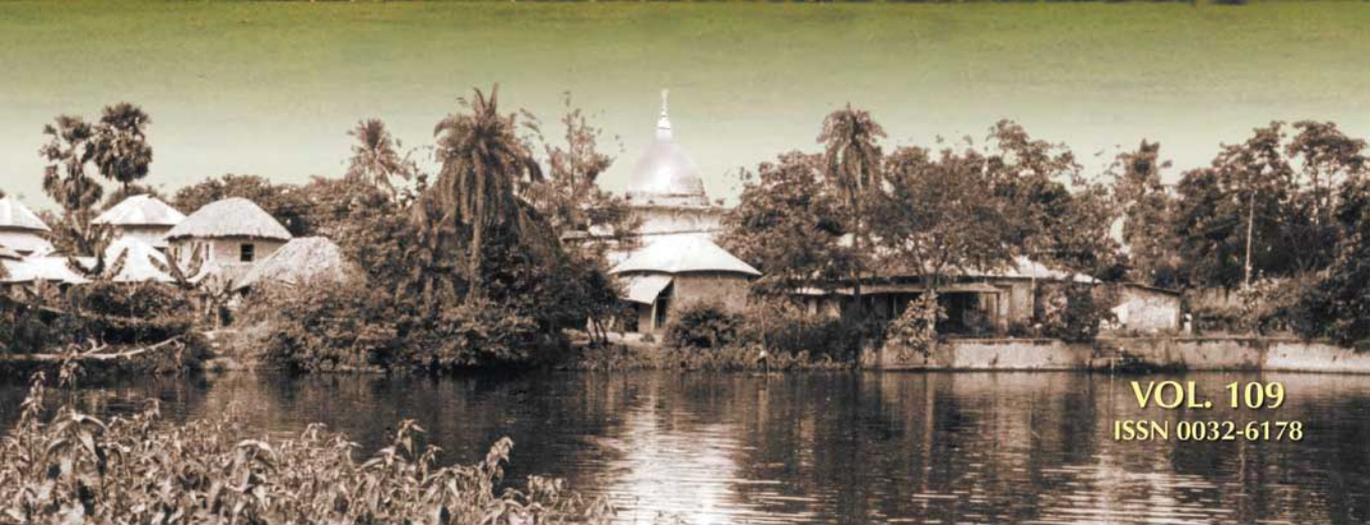


PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or AWAKENED INDIA*



NOVEMBER
2004

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Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



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CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom	571	Let Ramakrishna Dance His Rapturous Dance	599
This Month	572	<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>	
<i>Editorial: Fortitude</i>	573	Faith, Privilege and Spirituality	603
<i>Prabuddha Bharata-100 Years Ago</i>	577	<i>Dr C S Shah</i>	
Reflections on the <i>Bhagavadgita</i>	580	Parabrahma Upaniṣad	607
<i>Swami Atulananda</i>		<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>	
Shakti Worship and Sri Ramakrishna	582	Glimpses of Holy Lives	610
<i>Swami Prabhananda</i>		Sri Sarada Devi: Essence of the Infinite	611
Communication in the Light of Indian Wisdom	592	<i>Swami Satyamayananda</i>	
<i>Prakash Lohia</i>		Reviews	616
A Memorial to Swami Vivekananda ...	595	Reports	620
<i>Swami Satyamayananda</i>			



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Cover: Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother's temple at Jayrambati seen today and a period photograph in the foreground. Mother was born in this sanctified village for the good of all Her children in 1853.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 109

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No. 11

→ Traditional Wisdom ←

WAYS OF THE MIND

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥

One should uplift one's lower self by the higher self. One should not demean or downgrade oneself. For the self is verily one's friend and one's enemy.
(*Bhagavadgita*, 6.5)

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः ।
अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्तेतात्मैव शत्रुवत् ॥

To him who has conquered his lower self by his higher self, the self acts like a friend. But to him who has not conquered his lower self, the self is always hostile and functions like an enemy. (*Gita*, 6.6)

The outer layers of cakes are made of rice flour, but inside they are stuffed with different ingredients. The cake is good or bad according to the quality of its stuffing. So all human bodies are made of one and the same material, yet men are different in quality according to the purity of their hearts. (Sri Ramakrishna)

Free! We who cannot for a moment govern our own minds, nay, cannot hold our minds on a subject, focus it on a point to the exclusion of everything else for a moment! Yet we call ourselves free. Think of it! We cannot do as we know we ought to do even for a very short space of time. Some sense-desire will crop up, and immediately we obey it. Our conscience smites us for such weakness, but again and again we do it, we are always doing it. We cannot live up to a high standard of life, try as we will. The ghosts of past thoughts, past lives, hold us down. All the misery of the world is caused by this slavery to the senses. Our inability to rise above the sense-life—the striving for physical pleasures, is the cause of all the horrors and miseries in the world. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 6.30)

☪ This Month ☪

This month's editorial discusses **Fortitude** as a spiritual discipline.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features excerpts from an article 'Karma Yoga: Its Spiritual and Secular Results' by 'A Sannyasin'.

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita* is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on verses 20 and 21 of the tenth chapter of the *Gita*. The swami discusses the importance of desiring and remembering God alone. He assures us that help will come from God if only we practise a little to think of Him.

Shakti worship down the ages, its different streams, specialities of Tantra sadhana, and the salient features of Sri Ramakrishna's Shakti worship—Swami Prabhanandaji discusses all this in great detail in his learned article **Shakti Worship and Sri Ramakrishna**. The well-known author is a member of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission and head of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata. This article originally appeared in *Udbodhan* (September 1999), and the translation is being published with their kind permission. A former editor of this journal, Swami Sunirmalanandaji, the translator of the article, is from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama at Sao Paulo, Brazil.

In **Communication in the Light of Indian Wisdom** Sri Prakash Lohia discusses the importance of right communication and the necessity to divinize it. An MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, the author is the CEO of a laminating company.

A Memorial to Swami Vivekananda by

Swami Satyamayanandaji is a report on the restored and renovated ancestral house of Swamiji. The author is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order from Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Let Ramakrishna Dance His Rapturous Dance by Swami Atmapriyanandaji is a brilliant analysis of the advent, power and 'destructive' aspect of the Ramakrishna incarnation in the background of Nataraja symbolism. Well known to our readers, the author is Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur.

How faith is fundamental to knowledge, how shraddhā conduces to spiritual growth, and when privileges disappear—Dr C S Shah discusses these important points in **Faith, Privilege and Spirituality**. While preparing this issue news reached us of the author's sad passing away. He was a medical consultant from Aurangabad and regularly wrote for this journal.

Parabrahma Upaniṣad is the fifth instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Glimpses of Holy Lives describes some inspiring incidents from the life of Janabai, a famous Maharashtrian saint whom the Lord loved to assist in her daily household chores and proclaimed her devotion to all.

In **Sri Sarada Devi: Essence of the Infinite** Swami Satyamayanandaji portrays the divine and omniscient aspects of Holy Mother in the background of the latest theories about the universe.

Fortitude

EDITORIAL

Vedanta extols *titikṣā*, or fortitude, as one of the six treasures of a spiritual aspirant. The three consonants *sa*, *śa* and *ṣa* in Bengali are pronounced alike as *sho*, which means 'forbear'. Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples to '*sho, sho, sho*' and said, '*Je shoi she roi; je na shoi she nash hoi*', meaning 'Those who forbear, live; those who don't, perish.' Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, too, taught that forbearance is nobler than any other virtue.

What Is Fortitude?

'Fortitude means putting up with all difficulties, miseries and problems, without trying for their removal and at the same time not fretting or complaining about them,' says Sri Shankaracharya.¹ A bit of an idealistic definition indeed, but Vedanta advocates striving to live up to the ideal, rather than lowering the ideal to the actual. Says Swami Vivekananda, 'One of the most insinuating things comes to us in the shape of persons who apologise for our mistakes and teach us how to make special excuses for all our foolish wants and foolish desires; and we think that their ideal is the only ideal we need have. But it is not so. The Vedanta teaches no such thing. The actual should be reconciled to the ideal, the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal.'²

Challenges for Fortitude

Physical discomfort: The *Bhagavadgita* says, 'Heat and cold, and pleasure and pain arise from the contact of sense organs. They come and go, being impermanent. Bear with them patiently.'³ Heat and cold don't pose any challenge to us, thanks to gadgets that can keep us in comfort. Of course, braving heat and cold during power outages is a challenge. As for pleasure and pain arising from the contact of

the senses with their objects, we respond to them in a way we have been programmed by our thoughts and actions: desire pleasure and loathe pain.

Dualities of life: Mental discomforts arise from the dualities of life like pleasure and pain, praise and blame, and gain and loss. Though we tend to seek the pleasant and detest the painful, we need to face both, since life offers a package deal: you seek the one, and the other comes uninvited.

The agitation caused by lust and anger: Braving the forces of lust and anger is the greatest challenge. Under their grip man forgets what he is and acts in spite of himself in a way he himself might not approve of in his saner moments. Says Sri Krishna, 'He who is able to withstand even while alive the agitation caused by lust and anger—he is the self-controlled one and he is the happy man.'⁴ Commenting on the verse, Shridhara Svamin forcefully describes the immensity of the task: 'Just as a dead man is able to withstand the urge of passion or anger though his body is embraced by a wailing young woman or burnt by his sons and others, even so he who is able to withstand that urge *even while alive*—he alone is a poised and happy man.'

Dealing with impossible people: Another challenge is to put up with difficult people. We are of different temperaments, each with his own quota of foolishness, worldliness, selfishness and unreasonableness. When we cannot do without interacting with unreasonable people, establishing some sort of working relationship with them becomes a demanding task.

Why Practise Fortitude?

A very obvious answer to this question is,

only fortitude can ensure sane and peaceful living. Every impulsive reaction to an event means unavoidable loss of mental energy and takes its toll on our physical well-being as well. Vedanta offers a better reason to practise fortitude: We are divine by nature, and realization of this divinity, the Atman, is the goal of human life. We are not conscious of this divinity because of our identification with our body and mind. To the extent we free ourselves from their hold, we get glimpses of our true nature. The more agitated and impulsive we are, the more we remain identified with our mind and remain alien to our true nature. Fortitude can help us see ourselves in perspective, strengthen our will and facilitate our inner growth.

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Practice of Fortitude

Bearing with physical afflictions: Sri Ramakrishna lived what he taught. Here is an important teaching of his: 'Let the body and the affliction take care of themselves; O mind, you learn to be happy (by detaching yourself from them).' People pray to God for relief from afflictions. The prayer is not bad in itself, inasmuch as it affords them an occasion to think of God, albeit momentarily. Vedanta teaches us that the body has six characteristics: it comes into being (*jāyate*), exists as an object (*astī*), grows (*vardhate*), undergoes transformation (*vīparīṇamate*), decays (*apakṣīyate*) and dies (*naśyati*). No one's body—neither saint's nor sinner's—is exempt from this rule. As the saying goes, after the game of chess is over, the king and the pawns go back to the same box. When such is the case, Vedanta says it is foolish to ex-

pect the body to be free from afflictions and decay. Amid his excruciating pain from throat cancer and despite being forbidden by his physician to talk, Sri Ramakrishna spoke to people on spiritual life, since he was sure that might help even one soul towards God-realization. So it is far saner and more logical to pray for strength of mind to bear our karma-prompted affliction than to pray to be free from it. True, such a prayer for deliverance from affliction, too, could have a momentary positive effect, but that is a different matter.

Braving mental afflictions: We saw that mental problems arise from the dualities of life and, more important, from lust and anger. It is difficult to confront mental problems as long as we remain identified with our mind. Braving mental problems calls for a certain amount of detachment and learning to witness how the mind works. But this detachment is possible only by training and disciplining the mind. Thanks to our samskaras, our mind has been conditioned to

respond to situations in a certain predetermined way. We need to re-programme the mind with wholesome thoughts, and engage in noble actions. That will augment our good samskaras. Practice of japa, prayer, meditation and the like is aimed at awakening our discriminative faculty called buddhi, which can be called our higher mind. It is only when buddhi awakens at least partially that we are able to see our thoughts and actions in perspective and stop acting impulsively or passionately. The mind always tends to follow the sense organs and their objects, either at the gross or at the subtle (mental) level. Forbearance at the mental level involves training the mind to turn upon itself and trying repeatedly to anchor it in the Self whenever it strays.

Putting up with impossible people: This necessitates a change in outlook towards our-

selves and, as a sequel, towards others. If we are sparks of divinity, the Atman, so are others. Maybe not everyone is struggling for freedom, but that does not undermine their divine essence. And we have no case for blaming others because all of us are what we are because of our mental make-up, our samskaras. Says Swamiji, 'Never say any man is hopeless, because he only represents a character, a bundle of habits, which can be checked by new and better ones. Character is repeated habits, and repeated habits alone can reform character.'⁵ We believe that we can turn over a new leaf some day. We need to extend that belief to others as well: they too can become better. Of course, we need not spend our energies in transforming others, but a proper mindset can help us see people in perspective. Rightly it is said that when we put ourselves in the other person's place, we are less likely to want to put him in his place.

When his disciple Bhavanath told Sri Ramakrishna that he felt disturbed if he had some misunderstanding with others, the Master told him, 'Try at the outset to talk to him and establish a friendly relationship with him. If you fail in spite of your efforts, then don't give it another thought. Take refuge in God. Meditate on Him. There is no use in giving up God and feeling depressed from thinking about others.'⁶

Suffering others' foolishness unflinchingly is not just a pet theory. Holy Mother's life is an ample demonstration of its immense possibility. There was no dearth of foolish, insane and greedy people under her care. She suffered them all thanks to her pure mind, which was always rooted in God.

This topic of putting up with others leads us to some more related points.

Fortitude and Weakness

Fortitude does not mean being doormats.

It is certainly not necessary to meekly bear with the idiosyncrasies of those who don't understand us. It is to be remembered that Sri Ramakrishna did not encourage weakness masquerading as forbearance. He advised people to 'hiss', but not 'bite', telling them the parable of the snake that stopped biting people after a brahmacharin initiated it with a mantra and taught it to mend its ways. The snake did not even protest in self-defence when a group of boys caught it by the tail, swung it hard against the ground and bruised it badly. When the brahmacharin returned after some time to see how his disciple fared, he was surprised to see the snake reduced to a mere skeleton. On coming to know of the reason, he told the snake with love and compassion, 'My foolish child, I forbade you to bite, but why didn't you hiss to

Fortitude does not mean being doormats. It is certainly not necessary to meekly bear with the idiosyncrasies of those who don't understand us. It is to be remembered that Sri Ramakrishna did not encourage weakness masquerading as forbearance.

protect yourself?' Likewise, Sri Ramakrishna advised his householder disciples to hiss at those who troubled them, but forbade them to 'inject their venom into them'.⁷

Fortitude and Non-violence

Non-violence can be a virtue only if we can strike, but don't. Weakness or inactivity cannot pass as fortitude, since neither is a spiritual virtue, but only a manifestation of inertia (tamas). In his lectures on karma yoga Swamiji describes what is true non-violence:

The highest ideal is non-resistance, and ... this non-resistance is the highest manifestation of power in actual possession, and ... what is called the resisting of evil is but a step on the way towards the manifestation of this highest power, namely, non-resistance. Before reaching

With already a problem in hand, we can certainly avoid a second problem of working ourselves up in the process of solving the first. Many generally feel that their work will not be effective unless they get worked up to begin with.

this highest ideal, man's duty is to resist evil; let him work, let him fight, let him strike straight from the shoulder. Then only, when he has gained the power to resist, will non-resistance be a virtue.⁸

Incidentally, hissing in self-defence is all right for a householder, but a sannyasin must not have self-defence. (7.466)

Fortitude and Passivity

We saw that Sri Shankara's definition of fortitude has two aspects: (1) not seeking to remove the misery, and (2) not worrying and complaining about it. The first aspect may be possible only for a fairly advanced spiritual aspirant. But the second aspect is something that can lend itself to practice by everyone. With already a problem in hand, we can certainly avoid a second problem of working ourselves up in the process of solving the first. Many generally feel that their work will not be effective unless they get worked up to begin with. Swamiji demolishes this myth and says, '... the calmer we are and the less disturbed our nerves, the more shall we love and the better will our work be.' (1.80) He further amplifies this idea in his lectures titled 'Practical

Vedanta':

The less passion there is, the better we work. The calmer we are, the better for us, and the more the amount of work we can do. When we let loose our feelings, we waste so much energy, shatter our nerves, disturb our minds, and accomplish very little work. The energy which ought to have gone out as work is spent as mere feeling, which counts for nothing. ... The man who gives way to anger, or hatred, or any other passion, cannot work; he only breaks himself to pieces, and does nothing practical. It is the calm, forgiving, equable, well-balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work. (2.293)

* * *

Fortitude involves mind discipline, but it clears up our perception, enables us to lead saner lives and makes our work effective. As a spiritual discipline, it fosters detachment and strengthens spiritual aspiration. *

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1. *Vivekachudamani*, 24.
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3. *Bhagavadgita*, 2.14.
4. *Ibid.*, 5.23.
5. CW, 1.208.
6. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 572.
7. *Ibid.*, 85-6.
8. CW, 1.39.

There is nothing wrong about doing work; otherwise, how can one have purification of mind? It is when one works that one is tested: how much craving for the result of action does one have; how desireless is the mind; how much selfishness has gone; and how much still remains. All this can be known only through the performance of work. When divine love dawns in the heart, one no longer considers work as mere work—it turns into worship. That is real devotion.

