Brahma mantra* (from *Vishwasara Tantram*) and mantra praying for a harmonious *guru-śiṣya* relationship like *Om Saha Nāvavatu mantra* (from *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*) and some specific mantras are also chanted for *Bhagavadgītā yajña*. Thereafter, they

do *japa* of *Om Namaḥ Śivāya mantra* 108 times for calming the mind and for better concentration.

During the *pravachans* there is absolute silence. The original Sanskrit text (which is the subject of that particular *yajña*) is chanted from the scripture by the *ācārya* and then repeated by the audience. After that, the *ācārya* explains the meaning of the text and elaborates the same with quotations from other scriptures or anecdotes and quotations from Ādi Śaṅkara's commentaries or Swami Chinmayananda's teachings. The *yajña* session ends with chanting of OM and with a few minutes of meditation (during which the lights are dimmed). After the *pravachan* the audience have a choice to give their salutations to Swami Nikhilananda by bowing their head at his feet or touching the feet. I asked few disciples about this process. They answered that bowing down is symbolic of surrendering one's ego and while they bow down they feel that they are bowing down to the embodiment of Supreme Knowledge which is represented by Swami Nikhilananda.

After the last discourse of the *jñāna yajña*, an envelope for collecting *dīkṣā* is handed over to those attending the *yajña*. *Dīkṣā* is donation that a disciple is supposed to give to the guru for the knowledge he has gained from the guru. However, there are no specific demands for *dīkṣā* and everyone is free to decide how much he or she wants to donate. Those who are interested in continuing with the study of *Advaita Vedānta* are requested to fill in their contact details in a form after which they are allocated to a study group in a venue near their home.

The disciples I interviewed¹⁹ have unanimously said that *jñāna yajñas* have helped them in listening, contemplating and meditation on the teachings. This process is necessary for understanding and assimilating the concepts and teachings of *Advaita Vedānta*.

One disciple said that "*being a part of jñāna yajña is like being a part of a great event in which the energy generated by the collective study of the Scriptures, automatically uplifts each and everyone who is part of it and also purifies the subtle consciousness of the environment.*". Another disciple said that *jñāna yajñas* have actually led her to discover their wonderful spiritual heritage of

¹⁹ Extracts of some of the conducted interviews are given in the appendix I.

which she hardly knew anything (in comparison to what she now knows). She said "*what an eye – opener it has been! To think that all these years of our lives we have denied ourselves of this wonderful knowledge seems almost criminal!*". She added that *jñāna yajñas* are extremely useful since they not only help unravel the wonderful philosophical - spiritual teachings of the ancient heritage but helped her turn into better human being, raising her above petty self, constantly reminding her of her essential nature and opening doors for greater human achievements. (Nandita and Kajal, personal communications, 2014).

Presently, a *jñāna yajña* about *Bhagavadgītā* is being conducted by Swami Nikhilananda Saraswati in Delhi Centre of Chinmaya Mission. The *yajña* will be lasting over the time period of two years and are being conducted during the first week of every month.

2.5.1.3. Study groups

In March 1956 at the end of the 17th *jñāna yajña*, Swami Chinmayananda emphasised the necessity that it would be good to form study groups where seekers can meet regularly and learn in a methodical and systematic manner the scriptures of *Advaita Vedānta* (Patchen 1994: 122). The genesis of the study group is a quotation of Swami Tapovan "*To destroy the illusion that body is Self and to reinforce the knowledge of the Self one should carry out the exercises of the Self through thought and discussion.*" (Thapan 2005: 1). It means that to reach to the knowledge what scriptures contain, it is necessary to study regularly and to reflect and contemplate upon the message in it. Swami Chinmayananda has said "*mere listening will not add to your beauty. These ideas are to be reflected upon deeply and digested slowly. This process is hastened only when you discuss what you have studied with others. Study groups constitute the heart of our mission. The ideas gathered by you when discussed with others, not only they become deeply rooted in yourself, but as they become clearer in your own understanding, they also inspire those who listen to you. Thus each student, while trying to strengthen his own understanding can become an instrument for the spread of this*

knowledge. This process is the dynamic study scheme followed in the Vedantic tradition." (Thapan 2005: 2).

The study group scheme is designed by Swami Chinmayananda in such a way that even a beginner who has no background in Hinduism and knowledge about scriptures can pursue the studies. The studies take the seeker step by step from the preliminary text books, through the *Bhagavadgītā*, leading up to the *Upaniṣads*.

I have attended three different study groups. The sessions take place once a week, at a host member's house in the living room or some other appropriate spacious place. The class starts on time and lasts around one and a half hours. The room has a picture of the deity of choice of the host and also of Swami Chinmayananda. These pictures are kept in the elevated place and are garlanded. Lamp, incense sticks, sweets, fruits and other items are placed as offerings in front of the pictures to create special atmosphere. The host member is called *sevak* and he sits next to the pictures and other members sit facing towards the pictures. The leader of the study group, *sevak*, is appointed by the head of the local centre under which the study group functions. A *sevak* must have certain qualities which are akin to qualities prescribed by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya to be existing in an *Advaitin* seeker and a few other personal qualities. The class starts with chanting *Śānti Mantra* and *Guru Stotram*. When the class gathers for the first time, each member gives small introduction about himself/ herself. The method of study followed is that each member reads a paragraph from the text that is being studied and gives his understanding of the reading. This is followed by a group discussion on that paragraph. In the end of the class, the *sevak* gives a conclusion of the study. Thereafter, they chant *Śānti mantra* and take the Mission Pledge (appendix IV). While taking the pledge, each participator stands and places his hand on his chest, next to the heart.

If group members are left with any questions which could not be answered during the class, the same can be put to *ācārya* of the local centre who comes to the concluding class to evaluate the studies. In the concluding class of a study group that I attended, Swami Nikhilananda answered question of the participants. The class was then concluded in the traditional way (mantras, prayers etc) and

was followed by a dinner hosted by the *sevak*. The overall atmosphere was like that of a big united Chinmaya Mission family.

I have observed that participants of the study groups manifest a strong feeling of being a part of larger Chinmaya family and they are self motivated to study the scriptures and motivate each other also. Study groups facilitate spreading of the knowledge at a personal level. The participants are encouraged to attend every class.

According to the interviewed disciples²⁰, study groups provide a unique platform for spiritual learning, leading to a personal growth and transformation. The purpose of study groups is also to help like minded people to get together and revise the scriptures. They say that study groups helped them to develop firm understanding of the subject. The study groups give an opportunities for continues learning, clearing doubts and sharing ideas. The hesitation of subject is removed. They learn to chant mantras. Study groups help them to get more involved of Chinmaya Mission.

One of the disciples said that *"study groups help your spiritual studies, the urge to run around goes away. The knowledge slowly becomes more established in you, becomes part of your system. Convictions what you earlier may have had, start dropping off. And you start living by the convictions which are taught in the scriptures. And so your life slowly transforms."* (Ritu, personal communication, 2014).

Based on the pattern of study groups, Chinmaya Mission also has Chinmaya Devī (goddess) groups for women only. Like minded ladies form a group to study scriptures together and as well as apply scriptural concepts to solve their specific problems at home. The message of the Swami Chinmayananda for the Devī group was: *"When a mother is a true seeker, the whole environment of the house changes. Your family does not have to go out to hear a swami. You change, and your environment will follow suit. You are the mother, the model, the Guru."* (Dukes et al. 2011a: 147).

²⁰ Extracts of some of the conducted interviews are given in the appendix I.

2.5.1.4. Spiritual Camps

In March 1970, Swami Chinmayananda had suffered a major heart attack while conducting a *yajña*. This forced him to abandon all vigorous activities. So he decided that rather than travelling around and going to people, the people could come to him. Therefore he thought of organizing spiritual camps.

The first National *Yajña* camp took place in 1972 in Mumbai and twelve years later the First Chinmaya International spiritual camp was held. (Dukes et al. 2011b: 112).

During the two weeks, campers live a twenty-four-hour day immersed in *sādhana* (*spiritual practise*). Swami Chinmayananda also set the schedule for these spiritual camps. However, the schedule may have variations depending on where it is organized and for what purpose. (Dukes et al. 2011b: 147).

