

BOOK REVIEW

Meera Grimes, ED.: *Aphorisms of Masquism: The Wisdom of the Fundamental Grammar of Life and a Religion for Democracy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK, 2017.

Aphorisms of Masquism: The Wisdom of the Fundamental Grammar of Life and a Religion for Democracy is a work of Swami R. Vaidyanathan (1913-1990). Swami R. Vaidyanathan (Remaji) was a spiritual teacher and philosopher from India. In the 1950s, Swami wrote this philosophical treatise *Aphorisms of Masquism*, which remained unpublished during his lifetime. Meera Grimes, a disciple of Swamiji, collected the manuscript and organized and edited it in the present book form. For this brilliant effort, she deserves to be congratulated.

Aphorisms of Masquism is an original work that presents the author's philosophy of Masquism in an aphoristic manner. The whole work consists of nine aphorisms that the author has dealt with in three chapters of the book. The author here provides a detailed commentary on the aphorisms. Besides this major part of the text, two additional sections on the benefits and significance of the theory of Masquism have been added by the editor in the book as an appendix, without which the proper understanding of the text would have been a very difficult task. The most interesting portion of the text is the part where the editor has given a beautiful foreword and a fruitful Preamble. Meera Grimes here not only has successfully introduced the author to the readers but also has provided her account of the theory. Needless to highlight that without Meera's introductory outline, the proper understanding of the text could not have been possible.

The author of *Masquism* claims that it is a complete philosophy that not only solves the riddle of the world/reality but also provides a way to live in the world and finally realize our destiny. The author repeatedly claims that Masquism is both a view of life and a way of life. Masquism is presented as a grammar of life, a holistic philosophy that serves our worldly interests as much as our ultimate transcendental end. There seems to be a clear impact of theistic Vedanta, Mahayana, Saivism, and Christianity on the author. The author refers to Kant, Sartre, and Aurobindo and calls his philosophy of Masquism the eternal or perennial wisdom. Meera Grimes, in her foreword, has summed up the message of the book in two sentences. She says that human beings have been unconscious democratic factors/part-players in the historical evolution, and the time has come for them to live as conscious democratic factors/part-players. This message has been declared scientifically in Factorism and mystically in Masquism. Here it is to be noticed that Masquism presents two sets of philosophies of life, two alternative philosophies. One is the secular and the other the spiritual or theistic. The author calls the first one exoteric or scientific and the other mystical or esoteric. The basic philosophy presented in the book is that the ultimate reality is Nature or God. Everything in the universe is a play of this Nature or God. Everyone has his own role in the play. Unfortunately, we are not fully aware of our significant role. Masquism is the philosophy meant to awaken people to this great role

of theirs. Once we become conscious of our nature and the divine role, our life will be totally transformed. Our egoism would be eradicated, and we would begin to think of ourselves in terms of “We” instead of “I.” We will submit ourselves entirely to the love and service of God and other fellow beings who are also the sons of God like us. Love of God and Love for neighbors is the message of Masquism. The author also calls for forming an association between the believers and practitioners of this philosophy. Following are the nine aphorisms of Masquism:

1. “The individual is an unconscious democratic factor in Historical Evolution.”
2. “Let the individual live henceforth as a conscious and cooperative factor in Historical Evolution.”
3. “The individual is a Divine Maskrader, a Maskrading *Bhaava* of God, in an entranced condition, improvising their part in the Divine Drama or Masque, unconsciously, with a measure of freedom, and thus shaping the Masque, by their activities of knowing, experiencing, thinking, speaking and acting regarding men and matters.”
4. “Let the individual live henceforth as a conscious Maskrader, performing their activities and undergoing their experiences consciously, Maskradingly or with the Mask Rading Awareness (MRA).”
5. “The Mask Rading Awareness or MRA will induce (a) A Rassy or artistic-democratic apprehension of oneself and one’s activities and others and their activities. (b) An Agential or Pro-God apprehension of oneself and others, and thus an agentization of one’s concerns in men and matters (ACM).”
6. “In proportion to the Agentization of the concerns in men and matters, God’s government of the individual and their life becomes replaced by God’s conduction of them. With the increase of God’s conduction, divine attributes are increasingly manifested in the individual.”
7. “Disentrancement or Knowledge of the Substratum Self.”
8. “Rassing Capacity.”
9. “Dealing Capacity.”

The above aphorisms of Masquism present a complete philosophy. They deal with four major topics (1) the view of life (2) the way of life (3) the shift of the thought process and its effect, and (4) the supreme goal of life. Out of the nine aphorisms, the first two are about the factor theory or Factorism. According to it, the world is a natural democratic organization, and each individual is a factor in it, shaping the course of the organization by his free choices. The world is a factory, and the factory is History. It postulates God as the Boss or the Director of the world organization/History. The way of life it prescribes is conscious cooperation with History. Conscious cooperation is to assume one’s factory hood and live one’s life with Factor Awareness. When Factor Awareness is considerably established in an individual’s life, his thought process shifts from personal concerns in men and matters (PCM) to an agent’s concern in men and matters (ACM). When that happens, one’s thoughts and actions flow from an agent’s attitude, not from an egoistic one. Finally, when one factorizes (objectifies) one’s ego, one experiences that true essence of perfection, which is the supreme goal of life. All these are the subject matter of the fifth to ninth aphorisms.