—Swami Turiyananda

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

November 1904

Karma Yoga: Its Spiritual and Secular Results

Brahman is impersonal and beyond relativity. Ishvara is a person and within relativity. Religion means realization, with some, of the impersonal Brahman and, with others, of the personal Ishvara. Personality and personal relations are incompatible with the Impersonal. Separateness implies relativity; if there is the least separateness between the religious aspirant and his realized ideal, the ideal is within relativity and not Brahman. Realization of Brahman can therefore mean nothing but oneness with it, by giving up personality and personal relations. Difference in degree or kind is possible within and impossible beyond relativity. There can therefore be no difference in degree or kind in the realization of Brahman beyond relativity. Its realization is the same, whether effected through karma, bhakti or any other yoga. On the other hand, oneness is impossible within relativity, and certainly a person can be realized only by a person, and establishment of personal relationship between them is not inconsistent. One can therefore realize the personal Ishvara within relativity, only as a being separate from oneself, by keeping up one's personality and having, if desired, some personal relation with Him.

Spiritual Realization of a Karma Yogi

Difference being the condition of relativity, Ishvara, being within relativity, must have different aspects of which the realization will differ according to the yoga through which it is effected. The crowning realization of Ishvara through karma yoga consists in making oneself, as it were, an instrument through which He works. It is the attainment of a spiritual state, or being, in which the karma yogi can say, as Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Mother, I am the *yantra* (machine), Thou art the *yantri* (one who works the machine); I am the chariot, Thou art the charioteer; I do just as Thou makest me do; I speak just as Thou makest me speak; I behave just as Thou makest me behave.' The words of Bhagavan Sri Krishna to Arjuna, 'By Myself have they been already slain; be thou only an instrument, O Savyasachin', point it. (*Gita*, 11.33)

Karma in its widest sense denotes every action, physical or mental. So we perform karma all the time. The Impersonal is beyond action. If our end be realization of the Impersonal, we have to attain to a state beyond action. Karma yoga teaches the method of making use of action itself to go beyond it. The karma yogi plunges into the active world and working on, knowing the secret of work, comes out of it in the long run.

Two Effects of Karma

Karma, as ordinarily done, tends to continue our personality. First, every work we do makes an impression on our mind. The impressions are called *samskaras* in Sanskrit. When a work is finished, its impression remains in a fine form in the mind, with the potentiality of taking a definite shape under favourable conditions. Mind likened to a lake, every work produces, as it were, a wave in the lake; when it is done, the wave subsides, but does not entirely disappear. It leaves a mark behind, which reappears as a wave. Each impression, as it was the effect of a work done, becomes, in its turn, the cause of a work to be done and forces us to do it even in spite of ourselves. Our personality is thus continued, in the first place, as the actor of the works caused by the impressions. Second, every work

produces some results, primary and secondary, for the worker. By making a fire, we warm ourselves; that is the primary result of the work, 'making a fire'. The gratitude shown us by the man we help is the secondary result of our charity. The man who hates the world must be hated by it in return. One man struggles all his life to become rich to find at last that his struggles are of no avail. To another, Nature holds out her blessings; he has but to ask to receive. Why? Because the one did not, while the other did deserve to be rich. This deserving is determined, according to karma yoga, by the secondary results of a man's past actions. Bad work produces bad secondary results, good work good; if we do an evil action, we must suffer for it in the present or a future life; if we do a good action, it must bear its good result for us now or some time after. And we get the primary results as the immediate effects of the works we do. Our personality is thus continued as the sufferer from the bad or the enjoyer of the good results, both primary and secondary, of our works.

Working without Attachment and Selfishness

The two tendencies of work to continue the worker's personality have to be conquered by him whose aim is the realization of the Impersonal. How can this be done? The answer given in the *Gita* is 'Work, but be not *attached* to it or its results.'

Attachment means identifying oneself with anything, superimposing the idea 'mine' on anything. The central idea in karma yoga is that nothing has the power to act upon us unless we identify ourselves with it. A man does not generally become very miserable if a friend's son dies; but when his own son dies how miserable he feels. Because in the one case he has not and in the other he has identified himself with the son. The idea, *my son*, is the cause of his misery. The death of my friend's son does not affect me so much as that of my own. The less we are attached to a thing, we see, the less it has the power to affect us. And when we are perfectly non-attached to a thing, it cannot at all affect us. By non-attachment to work and its results, it becomes thus possible to overcome their tendency to act upon us. ...

How can we work without attachment? By thinking always that though seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing, speaking, seizing, in short, acting in any way, we virtually do not do any of those actions but it is the senses that function among sense objects; (*Gita*, 5.8-9) that we in reality are the Impersonal beyond action and that the actions do not belong to us but to the mind and body, which are but parts of the universal Nature and not ours; that we are not Nature but beyond it. By working incessantly but never identifying ourselves with the work, never allowing the mind to be enslaved by it. By learning to concentrate the mind on any work we like and also to take it away from that work whenever we wish. By looking upon this world as a sojourn. By being like the servant who takes care of his master's children as if they were his own, yet leaves them as soon as ordered to do so. By looking upon work not as the be-all and end-all of life but as the means to the end of spiritual realization. Working this way, our attachment to work ceases by degrees and when finally perfect non-attachment is attained, the impression-making tendency of work is completely subdued.

The selfish man himself enjoys and the unselfish man makes room for others to enjoy the fire he makes. Helping a man, if we expect him to be grateful to us, we fret and feel injured if he proves ungrateful. Doing a great work, if we look for name and fame, we become happy when the world applauds us. If we do not expect gratitude from the man we help or applause from the world by doing a great work, we are neither pained if the man shows ingratitude, nor are we pleased if the world applauds. It is our selfish desire for something in return for the work we do that opens us to the influence of the bad or good, primary and secondary results of our works. ...

Invariably we shall find some selfish motive behind every work done ordinarily; but, by persistent

self-denial, this selfishness gradually passes away, and when we are able to work for others without the least selfish motive, the result-producing tendency of work is wholly conquered.

The karma yogi is asked to preserve equanimity in success and failure, (*Gita*, 2.48) because the success or failure of only the work we are attached to or our self-interests are associated with elates or depresses us. He is asked to do whatever he does with wholeheartedness, being entirely absorbed for the time being in the work in hand, however trivial, because it is only when we are attached to work or are selfish that we attach less importance and not give the whole attention to the work to which we are less attached or which conduces less to our self-interest.

As the consequence of perfect non-attachment to work and its result, the moment their personality-continuing tendency is perfectly overcome, the karma yogi's personality dissolves, and oneness with the Impersonal Brahman is established.

In the realization of the Personal Ishvara, we keep our personality, but make it an instrument for His work. 'Actions are not attached to Me, nor have I a desire for the results of action; he who knows Me thus is not bound by actions,' says the Lord. (*Gita*, 4.14) We can never hope to be an instrument for the Lord's works unless our works partake of the nature of the Lord's. The first condition therefore is that we should, after the manner of the Lord, be neither attached to works nor desire their results. The practice for the fulfilment of this condition is evidently the same as in the case of the realization of the Impersonal. Next, we should use all the power of our thought to bring about the desired state. We should try to forget that it is we who work and, instead, always tell ourselves and think that the body, senses and mind are only obeying the Lord, that every impulse for action is coming from Him every instant, and think with all the concentration of thought that He is the doer and we are but the instrument of all the works, that we do as He makes us do. As we shall go on thinking thus, the strength of the thought will increase, and it will take possession of our head and heart, enter into our very blood and permeate our whole being. The old personality consisting in the self-consciousness that we are the doers will gradually give place to the new personality with the consciousness that we are instruments in the hands of the Lord. As the Lord is drawn by the bhakti yogi by the power of his intense yearning for Him and realized by him as the God of Love, He will be drawn by the power of the intense thought of the karma yogi and realized by him as the God of Action, enthroned in the temple of his body, working through his senses and mind, he himself being an instrument for His work.

As the spiritual result of karma yoga, the karma yogi himself becomes a spiritual gainer. As its secular result, the world finds in him a friend who helps it physically, intellectually and spiritually without expectation of any result from it.

All the evil deeds causing suffering and disturbance in the world can be traced to one or other selfish motive of their perpetrators. The karma yogi, working with no selfish motive, does only good deeds and is a blessing to the world.

... The karma yogi ... works as a master, not as a slave of his mind. He can concentrate his whole attention on one work. Surely the more a worker concentrates his mind on a work, the better it will be. ... By non-attachment the karma yogi denies the power of outside things, good or evil, to act upon him and maintains his calmness of mind in the midst of all conditions. It is the balanced and calm man alone who works well and properly. So the karma yogi turns out better works for the good of the world than the ordinary worker. Nor are his works, being not the compulsory doings of a slave but the voluntary services of love of a master, spoiled by the slave's grumbling fretfulness. ... How much faster than now would the progress of the world have been, had its simple workers learnt to be karma yogis, to be less attached to their work and its results.

—A Sannyasin

Reflections on the Bhagavadgita

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 10 (*continued*)

20. I am the Self, O Gudakesha, existing in the heart of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings.

You should think of Me as the Spirit, the innermost Self, the Reality dwelling in the heart of all beings. I am that within all beings, which remains when name and form are removed. I am the Soul, the very Existence of all. But if you cannot see Me as the Self of all, then see My manifestations and know that I am the source, the stay and the end of all beings. I am the alpha and omega of everything.'

Sri Krishna addresses Arjuna here as Gudakesha, which means conqueror of sleep. God can only be known by those who have conquered the sleep of delusion and ignorance. We must wake up; only then can we see. We have to be wide awake, always watchful, for the path of realization is very steep and dangerous. It is like walking on the edge of a sharp sword. The *Katha Upanishad* says, 'The path is like the sharp edge of a razor, the wise say: hard to tread and difficult to cross. Arise, awake, approach the great ones and learn.'¹ Therefore, the Lord calls Arjuna Gudakesha. 'Be watchful, be observant and be thoughtful. Do not think so much of the objects, but think of Me. Let all things serve as a suggestion. Let everything point to Me.' Then will come that spiritual state of which Sri Krishna speaks in an earlier chapter of the *Gita*: 'That which is night to all creatures is day to the sage who knows the Truth, and that which is day to the ignorant, is night to the sage.'² How can we be reminded of God through external things?

There are many ways. In the following verses, Sri Krishna will point out the way. The

examples given by the Lord are perhaps not so valuable to us as they were to Arjuna three or four thousand years ago. But the idea, the principle, is there.

Once Sri Ramakrishna requested to be taken to the zoo in Calcutta. He went round looking at different animals, enjoying the sight. At last he came to the lion's cage. Then he was highly pleased and satisfied. Before him stood the king of animals in all his beauty, strength and pride. 'Let us go back,' he said. 'I have seen the king of animals; why go any farther?' The highest manifestation includes all others. The lion called up in him the vision of the Highest and he went into samadhi and he saw God.

Suggestions will come if we practise a little, if we try a little. If we live a prayerful life, all help will come. Help will come from outside and from within. Nature will teach us and God will teach us. The world will speak and sing God's glory and the still small voice in the heart will guide us on.

If we could think of God always, our lives would be really blessed, for we cannot think of God, the eternal Spirit, and feel miserable. If we realize what God is, if we know for a certainty that He is the Soul of our souls, our real Existence, that we are really He and hence Immortal, we can never be unhappy. Religion makes us the happiest of beings. But religion must be *realized* to make us happy. It must become part of us, not simply a pleasant thought or a beautiful idea. When we live religion, we are happy. To live religion means to live the

Truth, to feel and to express that Truth in our lives. But first, we must know the Truth. Otherwise, how can we live it?

We are now deluded by ignorance. Truth is hidden from us. As scum and moss rise from the water and, resting on its surface, cover and hide the water from our view, even so the Atman, our real Self, is covered by ignorance. We must remove the moss if we want to see the pure water and remove the suffering of thirst. So avidyā, or ignorance, must be removed. Then the Atman manifests, pure eternal, blissful.

Ignorance takes the form of desire. Shankaracharya compares sense objects to sharks and advocates their killing with the sword of mature dispassion to cross the ocean of samsara (transmigration) without any obstacles.³

Through discrimination and renunciation we must try to get rid of false desires. We cannot live without desiring something. Therefore, says Vedanta, desire the Highest, desire to know and love God. Then other desires will not trouble you.

It is said that the odour of sandalwood removes all bad odours. So also, the desire of the Real drives away all other desires. Because we have been desiring the non-self, the apparent, the world, the desire for the real Self, which is God the Spirit, is kept back from us. But when we long for God constantly worldly desires

leave us of their own accord. The mind is the cause of our bondage; it is again the mind that makes us free. The mind creates desires, which bind us through attachment. It is the same mind that destroys the bondage by creating non-attachment. The mind must, therefore, be trained. It must be made our useful instrument so that it may help us reach our goal, which is liberation.

How shall we train the mind? Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Let your mind always think of Me.' Then Arjuna asked, 'How can my mind always think of You? I live in the world; I am busy with many things; I live a sense-life. How then can I think of You? I want to do that but don't know how. Please instruct me.' Then Sri Krishna said, 'Yes, you can do it. I will show you how. First of all, remember that I am the Self in all beings. He who realizes that need practise no more. He will always see Me. But if you cannot realize that vision, then try to see Me in the different objects with which you come in contact. Think that of all things I am the best of its kind. If you practise that a little, then it will gradually become a habit with you. You will then always try to see Me and think of Me. It will become natural with you. It will require very little effort once the habit has been cultivated. I will now give you a few examples. Think of Me in the following forms.' Sri Krishna describes how in the following verses.

21. Of the Ādityas I am Vishnu; of the luminaries I am the radiant sun; among the winds I am Marici; among the constellations I am the moon.

There are twelve sun-gods, called Ādityas. They bring about the universal conflagration by their simultaneous appearance. One of these is known as Vishnu. 'And that one I am. Remember also that I am the radiant Sun, on which depends all life. And I am Marici, the principal storm-god. And I am also the moon.' In Eastern literature the moon stands for all that is sweet and lovely. After the heat of a mid-summer day in the tropics, the moon is a most welcome appearance, cooling

down things. 'So when you see the sun and the moon, think of Me, Arjuna. That will purify and elevate your mind and it will make you happy.'

(To be continued)

References

1. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.14.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 2.69.
3. *Vivekachudamani*, 80.

Shakti Worship and Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

(Translated by Swami Sunirmalananda)

Drawing our attention to the deep significance of the word *shakti*, Sir John Woodroffe says, 'There is no word of a wider content in any language than this Sanskrit term, meaning "Power".¹ There is some supreme Power behind this universe who expresses Herself in diverse ways. But what is noteworthy is the glory of Her oneness behind this multiplicity. Heat, light, lightning—all these are expressions of just that Power. Everything in this universe is a conglomeration of power and nothing else.

The concept of shakti is indivisibly connected with Mother worship (*shakti sadhana*). Generally the worship of Durga, Kali, Sarasvati and other goddesses is considered Shakti worship. But the worship of Narayana, Shiva, Ganesha and other gods, too, is the worship of Shakti Herself. Whatever the means—image, symbol or yantra—the worship is only of Shakti. This is because, in the use of all these means there is a superimposition of the creation-preservation-destruction aspects of Shakti either fully or partially. So in a wider sense all worshippers are Shakti worshippers.

Both Vedic and Tantric sadhanas were prevalent in society once. Kulluka Bhata, the commentator on the *Manu Smṛiti*, says, '*Vaidīkī tāntrīkī caiva dvīvidhā śrutih;* Vedic and Tantric are the two types of shrutis.' But there is no end to the debate amongst pundits regarding the following questions: whether the Tantras originated from the Vedas or independently, in the Vedic age or after it; whether it is indigenous or has come from outside; whether Hindu and Buddhist Tantras are different; and which of the two Tantras is ancient. We don't think scholars like Swami Pratyagatmananda

Sarasvati, John Woodroffe, Haraprasad Shastri, Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, Dinesh Chandra Sen, Nagendranath Basu, Binaytosh Bhattacharya, Gopinath Kaviraj and others have arrived at answers to these questions beyond doubt and acceptable to all.

Shakti Worship down the Ages

History says that Shakti worship was prevalent all over the world in some form or other, but it was in India alone that an unbroken tradition has been set up, which has influenced the Indian mind permanently and deeply. Having made a deep study of the different religious ages, like those of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the philosophies, the epics and the subsequent religions, Swami Saradananda remarks, 'Shakti worship, especially the worship of God as Mother, is a personal property of India.' The great scholar and illumined soul Swami Abhedananda also says, 'India is in fact the only place in the world where God is worshipped as Mother.' By and large, their conclusions have been accepted by the scholarly world. The theme of the present discussion is this adoration of God as Mother.

The idea of the Great Goddess (Mahadevi) was known amongst both Aryans and non-Aryans. Though both Aryan and non-Aryan races were indirectly responsible for the growth of the ideal of the Great Goddess, the contribution of the Aryans to this field is great. Some say that the deities like Vāk, Sarasvati, Rātri and Śrīdevī of the 'Vāk Sūkta,' 'Rātri Sūkta,' and the Rig Vedic 'Śrī Sūkta' became Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasarasvati in due course.² Again, some pundits feel that in the 'Devī Sūkta' and 'Rātri Sūkta' of the *Rig*

Veda, the worship of Shakti is not at all the point. However, one cannot deny the appearance of the Goddess-idea in the *Yajur Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, and in some Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The special point here is this: though the Goddess (Shakti) mentioned in all these is the Great Goddess (Mahadevi), She is more of a Mother than a deity. Her maternal love is naturally evident everywhere. It is known that everyone has a natural attraction for his mother. The aspirant believes that Mother can be worshipped easily; She easily responds to the child's call. However, it took quite some time for Shakti worship to become transformed into the purest form of Mother worship.