A spiritual camp may be considered as retreat from world, to spend some time away from one's daily problems and to contemplate upon one's own self. Participants are advised to try to detached themselves from their routine worldly life and worries and focus more on spiritual matters. Participants are not suppose to leave the camp during its duration.

Swami Chinmayananda once mentioned that the camps are meant to set a person on the path of recreating himself. The camps try to create a healthy situation wherein one can try to deliver oneself from one's own inner weaknesses. Swami Chinmayananda, referring to the spiritual camps, said "*The great maternity ward is open. Come in and deliver yourself from your own ugliness! Come out of the camp fresh and beautiful!*" (Dukes et al. 2011b: 114).

I interviewed a disciple who has attended many spiritual camps. According to her, most important aspect of the camps is that they are held at a special place, which vibrates with spiritual power like Sidhbari (place of Swami Chinmayananda's *samādhi*) or Chinmaya International Foundation (which is situated at the birthplace of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya) or Uttarkashi (which is home to many saints). (Rupa, personal communication, 2014).

The *ācārya* of the camp inaugurates the camp on the first day. He tells the participants about the importance of the place, about the scriptural text, about the timetable and the dos and don'ts to be followed during the camp. The day usually starts with either meditation or *pūjā*. The first class is held from 7 to 8:30 AM followed by breakfast. Group discussions are held at 11:00 AM. A person attending the camp is assigned the task of making a report which is then presented in the evening lecture. The noon hours are meant for lunch and rest. A study class is held from 4:00 to 5:30 PM. After that, participants can go alone for a nature walk and contemplate. Groups are also formed wherein there are discussions on the scriptural text. Those who have to present the report, are found completing it with a few members of the group helping out. At 6:00 there is *pūjā* or *ārṭi* (honouring the deity with light). At 7:00 PM, there is either a class about scriptures or the campers sing *bhajans*. This is followed by report reading and question/answer session. Dinner is usually at 8:30 PM. On the last day, participants can go for sight-seeing. The spiritual camps end with a valedictory programme. (Rupa, personal communication, 2014).

According to interviewed disciples²¹, the spiritual camps provide special space for spiritual studies as they are away from worldly life, its duties and distractions. Disciples get special space for spiritual studies, which allows them an opportunity to be in a contemplative mood for twenty four hours. They get to experience calm, tranquillity and the sense of wholesome being. Disciples have felt that the camps help them to share their life and feelings with other members who have the same aspiration of attaining identification with the Supreme. They come forward to help each other and understand symbiosis.

A disciple sharing her experience in a spiritual camp, said "*I can absorb teachings of Advaita Vedānta at a deeper level and the entire routine of āśrama life with no newspapers, TV or cell phones is highly rejuvenating.*". (Ritu, personal communication, 2014).

I have observed that the ones who have attended the spiritual camps are more closer to each other and are more active in Chinmaya Mission activities.

²¹ Extracts of some of the conducted interviews are given in the appendix I.

2.5.1.5. Regular Vedānta classes

Most Chinmaya Mission centres hold regular classes on *Advaita Vedānta* as well. These classes are taken by the local *ācārya*.

In Chinmaya Mission, Delhi centre conducts regular *Vedānta* classes twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday, from 7:30 - 8:15 AM. These classes are small in number and are meant mainly for disciples who are more devoted to their spiritual studies. The difference of *jñāna yajñas* and regular *Vedānta* classes is that regular *Vedānta* classes are more intimate than *jñāna yajñas* with lesser and more keen disciples attending the classes. There is an interactive session at the end of the class.

Interviewed disciples²² have told that morning classes are most for every students to clear inner doubts and disturbance of the mind. According to one disciple "*regular classes are perhaps meant for advanced students or seekers who have understood the initial teachings, have practiced them and have reached a certain level of spiritual understanding and experience.*"

However my opinion is that these classes are for everyone who want to go into deeper studies of the scriptures.

2.5.1.6. Chinmaya Balvihar

Swami Chinmayananda believed that it would be easier for children to step into life if they were taught noble values. According to the *Brahmacārin Prarthana*, Swami Chinmayananda wanted especially to teach the Hindu children, "*he wanted to show them how glorious their culture is, he wanted to make them feel proud.*" (personal communication, 2014). Therefore a program for children was formed under the name of Balvihar. Under the program children meet once a week at a common place for 90 minutes and are exposed to India's cultural and spiritual heritage, by trained teachers. A typical Balvihar class includes singing

²² Extracts of some of the conducted interviews are given in appendix I.

bhajans, chanting, storytelling and different talks related with Hinduism. (Patchen 1994: 125-129).

In an conversation, a disciple who had enrolled her children in the Balvihar classes, recalled her reasons for taking the decision. She told that she wanted her children to attend the Balvihar classes because she felt the vital need for passing to the young generation an understanding of Hindu philosophy, symbolism and rituals. In the class they studied devotional singing, acting out stories from the scriptures, chanting the *Gītā* and understanding the wisdom of Hindu culture through the medium of storytelling. She also noted that now when her children are grown up (and their children attend the Balvihar), they still recall Sundays as their favourite day of the week. According to her, the program conducted when her children were attending these classes and the program conducted now, have the same essence. (Anita, personal communication, 2013).

Thus, Balvihar classes are aimed at inculcating Hindu religious beliefs and cultural values through a program designed for that purpose.

2.5.1.7. *Chinmaya Yuva Kendra*

A well known slogan used by Swami Chinmayananda was "*The youth are not useless or careless, but used less and cared less.*" Chinmaya Yuva Kendra (CHYK) is a forum that gives attention to the needs of youth, between the ages of thirteen to thirty five years, all over the world. CHYK motto is: "*Harnessing youth potential through dynamic spirituality*". Swami Chinmayananda believed that the study of the scriptures helps young people to become more aware of their potential and therefore can serve better the society. The core activity of CHYK is *Advaita Vedānta* study classes. (Dukes et al 2011a: 136).

In Chinmaya Mission, Delhi they gather together each Sunday in a living room in Swami Nikhilananda's residence to learn and discuss about spirituality under the guidance of Swami Nikhilananda. The atmosphere is quite relaxed and cheerful. Swami Nikhilananda uses a lot of anecdotes and jokes to make the

studies lively and interesting for the youth. They also engage in various cultural activities, as told by two boys with whom I had a small interview.

One had joined the CHYK after going through Balvihar classes. The other boy was introduced to CHYK by his friend and joined CHYK because he wanted to participate in the activities there. They told that CHYK organises and executes cultural, social and spiritual programs. They have been actively participating in Youth Empowerment Programs and cultural performances. The boy who had no contact with Chinmaya Mission before said that the studies have helped him to understand himself better and gain more confidence. (Personal communication, 2013).

It can be said that CHYK is an extension of Swami Chinmayananda's vision to incorporate youth in the fold of *Advaitic* teachings and to encourage them to be positive contributors to the society.

2.5.1.8. Celebration of festivals

In chapter 2.3.3, I have discussed the importance Swami Chinmayananda gave to true *bhakti*. A form of *bhakti* is a celebration of festivals dedicated to a Lord. Traditional Hindu festivals are celebrated in Chinmaya Mission in the original cultural context and disciples are taught about their meaning and importance.

I have attended three main celebrations of Hindu festivals in Chinmaya Mission, Delhi. As per my observations, the main deity to whom the festival is dedicated has a special place on the stage and it is worshipped with Sanskrit mantras. Offerings of milk, *ghee* (purified butter), honey, fruits and flowers are made to the deity. The *pūjā* usually lasts for about one to two hours. Different *bhajans*, *stotras* (hymns) and names of the deity are chanted during this time. In the Delhi centre, Swami Nikhilananda conducts these *pūjās* assisted by *brahmacāris* and long term disciples. For every *pūjā* few disciples are selected (usually two to five) to participate in the *pūjā* on the stage. There is no fix criteria for selecting these disciples but they are usually the ones who are recently married or have had a special event in their life or have made special request. Remaining

disciples sit in the audience. When the *pūjā* ends the disciples have the choice to show their respect to the deity and Swami Nikhilananda and to receive the blessings. This is done by bowing the head at the feet of the deity and Swami Nikhilananda. As mentioned in the chapter 2.5.1.2 this process is symbolic of surrendering one's ego. The *pūjās* are followed by distribution of *prasād* (blessed fruits or sweets) or *langar* (free lunch or dinner served with spiritual fervour).