Factorism is not necessarily a theistic worldview. It could be construed as Historism as well. In fact, the author presents Factorism as an exoteric or scientific worldview. Factorism interpreted as Historism is for those who do not believe in faith and want only a code of conduct. Here Nature takes the place of God. It says that serving the Master and serving His Organization are the two sides of the same coin. People can serve Nature and evolve History by adopting historical objectives and transacting them democratically according to democratic ethics.

In his commentary on the second aphorism, the author tries his best to find universalistic ethics (acceptable to both the theists and non-theists) on which human conduct could be based. The author calls this the Kinger principle. This Kinger principle is nothing but the perennial Golden principle of Ethics authenticated by the people like Kant and Sartre. The author here (pp.58-59) does refer to these philosophers. In fact, Kantian influence could be seen in the author repeatedly.

One of the major contributions of Swami Vaidyanathan to the world is his unique understanding of the theory of Democracy. In his commentary on Factorism, Swamiji provides a metaphysical foundation for Democracy. Swami not only finds the basic structure of the world and world process as democratic but also conceives God as the President of the republic of the world. Swami's thesis is that the world is a great democracy where each individual is democratically shaping History. The author thinks that there is a law underlying the world order, and it is a democratic one. Vaidyanathan writes, "The world itself is a great democracy of which God is the unparalleled President, where every factor or individual is voting on how things shall be for everybody by their very act. Every act of an individual implies a free choice of value, which is as it were one's vote for all". Swami concludes that the life of each is a factor in shaping the lives of others. What one will for oneself is one's will for all. We are democratically involved with All.

If the theories of Factorism and Historism have been propounded in the first two aphorisms, the principal thesis of Masquism, which the author calls an eternal and perennial Truth, has been advocated in the third and fourth aphorisms. Masquism is basically a philosophy of theism. As the term suggests, Masquism believes that the world is a divine play of God, a masque. Every activity of the world is God's *Impersonational* sport, the individual is God's *Impersonational* self in entranced condition, and God is the *Impersonator* or the Real Player of the play. Masquism says that the individual is God in an entranced condition. The condition of the entrancement is feigned from God's point of view and really from the individual's. God can be simultaneously in Himself and also be entranced in His *Impersonations*. The Divine Play is democratic in nature, and each individual is a democratic part-player in it, freely improvising one's part continuously with a measure of freedom and shaping the course of the play. However, the problem is that the individual is unaware of this truth due to ignorance. Masquism asks the individual to be conscious of this truth. The way of life that Masquism prescribes is the Conscious Cooperation (CC) with God. Conscious cooperation means accepting one's mask-hood and always being aware of one's life and the world as being God's Artistic Expression or *Masquerade*. The awareness of this truth is called *Mask Rading Awareness*. This awareness would remind one of the inseparable connections with God within and one's democratic

involvement with God's play without. This awareness will make one live Pro-God or as God's agent. Masquism holds that the MRA would shift one's thought process from personal concerns of men and matters (PCM) to that of Pro-God or agential concerns of men and matters (ACM). The shift in one's thought process would affect obtaining God's conduction. Conduction is God's grace. God's conduction will slowly manifest divine attributes in one's life. The last three aphorisms speak about these divine attributes: gradual disenfranchisement increased Raising capacity or *rasana* (artistic joy) in one's knowing, and Dealing capacity or creative capacity efficiency and righteousness(dharma) in one's actions or thoughts. When the disenfranchisement is complete, one obtains the knowledge of one's Substratum Self which is Perfect, Love, Bliss, and Power.

There are two major criteria on which the contribution of a philosopher could be assessed. The first criterion is related to the originality of the philosopher. The criterion is whether the philosopher has successfully coined some new philosophical terms or not. If this is accepted as the mark of great work, then the present work is certainly an original contribution, as it is full of new technical terms. These terms are *Masquism, Rader, Mask, Maskrade, Masquerade, Factorism, Historism, Mask Rading Awareness, Rassing capacity, Rassy, Himpersonal, Historade, Kinger, Kingerade*, etc. The editor has provided a useful glossary in the end in order to apprehend the correct meaning of the terms. Once the meaning of the Masquism terminology is correctly grasped, it becomes easier to understand what the author wants to communicate. The other criterion is related to the depth of the work. If the work provides a full proof philosophical system in which everything is explained, it should be called a grand success. Moreover, here again, one can see that this book is a grand success. It provides a complete philosophy explaining everything about the man and the universe, destiny and society, social relations, and spirituality. The only drawback I find with the work is that the author does not advance arguments supporting his thesis. However, this should not appear surprising to us as we know that the author is more a spiritual man than a philosopher. Furthermore, it is why the reviewer ventures to say that this work is more like holy scripture, a revealed text, than a well-argued rigorous philosophical treatise.

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