Tantras and Shakti Worship

One can never reject the importance of the Tantras in Shakti worship. '*Tanyate vistāryate jñānam anena iti tantram*;' That which broadens and widens the horizons of knowledge is called *tantra*.' Tantras are generally known as Agamas. Three forms of Agamas—Shakta, Shaiva and Vaishnava—are very popular. The vital topic of the Shakta agamas is the *shiva-shakti-tattva-rahasya* (the secret of the philosophy of Shiva and Shakti) or *tattva* sadhana (the practice of truths or realities or elements). It is in this context that the following spiritual practices are discussed: yantras (technical drawings), mantras (hymns and mystic syllables), devatas (deities mentioned in the mantras), mudras (signs made by the hands during worship), *nyāsa* (purifying various parts of the body by touching them while uttering sacred syllables), *upāsana*, yoga, *pañca-tattva samikṣā* (analysis of the five ingredients of worship) and *ṣaṭ-cakra* sadhana (spiritual practice related to the six plexuses).

Spiritual practice (sadhana) is given the utmost importance in the Tantras. *Sadhana* comes from the root *sadh* ('to be able to achieve'). Through sadhana, the individual will be able to manifest his innate divinity. The *Mahanirvana Tantra* says that in the Kaliyuga

all the mantras are awakened mantras, and bear fruit quickly.³ Sri Ramakrishna also says, 'The fact is that in the Kaliyuga one cannot wholly follow the path laid down in the Vedas. ... In the Kaliyuga the discipline of the Tantra is very efficacious.'⁴

In subsequent times, though philosophical literature entered the scene, Shakti sadhana has remained popular because of the belief that through spiritual practices alone one can attain mundane and other-worldly objects. Before Shakta philosophy became an independent school of thought, Shaiva philosophy was the philosophical basis of the Shakti cult. Surprisingly enough, in the *Sarva-darśana-saṅgraha* of Mādhvacārya or any other work, there is no mention of Shakta philosophy. From the aspirant's viewpoint, in the field of sadhana too the correct use of realities (God, soul and the like) makes philosophical conclusions effective. In his *Guptavati* commentary on Shakta philosophy, Bhaskara Raya writes that the one indivisible Consciousness, Brahman, being enveloped by the eternal maya appears to be the signifier (*dharma*) and the signified (*dharmī*). The signifier is essentially non-different from the signified, like fire and its power to burn. We can see the image of a red hibiscus in a crystal, but the crystal is not red. So also, the qualities of the signifier (creation and so on) are superimposed on the signified.

Specialities of Tantra Sadhana

The principal deity of the Shakti sadhana as well as Tantric sadhana is the Divine Mother Kali. She has various forms as represented by the Daśa-mahāvidyās. In order to understand the Tantric form of sadhana, which has had a very long history and got the form it had during Ramakrishna's time, we should know some of its specialities:

1. The doors of this system are open to all, irrespective of caste, colour or race. Of course, like in other scriptures, in the Tantric scriptures too there is the shadow of *adhikāra-vāda*, or the question of fitness of aspirants. He who

is not initiated cannot practise the Tantras.

2. This system can confer both worldly prosperity and spiritual emancipation. The Tantras have shown how one can convert *pravritti*, or involvement in the world, into spirituality. This system too has one ideal: liberation.

3. The body is highly esteemed in the Tantras. To torture the body is not permitted. Our body is the home of great spiritual power. To develop and express this power is the goal.

4. The conclusion of all the Tantras is this: '*Brahmāṇḍe ye guṇāḥ santi te tiṣṭhanti kalevare*; Whatever qualities are present in the universe are also present in the body.' Whatever is in the body is in the universe. In the body and in the universe alike there are different powers functioning in diverse ways. If a spiritual aspirant can manifest the powers within the body, all the powers in the universe become favourable to him.

5. Shakti sadhana can be freely called the sadhana of Advaita. Swami Saradanandaji says, 'The enlightened Tantric, like the Advaitin, sees no difference between mud and sandal [paste], friend and foe, a dwelling house and the cremation ground.'⁵

6. According to Advaita, Brahman is beyond qualities, without power, one, and non-dual. But without the influence of Shakti, the world cannot go on. The Advaitin says that the world is unreal, *mithyā*. By 'unreal' is not meant something impossible. What is meant is this: Just as the snake is superimposed on the rope when we mistake a rope for a snake, unreality is superimposed on Reality. Brahman alone is real; Shakti is nothing but maya.

7. The primal power of the universe is one and non-dual. Western science says that power is unconscious, or *jaḍa*. The Tantras, on the other hand, say that Power, or Shakti, is not unconscious, but is full of consciousness. According to the *Durga Saptashati*, the Goddess is called Consciousness in all beings.⁶ That Power which is in all beings as Consciousness is called Mahadevi. This great

Power is what is adored by all Shakti worshippers.

8. Tantra sadhana is harmony-oriented. Professor Nalinikanta Brahma has summarized this idea thus: 'The Tantric method of sadhana combines elements of yoga, prayer, worship and meditation on the identity of the individual and the Absolute, and thus shows evident signs of eclecticism.'⁷ In tune with the spirit of the Upanishads, the Tantras bring about a union of the soul and Shiva. But the Puranas and other devotional scriptures say that the soul and God are different.

9. Shakti worship is predominantly a householder's sadhana. The scriptures too say that the devout householder has been called *gṛhāvadhūta*, a householder-mendicant. In this respect too the sages of the Upanishads have been followed.

10. The mainstay of Shakti worship is *ācāra*, or rites, and *bhāva*, or mood. The *ācāras* are principally seven in number: *vedācāra*, *vaiṣṇavācāra*, *śaivācāra*, *dakṣiṇācāra*, *vāmācāra*, *śiddhāntācāra* and *kaulācāra*. Each of these *ācāras* depend on a particular *bhāva*. The *bhāvas* are three: *paśubhāva*, *virabhāva*, and *divyabhāva*. Sri Ramakrishna has said no to *vāmācāra*, and in his Calcutta Address, Swami Vivekananda has come down heavily upon Vāmācārins.

Aspects of Mother Worship

Those interested in knowing how the little stream called Mother worship in the Shakti system became such a strong current in later times will find that there were two aspects of Motherhood: (1) the Mother of plants and the Protector of animals; and (2) the mountain-dwelling, lion-riding Mother. In time, the second aspect became powerful. The mountain-dwelling Mother, who rode the lion, subsequently became Parvati, Girija, Adrija and so on. She is also the Uma Haimavati of the *Kena Upanishad*. In different ages, this same Mother has been receiving worship in different names and forms. The worship of this Mother, who has countless names and forms, does not

mean polytheism; each image of Mother takes the aspirant straight to the supreme goal of life. Max Mueller, the famous German Indologist, coined a new term to explain this phenomenon: *henotheism*. Though names and forms are different, the philosopher says that the Goddess is one and non-dual. And the aspirant says, 'It is the splendid sport of the one Mother.' The sages have sung in the *Devi Bhagavata*: 'Whatever be the number of goddesses accepting worship in the cities and villages of Bhārata, they are all aspects of the one Mahadevi, because they are not different from the primordial Mother, but different aspects of the same Mother.'⁸ What a wonderful concept has come to us down the steps of time! It is certainly born of experience. This spiritual history only eulogizes the glory of the Divine Mother.

Coming to poets, the poet Kalidasa has endeared Uma, the daughter of Himalaya, to the heart of every Indian, in the form of an ideal daughter or wife; through his works Uma has become enlivened in the soul of the people. She is an ideal in beauty, sweetness and love. In subsequent times, however, this ancient Parvati has, through the Puranas, become united with Chandi or Durga, and thus her gentle, loving form has become a bit hidden, as it were.

Surprising as it may appear, the name Uma was known in other parts of the ancient world too. SK Dikshit writes, 'The Babylonian word for Mother is Ummu or Umma, the Accadian Ummi, and the Dravidian is Umma. These words can be connected with each other, and with Uma, the Mother-Goddess.'⁹ This apart, in one of the coins of the Hittites, the image of the Goddess seen was also called Ummo.¹⁰ It is evident that our Parvati, or Uma, has similarities in name and form with the goddesses of other races. In our own country, we read in the Upanishads that She gives the supreme Knowledge to the gods; we again see that She is the daughter of the Mountain King and the daughter of Sage Jahnu. Again, it

is She who has adorned Bengali hearts as the daughter of the poet Ramprasad. In the *Chandi* She is called Durga. She is the loving wife of Shiva and She is the mother of Ganesha, Kartikeya, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. Mother Durga descends to the mortal realm every year to enjoy the love and affection of Bengali mothers. She is not only the dear goddess of Bengalis, but all people of India experience her love and affection. So the one Divine Mother has become so diverse with the flow of time.

A different form is that of the demon-destroying Caṇḍikā. Perhaps these two forms became one in later times. Here, in the stream of the development of the worship of the Great Goddess, another stream too came and merged. That was the worship of Kālikā, or Kālī. Thus there are three: the lion-riding Durga or Uma, Caṇḍikā and Kali. In the field of the Shakti worship of the Bengali people, Mother Kali has assumed the highest position, leaving behind all the other goddesses. Whereas in Durga worship importance is given to festivities, in the worship of Kali and other deities, including the Daśa-mahāvidyās, sadhana has become important.

Some say that the Rātri Devī of the Vedic 'Rātri Sūkta' became the terrible Mother later. The Nirṛti Devī of the *Shatapatha Brahmana* and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* are considered the origins of Mother Kali by some others. The *Mundaka Upanishad* mentions several names for Kali. Kali is mentioned in several places in the *Mahabharata*. The Puranas, Upapuranas and the Tantric literature are filled with Mother Kali.

Coming down the steps of history, we see that Cāmuṇḍā Devī becomes one with the blood-tasting, terrible Kali. The early form of such a unification is indicated in the *Chandi* of Mārkaṇḍeya. Defeated by Shumbha and Nishumbha and driven out of heaven, the gods sang hymns in praise of the goddess. Kauṣīkī Devī came out of the person of the goddess and thus became black in colour. She also came to be called Kālikā, whose abode is the

Himalaya: '*Kāliketi samākhyaṭā himācalakṛtā-śrayā.*' There is another story in this book. Seeing Chanda and Munda coming near her, the Divine Mother's face became dark in colour due to anger. And from her forehead emerged the black goddess Kali, with weapons in her hands. She destroyed the demon army. She held Chanda by the hair and beheaded him. At that moment, Munda ran towards her. The Devi slew him also. She then gave the two heads as a gift to Caṇḍikā. Being pleased with her, Caṇḍikā told her, 'You will be known as Cāmuṇḍā in the world.'¹¹ Again, during the killing of the demon Raktabīja too, we see the important role Kali played. She consumed the blood that fell from the body of Raktabīja. When she did this, Raktabīja became helpless, and then the Devi killed him. The Goddess has been called Kali, and the killer of Chanda and Munda has been called Cāmuṇḍā. Thus the Puranas have unified the two: Cāmuṇḍā and Kālī.

Kali Worship

In the *Tantrasāra* of Kṛṣṇānanda Āgama-vāgīśa there is a description of Mother Kali, which was originally mentioned in the *Kālī Tantra*. This has come to be the meditation verse of Kali during her worship. Lord Shiva lies supine at Mother's feet, and one of her feet is placed on his chest. In ancient descriptions, however, Kali does not stand on Shiva; she stands on a *śava*, or dead body. She has destroyed the demons and is stamping their bodies underfoot; hence this form. Some factors helped in bringing about such a change from *shava* to Shiva. According to Dr Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta, these are (1) the nirguna Purusha and the threefold Prakṛti of the Saṅkhyā; (2) the *viparīta-ratātūrā* idea of the Tantras; and (3) the supremacy of Shakti.¹²

In the first volume of his *Bhāratiya Shakti-sadhana*, Upendranath Das says that Kali worship was prevalent from ancient times in Gujarat, Rajputana, Mysore, Tanjore, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. But it is in Bengal alone

that the tradition of spiritual aspirants has been strong.

The 'Adyā Stotra' from the *Brahma-yāmala Tantra* says, '*Kālikā vangadēse ca*; and Kali in Bengal.' Among the Tantric works prevalent in Bengal, one is the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. In that too we can clearly notice the description of Kali. The Bengali's love for Kali is not something new. Seen in this background, we can notice how in different Puranas and Upapuranas there is a clear attempt to unify the concepts of Kali and Parvati. Because this attempt has succeeded, Kali has become the Great Goddess (Mahadevi).

One more attempt has gained weight in this way of thinking: Kali is the original Devi, and Pārvati Devi has, along with her diverse forms like Uma, Gauri, Durga and Chandi, originated from Kali. Gauri, Durga and others are different forms of that one goddess alone. One more thing. Numerous stories have found place in the Puranas and Upapuranas regarding how Mother Kali attained this Gauri-hood. In the *Kālikā Purāna*, the daughter of Daksha was 'Simhasthā Kālikā Kṛṣṇā'. She gave up her body and took birth in the house of Himalaya, and got the name Kali. Parvati-Kali's marriage took place with Shiva. One day, they were moving about in Mount Kailas. In front of the fair-complexioned Urvashi and other nymphs who were present, Shiva addressed Kali as '*Kālī bhinnāñjana-śyāmā*, Kali of dark complexion.' Mistaking this to be Shiva's teasing her for her black colour, Kali felt insulted. She went away to perform austerities. She adored Vrishabha-dhvaja for hundreds of years. By his grace, she gave up her black colour and attained the fair colour. Then she returned to Shiva.¹³

From the end of the sixteenth century onwards, there was a reawakening amongst the worshippers of Kali and Mahavidya. Their only aim was the attainment of the feet of the Divine Mother. All their efforts, eagerness and struggle were to attain that goal. The efforts of Krishnananda, Brahmananda, Purnananda,

Raja Ramakrishna of Natore, Sharvananda Thakur, Bāmākhēpa, Ramprasad, Kamalakanta and others culminated in the attainments of Sri Ramakrishna. Holding on to the divine form, these aspirants reached the Formless; they held on to the image of the Divine Mother and attained the Divine Mother Herself. Thus they practised broad and universal ideals and have made sadhana easy of approach and useful for the age. The perfection Sri Ramakrishna attained through this Shakti sadhana will be discussed later.

At the time of his advent, Ramprasad had seen two streams of Mother worship: (1) secret sadhana and (2) worship of the Divine Mother in Her image with all pomp and show. In the aspirants who followed the second worship were seen the exhibition of splendour, awareness of cult and hatred for Vaishnavism. Combining both streams, Ramprasad lifted Kali worship above the limits of cult and gave it a universal appeal. The Tantras stress internal purification, and Ramprasad stressed *bhāvas*. He says, 'It is a matter of *bhāva*; without emotion can She be attained?' Mother, who is the repository of all *bhāvas*, is the culmination of emotions (*bhāvi*). Ramprasad sings, 'I learnt *bhāva* from a *bhāvi*.' He learnt that one should hold on to devotion and bring out the pearl called Shakti from the depths of the ocean of Knowledge. Holding on to the Divine Mother Śyāmā, Ramprasad tried to attain the supreme Brahman. He would say, 'My Tārā is formless.' And when the heart-lotus opened, he saw that 'My Mother is all-pervasive.'

Mother Kali's Unique Lila

Sri Ramakrishna's life was a unique field of Mother Kali's sport. The extensive, diverse and meaningful way in which Shakti sadhana expressed itself in Sri Ramakrishna's life was never before seen in any other aspirant. When he was young, he fell into a trance on the way while visiting Vishalakshi of Anur. He had a unique vision then. From then on his life took a different turn. From the day he began wor-

shipping Mother Kali at Dakshineswar, the deeper, expansive and intensive sides of his Mother worship came to the fore. He had heard that 'When pleased, She is the giver of liberation to human beings.'¹⁴ He understood that unless the Divine Mother cleared the way, there could be no God-realization. Thus he pleased the Divine Mother with his purity and intense aspiration, and attained Her vision. He did not rest with the Divine Mother's vision; he also practised other Shakti disciplines through various moods. He moved about freely in the world of sadhana, becoming an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother.

Under the directions of Yogeshvari Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna practised all the sixty-four Tantric disciplines. There is a subtle intermingling of moods in these sixty-four methods. Gradually, he scaled the highest pinnacle of these methods of sadhana. Thereafter, he undertook Advaita sadhana under the tutelage of Totapuri. Being established in Advaitic knowledge, Sri Ramakrishna entered into the mood of the vijñani and remained a child of the Divine Mother. Coming down from nirvikalpa samadhi, he began enjoying the attitudes of devotee and devotion. The Brahma leader Pratap Chandra Mazumdar wrote about Sri Ramakrishna: 'He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantist doctrines. He is an idolater and is yet a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the one, formless, infinite Deity, whom he terms Akhanda Satchidananda.' According to Sri Ramakrishna, there is no difference between Kali, Krishna and Shiva. According to the *Sammohana Tantra*, he who distinguishes between Rama and Shiva is an idiot.