2.5.2. Other purposes of Chinmaya Mission

Beside the core activities described above, Chinmaya Mission also runs several other programs and projects which can be broadly categorized into: 1) *re-invigorating Indian culture* and 2) *doing social work*. In the next sub-chapters, I have given brief overview of these programs, in order to get more holistic understanding of Chinmaya Mission.

2.5.2.1. Re-invigorating Indian culture

In order to fulfil the second purpose of Chinmaya Mission which is "*re-invigorating Indian culture*", several platforms and forums have been set up which are engaged in imparting a better understanding and promotion of Indian culture and spirituality. As of now, Chinmaya Mission run 80 schools, 8 colleges, 1 international residential school and other educational institutions. These educational institutions follow Chinmaya Vision Program under which they teach the children *Advaita Vedantic* knowledge, Indian culture and patriotism. Additionally there is a residential learning centre for Indian Performing Arts (music and dances of India). Chinmaya Mission also runs the Chinmaya International Foundation (CIF), which is a research centre started by Swami Chinmayananda in accordance with his vision that there should be a centre which forms a bridge between East and West, past and present, science and spirituality, *paṇḍit* (priest) and public. It is a research centre for Sanskrit texts and Indian

Culture. Over the years, the CIF has also hosted a variety of academic programs and has a library with rare books and ancient manuscripts. It has also launched a few internet study programs as E-*Vedānta* and Sanskrit Online course. (Dukes et al. 2011).

2.5.2.2. *Social work*

The third purpose of Chinmaya Mission is "*doing extensive social work*". The mission is engaged in various social service projects for disadvantaged and underprivileged people. Many organizations have been set up in line with this purpose. Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development (CORD) engages in development of rural villages. The basic theme behind its programs is self-empowerment of the villages. The organisation tries to fulfil the health, education and employment needs of the villagers. It has opened schools in different villages which provides free education to the children. The organisation also provides primary healthcare services to the villagers through its dispensaries. A especial program is run for poor rural village women in which they are taught vocational courses to enable them to earn their own living. Different centres and organisations function under CORD to achieve overall objective of development of rural villages. Chinmaya Mission has also set up a hospital which is a modern 200 bed hospital in Bangalore where considerable proportion of services are provided either free cost or at affordable cost. The hospital also provides free immunization to many infants every week. The hospital also has a village centre where many medical services are provided to the villagers along with childcare and education to the poor. For the free education, Chinmaya Mission, has opened two schools by the name Hari Har. These schools have been opened to provide free education to the poor children. These schools also provide vocational training beside academic curriculum. In addition, the mission runs 8 *Pitamaha Sadans* in different states of India. These Sadans provide affordable accommodation to the elderly people. Proper medical care is given to the elderly and main focus is spiritual unfoldment through various spiritual activities. (Dukes et al. 2011).

2.6. Impact on disciples

In this chapter I have studied the effect of these teachings and methods on the disciples of Chinmaya Mission. These disciples are part of the Delhi branch of the Mission. I chose this branch to get a glimpse of the success of the methods of spreading the knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*. I could not reach other branches due to limited time and finances.

Questions that naturally arose are: have the methods helped them learn the scriptures. To further compliment my research, I have tried to know what spiritual growth have disciples experienced and what other benefits have they derived from the knowledge. Before going into the answers to these question, it is important to know as to how the disciples' joined the Mission and what were their reasons for joining the mission.

2.6.1. Reasons for joining the Mission

Different disciples' came to know about the Mission in different ways. Some were introduced by their family or friends. Some came to know about the mission through advertisement in newspapers or social media. There were others who got attracted to the Chinmaya Mission after reading articles or books written by Swami Chinmayananda and after attending a discourse given by any one of the gurus of Chinmaya mission.

The reasons for joining the mission are very personal to each disciple. Some joined because they were undergoing a turmoil or stress in their personal lives and wanted peace. Some joined because they were in a state of despair due to a recent loss of a loved one in the family and were looking for a meaning to life. A disciple said "*when my mother passed away, I was very disturbed. Maybe I loved her too much, I never thought I would need to live without her. And I started wondering, why are we coming to this life, live our life and then just go. Nothing looked permanent. Ultimately we all want something permanent. So those*

questions started bothering me." According to her this state of mind brought her to Chinmaya Mission in the hope to get some answers. In these reasons, an underlying common reason is reflected which is the search for a higher meaning in life.

Interestingly, one disciple told that she has no recollection of why she joined the mission. She said *"this may be a little hard to believe but I have very little memory of the past. The practice of keeping the mind in the present moment has the eventual result of deleting unnecessary files stored in one's memory."*

The disciples were also looking for a qualified guru who could show them spiritual way. They had been searching for a spiritual guide but were apprehensive to attach to any guru before joining Chinmaya Mission because they felt that the institution of a guru had been commercialized in India. There has been lot of cheating happening around the concept where people posing as gurus were manipulating disciples in the name of spirituality. One disciple explained the qualities she was looking in a guru in these words: *"the teacher should be established in the knowledge and he should also have the capacity to teach you the scriptures in a systematic way and take you to that stage where he is, to follow the path what is being showed."* However, when they came to Chinmaya Mission, they found that the swamis of the mission fulfilled the scriptural criteria set forth for a good guru. Perhaps, it can be said that the residential *Vedānta* course (*gurukula*) as discussed in chapter 2.5.1.1, is fulfilling its aim of training individuals to become qualified spiritual teachers.

Once the disciples joined the mission, they also found that the mission had all the practical means and methods in the form of *jñāna yajñas*, spiritual camps, study groups etc. for helping them in their spiritual quest.

A combination of these factors were responsible for the decisions made by the disciples to continue their spiritual journey with Chinmaya Mission.

2.6.2. Disciples' spiritual growth and other benefits

Just like the effectiveness of medicine for killing pain can be found only after the patient takes the medicine and experiences any relief, similarly the effectiveness of teachings and success of the methods of Chinmaya Mission can only be found by studying the spiritual growth and benefits that the disciples have received by following the teachings and methods. It is hard to have any measuring criteria for spiritual growth which is a very subjective experience, therefore I am relying on the information given to me by the disciples. Some disciples have given direct answers on the subject but for others, I had to derive the answers from the complete text of the interview.

The disciples feel that the teachings have made them more clear about the path and the goal that has to be attained. In a disciple's words: "*Advaita Vedānta is path to know that you and God are one. And as well logically I can understand it. The ultimate Goal is more important than the path. There are so many paths, so it is better to finalize the goal first. I would like to reach one day to enlightenment.*". The path to Self-realisation is to listen to the scriptures, contemplate on their meaning and then meditate.

Disciples have told that the teachings have helped them to developed a sense of awareness. They have started appreciating the role of divine in everything and have a feeling of gratitude towards God. They have become more established in the present. The past and the future do not bother them much. Most of the disciples have felt that their lives have transformed at a subtler level. A disciple said: "*the exposure to Vedānta has given me a new and totally different take on life. It is in the nature of a sublime vision. It has changed my values and attitudes. The teachings have gone deep within me. I constantly reflect on what has been heard so that I can be more convinced and so I am more ready to live life in the new way.*"

I have observed that the disciples measure their spiritual growth on the path of Self-realisation by the level of concentration they have achieved in listening, contemplating and meditating on the teachings of the scriptures. The

disciples told that earlier they were unable to concentrate even on the listening part but now contemplation also comes to them naturally. In one disciple's words: *"throughout the day my mind is more or less involved in thinking about [Advaita] Vedānta . The aim for me is thinking, contemplating 24 hours about Vedānta and the teaching."* However, these teachings have to be applied in everyday life, as a disciple explained: *"I have deleted my old files containing my past understanding and replaced them with files containing my new understanding. Then, when I encounter any person or situation my response is according to my new Vedantic vision. Let me tell you, Vedānta is not a dead understanding but something live and fresh which is to be applied from moment to moment in actual life. As one changes or transforms in tune with the teachings, the world and it's beings also change. It is not the other way around."*

Another disciple said that she is able understand the hidden spiritual meaning given in the scriptures with the help of the spiritual master explaining the same. These teachings remain in her mind for longer time and contemplation also takes place. In her words: *"I have come to know of my true nature – that I am not this limited body/mind/intellect equipment which I consider myself to be but I am of the nature of existence/consciousness/bliss. That in myself alone this world arises, remains and dissolves. That this body which I consider to be me is just a part of this world which appears in me. And though myself is the substratum of this whole world, It does not in any way get touched or affected by it."* She also said that her desire to experience the truth has become very strong and she has also started experiencing awareness, a feeling that everything is pure consciousness. She revealed that the practise of contemplation makes her feel blissful.