Sri Ramakrishna's Shakti Worship: Salient Features

Regarding Sri Ramakrishna's Shakti worship and supernatural attainments, here are a few important points:

1. All of Sri Ramakrishna's sadhanas are tinged with the ideal of harmony. With the permission of the Divine Mother he practised the sadhanas of the different modes of Hinduism and those of other faiths. This effort of his was to know how people worshipped the Lord in all those faiths, and to know their truth and validity. Regarding the sadhanas of the vast religion called Hinduism, his opinion was this: 'He who is spoken of in the Vedas, He who is spoken of in the Tantras, is also spoken of in the Puranas.' He would say:

Do you know what the truth is? God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with wholehearted devotion. Suppose there are errors in the religion that one has accepted; if one is sincere and earnest, then God Himself will correct those errors.¹⁵

2. The *Kularnava Tantra* says, '*Sādhakānām hitārthāya brahmaṇo rūpa-kalpanā*; Forms of Brahman are assumptions to help spiritual aspirants.' The Supreme presents Itself before the aspirant assuming forms like Kali, Durga and Shiva. However, these forms are not imagined according to the whims of aspirants. Behind these forms is the secret of the aspirants' attainments. And it is to be remembered that 'secret' does not mean magic of any sort. The Divine Mother revealed to Sri Ramakrishna that just as She is of the form of the blissful Mother, She is also of the nature of the formless pure Consciousness. She is both with form and without form; She is both with attributes and without attributes; and much more.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Kali is Brahman and Brahman is Kali. So long as the 'I'-consciousness of the aspirant remains, there are Kali, Krishna and so on. When that 'I' goes, the 'form merges into the formless'. This self-revealing (*svasamvedya*) Truth should be understood at every step.

3. In the Tantras, the position of Shakti is

supreme. According to Advaita, Shakti is called maya. Brahman alone is real. Maya is inexplicable; it is neither existent nor non-existent. In one word, the Advaita school ignores Shakti. In the *Devi Bhagavata* there is a harmonization between the two streams: 'Shakti is always one with Brahman. Their mutual connection is like fire and its power to burn.'¹⁶ Sri Ramakrishna went a step further. He said that Brahman and Shakti are the same. He said, 'He whom you address as Brahman is none other than She whom I call Śakti, the Primal Energy. It is called Brahman in the Vedas when it transcends speech and thought and is without attributes and action. I call it Śakti, Ādyāśakti, and so forth, when I find it creating, preserving, and destroying the universe.'¹⁷ Still water is the example for Brahman, while the wavy waters are the example of Shakti. This attitude was evident in Sri Ramakrishna's everyday life. He did not want to be in samadhi and remain 'unconscious' with the knowledge of Brahman. He wanted to become a vijñani and come down to the plane of duality to enjoy the company of devotees.

4. Even though there is the manifestation of Shakti in everything that has name and form, in women there is the greatest expression of the *sandhinī*, or creative and protective, and *hlādinī* aspects. It is due to this speciality that women are worshipped as sources of the universe and as symbols of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna did that. He worshipped his wife as the Divine Mother Tripurasundari and offered all the fruits of his sadhana at her feet. He considered all women as the representations of some or other form of the Divine Mother. He would say that he had the attitude of 'mother and child'. In Shakti sadhana, the attitude of a child towards its mother is very pure. In the attitude of the hero, there is a fall in most cases.

5. The mansion of sadhana has seven storeys. Sri Ramakrishna had free access to all of them. His spiritual practices too were nothing but sport. To cite one of the numerous in-

stances: Though he followed the child attitude towards the Divine Mother, he had become filled with the Divine Mother once and had accepted the worship of the devotees. This happened on the evening of Kali Puja in 1885. An eyewitness writes, 'Who Kali is or who he is, I can't understand. In Kali he alone is and in him She alone lives.' During the worship, the devotees saw his divine smile and hands bestowing blessings, and were assured that they were always protected by the Lord. They were freed from fear.

6. Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'Both the Vedas and the Puranas describe pure food and conduct. But what the Vedas and the Puranas ask people to shun as impure is extolled by the Tantra as good.'¹⁸ Knowing everything, he accepted that which was good. He objected to the sadhana of the hero mood. He stressed purity. He rejected the hero attitude and stressed the 'mother and child' path.

7. During the nineteenth century, the worship of Shakti (*śākta-dharma*) had developed into a religion, as it were. Sri Ramakrishna's sadhanas had ended with his practice of Advaita Vedanta. In reality, whatever sadhana he undertook—Shakta, Vaishnava and Shai-va—all were with the ideal of Oneness or Advaita in mind. The author of *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* has discussed all this in detail. On the other hand, Swamiji saw that Vedanta in its three forms is the source of all religions; it is scientific, modern and also the unifier of human beings. Thus the Shakta and Vedanta ideals were seen by the teacher and disciple as universal and broad. Therefore Swamiji did not preach Shakti sadhana but preached Vedanta, and said that we should understand Vedanta in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

8. Though the teacher and disciple were one in this respect, to the sadhana-oriented Sri Ramakrishna the Divine Mother was extremely gentle and loving, and to the vision-oriented Swamiji She was a combination of the terrible and the benevolent. He wrote:

Of Death begrimed and black—
Scattering plagues and sorrows,
Dancing mad with joy,
Come, Mother, come!
For Terror is Thy name,
Death is in Thy breath,
And every shaking step
Destroys a world for e'er.
Thou 'Time', the All-Destroyer!
Come, O Mother, come!
Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in Destruction's dance,
To him the Mother comes.¹⁹

Above all, in Sri Ramakrishna's Shakti sadhana—where he accepted a woman as his teacher, worshipped his own wife as the Divine Mother and saw all women as representations of the Divine Mother—Swamiji saw a new meaning and mission of social awakening. He also saw the initiation of women's awakening in this sadhana of Sri Ramakrishna. Therefore Swamiji thought of starting a women's monastery.

9. The Shakti worship of Sri Ramakrishna, tending towards Advaita, had finally established him in the pinnacle of Advaitic vijñana. His disciple Narendranath had been blessed with the attainment of nirvikalpa samādhi. But neither of these two remained aloof after tasting this divine nectar. The taste of the nectar of spiritual illumination never made them turn away from humanity. The whole universe is Brahman itself. Since the living being is Brahman itself, 'Nara' became 'Narayana' for them. Love of the living being is love for Shiva, and service to the living being is service to God, they announced.

10. That Divine Mother-Power whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped as Tripurasundari, and at whose feet he offered everything he had attained, and that very Power whom Swamiji considered 'the living Durga'—that Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi also performed Shakti sadhana. Expressing the Motherhood of God fully in her, she added strength to Sri Ramakrishna's Shakti sadhana. The Divine Mother

Herself came as a human being this time and showed unsurpassing love towards all—irrespective of caste, creed or station of life—and served everyone, thereby establishing a very high ideal of motherhood.

If one wishes to understand the Shakti worship of Sri Ramakrishna, one has to look deeply into the Shakti worship of Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji, whose vital role we have hinted already. To Sri Ramakrishna, the Divine Mother is basically full of benevolence and bliss. To Swamiji, She is both benevolent and terrible. He saw behind the blissful, benevolent form of the Divine Mother Her terrible form, which human beings don't wish to look at, because of fear. Swamiji's vision was fundamentally that of a philosopher, and Sri Ramakrishna's, of an aspirant who had offered his everything to Mother.

* * *

In earlier times, attempts were made to understand Shakti worship more or less through the lenses of spiritual striving and philosophy. Apart from these, modern minds want something more: concrete examples. They want to know the utility of this sadhana; they want to know how social good could be achieved through this. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's sadhana and life have fulfilled these needs. The Divine Mother Herself came in the form of Sri Sarada Devi and lived amidst us. Sri Sarada Devi accepted all human beings as her own children. In her presence both ordinary souls and great spiritual aspirants understand the completeness and glory of Shakti worship, and achieve tremendous inspiration. Through the holy trio, the worship of the Divine Mother has attained completeness, and all those sadhanas that were hidden in secrecy and darkness have been released from such stigmas and have become complete now.

The breadth of vision, expansiveness and all-pervasiveness, and social utility that the Shakti worship of this holy trio under the leadership of Sri Ramakrishna has achieved is

something novel and unheard of in the world of Mother worship. True, like in earlier times, the goal of Shakti worship is liberation of the individual. But owing to the needs of the times, it has also become an instrument of social good, and has also become easily accessible to all types of people.

The Ramakrishna movement has come up by centring on the collective ideal of Shakti worship. If we compare this movement with the flow of the Ganga, we could say that Dakshineswar is its Gomukh and Belur Math its Gangotri. We may remember a statement of Swamiji regarding the speciality of this movement. He wrote to his brother disciples: 'Now we have a new India, with its new God, new religion, and new Vedas.'²⁰ From image worship to the worship of the supreme Truth; from individual liberation to collective liberation; from Kali worship to Advaita Vedanta sadhana—all have been freed of boundaries and limitations. At the heart of all these is the dear child of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna. Monks and devotees of the Ramakrishna Mission, who are part of the great movement, feel that they are eager children of the Divine Mother seeking Her grace, and pray to Her earnestly: 'O Great Goddess, You are all-pervasive, the Mother of all. We know, O Mother, that if You are pleased, everyone is pleased.'²¹ *

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2. See Swami Prajnanananda, *Tantre Tattva o Sadhana* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1988), 12.
3. *Mahanirvana Tantra*, 2.14.
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6. *Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu cetanety-abhidhiyate*.
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8. *Kalā yāḥ yāḥ samudbhūtāḥ pūjītāstāśca bhārate; Pūjītā grāmyadevyāśca grāme ca nagare mune.*
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11. *Cāmunḍeti tato loke khyātā devi bhaviṣyasi.*
—*Durga Saptashati*, 7.27.
12. *Bhārate Śakti Sadhana o Śakta Sāhitya*, 70.
13. *Ibid.*, 80-6.
14. *Saiṣā prasannā varadā nṛṇām bhavati muktaye.*
—*Durga Saptashati*, 1.56.
15. *Gospel*, 559.
16. *Devi Bhagavata*, 9.1.14.
17. *Gospel*, 434.
18. *Ibid.*, 564.
19. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.384.
20. *CW*, 7.496.
21. *Tvaṁ sarva-rūpiṇi devi sarveṣāṁ janani parā; Tuṣṭyām tvayi deveśi sarveṣāṁ toṣaṇam bhavet.*
—*Mahanirvana Tantra*, 4.24.

Morality

This Self cannot be gained by a man who is weak and cowardly. He must shake off all false ideas of weakness in time. He can never be weak if he believes himself to be a part and parcel of the all-powerful God. How can the child of such a father be weak? He must have faith in his own boundless strength, which, though latent, may be displayed to its full advantage whenever the occasion demands it. If the struggle is continued in this way, victory will come within a very short time.

The senses want one to make friends with all the beautiful women of the world; morality commands, 'Marry only one girl and love her if you cannot resist lustfulness, for, as says St Paul, "It is better to marry than to burn", but if you can make yourself a "eunuch for the Kingdom of God", that is far better and nobler.' The senses want a man to sacrifice truth for pleasure; morality comes forward and commands him to sacrifice pleasure for truth and duty. The senses want him to live for the enjoyments of life; morality commands him only to take as much enjoyment in the shape of food and drink as is necessary to keep his body and soul together, for fools alone live to eat, whereas the wise only eat to live. The senses want him to believe that all pleasures lie centred in them; morality comes forward and says, 'No, the senses are the homes of misery, pain and anguish; the abode of pleasure is beyond the senses. So spurn the senses, go beyond them, and you will find bliss perennial. March onward and never stop until you crush the senses under your feet.'

When perseverance, strength and courage at last win the day, and when the senses are fully subdued, then begins to rise on the horizon of his mental plane the gladdening suns of Truth and Bliss, which are eternally and indissolubly connected with each other and shed their benign, congenial, balmy and life-giving rays so as to plunge the victor into the ocean of unbroken beatitude.

—*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

Communication in the Light of Indian Wisdom

PRAKASH LOHIA

Among the famous nine courtiers in the court of Emperor Vikramaditya, known as nine jewels for their wisdom, learning and mastery in arts and letters, two great literary luminaries were Bhavabhuti and Mahakavi Kalidasa.

To overestimate one's own talent and to resent the recognition of others' achievements as overstatement is a common human folly, and even Bhavabhuti could not rise above it. He could not suppress for long his anguish at being rated second to Kalidasa in literary merit and expressed it one day to the emperor himself.

Importance of Right Communication

Quite often CEOs in the modern corporate world also face such dilemmas, when they have to establish the worth of their judgments (including unpleasant feedbacks) of human talent to their team members, who often individually wield higher merit in their own fields than the leader himself. And this has to be achieved without allowing resentments and de-motivation to set in. The more meritorious the team, the subtler are the interacting forces, and the greater is the challenge to uphold the morale, motivation and creativity of the team. The most important, nay, the only instrument left to the leader is the transparency and fairness of the decisions or judgments at every stage, and the subtlety of its communication to all concerned, befitting the situation.

Human Resources Management in a Bygone Era

Let us go back to our original narration. Vikramaditya was taking a morning stroll in the royal garden accompanied by both Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti. Such strolls were perhaps

a part of the royal daily routine. It is not very difficult to imagine the subject matter of discussion and also the underlying tension that often accompanies the creative interaction of titans. It is again not difficult to imagine how Vikramaditya, a great patron of excellence that he was, would effortlessly utilize such tension to elicit the best from his team. Suddenly a dead dry tree standing by the wayside caught his attention. And Vikramaditya found in it the right opportunity to put at rest the anguish haunting Bhavabhuti.

To carry an unresolved problem just below the conscious level, a part of the mind continuously pondering on it unawares, while carrying on normally with other work, and arriving at the solution in a flash, stimulated by some factor, internal or external—most of us experience this once in a while. Great leaders have to carry many unresolved problems, and such mechanism becomes a part of the normal functioning for them. It is not very difficult to imagine how Vikramaditya might have asked his learned companions to describe the dead tree without exposing the purpose behind. Propelled by the unconscious urge to prove his merit (agitation of *rajas*), Bhavabhuti prattled, '*Suṣkam kāṣṭham tiṣṭhatyagre*; A dry piece of wood stands there in front.' He then looked at Kalidasa. Kalidasa muttered, '*Nirasa-taruvā-purato bhāge*; A stark arid, towering tree looms ahead.'

A great manager of human affairs, Vikramaditya continued with his earlier discussions without betraying any expression, as if nothing had happened. This was a rare feat of excellence in human relations by a CEO. Bhavabhuti was himself a poet of great merit. The fact that, in spite of being a contemporary of the great Kalidasa, he could leave a separate

identity and mark for himself establishes his literary genius beyond all doubt.

We all know that highly creative people nurture highly sensitive egos and they possess a very effective defensive mechanism to protect it, a mechanism capable of shielding any communication appearing as a threat to the ego. The sensor operating the defensive mechanism is self-respect or self-esteem. The same self-esteem can be intelligently used to disarm the defensive mechanism as well. That is precisely what Vikramaditya did. By playing down the whole issue, he allowed Bhavabhuti to ponder over it, accept the qualitative difference and retreat with his self-esteem intact. To borrow an expression from the guna theory of the Sankhyas, Vikramaditya made sattva prevail over rajas, while very subtly conducting the interactive session to resolve the conflict.

As a practising manager I could not control the urge to impart a case-study touch to the ancient historical episode. My apology to the learned readers for making the background too lengthy before starting with the main topic.

Divinizing Communication

Strangely enough, I landed myself in the shoes of Bhavabhuti, of course on a nano scale, confronting Mahakavi Kalidasa after a time gap of nearly fifteen hundred years. In a rare feat of imagination, I penned down some thoughts on the relationship of thought and word in an expression or communication, which I reproduce below.

Thought and word are entwined in an expression. It is true for both contemplation within and communication with the outer world. If language is the body of expression, thoughts are the life or the Spirit permeating the body. The Spirit depends on the body to manifest. Without the body the Spirit is inconceivable, and the body without the Spirit means death and decay. Thoughts need language to express itself. The subtler the thought, the more refined the medium it gropes for to

communicate. It is like the artist's imaginative faculty and his mastery over the creation of colours in different shades and hues and the techniques of their proper application. We are told that Michelangelo, the great artist and sculptor of Italy, worked like a miner for some years in a quarry to develop the feel of marble. To him it was not just a cold, lifeless piece of stone but a lively medium responding with pain and pleasure to every touch of his chisel, letting his dream come true. In the statues of David and Moses, the ageless creations of the master, we find the consummation of the loftiest flights of imagination and perfection of the medium of expression.'

If after such an articulation, a person of my talent and merit feels somewhat elated in self-esteem, the wise will take a kinder view, and may utter a few words of appreciation as well with due sincerity. But lo, the moments of pride were very short-lived. I stumbled upon a verse of the great Kalidasa dealing with the same subject. First of all, with the limited range of knowledge and limited span of interest that I possess, I am not supposed to come across Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha*. Even if that happens, coming across the very verse dealing with the subject of my maiden literary venture is too weird a happening to accept as mere chance. Rather I shall prefer to accept it as my tryst with destiny (in the field of scholastics) and share with you the expressions of the master: *Vāgarthāvivā sampr̥ktau vāgartha-pratipattaye; Jagataḥ pitarau vande pār̥vati-paramaeśvarau* (I bow, lowly, in obeisance to You,/ O Queen Parvati and Lord Parameshvara,/ The twin parents of the e'er-moving worlds./ Bonded, as one, as word and its inhering thought—/ Even so may my words and thoughts instill unwavering faith).

This verse is the invocation hymn to Goddess Parvati and Lord Parameshvara at the beginning of the epic poem *Raghuvamsha*. The poet prays to Them that just as They are inseparably bonded as one and the same—much as a word and the thought it carries—so may his

words be bonded with their indwelling thought and may this united harmony awaken the faculty of understanding in the readers of the epic work. (The English rendering of the verse and the explanation is courtesy Prof Shyamal Banerjee.)

They say that every cloud has a silver lining. Though mediocrity is despised in intellectual circles, it shields the person under its spell from the pangs of egotism. No sooner did I come out of the initial shock of disappointment, than I started wondering about the expressions of the master and just went into raptures.

It is a verse with just twelve words arranged in two lines in the form of a hymn, invoking the blessings of Divinity at the beginning of an important undertaking, as part of the time-honoured Indian tradition. At the same time the verse is elevated to the heights of a *bija mantra* to invoke the divine Spirit behind every expression by associating the word and thought with Purusha and Prakriti. Every

expression is thus identified with the cosmic creation, the jagat; every communication is brought under the auspices of *satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram*.

* * *

In today's world, when we find that the only unit of measurement left is material benefit; when every human talent and creativity is a commodity to be encashed into the fastest million; when often the strong oppress the weak in the guise of globalization; when Socialism meets its fate in Stalinization and Capitalism in Enronization; when sophistry is allowed to replace philosophy and cynicism dons the garb of idealism—do we feel somewhere deep in our hearts that things are not right? It is high time we paused and lent our ears to the feeble but clear message of eternal India: 'Creation is the cosmic dance of Shiva. Nothing in the creation is secular; everything is sacred, spiritual, a means to worship the Truth and realize the Truth.'

*

Life is an Echo

A little boy in a fit of anger shouted to his mother that he hated her. Then, perhaps fearing punishment, he ran out of the house to the hillside and shouted at the valley, 'I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.' Back from the valley came the echo, 'I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.'

Somewhat startled, the boy ran back into the house and told his mother there was a mean little boy in the valley saying he hated him. His mother took him back to the hillside and told him to shout, 'I love you, I love you.'

The little boy did as he was told, and this time he joyously discovered that there was a nice little boy in the valley saying, 'I love, I love you.'

Life is an echo. What you send out comes back. What you sow you reap. What you give you get. What you see in others exists in you.

Regardless of who you are or what you do, if you are looking for the best way to reap the most in all areas of life, you should look for the good in every person and in every situation and adopt this golden rule as a way of life.

—from cyberspace

A Memorial to Swami Vivekananda

A report on the restored and renovated ancestral house of Swamiji

— Swami Satyamayananda —

Before and after Swami Vivekananda appeared at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago and shot to fame as a world teacher, he had to pass through many struggles. One of the problems before him was to decide between dedicating himself to his future mission and looking after his starving family in straitened circumstances. The former was still in a nebulous state and the latter was a concrete and painful reality. In his California lecture 'My Life and Mission' Swamiji says, 'I had to stand between my two worlds. On the one hand, I would have to see my mother and brothers starve unto death; on the other, I had believed that this man's [Sri Ramakrishna's] ideas were for the good of India and the world, and had to be preached and worked out.'

Swamiji was a unique personality. He represented India's history, culture, religion, philosophy, mythology, arts, sciences, her greatness, her poverty and her misery. Nay, he was the very soul of India. He lived for, loved and worshipped India. His master Sri Ramakrishna represented the true, spiritual India and moulded his illustrious disciple for the great mission of awakening the nation and the world.

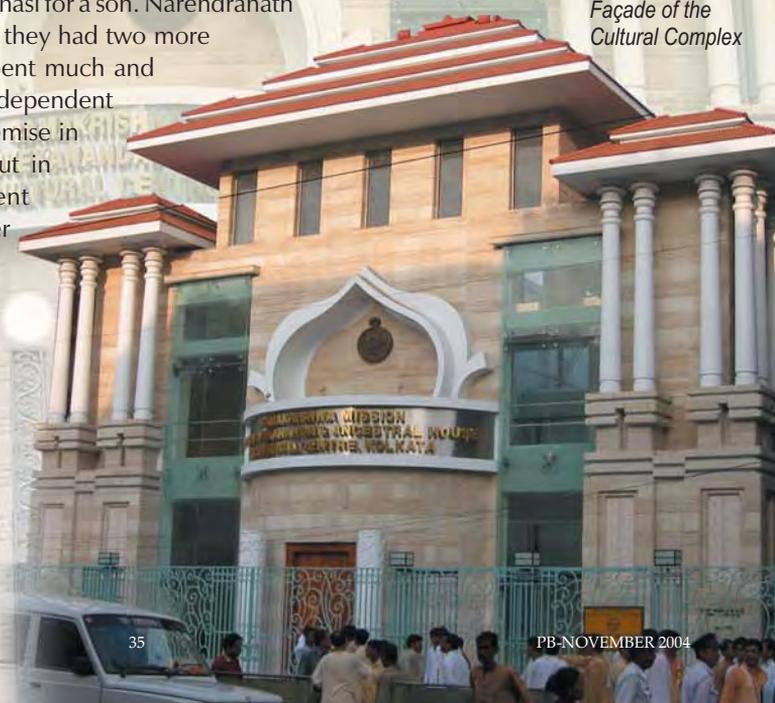
The Datta Family and Swamiji's Birth

Till a few years ago just a grimy, nondescript marble plaque at the entrance of a crumbling building swarming with tenants was the doleful reminder that Swamiji was born there on 12 January 1863. This sprawling house was home to the joint families of the cultured Dattas of Simla, a northern suburb of Kolkata. It had seen affluence at one time, but even during Swamiji's youth, poverty had made inroads into the family.

Rammohan Datta was an English solicitor's associate and had earned much wealth and built the house 300 years ago. He had two sons, Durgaprasad and Kaliprasad. Rammohan made intelligent Durgaprasad his partner in the legal profession. Durgaprasad married but renounced the world and became a sannyasin after the birth of his son Vishwanath. Vishwanath Datta also became a successful solicitor. His wife Bhuvaneshwari Devi was a devoted woman. After being blessed with two daughters, she prayed to Lord Vireshwara Shiva of Varanasi for a son. Narendranath was born to the couple in 1863. Later, they had two more sons. Vishwanath Datta earned and spent much and lived an aristocratic life with many dependent relatives around him. At his sudden demise in 1884 the avaricious relatives came out in their true colours. Everything went spiralling down for the family. Soon after the period of mourning, the relatives demanded their share of the property. The dispute became a long-drawn court case. The court finally divided the property into ten parts, out of which one was allotted to Narendra's family.

The idea was growing in many people to restore the sanctity of the place and enshrine the sacred memory of Swamiji's birth and early life in a suitable memorial.

*Façade of the
Cultural Complex*



Acquisition and Restoration

Before Swamiji's birth centenary celebrations in 1963, the Government of West Bengal had decided to establish a memorial institution at Swamiji's birthplace and had enquired if the Ramakrishna Mission was interested. The birth centenary celebrations committee then submitted a definite plan, which was accepted by the government, which then issued a notification to help acquire the property under the Land Acquisition Act in 1963, and again in 1973. The 54 families, who were occupying the place, then went to court challenging the government order. These legal battles stretched for three decades.

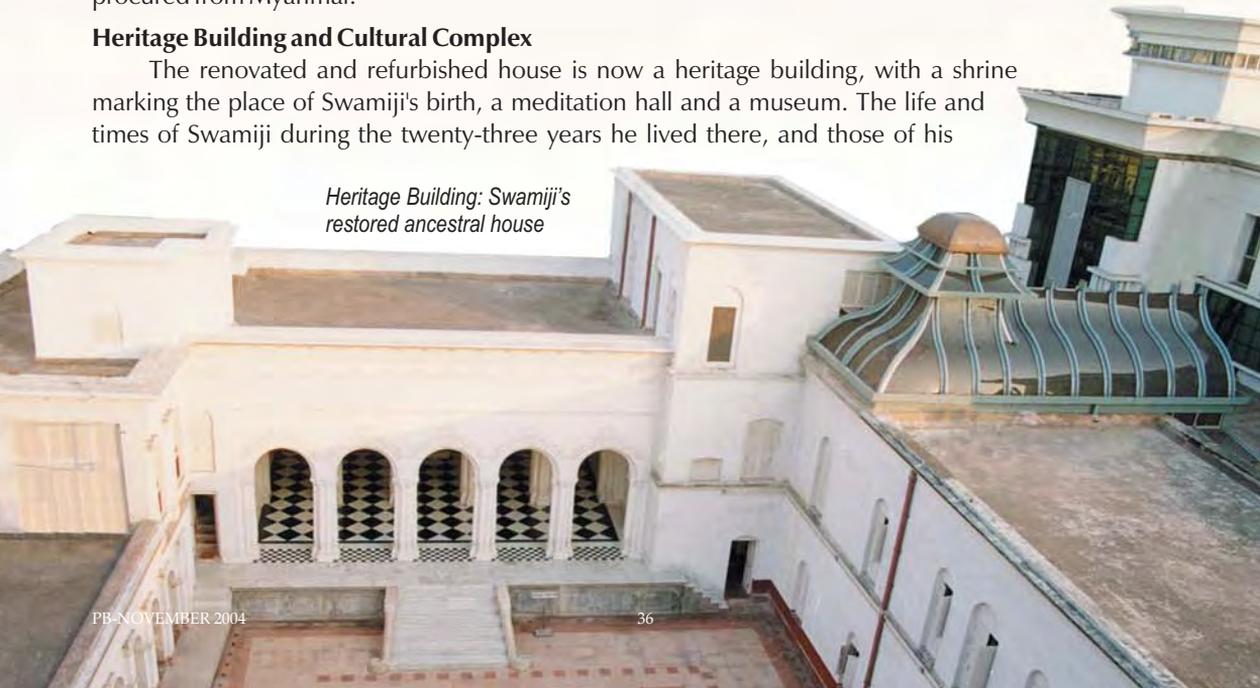
Divided and subdivided through years, the old premises housed 143 tenants, including commercial establishments. In 1993, the centenary year of Swamiji's appearance on the world stage, the Ramakrishna Mission decided to tackle the legal problems by direct negotiations with the tenants. Persistent efforts by monks and devotees and government agencies began to reap rewards, however slowly, and the maze soon began showing signs of clearing up. With the consent of the court, it was settled that the Ramakrishna Mission would provide alternative accommodation to the tenants. For this purpose a large plot of land on Muraripukur Road was purchased from the Kolkata Improvement Trust. A six-storey residential complex with 28 flats was constructed and the tenants shifted here. Additional flats had also to be purchased in Behala, Kasba and other places in Kolkata to complete the rehabilitation. Some of the occupants preferred cash compensation. The total cost of rehabilitation alone came to Rs 6 crore. Then the Government of West Bengal acquired Swamiji's ancestral house including some adjoining land and turned it over to the Ramakrishna Mission in May 1999. The Mission also independently purchased some more land to meet its administrative needs for philanthropic work to be taken up later.

The restoration of the house covering 21,600 sq ft was done without disturbing the original structure as far as possible. The original plan of the premises was secured from the archives of the Calcutta High Court. Archaeologists from the Archaeological Survey of India and reputed architects from Development Consultants Limited (DCL), shared their expertise in identifying the original structure and the later additions. After demolishing the encroaching structures, the original house was dismantled brick by brick and beam by beam, and repaired and reassembled. Excessively damaged bricks were marked out and replaced with similar, specially made ones, manufactured in Murlu village in Bankura, West Bengal, and sealed with a special kind of mortar lime brought from Katni in Madhya Pradesh and Puri, Orissa. Thirty-five per cent of the wood used for the restoration was from the original structure; the rest was procured from Myanmar.

Heritage Building and Cultural Complex

The renovated and refurbished house is now a heritage building, with a shrine marking the place of Swamiji's birth, a meditation hall and a museum. The life and times of Swamiji during the twenty-three years he lived there, and those of his

Heritage Building: Swamiji's restored ancestral house



mother, sisters and brothers have been recreated with the help of the latest technology. A replica of the image of Vireshwara Shiva, made in Varanasi, has also been installed here.

Three more buildings surrounding the heritage building form the cultural complex, covering an area of 24, 480 sq ft. The plan, drawn by DCL, was executed by Larsen & Toubro. The complex has the following wings:

1. *Vivekananda Research Centre*: This wing will hum with research on the various dimensions of Indian religion and culture. In contrast with most researches on India conducted by Western scholars, this centre will conduct research from the Indian perspective. It will have three departments: (1) Department of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Studies, (2) Department of Religious Studies and (3) Department of Cultural and Scientific Studies.

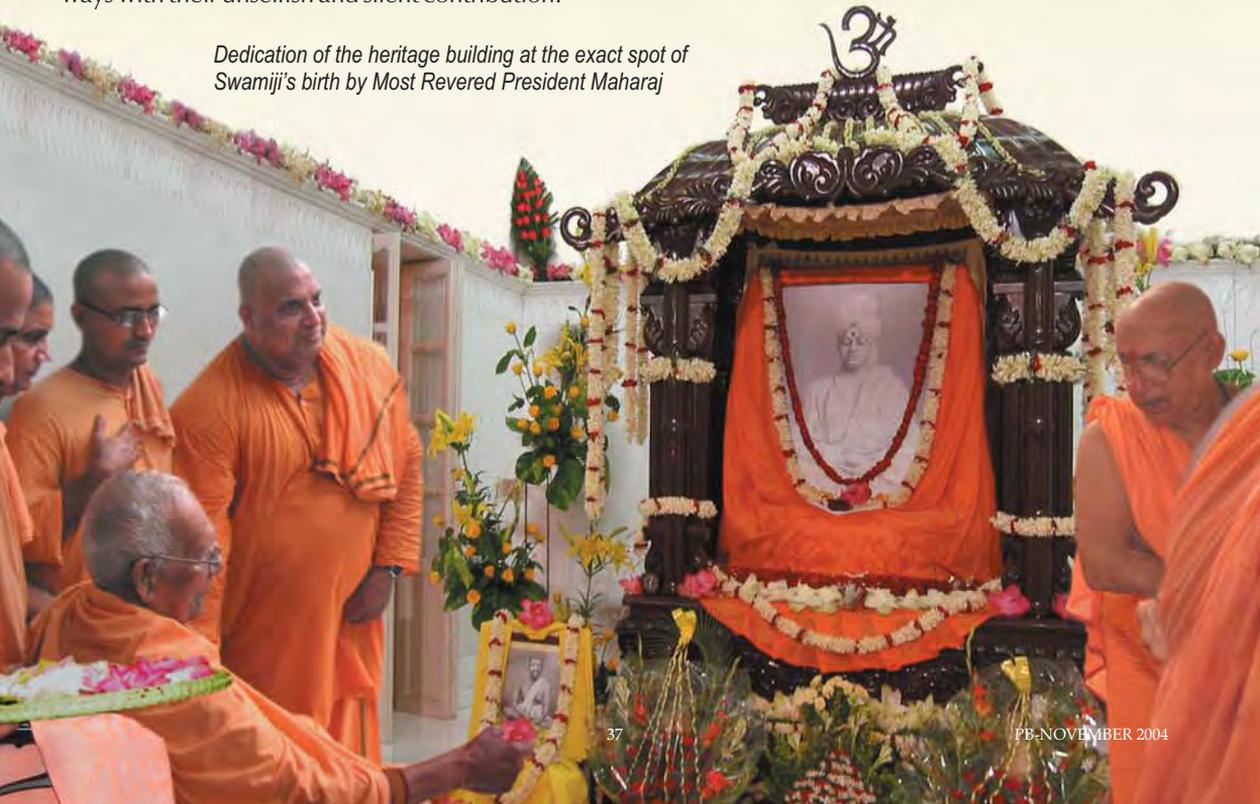
2. *Textbook Library and Seminar Hall*: The library already has about 5000 textbooks following the syllabuses of Calcutta, Jadavpur, Burdwan, Rabindra Bharati and Kalyani universities. The basement will store the textbooks; the ground floor will house the offices; the first floor is earmarked for the use of students of higher secondary to graduation levels; the second floor is for postgraduates; and the third floor has the seminar hall.

3. *Rural and Slum Development Centre*: This will undertake studies and projects to address issues like unemployment, health and sanitation. Self-employment schemes, vocational training, non-formal schools and coaching classes are on the cards. The top floor will house the monks' quarters.

Project Cost

The total cost of rebuilding and renovation of the heritage building and cultural complex and the resettlement of tenants has come to about Rs 20 crore. The central government helped the Mission with a grant of Rs 9.9 crore and the state government with Rs 6 crore (of which Rs 4 crore has already been received). The rest was collected as donation from the public. DCL experts worked untiringly; their labour of love is a service to Swamiji and the nation. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation did everything in its power to help the project, sometimes even going out of the way! Innumerable people helped in countless ways with their unselfish and silent contribution.

Dedication of the heritage building at the exact spot of Swamiji's birth by Most Revered President Maharaj



Inauguration

26 September 2004 dawned unlike any other day. After years of hope and hard work, the devotees' faces reflected the silent will of India's millions. The ambience in Swamiji's house was electric. A mangalarati at 5 am at the exact spot of Swamiji's birth, followed by Vedic chants and hymns sung by brahmacharins further intensified the atmosphere. The special puja began at 7. At 7.30 Dhrupad maestros gave a performance. At 9.30 Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, formally inaugurated Swamiji's ancestral home in the presence of the three Vice Presidents and administrative heads of the Order. Over 400 monastics and thousands of devotees witnessed the solemn event. Doordarshan beamed the event live across the country.