While interacting with the disciples I found that they were least concerned with magic and mysticism. Their focus was on gaining knowledge through scriptures and applying it to realise the self within.

The disciples have also experienced positive changes in their personality as a result of practicing the teachings. Some feel more confident, some experience more inner strength, some feel a sense of security, some feel that they have gained an ability to deal with stressful situations in a calm way. A disciple told that her

confusion about life and living has gone away and negative emotions like fear, greed, hatred, anger have reduced substantially. All disciple in general have experienced calmness in mind and inner happiness.

However they feel that they have been able to achieve spiritual growth due to the guidance from their guru. A disciple felt a deep sense of gratitude for Swami Chinmayananda, who not only taught and inspired so many people but also started a great lineage *guru - śiṣya paramparā* in Chinmaya Mission which helps in continuing his work for the generations to come.

Conclusion

Swami Chinmayananda made extensive contributions to Hinduism and also tried to develop it as a world religion. He attempted to revitalize Hinduism and popularize the philosophical knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta* amongst the contemporary Hindus, who were more concerned with ritualistic practices without knowing their significance.

He **revitalised** Hinduism by formulating systematic methods (*jñāna yagñā*, regular *Vedānta* classes, study groups, spiritual camps, residential *Vedānta* course (*gurukula*) etc.) to teach the philosophical knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*.. He also simplified the teachings by inventing the BMI chart so that the disciples who have not studied *Advaita Vedānta* in depth, could still understand the complex teachings of this philosophy. He explained to his disciples the meaning of *bhakti* in *Advaita Vedantic* sense. He also taught spiritual practises (*japa*, meditation etc.) as necessary tools to develop the concentration of mind and develop a right attitude to approach and apply the knowledge of the scriptures. These ways and means helped the disciples to assimilate the knowledge and apply it to their lives.

Swami Chinmayananda also tried to **spread** the philosophical knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*. Therefore he undertook extensive travels, national and international, to give spiritual discourses. He also reached to his devotees on a daily basis by writing letters to them which contained his teachings. He authored many books and commentaries on the scriptures. He found the Chinmaya Mission and started various programs to reach different sections of the society, with stress on reaching to the younger generation in particular (Chinmaya Balvihar,

Chinmaya Yuva Kendra, Chinmaya Vision program). In order his Mission to be continued after he has passed away, Swami Chinmayananda established *gurukula* (Hindu seminary) to train the desiring disciples to become *brahmacāris*, who may become swamis later on. Thus, he formed the Chinmaya lineage for his work to be continued in the times to come.

As of now, **Chinmaya Mission** has 350 centres worldwide. These centres are headed by *brahmacāris* and swamis who have been trained in the *gurukulas*. The Mission is applying different ways and methods that were formulated by Swami Chinmayananda to revitalise and spread the knowledge of *Advaita Vedānta*. Additionally, Chinmaya Mission continues to run the programs started by Swami Chinmayananda. These programs are serving as tools to spread the philosophical knowledge and to reinvigorate Indian culture. The Mission centres celebrate Hindu festivals in the traditional manner and educate the disciples about the meaning and importance of these festivals. Keeping pace with modern technology, the Mission uses social media and mass media to establish a wider outreach.

However, I have observed a contradiction and limitation to the Mission's statement which states "*To provide individuals from any background the wisdom of Vedānta ...*". Since the mode of teachings is English language and most of the publications are also in English language, the teachings cannot reach to individuals of every background as English speaking population is only a fraction of the total population of India.

Based on my observation and interviews with the disciples of Chinmaya Mission, Delhi, I conclude that the systematic way of spreading and revitalising the *Advaita Vedantic* knowledge has helped these disciples. According to interviewed disciples, they have found their path of spirituality and have comprehended the meaning of scriptures. They have started applying the *Advaita Vedantic* knowledge in their daily life. Therefore, they are more established in the present and have experienced additional benefits like peace, calmness of mind, confidence, inner strength and the like.

In order to reach more comprehensive conclusion, further study and research are needed into Swami Chinmayananda's doctrine and wider contact with other branches of the Chinmaya Mission has to be established.

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Resümee

Hinduismi ajalugu ulatub kaugesse minevikku ja seega on läbinud nii tõusu- kui ka mõõnaperioode. Ajalugu on näidanud, et hinduismi langusajal on leidunud reformiste, kelle sooviks on hinduismi taastamine niinimetatud "kuldsele ajale". Šaṅkara oli üheks nendest reformistidest, kelle sooviks oli taaselustada hinduism, juhtides tähelepanu rituaalide tühisusesse ja ülistades ning õpetades pühakirjadest tulenevaid tõelisi teadmisi, mis vastavad *advaita vedānta* filosoofiale. Mogulitest imperaatorite saabumisega aga tabas hinduismi järjekordne langus. Mogulite valitsusajale järgnes Briti impeeriumi asutamine ning hinduismi iseloomustavateks joonteks said sisutühjad rituaalid ja sotsiaalsed pahed nagu *satī*, lapsabielud ja kastipõhine diskrimineerimine. Selline iseloomustus tekitas häbitunnet India intelligentsi ja religioosse eliidi seas. Swami Vivekananda kirjeldas taolist olukorda kui haigust, mille põhjuseks on pühakirjade vähene tundmine (Thapan 2004: xxix). Oli aeg uuteks religioosseteks reformliikumisteks, millised leidsid aset nii enne India iseseisvumise saavutamist kui ka peale. Ka Swami Chinmayananda soovis taaselustada hinduismi ja seega on üheks reformistik. Selleks aga et laiaulatuslikumalt levitada õpetust *advaita vedānta*´st kaasaegsesse ühiskonda, ta rajas hinduistliku spirituaalse organisatsiooni nimega Chinmaya Mission.

Minu uurimustöö objektiks on Swami Chinmayananda töö ja Chinmaya Mission´i tegevus. Olen püstitanud küsimused nagu kuidas Swami Chinmayananda taaselustas, populariseeris ja levitas *advaita vedānta* filosoofiat ning kuidas Chinmaya Mission jätkab antud tegevust kaasaegses hindu ühiskonnas.

Uurimustöö kirjutamisel kasutasin erinevaid meetodeid, et püstitatud küsimustele vastuseid saada. Kuna ma lähenen uurimusobjektile ajaloolise nurga alt siis olen analüüsinud kirjalikke allikaid kui ka audiovideosalvestusi, et mõista Swami Chinmayananda panust *advaita vedānta* filosoofiale ning samuti nimetatud õpetuse populariseerimist. Lisaks, olen osalenud aasta jooksul (2013-2014) Chinmaya Mission'i Delhi keskuses korraldatud üritustel (loengutel, seminaridel, hinduistlike festivalide tähistamistel jne) ning olen suhelnud tihedalt keskuse eestvedajate ja reaalikmetega. Niisiis on töö aluseks ka osalusvaatlus ning intervjuud. Seega, oma töös olen kasutanud metodoloogilist pluralismi, mis seob diakroonilise lähenemise religioonile sünkroonilise uurimusega.

Selleks, et uurimisülesannetele süsteemselt läheneda, olen oma uurimustöö jaotanud kahte ossa. Esimene osa käsitleb hinduismi *advaita vedānta* perspektiivist. Leian, et see on vajalik, et mõista Swami Chinmayananda ja Chinmaya Mission'i olemust. Teine osa sisaldab Swami Chinmayananda visiooni ja missiooni ning Chinmaya Mission'i käsitlemist.

Oma uurimustöö läbiviimisel läbitöötatud materjalide ning erinevate kasutatud meetodite põhjal saan kokkuvõtvalt öelda, et Swami Chinmayananda on aidanud kaasa hinduismi taaselustamisele ning populariseerimisele kaasaegses hindu ühiskonnas, selleks:

- ta töötas välja süsteemsed meetodid (*jñāna yagña*, regulaarsed *vedānta* tunnid, õppegrupid, spirituaalsed laagrid, *gurukula* (*vedānta* kursus) jne),
- ta esitles BMI skeemi, mille ta välja töötas, et lihtsustatud kujul edastada *advaita vedānta* õpetust,
- ta õpetas spirituaalseid meetodeid (*japa*, meditatsioon) ja rõhutas nende vajalikkusest pühakirjade õpetuste omastamisel,
- ta selgitas *bhakti* tähendust *advaita vedānta*likust vaatenurgast.

Selleks, et levitada *advaita vedānta* filosoofiat, Swami Chinmayananda:

- pidas arvukalt religioosseid diskursuseid, mida ta andis nii mööda Indiat ringi reisides kui ka väljaspool Indiat (ühtekokku 26 välisringreisi),

- ta kirjutas raamatuid ning kommentaare pühakirjadele,
- ta pidas tihedat kirjavahetust oma järgijatega,
- ta pani aluse Chinmaya Mission'i organisatsioonile ja moodustas programme, et paremini jõuda erinevatesse ühiskonnakihtidesse rõhuasetusega lastele ja noortele mõeldud tegevustele (*Chinmaya Balvihar, Chinmaya Yuva Kendra, Chinmaya Vision program*),
- ta asutas hinduistliku seminari (*gurukula*), õpetamaks neid järgijaid, kes soovivad jätkata tegevust õpetajana (*brahmacāri'd* ja *swami'd*) Chinmaya Mission'is ja seeläbi kindlustades Chinmaya liini jätkusuutlikuse.

Chinmaya Mission'il on antud hetkel 350 keskus, nendest 50 asuvad väljaspool Indiat. Chinmaya Mission'i tegevust jätkavad *brahmacāri'd* ja *swami'd*, kes on lõpetanud eelnimetatud *gurukula*. Mission jätkab Swami Chinmayananda poolt väljatöötatud meetodite ja programmide tegevust. Lisaks Mission'i keskustes tähistatakse hinduistlike festivale traditsioonilisel viisil, et õpetada liikmetele nende tähendust. Oma tegevuste teavitamisel ja levitamisel kui ka õpetamisel, kasutab Chinmaya Mission sotsiaal- ja massmeediat ja muid moodsaid tehnoloogilisi võimalusi.

Chinmaya Mission on märkinud oma eesmärgiks "tagada *vedānta* õpetus igale indiviidile olenemata tema tagapõhjast (päritolust) ...". Minu poolt läbi viidud vaatlustulemuste põhjal võin aga öelda, et antud eesmärk ei vasta tegelikkusele kuna õppetöö viiakse läbi inglise keeles. Samuti on enamus Chinmaya Mission'i poolt välja antud publikatsioone inglise keeles. Seega ei jõua see õpetus igale indiviidile olenemata tema tagapõhjast kuna vaid väike hulk hindusid räägib sellisel tasemel inglise keeles, et Mission'i tegevustes osaleda.

Läbiviidud intervjuude analüüsi põhjal võin järeldada, et Chinmaya Mission'i Delhi keskuses õpitu on järgijatel aidanud mõistmaks *advaita vedānta* likke õpetusi ja sealttulenevalt saanud endale spirituaalse eesmärgi (*self-realisation*), mille poole püüelda. Samuti kasutavad nad antud õpetusi igapäevalistes tegevustes ning oskavad olla hetkes ja seeläbi kogevad rahu, tasakaalu, julgust, sisemist jõudu ja muud sarnast.

Minu uurimustööd tuleb jätkata, nii Swami Chinmayananda doktriini uurimisel kui ka erinevate Chinmaya Mission'i keskuste tegevuste analüüsimisel, selleks, et jõuda laiaulatuslikematele järeldustele.

Appendixes

Appendix I

Interviews

I have conducted several interviews with many members of Chinmaya Mission, Delhi branch.

Most of the interviews include questions such as:

- Why a member became a part of Chinmaya Mission?
- What does a member think of the different practical means (such as *jñāna yajña*, study groups, spiritual camps, regular *Vedānta* classes) provided by Chinmaya Mission?
- How a member evaluates his spiritual growth and what other benefits he has gained?

In Chinmaya Mission, Delhi, the most profound scriptural study course is Regular *Vedānta* class. This class happens twice a week in the early morning and is expected to be attended by members who are very dedicated to their spiritual studies. Approximately eleven disciples attend regularly the classes and are also the most active members in the Chinmaya Mission (Delhi). Out of the eleven disciples I conducted formal interviews with six disciples.

The interviewees have been part of Chinmaya Mission around 6-9 years and are females in their mid-forties and fifties (there are only two men who attend Regular *Vedānta* classes and they were not available for interview).

These interviews have been conducted in the Mission itself or in their respective homes in a more relaxed atmosphere. The time and place was decided by interviewees.

Additionally, I have interviewed a few other members, if members, mentioned above, could not provide their insight to some questions. For example I wanted to know about study classes for youth and therefore I interviewed two young boys or I wanted to know more about Residential *Vedānta* course (*gurukula*), therefore I interviewed Swami Nikhilananda Saraswati, Regional Head of Chinmaya Mission in New Delhi and its centres in Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad, *brahmacārin* Prarthana.

Extracts from some of the conducted interviews:

Sangeeta

Sangeeta is in her late forties. She is from a Maharashtra *Brahmin* family and married with Punjabi *Ksatria*. She is a mother of an adult son. Sangeeta has BA in Social Science. She is currently working as an accountant in a family company. Her husband is not particularly spiritual. Her parents followed more ritual path.

She has been part of Chinmaya Mission, 6 years.

Why did you become a member of Chinmaya Mission?

I live in Defence Colony which is 10 min from this place. I'm living there last 25 years but I never thought of coming here. It was in 2006 when my mother past away and I was very disturbed. Then I started wondering - we are coming to this life, live our life and then just go. Nothing looks permanent. Ultimately we all want something permanent. Those questions started bothering me and I started reading many books. Once I got to know that Ramana Maharishi has a ashram in Delhi, and Swamiji [Swami Nikhilananda] from Chinmaya Mission will give *pravachan* on the commemoration of Ramana Maharishi birthday. I went there,

and heard his *pravachan*. The moment I started hearing, I knew - this is exactly I am looking for, which I had not found in any books. I can't express to you, how I felt exactly at that time. I had just such a wonderful feeling inside me.

Do you know that at that time the idea about guru was very funny, I used to think that guru will put his hand on me, and I will be enlighten or he will give me some mantra, and I will be fine. But now, I think differently. When we look at the scriptures, then they talk about knowledge and this is the path you need to follow. *Advaita Vedānta* is the path to know that you and God are one. And as well logically I can understand it. The ultimate goal is more important than the path. There are so many paths, so it is better to finalize the goal first. I would like to reach one day to enlightenment.

But guru has to be there. You may read a lot of books but it could be that you don't understand much. Gurus teaching many books but the messages is the same - know yourself! I'm interested in what these text are teaching, it is helpful for my *sadhana*.

What do you think about different study methods in Chinmaya Mission?

Jnana yagñā

Jnana yagñās are very important for me. In Hindu tradition, a lot of emphasis is given to listening, contemplation and then focused meditation. I feel listening should go on till there is clear picture of the entire subject. One should be able to clearly contemplate on what is taught. Listening has helped me drop unnecessary action, thinking and talk. It has also helped me in understanding the whole idea in clear way. Till there are questions which come in my mind about the subject we study, I know I have to continue with listening.

And along with listening, contemplation began naturally. As the interest rose, I started thinking more and more about the subject. Throughout the day my mind is more or less involved in thinking about *Vedānta*. The aim for me is thinking, contemplating 24 hours about *Vedānta* and its teaching. I am not very

involved with the texts that are taught but I am trying to grasp the essence of what is being taught.

Contemplation is must, not only after the *pravachan*, but it should continuously be practiced. Practice comes when one is 100% convinced about the validity. It only happens with time and efforts and I am still working on it.

Study groups

Study groups is very good for beginners. They get more involved. The hesitation about the subject is removed because of regular discussions. They learn to chant well. Study groups help the new comers to devote time to spirituality.

Spiritual camps

I always look forward to spiritual camps. There are many reasons. The most important reason is that I can be in 24 hours in the contemplative mood. And therefore the subject is studied with focused attention. It also good to be away from the daily life. It one can have a taste of *sannyasa āśramaa*. This is completely my opinion. Each camp has helped me progress in the *sadhana*. Each time I felt I have returned back more sincere towards my *sadhana*.