At 10 Swami Smarananandaji, the General Secretary, welcomed everyone at the public meeting held in a pandal in the courtyard. Swami Prabhanandaji followed with his brief informative talk. Most Revered President Maharaj then blessed everybody with a few words of benediction and forcefully exhorted the nation to put Swamiji's message of 'man-making' and 'nation-building' into practice. The three Vice Presidents then addressed the assembly. At the end, Swami Vishokanandaji, who spearheaded the entire project from beginning to end, gave his touching vote of thanks. More than 1,00,000 people paid their homage to Swamiji throughout the day.

At the evening arati at 6.30, prayers reached a thrilling spiritual crescendo, transporting the devotees to an altogether different world. The day's programme ended with a delightful musical mono-act by Sri Sekhar Sen, which intensely recreated Swamiji's life. People streaming out into the night left with shining faces and hearts brimming with joy.

His Excellency Dr A P J Abdul Kalam President of India and a great admirer of Swamiji, inaugurated the cultural complex on 1 October 2004 at 5.45 pm by unveiling a plaque commemorating the occasion and garlanding Swamiji's photograph in the shrine. He was accompanied by Sri Viren Shah, Governor of West Bengal, Sri Kanti Biswas, Minister of School Education, Government of West Bengal, and Sri Subrata Mukherjee, Mayor of Kolkata. In the course of his tour of the complex the President also declared open the textbook library. At the public meeting that followed the inauguration, His Excellency spoke of Swamiji's role of an inspirer and awakener of souls and the nation. Sri Viren Shah drew attention to the growing need of Swamiji's message of strength. Sri Subrata Mukherjee spoke for the citizens of Kolkata, saying that it was a great day for the city and its future cultural and spiritual development. □

*His Excellency the President of India accompanied by
His Hon'ble, Governor of West Bengal at the Inauguration*



Let Ramakrishna Dance His Rapturous Dance

SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Swami Brahmananda, a most intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once went into an ecstatic mood at the sight of an image of Lord Nataraja (dancing Shiva) at the Madurai temple in South India. Nataraja literally means the King of Dancers. Shiva is portrayed as a majestic dancer who dances his dazzling dance poised wonderfully on one foot in an act of supreme balancing. Usually, it is the left foot that He raises in the air, keeping the right foot on the ground, and thus he does his balancing act standing on one foot. The story goes that the Pandya king ruling over Madurai empathetically felt the Lord's pain in the right foot and fervently pleaded with Nataraja to change His posture: to dance, for a change, with the left foot on the ground and the right one in the air. The compassionate Lord at once obliged and started dancing as requested! This image of Nataraja dancing the reverse way is seen only in Madurai and is considered a unique posture of the dancing Shiva. When Swami Brahmananda saw it, he at once went into ecstasy and exclaimed that he had seen Sri Ramakrishna dance *exactly* in the same posture!

The Two Divine Dances

Nataraja dances are of two kinds: one, in the overflowing divine joy of absorption in his higher Self; and the other, in a state of feeling great compassion for the world, which needs to be absorbed, with all its creatures, into Himself whence they sprang. Shiva means the Auspicious, the Blessed, the Good. But this auspiciousness, blessedness or goodness comes through a divine Power that destroys all evil,

selfishness and smallness in one single sweep; hence the dance imagery. The first kind of dance is greatly enjoyable, adorable and soothing, while the second kind is terrible, too powerful to be calmly adored, and oftentimes, too devastating in its effect to be admired. Nevertheless, both of them conduce to the welfare of humanity. Nataraja is said to dance both kinds of dances in the *chidambara*, the space of Consciousness, or Awareness, also known as *daharākaśa*, *hridaya-guha* and so on. While these concepts are too profound for ordinary mortals like us who have not yet discovered the existence or reality of a vast inner space, we could at least reverentially contemplate the goodness and auspiciousness flowing out of the Self-contented and Self-absorbed Shiva as Nataraja and pour our hearts' devotion in a prayer for the destruction of our selfishness and egocentricity.

The Destructive Power of Incarnations

We do not really know how Shiva looks in his ecstatic divine dancing mood of Nataraja. Saints and sages who have had His darshan in the depths of their being have left some portraits. But in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, the picture is right there before us in the form of authentic photographs. If only video pictures were possible during Ramakrishna's lifetime, we would have had the great benefit

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While a Ramakrishna or a Krishna or a Buddha may look the picture of peace and calmness and overflowing inner joy, they are, in fact, powerful dynamos of spiritual power. They are a Power that destroys and devastates, rather than soothe or comfort.

of seeing live motion pictures of his ecstasies, dances and rapturous discourses with the devotees. Nonetheless, the still pictures and photographs, animated by the vivid descriptions of Mahendranath Gupta (who styled himself 'M'), invade our being with such power that our vulnerable inner structure of the self begins to crumble at once. Christian mystics speak of Christ, the outwardly meek and humble Son of God, as the 'Hound of Heaven'. Swami Vijnanananda, a mystic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna into whom the Master infused great spiritual power by a mere touch, used to describe the Master as '*kancha kheko devata*; the deity that devours raw flesh'. Whereas the other deities are offered cooked meat and fish, Sri Ramakrishna, the outwardly meek and humble devotee of Kali, swallows up a person alive, flesh, blood and all, to transform him or her into a true divine being transcending the body, mind and the senses. Herein lies the power of the avatara, the divine Incarnation. While a Ramakrishna or a Krishna or a Buddha may look the picture of peace and calmness and overflowing inner joy, they are, in fact, powerful dynamos of spiritual power. They are a Power that destroys and devastates, rather than soothe or comfort. This Power destroys all smallness, littleness, self-centredness and egocentricity in one's personality. It would therefore be wise on the part of those who would like to fondly cling to their little individuality not to venture too near these Divine Incarnations!

The Power That Was Sri Ramakrishna

How quietly a Ramakrishna invades one's

personality is a matter of experience and perception for any sincere spiritual aspirant. This illiterate priest of Bhavatarini Kali at Dakshineswar, clad for most part of the day merely in the apparel of bhakti (*projjvala-bhakti-paṭāvrita*) rather than earthly clothes; with the almost contagious innocence of a five-year-old but ripe nevertheless with an ageless wisdom; with a disarming Krishna-like smile playing on his lips, his countenance beaming with the bliss of God-absorption (*samadhi*) and his ecstatic movements radiating the soothing splendour of a million moons; with a sweet stammer that is the very antithesis of shrill oratory, but with divine discourses pouring spontaneously from the very recesses of his being as in a torrential outpour of ambrosial waterfall; with an unparalleled compassion for the human being in bondage—how could one even conceive that this humble child of Kali was such a storehouse of spiritual power that devastated even a Vivekananda so proud of his mental strength and intellectual accomplishments! Swami Shivananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna's intimate disciples, once observed, 'We knew and thought of him as a very holy man, pure and innocent like a child. But how could we ever know that this little man contained within him millions of universes!'

To say the least, all this would naturally sound funny to most people. It would appear to be rhetoric and verbal jugglery at best, or downright oriental hyperbole (unsubstantiated, unverified and unverifiable panegyric) at worst. That is how it sometimes appeared to Sri Ramakrishna's own disciples—from the highly intellectual, agnostic Naren, who alone knew the Master most intimately, to the highly unsophisticated, illiterate Latu, who felt a spontaneous attraction for the Master but knew not why. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna himself did not care to understand much of him-

self and his uniqueness in the realm of spiritual tradition: he was just content with getting more and more absorbed in Truth in Its multifarious manifestations, from the apparently lowest so-called idolatry to the highest flights of Advaitic awareness of Oneness.

Speaking about himself, he said that he was a glutton in the spiritual realm, the insatiable hunger of his soul driving him to savour the spiritual essence in ever so many ways. He was an adventurous mountaineer of the Spirit who tirelessly set out to scale newer and higher peaks of spiritual sublimity in a mad pursuit of an irrepressible inner urge. He was an expert diver into the ocean of the inner Spirit who joyously delved into the depths of that ocean of both the formless Reality as well as that with form, and brought out the gems of spiritual wisdom to be shared with the entire humankind in a rapturous rapport of universal kinship.

Nevertheless, Sri Ramakrishna was intensely human, simple and unsophisticated, freely accessible to all without distinction and so overwhelmingly compassionate. We could feel free to talk to him—yes, to him who is now dead and gone for more than a hundred years, in gross physical terms, but very palpably alive in his subtle spiritual Ramakrishna form, a fact vouchsafed by his disciples; we could feel the vibrations of his assuring response in the depths of our hearts. When our minds become bogged and we stand dumbfounded by the sheer profundity of his amazing spiritual sadhanas followed by the unending procession of his breathtaking realizations, his trances and ecstasies and samadhis and rapturous sports in the spiritual field; when we tend to feel ashamed of our own littleness, impurities of heart, lack of spiritual fervour—it is then that his voice of compassion speaks to us, as it did to Arjuna: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you,

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whosoever contemplates my form and my teachings shall inherit my wealth, even as a son does inherit his father's wealth. All that ye need to do therefore is to strive to get absorbed in such a contemplation; as to the rest, I shall take care of everything.' Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly gave this assurance to M, Sri Mahendranath Gupta, the recorder of the *Gospel*. M mentioned it to his intimate circle of devotees and disciples, and one among the latter, Swami Nityatmananda, records this Great Assurance, this Divine Command, this Singular Promise of the Lord in his immortal books of M's conversations.¹ M himself seems to have couched this Great Assurance in biblical language and style to add grandeur and gravity. M then adds, very significantly and touchingly: 'And what does his wealth consist of? *Jnana-bhakti, viveka-vairagya, shanti-sukha, prema-samadhi* (Knowledge and devotion; discrimination and dispassion; peace and bliss; divine love and God-absorption).' What a promise and how very assuring for us present-day humans caught in the rat race of what Sri Ramakrishna used to call *kama-kanchana* (lust and gold)!

The Real *Dharma-glāni*

An avatara manifests Himself whenever there is *dharmā-glāni* (virtue getting overpowered by vice).² At the inner (microcosmic) level, it is only when an aspirant's heart is overpowered by a deep anguish and enveloped, as it were, by an *anirvacaniya glāni* (indescribable sorrow) that the divine Lord chooses

to manifest in his heart. And this too, when the aspirant has come to the end of his tether, having tried and tried and tried, but just finding it unable to penetrate into the realm of Light; helplessly attempting but unable to deliver that last punch, that final blow, that would make the unconscious explode and get annihilated at one stroke—the final stroke that would ignite and illumine the whole inner being. When the aspirant is at the brink of such a psychological and spiritual crisis (this being the real *dharma-glāni*), the Divine Lord chooses to manifest in his heart. The joy and rapture of a Ramakrishna then become the property, the inherited wealth, of the aspirant. Describing such a *coming of the Divine* into one's heart, Swamiji wrote in his famous poem 'Kali the Mother': 'Who dares misery love,/ And hug the form of Death,/ Dance in Destruction's dance,/ To him the Mother comes.'³

The dance of destruction is the annihilation of the self—of all smallness, littleness, self-seeking, egocentricity. When all these get burnt up in *jñānāgni*, the fire of divine Wisdom, then, and only then, does the Mother come. Swamiji ends his famous Bengali poem 'Nachuk Tahate Shyama', translated into English under the title, 'Let Shyama Dance There' with the following immortal lines: 'Shattered be little self, hope, name, and fame;/ Set up a pyre of them and make thy heart/ A burning-ground./ And let Shyama dance there.'⁴

Ramakrishna's Rapturous Dance

If we want Ramakrishna to come into our hearts, we need to burn away *all* desires, *vasanas*, without the least trace and in that cremation ground of the heart that then becomes the seat of *nirvāsana upāsana*, Ramakrishna would come and dance his joyous dance—the dance of Nataraja in the *chidambara*, the cave of our Heart (*hrīdaya-guha*). And may it be our great good fortune that in this very life we shall witness in our Heart of hearts this divine dance of Ramakrishna!

With the darkness of ignorance dispelled and all *vasanas* burnt in the divine Fire of jnana in the secret chamber of the Heart irradiated by the Light supreme—in that divine Illumination of the *daharākāśa* let Ramakrishna dance his rapturous dance!

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Call on Him

May Mother bless you fully; may She remove all the disquiet from your mind. Wait steadfastly at Her door, my son; lie down at Her door. She will fulfil everything in due course. Never be dispirited. Call on God with all earnestness and pray, 'Master, be kind to me. I am an ignorant person; I do not know how to pray to You. Be gracious to me. Grant me love for and faith in Your lotus feet; and grant me full knowledge. To whom else can I turn but You? Take pity on me, and reveal Yourself in my heart.' ... if one but takes on meditation and japa and prays to Him constantly, one's mental tendencies get proper direction, and one's senses come under control. Struggle, struggle, my son; call on Him with all sincerity. His name has in it all the requisite powers in latent form.

—Mahapurush Swami Shivananda

Faith, Privilege and Spirituality

DR C S SHAH

Until one gets true Knowledge, it is all faith, and all faith is 'blind'. Without this blind faith, however, man does not strive to acquire true faith, or knowledge, as it is usually called. True Knowledge—that of the oneness of all existence—has no room for privilege, and, conversely, where there is a seeking for privilege, true Knowledge has not arisen there. Spirituality concerns itself with spiritual disciplines based on faith in the scriptures and the utterances of realized souls. Such faith may be called *active* faith as it activates one to practice, and this active faith leads to ultimate Knowledge.

Advaita in Brief

Swami Vivekananda started discussing the practical aspects of Vedanta after having nearly 'finished the metaphysical portion of the Advaita.'¹ He summarized the teaching of Advaita Vedanta in a few sentences when he proclaimed:

All we see around us, and the whole universe, in fact, is the evolution of that one Absolute. This is called, in Sanskrit, Brahman. The Absolute has become changed into the whole of nature. But here comes a difficulty. How is it possible for the Absolute to change? ... Change of the unchangeable would be a contradiction. ...

[The theory of Vedanta] is that this universe, as we know and think it, does not exist, that the unchangeable has not changed, that the whole of this universe is mere appearance and not reality, that this idea of parts, and little beings, and differentiations is only apparent, not the nature of the thing itself. (1.417-8)

Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda) had the fortune of converting this conclusion of Advaita Vedanta into Knowledge at the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna, and later he spread this Truth while addressing the East

and the West. If we fail to take this into consideration, we may neither understand the true import of his teachings on 'Practical Vedanta' nor the meaning of faith, privilege and spirituality.

Faith Precedes Knowledge

Truly, we find it difficult to proceed to discuss Swamiji's ideas on faith, privilege or spirituality as we have no actual *knowledge* of the said Advaita teaching. We can only talk in terms of conjecture and hypothesis. With the exception of a few realized souls, probably this shortcoming applies to the vast majority of persons attempting to write or elaborate on the teachings of Swamiji. By necessity, therefore, the force of explanation becomes weak and does not appeal to the readers with the conviction the writer desires to transmit. The dilemma can be overcome to some extent by deliberately cultivating *faith* in his teachings and sayings first.

Other people's experience is just a belief or faith for the beginner. The father tells his son that the mango is sweet; and the child eats it to confirm its sweetness. The child gets joy after it. Copernicus came to the conclusion that the Earth moves round the Sun, and not the other way round. A few people believed in him in the beginning. The truth of his proposition became evident later. Faith is the starting point of a novice to attempt to know the truth himself. But faith is not static laziness; it is dynamic activity. It stimulates the person to act to reach the goal. In this process faith evolves and appears as changing, but this change is the sign of its vitality. Let us not forget that the concepts of physics evolved from Newtonian Laws to the Quantum Theory.

'The scientific approach is lost,' shout in-

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Otherwise, at best, it is a firm belief or faith as we call it. When the truth embodied in that belief is realized in one's own life, it becomes knowledge.

tellectuals when we speak of faith. Supplementing science with the ingredient of faith is not yet acceptable to most moderns. They fail to understand that their science and methods of experiments are *also* based on and start with the firm belief in the findings and observations of their predecessors and nothing else. This faith itself they call and take for granted as knowledge.

Here comes the role of the basic teaching of Vedanta: Unless and until an individual has *actually* experienced the truth of Vedantic statements, it cannot be called knowledge. Otherwise, at best, it is a firm belief or faith as we call it. When the truth embodied in that belief is realized in one's own life, it becomes knowledge.

Shraddha Goads One to Action

Swamiji defines shraddha as 'strong faith in God and the consequent eagerness to reach Him'. (1.407) Sri Ramakrishna gives a wonderful example to define faith: 'Suppose there is a thief in this room, and he gets to know that there is a mass of gold in the next room; what will be the condition of that thief?' ... [The answer is,] 'He will not be able to sleep at all; his brain will be actively thinking of some means of getting at the gold, and he will think of nothing else' (1.407)

Three things are to be noted here: 1. that the person is a thief; 2. he has not seen the gold, but believes because a person has told him so; 3. he is restless to get it; he will be happy and quiet *after* he gets it with efforts.

One may substitute 'thief' with 'lawyer', 'doctor', 'engineer', 'worker' or 'businessman', and consequently, 'gold', as an object of desire, with 'name and fame', 'profit making', 'winning or treating a case' and so on. The strong desire to get the desired outcome will remain; and the person will be happy when he obtains it. The emphasis is on the belief and

the strong desire, which is what faith means.