Initially it may have felt as though I am getting a chance to be away from daily chores but recent times, it has helped me to become a better human being. The camps also help in understanding the symbiosis and each member comes help the other.

Regular Vedānta classes

I enjoy the morning classes. The knowledge conveyed is very profound. It can be understand by very subtle and sharp intellect and only guru can open up the hidden meanings of the [scriptural] texts. And then these meanings start sinking on you, slowly.

I like attending in various programs and helping out other Mission members. This is my gratitude to express towards Mission. In life we do some or the other activity. Simply, being engaged its activities makes me happy.

How do you evaluate your spiritual growth and what other benefits you have gained?

The *pravachans* have helped me tremendously. A lot of confusion about life and living has gone away. A lot of negative emotions have reduced. Like fear, greed, jealousy, hatred, anger have reduced. Somehow it feels very low if I find such feelings in me. As well I can face people with confidence.

But there was as well resistance in me also, why should I became *dharmic*. It's not easy to leave all ego, pride, anger etc.

The knowledge what I have gained have helped me to transform completely. There is always a feeling of gratitude towards God. The past and future does not bother much. Heart is mostly satisfied.

Most importantly, Kelli, I found a purpose. I know this calmness in mind is positive sign that I am on right path - me and God are one.

Neeraj

Neeraj is around middle aged Indian woman. She comes from educated and well-off family. Neeraj is married with government officer. Her two children, son and daughter, have higher education, and are married. They live on their own. Neeraj has a master degree in Spanish language and is teaching it in the university. His husband has been attending some Chinmaya Mission lectures with her, if he is in town. Her parents follow another guru.

She has been part of Chinmaya Mission around 9 years.

Why did you come a member of Chinmaya Mission?

I came to know about Chinmaya Mission through newspaper article. This article was written by Swamiji [present head of Delhi branch, Chinmaya Mission] and somehow the text touched my heart. It was 9 years ago.

But before, I may say, that I had been searching [suitable spiritual path] a long time. I used to go to the temples, and questions like, to whom we are praying and what are we doing, came to my mind. Also I have searched that something in

Buddhism and some other spiritual organisations but I didn't stay longer than a year. Chinmaya Mission is just the right place for me.

What do you think about different study methods in Chinmaya Mission?

Jnana yagña

I have attended many *yagñas*. I have enjoyed so much the *yagñas* about *Bhagavadgita*. It has such a beautiful and fascinating teachings. And I have very much enjoyed different *yagñas* about *Upanisads*. *There have been so many wonderful, wonderful pravachans.*

Study group

Yes, I have attended study group. One study group was with friends. We would discuss the lessons. It was a great learning experience. These courses give the main concepts of *Vedanta* in a very systematic way.

Spiritual camps

I love spiritual camps! I have attended so many camps. I think that during the 9 years I have attended all of the camps! I think that the most important aspect of the camp is that first and foremost we go to a special place, which is vibrating with spiritual power like Sidhbari, where we have Gurudev's [Swami Chinmayananda] samadhi or Chinmaya International Foundation which is the birthplace of *Sankara* or Uttarkashi, which is home to so many saints. Also we study there with full focus and concentration since we are free from worldly duties and distractions. I think that this constant study and contemplation with single pointed focus cannot happen in our worldly life. Also I like that we, seekers, stay during this time together and share the same aspiration of attaining identification with our Supreme True Self. And, that is the place where we can share as well our feelings.

Regular Vedānta classes

In the morning we come with a more quiet, *sattvic* mind and the group is smaller. Also we study some very beautiful texts and we can ask questions. Sometimes in the morning lessons, Swamiji answers the question what has been in my mind. These sort of things have happened many times. As well many times, when I have been in a difficult situation, then the answers come during the lecture.

How do you evaluate your spiritual growth and what other benefits you have gained?

Chinmaya Mission teachings have given a purpose to my life. They have shown me the goal of life as also the way to reach that goal.

Kelli, with the help of spiritual master who is explaining these most profound texts, I am able to comprehend the deep spiritual meaning that lies hidden within the words. The message these texts convey is so subtle that one has to listen many times even. After the class the teachings remain strongly in my mind for some time and also contemplation takes place. Many times there are points which touch me very deeply. The only drawback is that, the daily activities, I am involved with, distract my mind and I am not able to contemplate as much as is required in order to become firm in this spiritual knowledge.

The knowledge one gains after studying the *Upanisads*, the *Bhagavadgita* and other texts of saints and sages [...] can never be gained by any other means. Through them I have come to know of my true nature – that I am not this limited body/mind/intellect equipment which I consider myself to be but I am of the nature of existence/consciousness/bliss. That in myself alone this world arises, remains and dissolves. That this body which I consider to be me is just a part of this world which appears in me. And though myself is the substratum of this whole world, It does not in any way get touched or affected by it.

There is no doubt that this truth has to be then experienced and a lot of contemplation (*mananam*) is required which will then lead to meditation or *nidhidhyasana* and then the final abidance in the truth. However, without knowing the path how can one ever think of walking on it? Also to understand the

scriptures is impossible without a guru. At Chinmaya Mission it became possible to study the scriptures at the feet of a Guru.

Over the years the understanding of the truth revealed in the scriptures is becoming more and more clear and the desire to experience the truth is so very, very strong.

Although, we are still entangled with the world, we can learn the knowledge. Sometimes I feel how the truth is entering - the awareness, and that everything is pure consciousness. It is blissful. But I still have to work on with it and to contemplate more. But I suppose that things happen when they must happen.

Nandita

Nandita is around forty years old Indian woman. She is single and lives together with her mother and brother. She has higher education in Literature. At the moment she is not working. Nandita goes to the mission together with her Mom.

She joined Chinmaya Mission 7,5 years ago.

Why did you become a member of Chinmaya Mission?

I had very difficult times in family. I prayed for God, how do you want me to survive. I was watching many TV lectures by different gurus but you don't know whom to trust. And I was reading many books. Many masters have come to me through books. Especially masters from *Adavaita Vedānta*. Its philosophy makes sense, it clicks with me.

Once I got a present from my aunt. It was a book with comments by Gurudev [Swami Chinmayananda]. When I started to read this book then his words got connected with me. I wanted to read that book slowly, to enjoy each word. Then around six months later, I saw an ad on a paper that Swamiji [Swami Nikhilananda Saraswati] will talk about *Bhagavadgita*.

What do you think about different study methods in Chinmaya Mission?

Jnana yagñas

For me being part of the *jnana yagña* is like being part of a great event in which the energy generated by the collective study of the scriptures, automatically uplifts each and everyone who is part of it and also purifies the subtle consciousness of the environment.

Study group

Study groups like more informal smaller groups and more interactive. It is a good tool for continuing the studies. It has helped me clearing some doubts and as well sharing my ideas.

Spiritual camps

Spiritual camps are out of this world! Literally I feel that when I am there then I am in a different space and world. I have been to three spiritual camps. Two to Sidhbari and one in Goa. Kelli, for me, going for these camps, was like crossing a barrier, I never thought that I will be able to go for them. Because of my health problems and other issues. It feels like it all happened due to grace of God. Everything was taken care of by some power. Spiritual studies were very intensive but we had a lot of fun also. The whole camp energy is so positive. It really helps me to open up and connect to people. I really hope that can go for the next one also.

Regular Vedānta classes

These are my favourite! The texts Swamiji is doing are just amazing, and I am so grateful to him. As without him I have not been able to study or even understand the texts. His insights and teachings are so deep and thorough.

Pūjās and Festivals -- In Chinmaya Mission we celebrate all the important Indian festivals with the traditional *pūjā*. For us it is a good way to be

connected to our culture and tradition. Even the new year *pūjā* every year with Swamiji is such an auspicious way to begin the new year.

Balvihar Summer Camp -- It is such a joy and fun to be part of them, and every year I look forward to be able to attend them on all days. The co-ordinators are so talented, dedicated and hard working. The atmosphere is so pure. The children have so much fun, yet learn so many things in such a short time.

How do you evaluate your spiritual growth and what other benefits you have gained?