However, all such worldly pleasures are temporary. They tickle one's senses and the mind; and the happiness, therefore, is short-lived. First, this is because, instead of being reposed, the mind becomes greedier. Therefore, the means employed to fulfil the rising expectations are distorted and unethical. Second, Vedanta says this is what can be expected from the pursuit of sense pleasures, because sense objects can give only limited pleasure. And people seek pleasure in the senses since they are not aware of an alternative offering them higher happiness. The *karma-kanda* of the Vedas is to be studied in this respect: it tries to lead a person of worldly concern gradually from a lower faith to a higher faith, from selfishness to selflessness.

'Go Forward'

In this connection, we recollect Sri Ramakrishna's simple but very meaningful parable of the woodcutter:

Go forward. A woodcutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' He obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandalwood trees. After a few days he reflected, 'The holy man asked me to go forward. He didn't tell me to stop here.' So he went forward and found a silver-mine. After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine, and next, mines of diamonds and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich.²

This 'going forward' came to the mind of

the woodcutter on reflecting upon the words of a wise man. The woodcutter had *faith* in the advice of the brahmacharin, who he *believed* had knowledge of the treasures ahead! A question may arise in those of us whose mind is engrossed in 'gold': 'Why, then, didn't the brahmacharin himself seek the treasure?' Vedanta answers, that is because the brahmacharin had found a treasure of higher value: God, the ultimate Treasure. If we stretch the parable further, the woodcutter would perhaps become a sannyasin after enjoying the fruits of his acquired riches and attain peace after going still further!

Swamiji says:

When it is said that the same power which is manifesting in the flower is welling up in my own consciousness, it is the very same idea which the Vedantist wants to preach, that the reality of the external world and the reality of the internal world are one and the same. ... The theory of the Vedanta, therefore, comes to this, that you and I and everything in the universe are that Absolute, not parts, but the whole. You are the whole of that Absolute, and so are all others, because the idea of part cannot come into it. These divisions, these limitations, are only apparent, not in the thing itself.³

According to our faith and the distance we have 'gone forward', we will understand the above passage, each in his own way. For a few, all this will appear as a dream or useless talk; for some, there may be points in the passage to ponder over; and for still others, it may suggest the *diamond mine* to be acquired by *going forward*. For the majority, however, at their present stage of evolution, faith is fixed at the pursuit of their vocation and earning money, name and fame, and so on. And one's faith dictates one's actions. This leads us to the following corollary: one's faith can be easily judged by observing the actions one is engaged in. I may be talking and writing about

According to our faith and the distance we have 'gone forward', we will understand the above passage, each in his own way. For a few, all this will appear as a dream or useless talk; for some, there may be points in the passage to ponder over; and for still others, it may suggest the diamond mine to be acquired by going forward.

lofty ideas in an article, but if my actions are not in conformity with what I say or write, one can easily infer that my faith is just in writing the article and not beyond. I am still cutting the 'sandalwood' instead of trying to gather the riches from the 'mines of treasures'!

Need to Change Oneself

As one goes ahead in this field of philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, one sees the same God in every person. The idea of privilege gradually starts leaving him. He begins to understand that this philosophy is purely subjective. If he is pure, if he changes for the better, his vision changes and the world begins to appear different to him. As the subject grows in spirituality—love, beauty, goodness and holiness—to him the object of his observation, this world, undergoes change. He develops the sameness of vision (*samatva*) described in the *Bhagavadgita*.

For many others the world still remains divided into many parts, full of misery and joy, good and bad—in short, a mixture of dualities. Let it be. One's concern is to go ahead oneself without blaming anybody of lethargy or weakness or ignorance. If someone sees others weak, as sinners, ignorant or selfish, we can be sure that he himself is not able to discard these traits from his mind. At best, he can offer others a helping hand to pull them down to his own level! It will not be out of place here to quote Holy Mother's eternally relevant advice to this world: 'But one thing I

tell you—if you want peace, my daughter, don't find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.⁴

Faith evolves just as our ideas about matter do. With this evolution in faith, our knowledge of the relative world also changes. As we grow spiritually—and we are discussing the spirituality of Advaita Vedanta—our faith in separateness also vanishes, only to be replaced with a newer and higher faith in universal brotherhood. We grow from selfishness to selflessness. Our love grows from being limited to ourselves and the family, and extends to our neighbours and society at large. The restrictive egotism begins to lose its grip over our mind, and we start feeling more free. We start breathing in a vaster area of the world with peace and bliss.

Faith Leads to Knowledge

Firm faith in something gradually brings knowledge about it. A football player having faith in playing football gains name and fame, money, physical fitness and so on and starts playing the game with more and more concentration, determination and perseverance. While doing so he acquires the knowledge about the ideal air pressure in the ball, size of the ground, rules of the game, nuances and subtleties of play, the playing techniques of other great players of the past and present, and so on. He also realizes his capabilities and limitations. He tries to attain perfection according to his capacity. Afterwards, just the idea of enjoying the game remains in his heart. He takes pleasure in undertaking every activity related to the game. He has done sadhana in that field and achieved the goal, so to say!

When Is Privilege Effaced from the Mind?

The idea of privilege is, therefore, related to the object of our faith. If we have faith in sense enjoyments, we will seek more and

more privilege based on wealth, education and secular knowledge. Similarly, a society engaged in sense pleasures will demand more privileges based on caste superiority and the monetary power of a few. The same thing will apply to the rich and technologically advanced nations who try to dominate the less privileged nations. A stage will come in everybody's life when the evolution of faith reaches the highest level where concepts like 'service of man as worship of God' and 'the giver is more blessed than the receiver' are realized in his life. Then the idea of privilege is totally effaced from his mind forever.

* * *

Our only hope lies in our faith in the correctness of Vedanta philosophy: True knowledge and spirituality do not come from outside, but are inherent in each and every one of us irrespective of nationality, caste or sex. Fortunately, in India there have been many spiritual scientists from time immemorial. They have given us the Upanishads and other scriptures to strengthen and stabilize our shaking faith. We are fortunate to be living in a period of history not far from when the principles of Advaita Vedanta were personified in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami ji, and their disciples. These facts should make us bolder and more courageous to drive away all lingering doubts from our mind and allow shraddha to enter our heart. *

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Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

The means to the realization of the three-footed (*tripāda*) Brahman (*continued*)

... तत्परं नापरं त्यजति । तदैवं कपालाष्टकं संघाय य एष स्तन इवावलम्बते । सेन्द्रयोनिः स वेदयोनिरित्यत्र जाग्रति । शुभाशुभातिरिक्तः शुभाशुभैरपि कर्मभिर्न लिप्यते । ... ॥२॥

2. ... That¹ is the supreme; [it is] not [that an illumined sage] renounces [things other than Brahman], [for there exists nothing] other than That [supreme Reality].² Then, by proper inquiry into the path of *yoga*³ [that is, by practising the eight-limbed *yoga* technique], [the spiritual seeker attains the highest Knowledge and fulfilment in life].⁴ [The basis of this *yogic* meditation is] this [heart-lotus] that hangs down like a teat;⁵ [and the *nāḍī* called *suṣumṇā* that runs through it is] the source of Indra,⁶ [that is, Brahman]. [That *īśvara*, spoken of as the source of Indra, is also adored as] the source of the Veda [and is thus the Supreme Lord, *parameśvara*, who is] awake there [that is, in the lotus of one's own heart].⁷ [The illumined sage who goes] beyond good and evil is not tainted by the good and bad actions [he might happen to perform].⁸ ...

(*To be continued*)

Notes

1. The state of absolute non-differentiation, that is, Brahman, unqualified and pure, which alone remains when such a concept of union is also rejected.
2. For the illumined sage established in that unqualified, undifferentiated supreme Brahman (*nirviśeṣa brahman*), there is no question of *giving up* or *renouncing* the lower strata of reality—the phenomena of duality (*dvaita prapañca*)—because he does not at all recognize their existence; that is, he does not perceive the world of duality as anything different from the absolute Brahman, so that the idea of *renunciation* of this duality does not occur at all, for one could renounce only what one perceives as the ‘other’ apart from the ‘Self’. For such a sage, therefore, the concepts of renunciation (rejection) or acceptance lose their meaning. (See *Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā*, 6.1-4; *Avadhūta Gītā*, 3.46, 4.14, 5.14, 6.20; and *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 484, 502).

Once again, this statement could be clearly understood in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. Sri Ramakrishna recounts a story from the *Rāmāyaṇa*: Rāma suddenly became seized with tremendous dispassion (*vairāgya*) and wanted to renounce the world of duality. Daśaratha became worried and commissioned his chief sage-counsellor Vasiṣṭha to advise Rāma to give up his idea. Vasiṣṭha went to Rāma and told him, ‘O Rāma, you are at perfect liberty to renounce the world, if only the world were different from Brahman. Argue with me: Is the world different from Brahman? Is there anything apart from Brahman?’ Rāma clearly perceived that there was nothing different from Brahman and renounced his resolve to renounce. (See *M, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda [Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002], 648) Sri Ramakrishna used to say that at the beginning of spiritual life, the *sādha* (spiritual aspirant) follows the path of *neti, neti* (‘not this, not this’) and rejects all that is *not* Brahman; at the end of this process, he finds that there is nothing apart from Brahman and sees that his very act of renunciation of the non-Brahman was an exercise in futility. This world, seen as a ‘framework of illusion’ (*dhokār ṭāṭi*) at the beginning of this *neti, neti* process, gets transformed, as it were, into ‘a mansion of mirth’ (*majār kuṭi*), because in that integral vision, all

that is seen and experienced is just that supreme Reality (Brahman), that is, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (*sat-cit-ānanda-svarūpa*), Truth-Knowledge-Infinity (*satyam-jñānam-anantam*). The following line from one of Śrī Śaṅkarācāryas's minor works (*prakaraṇa granthas*) is also strikingly relevant in this context: '*Dr̥ṣṭūṁ jñānamayīm kṛtvā paśyet brahmanamayīm jagat*; Make your vision endowed with the Knowledge of the non-dual, undifferentiated Brahman and perceive the world as filled with Brahman-Consciousness.'

Such a vision—divinized and metamorphosed with Brahman-Knowledge—precludes the idea of renunciation, for there is nothing apart from Brahman, which is one's own Self (Ātman), and hence nothing that needs to be renounced. For such a sage of the highest illumination, whom Sri Ramakrishna calls a *vijñāni*, the so-called concept of 'renunciation' would appear stale and insipid. An incident recorded in the the *Gospel* is significant in this context: Naren (later Swami Vivekananda) was singing a song composed by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya whose import was that life in this world of relativity and duality is as evanescent and fleeting as unsteady and shaky water drops on a lotus petal. Sri Ramakrishna immediately intervened and said: 'These are just commonplace ideas.' He meant that when one realizes that the so-called world of relativity is interpenetrated with God's presence, His infinite plenitude, then one sings for sheer joy the glory of the Supreme, rather than harp on the negative aspect of the so-called 'renunciation' in a mood of mourning, as it were. (*Gospel*, 945)

Since there is no 'other' apart from the Self, or Brahman, the technical term used in later Vedānta as one of Its attributes is *niṣpratiyogikatva*.

3. The word used in the original text is *kapālāṣṭakam*, which is interpreted by Upaniṣad Brahmayogin as the 'eight-limbed *yoga*' technique. His ingenious interpretation is as follows: *Kam* is happiness, here meaning the supreme joy of Brahman-realization. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, for example, speaks of Brahman as *kam*: '*Kaṁ brahma, khaṁ brahma.*' (4.10.4) *Pāla* means 'protecting'. Thus, *kapāla*, taken as *kapālāni* in the plural, would mean 'those who protect (that is, engender and sustain) the supreme joy of Brahman-realization. These *kapālāni* are spoken of as *aṣṭakam*, meaning 'eightfold' so that the term *kapālāṣṭakam* would mean the 'eightfold (or eight-limbed) *yoga mārga* (*yoga* technique)'.
4. The eight limbs (*aṣṭāṅga*) of *yoga* are well known: *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. 'Inquiry' into them means meticulous practice of this eight-limbed discipline of *yoga*. By the strength of this practice, the spiritual seeker becomes capable of washing off the impurities of his mind. The purified mind leads him to acquire the impersonal, absolute Knowledge (*jñāna*), which is his life's fulfilment. —Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.
5. The description of the 'basis' of this *yogic* meditation given by Upaniṣad Brahmayogin is as follows: 'It (the heart-lotus) hangs down like an inverted plantain flower in the region of the chest. At the time of, and by the practice of, *yoga*, it straightens up, takes an upright position and opens up into a blossom.' Notice the remarkable resemblance of this description with Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual experience as recorded in the *Gospel*. (934)
6. We have followed here Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's commentary on an identical passage occurring in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*. (1.6.1) There is, however, a slight difference: According to Śaṅkara, that which hangs down like a teat is between the palates; through it runs the *nāḍī* (spiritual nerve) called *suṣumṇā*, this nerve itself originating from the heart. This is supported by the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. (2.3.16) A spiritual seeker ascending after death through this *nāḍī* is said to reach the *hiranyagarbha-loka* (called *avyaya-ātma*, or the Undecaying Self, in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1.2.11) through a process known as *krama-mukti* (gradual liberation). In such a context, therefore, Śaṅkara interprets *sendrayoni* as *sā indrayoni*, *sā* meaning 'that' (*nāḍī* being in the feminine gender), *indra* meaning Brahman and *yoni* meaning *mārga*, or path. Thus, the overall meaning would be that the *suṣumṇā nāḍī*, which runs through the teat-like projection hanging down between the palates is the path leading to Brahman, the path for the realiza-

tion of His true nature. If we exactly follow this interpretation by Śaṅkara, there is likely to be a mix-up, for the teat-like thing that is mentioned in the present Upaniṣad is said to be hanging down in the region of the chest (*uraḥ-pradeśe*) according to Upaniṣad Brahmayogin. He therefore interprets *sendrayoni* as follows: Here (in this heart-lotus) indeed it rests along with *indrayoni*, that is, Brahman, so that this heart-lotus itself is *sendrayoni*. He who is spoken of as *indrayoni* is the *parameśvara*.

7. This *parameśvara*, adored and eulogistically sung to as *vedayoni*, the source of the Veda, awakes in the heart of the spiritual seeker through the practice of *yoga*. That is the idea. There are references to other Upaniṣads too to the fact that the Supreme Lord (*parameśvara*) Himself is the source of the Veda. In fact, the Veda is said to be the breath of the supreme *īśvara* in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. (4.5.11)
8. One might wonder how an illumined person can perform evil actions. Sri Ramakrishna says that the fire of illumination burns away all impurities, and the *saiṃskāras*, or latent tendencies, of a person of realization become like roasted seeds (*dagdha bija*)—they may look like seeds, but cannot sprout any more; or, they become like a burnt rope—it may retain the shape of a rope, but cannot bind anymore; (*Gospel*, 940) or, they become like a sword converted into gold by the mythological touchstone—it may retain the shape of the sword, but cannot cut anymore. (1019) In light of this teaching, one should interpret the Upaniṣadic passage thus: Whatever remains, if anything, of his old *saiṃskāras* that might appear bad, are actually dead and gone for ever and therefore do not affect the sage in any way. In fact, in the case of an illumined sage, the question of performing evil actions does not arise at all. The difference, however, is that his non-performance of evil actions is not because he consciously cultivates goodness, but because the Supreme Divine, the Infinite Good, possesses him like a ‘Hound of Heaven — as the Christian mystics might put it—and prevents him from taking any false step. Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘He who has learnt to dance correctly never makes a false step.’ (220)

Compare this with a similar passage in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*: ‘*Ānandaṃ brahmaṇo vidvān; na bibheti kutaścaneti; etaṃ ha vāva na tapati; kimahaṃ sādhunākaravam; kimahaṃ pāpamakaravamiti; sa ya evaṃ vidvānete ātmānaṃ sprṇute; ubhe hyevaīṣa ete ātmānaṃ sprṇute.*’ (2.9) The simple meaning of this passage is as follows: ‘Knowing the bliss of that Brahman, one does not fear anything. Verily, the thought ‘Why have I not done the right thing? Why did I do the wrong thing?’ does not torment such a one. He who comprehends [the truth that the Ātman, which is one’s true nature, is untouched by good or evil] in the manner described above redeems his self from both these thoughts. For, truly, he who knows thus redeems his self from both.’

The following remarkable interpretative explanation given by Swami Sharvananda is worth quoting in this context: ‘Ethics is the science that deals with the relation between the individual agent and his social environment. It fixes the norm for individual behaviour in the light of social and individual happiness. The sense of individuality is the basis of all moral regulations. One who has effaced all egotism and individuality needs no moral rules to bind him to good life. He requires no conscious effort to be perfect, just as a trained dancer does not require any special effort to avoid wrong steps. He transcends the realm of do’s and don’ts. His whole behaviour becomes one with the divine perfection and he is no more impelled by any external standard. This is what is emphasized by the above passage. The Christian Bible says, “But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” (*Galatians*, 5.18) Also, “Whoever is born of God cannot sin.”’ (Swami Sharvananda, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977], 177)

Security depends not so much on how much you have as on how much you can do without.