For me the most important benefit I have gained is to be blessed with a great spiritual teacher. For a seeker this is an important step as the teacher gives the right direction and focus to one's study. I feel deep love and gratitude for Swami Chinmayananda. He not only taught and inspired so many people himself to study the scriptures, but started a great lineage in the *guru - śiṣya parampara* at the Chinmaya Mission, which by his grace continues to bless so many seekers all over the world. He has given the access to this great treasure of knowledge, which gives a chance to know the purpose of one's life.

And Swamiji' is an ideal teacher who loves teaching. For us he selects the texts in a systematic way and clear and simple way. Whatever be our level he listens to us and clears our doubts. I just love attending all his classes. They give so much joy and peace and I feel so much nearer to my Self and even the goal seems attainable.

There is a long way to go but when I am comparing myself from the time I had started attending the classes, there has definitely been some progress. I have become calmer and more accepting. The sense of awareness has deepened. I am able to appreciate the play of the divine in many small things all around. And generally I have the idea in what direction I am moving and to what attain.

I find myself more evolved and have become more independent psychologically. I feel a little more empowered and confident and stronger. For example, I got assignment to do public speaking, twice, which I never thought I would be able to do. There are many other small things that I was not confident to

do, but here [Chinmaya Mission] I have always been encouraged to be part of all the activities. And I receive a lot of love. Also I have met so many good and helpful people, who are so dedicated and work with so much devotion and teamwork. In fact, because of I am attending all the activities then I am always in the company of good people, and there is hardly any time to interact with others.

To think of, I see such a change in my life, what I was then and now... I used to be so shy but now I have changed. I have gained so much confidence. I feel protected, supported. Grace is there. I have handled even many stressful situations, calmly... It is the blessings of the gurus.

Ritu

Ritu is around 50 years old Indian women. She is single and lives alone. She have had very high position as taxation officer in the government. Currently she is totally dedicated to the Mission activities. Her father was following the path of *Adavaita Vedānta*.

Ritu has been member of the Chinmaya Mission in the last 8 years.

Why did you become a member of Chinmaya Mission?

I had been working for the government for the last 20 years, I worked in the in tax department, as a commissioner. I was in duty almost 24 hours, or at least thinking about work. But there was this desire in me, from a very young age that I wanted to study *Adavaita Vedānta*, I wanted to follow the path of spirituality.

Therefore when I was growing older, I suddenly started realizing that I need to change the direction of my life. And I started intensively study scriptures. I read from the scriptures that you must find the teacher. And I was wondering where should I find? I had read as well in the scriptures that the teacher should be established in the knowledge and he should also have the capacity to teach you the scriptures in a systematic way and take you to that stage where he is, to follow the path what is being showed.

One day I got to introduced to Chinmaya Mission by my neighbour who worked for them (paid job) and who is now as well active member. So, I visited a lecture. And after few months attending the lectures I became convinced that the Chinmaya Mission is a right place for me and the Guru is the person who can teach me the knowledge. So I started to attend all of the activates in Chinmaya Mission.

What do you think about different study methods in Chinmaya Mission?

Jnana yagñas

Attending the *jnana yagñas* is very important. While you are listening the discourses then slowly the knowledge should affect you and transfer you so deeply that you come to realisation that whatever I am doing, studying the scriptures is the most important. So in that way if you are studying the knowledge and the teacher is repeatedly saying that there can be nothing better than this in the entire world and once you gain this, you will be in the state of supreme happiness, you will be free from all your sorrow.

Study groups

The purpose of the study group is that likeminded people can come together and revise. The system in the study groups is simple. We fellow certain order, then take the book, read the paragraph and give our own understanding and later we all give our input. So, the concept will come very clear. That study groups help your spiritual studies, the urge to run around goes away. The knowledge slowly becomes more established in you, becomes part of your system. Convictions what you earlier may have had, start dropping off. And you start living by the convictions which are taught in the scriptures. And so your life slowly transforms.

Spiritual camps

The spiritual camps are a wonderful opportunity to get away from the demands and tensions of worldly life and experience calm and tranquillity. I can

absorb teachings of *Advaita Vedānta* at a deeper level and the entire routine of *āśrama* life with no newspapers, TV or cell phones is highly rejuvenating. Camps give an environment for absorbing the teachings and I feel that the teachings have transformed me at a subtle level.

Regular Vedanta classes

Morning classes are a must for every serious student. One of the things which I found is very common with other devotees is that when we go to the morning class. Any of the students who is attending the class regularly if they come to the class with some sort of doubt or being worried, when the class ends that particular disturbance goes away.

How do you evaluate your spiritual growth and what other benefits you have gained?

The exposure to *[Advaita] Vedānta* has given me a new and totally different take on life. It is in the nature of a sublime vision. It has changed my values and attitudes. And the teachings have gone deep within me. I constantly reflect on what has been heard so that I can be more convinced and so I am more ready to live life in the new way. To me, *Vedānta* is the path to goodness, inner and outer prosperity and above all to full freedom, joy and enlightenment.

I have deleted my old files containing my past understanding and replaced them with files containing my new understanding. Now, when I encounter any person or situation my response is according to my new *Vedantic* vision. Let me tell you, *Vedanta* is not a dead understanding but something live and fresh which is to be applied from moment to moment in actual life. As one changes or transforms in tune with the teachings the world and its beings also change. It is not the other way around.

Guru – Śiṣya relationship

The transfer of knowledge in *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy takes place from a knowledgeable and realized master to a worthy and desiring disciple. The teacher (master) is called a guru and the student (disciple) is called a *śiṣya*.

Guru is described as comprising of "*gu*" which means darkness or ignorance of the highest reality and "*ru*" which means removal of the ignorance. Thus disciple is believed to be in ignorance of the absolute reality and "guru" is someone who helps the disciple to realize the absolute reality. John Mitchiner (1991: 10) stresses that guru is the one who has already reached the goal of *Advaita Vedānta*, who has seen the vision of God and realized his own nature as divine. Guru is the enlightened master who holds within himself the key to unlock this experience for his disciples, and who acts as the guide to others on the path.

In a famous Sanskrit poem, *Vivekachudamani*, which is attributed to Ādi Śaṅkara, the guru is described someone who is "*well-versed in the scriptures, sinless, unaffiliated by desires, a full knower of the Supreme, calm as the fire that has burned up its fuel, a bondless ocean of mercy that needs no cause to express, and an intimate friend to those who have surrendered unto him.*" (Chinmayananda 1997: 25).

Advaita Vedānta emphasizes that the guru should be one with Brahman, which means that he is not just a physical entity. Guru is like guiding force within every seeker, he is ever-present. Therefore guru's physical or subtle form manifests solely for the benefit of the disciple. (CM3 2011: 75-76).

In *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, verse I, II: 12 prescribes the following qualities for the guru:

- ✓ The master should be versed in the Vedas. He should have knowledge of the Vedas and should understand the meaning conveyed in the Vedas.

- ✓ He should be established in the Brahman. Thus, the verse declares that the master should have direct and personal experience of the eternal truth and should be established in it within himself.

These two qualities should exist in a master simultaneously for him to be a true preceptor.

Śiṣya is one who is devoted to the guru, implicitly follows the guru's teachings, and serves the guru for the sole purpose – to go beyond *saṃsāra* (the cycle of births and deaths) and attain Self- realization.

In Hinduism, a lot of focus has been given to the potential of the guru and the deservingness or worthiness of a *śiṣya*. While it is important that the guru has true knowledge and experience, it is equally or even more important that the *śiṣya* is worthy of receiving that knowledge that is considered to be the highest in nature.

In *Munḍaka Upaniṣad* (verse I,II: 12) prescribes the following qualities for the *śiṣya*:

- ✓ He should be aspiring for true knowledge of the Eternal.
- ✓ He should be mindful of the fruits of action.
- ✓ He should be conscious of what is eternal and what is not eternal and realize that everything in this world is changing, nothing in this world is eternal. Hence, nothing eternal can be achieved through worldly actions.

By going through a conscious process of analyzing the world of actions and its fruits, he should have acquired freedom from all desires. Desires here refer to desires of the world which is not eternal. Desire for the knowledge of eternal is not negated in this verse.

- ✓ He should approach the preceptor (guru) with sacrificial fuel in his hand. Sacrificial fuel here refers to an offering to be made by the *śiṣya*.

The verse does not require the *śiṣya* to take any gifts or money to the master for acquiring knowledge. But only puts a requirement of taking sacrificial fuel. An explanation of this requirement is given by Swami Chinmayananda. He explains that in olden days, *śiṣyas* would approach a guru by carrying a bundle of

fuel as a symbol of the disciple's readiness to surrender totally to the guru and tune himself through continuous and tireless service. The fuel symbolized the disciples' declaration that he was coming to the Guru only after burning all his negativities, animal tendencies, egoistic vanities and foolish attachment to the sense world" (Thapan, 2004: 157).

Few more qualities of a good disciple are given in *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (verse I, II: 13):

- ✓ The student must approach the master with respect.

The relationship between the master and disciple is such that the master gives the Knowledge of the eternal truth and the disciple receives such knowledge. Thus the receiver should approach the giver with respect.

- ✓ The mind of the disciple should be at rest.

A restless mind cannot concentrate and retain what is being taught. Hence a peaceful mind is needed to absorb the knowledge.

The senses of the disciple should be subdued. It is necessary for the disciple to have subdued senses to achieve freedom from worldly desires as required in Verse I, II, 12 of *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. If the senses are not subdued, they will hanker for sense objects thus giving rise to new worldly desires. If the disciple has worldly desires, his mind will hanker for fulfilling those desires and will not concentrate on acquiring knowledge of the eternal truth which is more subtle. Thus the verse declares that the disciple should have subdued senses.

The relationship between a guru and a *śiṣya* has been accorded a very high status in Hinduism and in *Advaita Vedānta* in particular. The spiritual relationship between guru and *śiṣya* is similar to that of a parent and child. Parents give the child life, but the guru gives the disciple freedom from life and death by guiding him to realize his own true nature. Thus, it is even said that the disciple can never repay the guru for his debt. (CM 3 201: 76).

Guru – Śiṣya paramparā

The guru phenomenon stretches far back into the distant past of Hinduism, and is one of the cornerstones of continuity within the religion. The guru is an enlightened teacher and passes on the knowledge to his followers to gain

enlightenment. In this way, the teaching is handed down across generations. Therefore the knowledge and insight which he has gained from his own teacher, who in turn gained it from his teacher, and so on, forms a continuous line of succession. In this way a guru can often trace his line of teaching back through successive teachers to the original, often divine, imparter of the teaching. This constitutes what is called the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, the lineage of guru-disciple succession, which helps to authenticate the guru within his own tradition. (Mitchiner 1991: 10).

Thus, a continuous line of gurus and *śiṣyas* forms a lineage. The lineage is seen as akin to a spiritual family tree in the spiritual world. As mentioned in the sub-chapter of *Advaita Vedānta*, Chinmaya Mission belongs to the order of the *Daśanāmis Sannyāsīs*, founded by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. It belongs to the lineage and traditions of the *Sringeri Maṭha* in south India.

Let us be Hindus

(Extract of the Swami Chinmayananda's speech)

A Hindu swami to talk. A Hindu temple for a background. A Hindu audience, and the subject for discussion: "Let Us Be Hindus". Strange! It sounds like a ridiculous paradox and a meaningless contradiction. I can very well see that you are surprised at the audacity of this swami!

It has become a new fashion with the educated Hindu to turn up his nose and sneer in contempt at the very mention of his religion in any discussion. No doubt, Hinduism has come to mean nothing more than a bundle of sacred superstitions, or a certain way of dressing, cooking, eating, and so on. Our gods have fallen to the mortal level of administrative officers at whose altars the faithful Hindu might pray and get special permits for the things he desires, that is, if he pays the required fee to the priest.

This degradation is not the product of any accidental and sudden historical upheaval. For two hundred years, Hinduism has remained an unwanted orphan without any patronage from the state and with little encouragement from the rich. Once upon a time, the learner philosophers were rightly the advisers of the state. But then the quality of the advisers class (*brāhmaṇa*) and the ruler class (*kṣatriya*) deteriorated. By slowly putrefying themselves in the leprous warmth of luxury and power, they have taken us to the regrettable stage in which we find ourselves now.

At the present state of moral, ethical, and cultural degradation in our country, to totally dispose of religion would be making our dash to ruin even quicker. However decadent our religion may be, it is far better than having none at all. My proposal is that the wise thing for us would be to try and bring about a renaissance of Hinduism, so that under its greatness - proven through many centuries - we may come to grow into the very heights of culture and civilization that was ours in the historical past.

Hinduism is not this external show that we have learned to parade about in our daily life. Hinduism is a science of perfection. There is in it an answer to every individual, social, national, or international problem.

The *Upaniṣads* declare in unmistakable terms that, in reality, man - at the peak of his achievement - is God himself. He is advised to live his day-to-day experiences in life in such a systematic and scientific way that, hour by hour, he is consciously cleansing himself of all the encrustation of imperfections that have gathered to conceal the beauty and divinity of the true Eternal personality in him, The methods by which an individual can consciously purify and evolve by his self-effort to regain the status of his true nature - is the content of Hinduism.

During these days of the *Upaniṣad jñāna yajña*, we shall try to discover the eternal happiness and bliss that is the succulent essence of all true religions. In the light of the principles of Truth declared in the *Upaniṣad*, we shall try to get at the scientific significance of the various practices that are considered part of our religion. In the spirit of communal living for these 1000 days, we shall come to discover the science of Perfection, the true essence of Hinduism.

Let us know what Hinduism is! Let us take an honest oath for ourselves, not only for our own sake, but for the sake of the entire world; that we shall, - when once we are convinced of the validity of the eternal Truth - try honestly to live as consistently as possible the values advocated by this ancient and sacred religion.

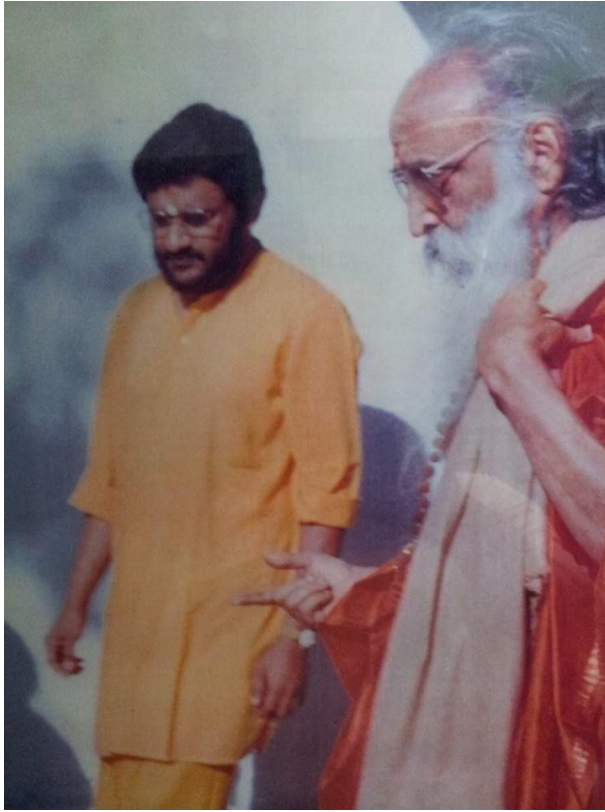
Let us be Hindus, and thus build up a true Hindustan, peopled with thousands of Śaṅkara, hundreds of Buddhas, and dozens of Vivekanandas!" (Krishnakumar 2011: 111-119).

Pledge of the Chinmaya Mission

"We stand as one family, bound to each other with love and respect.
We serve as an army, courageous and disciplined, ever ready to fight against all
low tendencies and false values, within and without us.
We live honestly, the noble life of sacrifice and service, producing more than we
consume and giving more than we take.
We seek the Lord's grace to keep us on the path of virtue, courage, and wisdom.
May Thy grace and blessings flow through us, to the world around us.
We believe that the service of our country is the service of the Lord of lords, and
devotion to the people is the devotion to the supreme Self.
We know our responsibilities, give us the abilities and courage to fulfil them.
Om Tat Sat!"

Pictures

Source: Chinmaya Mission



Swami Chinmayanda (right) and Swami Nikhilananda Saraswati



Some of the graduates of gurukula. Swamis forming the Chinmaya lineage



Jñāna yajña and down Balvihar class in Chinmaya Mission Delhi centre.



Diwali puja

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Mina, Kelli Kaarep

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Swami Chinmayananda, his Vision and the Mission,

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