—Joseph Wood Krutch

Glimpses of Holy Lives

‘Never Does My Devotee Perish’

Dama belonged to a low caste and lived in Gargakhed on the banks of River Godavari. He had a daughter by name Jana. The girl, however, could not even spend her childhood with him. Dama had a divine dream in which he was asked to offer her as a household help to Damasheti, a tailor in Pandharpur. The tailor happened to be Sant Namdev’s father. The household welcomed child Jana lovingly and treated her like a daughter. They trained her in the daily chores. Jana came under the wholesome influence of Sant Namdev and Sant Jnaneshvar, both of whom often visited the house.

Jana’s devotion to God grew from day to day, her intense yearning for God at times overwhelming her: the winnowing basket remained idle on her lap while her eyes were in tears. Again, tears freely mingled with the water when she washed clothes. She sang hymns with great longing and prayed to the Lord to reveal Himself. She looked upon Lord Vitthala as her Mother and prayed, ‘My Pandhari Mother, O Vitthabai, please come to me.’

The Lord soon rewarded her by granting His vision. In ecstasy she sang of having beheld the sacred feet of Lord Vitthala. From then on, her life became a mart of joy. Lord Panduranga often visited her and helped her in her daily chores. The Lord placed His hand on hers when she turned the grinding stone, and helped her by pushing the grains into the grind. Her life became interwoven with that of her Lord.

The Test

But the Lord loves to test His devotees now and then, more to proclaim their devotion to others. After helping her grind rice late one evening, Vitthala ‘forgot’ His costly shawl

and jewel in her house, wore her patched quilt and returned to the temple.

Next morning, the priests were scandalized to see the Lord in the temple shrine without His shawl and jewel, but with a ‘new’ apparel. The missing items were traced to Jana’s room. Namdev, however, assured her that her innocence would be proved before long.

Jana was taken to the local ruler’s court, where she was condemned to die on the *shula*, a long, pointed steel pole on which she was to sit and undergo a swift but painful death.

The Deliverance

The young girl was horrified at this and cried to her Beloved, ‘You have visited me often to comfort me. Why are You asleep now?’ Accompanied by two guards, Jana was made to cover the stretch of burning sand at a fast pace. She cried again, ‘You are my everything. Why are You so slow in coming? Just show me Your face. I shall not ask anything of You.’ The Lord appeared before the little girl and embraced her. ‘With You near, I shall never fear,’ cried a grateful Jana. On reaching the execution post, she looked at the shining *shula*, thinking that with the Lord for company, the *shula* should just be as soft and soothing as water. Immediately, the *shula* liquefied and started flowing. Jana fell at her Lord’s feet in gratitude. Appreciating her greatness, the priests exclaimed, ‘She deserves diamonds, jewels and the finest clothes. The Lord did well to leave His jewel and shawl with her.’ Everyone sought her blessings and carried her in a procession.

Jana’s soul-stirring *abhangs* are simple and beautiful, revealing the yearning and true love of a little girl. She is adored as Sant Janabai in Maharashtra. *

Sri Sarada Devi: Essence of the Infinite

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

God's Inscrutable Ways and Appeal

God incarnated as Sri Sarada Devi in Jayrambati, in poor rural Bengal, on 22 December 1853. Of course, that was not the first time God incarnated for humanity and certainly that will not be the last time either. Can anyone understand God's ways? 'Bhishma was none other than one of the eight Vasus, but even he shed tears on his bed of arrows. He said: "How astonishing! God Himself is the companion of the Pandava brothers, and still there is no end to their troubles and sorrows!" Who can ever understand the ways of God?'¹ This descent of the Divine may be inscrutable to logic and philosophy, but it is immensely appealing to the heart. God's incarnation as Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi has also opened to us a new vision of God, spirituality and sadhana, spiritual practice. Amazingly, one finds that Holy Mother was not so reticent about her real nature as Sri Ramakrishna was. This is a bigger appeal. For instance, here is a conversation between Holy Mother and her devotee:

I [Surendranath Sircar] said, 'Mother, devotees call you Kali, Adyashakti, Bhagavati, etc. In the *Gita* it is mentioned that the saints Asita, Deva-la, Vyasa and others called Sri Krishna as Narayana Himself. By mentioning it himself in the *Gita* [10.13], the idea has been still more emphasized. I believe everything that I have heard about you. Still, if you will please speak of it yourself, my doubts will be dispelled. I want to hear from you directly whether these things are true.' 'Yes, true they are,' said the Mother.²

Even with all this, Mother seems like anyone of us. Otherwise, why should we feel so identified with her? This is the biggest appeal. More importantly, we had been pining to know our real Mother for long, and when we

suddenly discover her in our midst, the joy and relief is immense like children feel on finding someone after a tiring search in a game of hide-and-seek. This joy is compounded when the hidden person equally enjoys being discovered and joins in the fun and laughter.

The Visible and Invisible Universe

There are some 100 billion galaxies, each with an average of a 100 billion stars. In each galaxy there are perhaps as many planets as stars. This is, of course, not the final figure; the process of mapping the heavens is still on and will go on for a long, long time. Given these numbers, the idea naturally arises that space must be very cluttered, but no, the immensity of space makes these massive galaxies float at mind-boggling distances from each other. Travelling at 1,86,000 miles per second, light from some galaxies take billions of years to reach the Earth. Intergalactic distances are so immense, so staggeringly far apart, and space seemingly so desolate, empty, cold and dark that the best-trained imagination begins to ache, tremble and simply fizzle out. All these celestial bodies are in different stages of evolution, some of it occasionally happening in a very violent way. Apart from this, the universe is frighteningly silent to human ears. Every planet, star and galaxy also rotates and revolves around each other, and the entire universe is expanding at an unimaginable velocity.³

Our Galaxy and Human Nature

The Milky Way, our spiral-armed galaxy, contains 400 billions stars. Of all these stars we know a little perhaps about just a small mediocre one. We see it rise and set daily, and it is the source of light and energy to us. Rooted in this

microscopic speck of dust called planet Earth, in the midst of swirling galaxies of cosmic dust and gas all around, the mind is overwhelmed and awestruck at this fantastic vision spread before it. Yet, due to their inherent inquisitiveness, humans have dared to dream, to scan and study the heavens for knowledge and conquest. This eternal quest obviously raises the questions *Why? Are we alone?* These questions rising from deep within human souls waft away, seemingly down and up, and get lost in the very vast intergalactic distances. But since every motion in this universe is circular, things return to where they started. These questions also return to where they originated, but as faint echoes. If one is sensitive and also expansive in mind, one can catch the feeble echoes that have been transformed by their travel, echoes that say that this earth with its life is unique, beautiful, significant, mysterious, terrifying and much, much more (the last being the subject of this article). Another reason humans have to seek answers is because we are products of this universe (our bodies are made of the very stuff stars are made), and to study it is to study us, and conversely, studying ourselves also reveals the universe.

The Final Result and Its Production from the Means

Let us look at it this way: we know it takes thousands of years with millions of tons of constant pressure to produce a diamond in the bowels of the earth. Likewise, acres and acres of fields are required to be cultivated to produce a few thousand saffron flowers, from the stamens and pistils of which one gets a handful of *kesar* (*Crocos sativus*). On squeezing it we get just a few precious drops of oil. To carry this line of thought further: a nation produces just one champion after years and years of daily hard work and practice by thousands and thousands of athletes. To come closer home: for many, youth, manhood, energy and mental brilliance have to be sacrificed till they

earn their first million rupees. In spiritual life it takes maybe millions of repetitions of a mantra till it becomes 'awakened'. The Lord says in the *Bhagavadgita*, 'One perhaps in thousands of men strives for perfection; among such striving men, one perhaps knows Me in reality.'⁴ Further, 'At the end of many births the man of wisdom takes refuge in Me.'⁵ All these examples are just to fix in our minds the law that the 'means' are almost exhausted to produce the 'end'. Everything is almost sucked dry for the result to emerge. So also this whole universe, light years away from us, with its billions and billions of stars, with all its materials and secrets, is required to produce just this one precious Earth we call our home. For now, this small planet is the very essence, the gem, of the universe, the condensed form of infinite time, space, matter and energy made palpable.

The 'Multiverse'

At the present state of knowledge, even with ongoing diligent search with sophisticated telescopes, astronomical spectrometers and supercomputers, this Earth is the only planet pulsating with life. This could be an understatement; it is found to be teeming with life (just view a drop of water under a microscope) extending from the simple single-celled amoeba to the huge blue whale, with plants, trees, insects reptiles, birds and complex mammals in between. All life forms come in innumerable shapes, sizes, behaviour and functions, with lifespans ranging from a few seconds to more than a thousand years (like that of giant redwood trees). All these 'simple to the highly complex' species number in millions. They live in the atmosphere high above, in air, water, on the ground and below. All these species collectively live their lives in their own universe, so to say. From the individual standpoint, life in a single body needs to live by struggling and battling with its own kind and other species for survival and self-propagation. For instance, as *Homo sapiens*

we believe we are part of a very large multicoloured family called the human universe, yet each one of us lives in his own personal world of joys, sorrows and fears. But all these living universes of collective species and worlds of individuals, from the microbe to man, constantly interact; they are interdependent and interconnected. Hence a word for all this, which is becoming quite current: 'multiverse'.

Consciousness, the Essence of the Universe

Man stands at the crest of this 'teeming ocean of life' on Earth. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Man is the epitome of all things, and all knowledge is in him.'⁶ The Earth, as we have seen, is the very essence of this massive universe, and the best product of Earth (that is, matter) is the human brain. Life is the very essence of matter; the essence of life is mind; the essence of mind is intelligence; the essence of intelligence is consciousness. Thus consciousness is the essence, as it were, of everything in the universe and 'multiverse'. Though consciousness is present in a bacterium and plants, yet in them it is in a rudimentary state. In man it is fully manifest, but here again, the differences in man are quite marked, and these differences are principally due to the difference in the manifestation of consciousness. In the highest men, consciousness is completely unfurled; these are known as the *paramahansas*. This all-pervading consciousness is spoken of thus in the *Aitareya Upanishad*:

... this is all these (big creatures), together with the tiny ones, that are the procreators of others and referable in pairs—to wit, those that are born of eggs, of wombs, of moisture, and of the earth, viz horses, cattle, men, elephants, and all the creatures that there are, which move or fly and those which do not move. All these are impelled by Consciousness; all these have Consciousness as the giver of their reality; the universe has Consciousness as its eye, and Consciousness is its end. Consciousness is Brahman.⁷

The Particular and the General

Are we sure or this? Why not! If you

know one hydrogen atom here, you know all the hydrogen atoms in the universe. One need not study it out in space. Take the atom. It is particular; but it gives rise to the knowledge of the universal. We know *all* the hydrogen atoms in the universe on knowing one here. Again, according to the well-known Indian adage, 'Just by pressing with the fingers one grain of rice in the cooking pot one can know whether all the grains in the pot have been boiled or not.'⁸ If you know one physical law, it is the same throughout the universe. The very idea is presented in the *Chandogya Upanishad*: 'O good looking one, ... by knowing a lump of clay, all that is made of clay is known, every modification being only a name, arising from speech, while clay is the only reality about it.'⁹ Hence what is known in the microcosm is known in the macrocosm. If we know our bodies, we can study other bodies; if we know life in our bodies, we can know and understand life in other bodies. If we know our minds, we can know other minds. If we know our intelligence, we can understand intelligence everywhere. This knowing and understanding things comes from Consciousness, which is our root. Hence we can understand and appreciate consciousness in every being.

Gross Forms Arise from the Subtle

These are the faint echoes coming back from the questions *Why? Are we alone?* Add to them *when* and *how*. As every question implies an answer (as every problem always comes with its solution), the echoes return to us in the depths from where they arose, from the depths of our consciousness, whispering the answers. This is the secret of the universe. This whispering answer sometimes manifests in bold form. In other words, things commence from the extremely subtle and become gross by degrees. This is the greatest secret and mystery of this universe. To give a crude example, it is like anger: constantly dwelt upon and cultivated secretly in the subconscious, anger gradually becomes strong, slowly colouring

the mind and then rearing itself violently at the conscious level. This wave of anger then grips the body and shakes it, as it were, and impels it towards karma to fulfil the emotion. To illustrate: it is like huge monster waves lashing the shoreline, waves that have arisen miles and miles away from an earthquake on the ocean floor and travelled almost imperceptibly all the distance, slowly gathering strength to finally erupt in fury. Similarly every *how, why, who* and *when* that proceeds from man's consciousness slowly gathers strength as it makes the circuit of the universe, as it were, and finally returns with answers. Add to this every cry from the human heart, every pain, every misery, love, compassion and so on—in fact, everything that weeps and seeks solace. In this age, all these have manifested as Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Hence Holy Mother holds in her all the answers, all the remedies for our times. It is but natural that Holy Mother will run to her children who cry for her; we see it happen in our lives everywhere.

Mother's Two Astounding Answers

In the *Gospel of the Holy Mother* there are two simple but astounding answers to some fundamental questions.

Disciple (Swami Arupananda): Mother, infinite is this creation; who can tell what is happening in a remote plane? Who can say if any living beings inhabit any of those innumerable stars and planets?

Mother: It is possible only for God to be omniscient in this realm of Maya. Perhaps there is no living being in those planets and stars.¹⁰

If the doubt arises as to whether the answer was offhand, the next answer set the doubt at rest:

Disciple: Are you the Mother of all?

Mother: Yes!

Disciple: Even of these birds and animals?

Mother: Yes, of these also. (75)

Similarly, she also said, 'Beings all over the universe are my children.' (204) These two

answers are staggering and tremendous. First, who could have said this? Only one who knows for certain; and that person has to be even vaster and greater than the universe. The second answer is more amazing; Holy Mother is the Mother of all life forms.

Just as this 'multiverse' is the essence of this universe and Consciousness is *its* essence, Holy Mother is the essence of this Consciousness, for it is clearly said in the *Chandi*: 'Repeated salutations to Her, who, established in the form of Consciousness, pervades the whole world.'¹¹ This is the ground in which our 'roots' are anchored. There is nothing higher than this. Swamiji puts it powerfully: 'In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the soul, Who is the Soul of Man ...'¹²

Some Modern Scientific Views

To make a minor digression in order to bring in modern views: it is now common knowledge that we are living in a world that is just right for life forms like ours. It suggests that the universe is run by some transcendent intelligence called 'Anthropic Principle'.

The Anthropic Principle was first coined in the mid 1970s by Cambridge astrophysicist Brandon Carter. Carter observed that the balance of power between two forces, gravitational and strong interaction force (of atoms), is so incredibly fine-tuned that if the strength of the force of gravitation had varied by as little as a mere small part (1 part in 10^{40}), this delicate balance would have been destroyed and stars such as our Sun would never have formed.¹³

There must be some regulating principle behind the whole universe, visible and invisible. Even the living legend Stephen Hawking says, 'It is difficult to discuss the beginning of the universe without mentioning the concept of God. My work on the origin of the universe is on the borderline between science and religion, but I try to stay on the scientific side of the border. It is quite possible that God acts in

ways that cannot be described by scientific laws.¹⁴

Mother's Real Identity

We conclude by quoting one more instance of Holy Mother's revelation of her true nature.

Disciple (Prafulla Kumar Ganguli): Does the Master receive the food that I offer to him? Do you, too, receive what I offer to you?

Mother: Yes.

Disciple: How can I understand this?

Mother: Why? Have you not read in the *Gīta* that God receives the fruits, flowers, water and other things that are offered to Him with devotion?

Surprised at this reply I said, 'Then, you are God?' On hearing this, the Mother laughed heartily. We too joined her.¹⁵ *

References

1. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 183.
2. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2000), 224.
3. See Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Ballantyne Books, 1985), 2.
4. *Bhagavadgīta*, 7.3.
5. *Ibid.*, 7.19.
6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.21.
7. *Aitareya Upanishad*, 3.1.3 from *Eight Upanishads*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda, 2 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1, 1977; 2, 1978), 2.71.
8. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, 2 vols. (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1, 1978; 2, 1984), 1.102.
9. *Yathā saumyaikena mṛtṭpiṇḍena sarvaṁ mṛiṇmayāṁ vijñātaṁ syād-vacārambhaṇaṁ vikāro nāmadheyāṁ mṛtṭiketyeva satyam.*
—*Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.1.4.
10. *Gospel of the Holy Mother*, 112.
11. *Cītirūpeṇa yā kṛtsnametad-vyāpya stithā jagat; Namastasyai. Namastasyai. Namastasyai namo namaḥ.* —*Chandi (Durga Saptashati)*, 5.78-80.
12. CW, 5.435.
13. M Talbot, *Beyond the Quantum*, 184; quoted in Swami Jitatananda, *Modern Physics and Vedānta* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2003), 149.
14. Michael White and John Gribbin, *Stephen Hawking* (Viking, 1992), 167; quoted in *Modern Physics and Vedānta*, 150.
15. *Gospel of the Holy Mother*, 331.

Only When Mother Is Pleased ...

She is the Mother of us all, none other than the Divine Mother Herself. She incarnated Herself to fulfil the mission of the Master. The world is blessed by her very presence. None of us can understand her. Who, indeed, can understand her, since she is so guarded in the expression of her divine moods? She eludes everybody's grasp. She lives like an ordinary housewife, attending to her chores and meeting the needs of devotees. Who can divine that she is none other than the Divine Mother Herself? The Master told me one day, 'The Mother who is there in the temple (of Kali) and the Mother in the concert tower are the same.'

Make your obeisance to Mother and pray earnestly for faith and devotion. One can get faith or liberation only when Mother is pleased.

—Mahapurush Swami Shivananda



Reviews



For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.

Paratattvagaṇitadarśanam. G S Murthy.
Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow
Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007.
E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2002. 400 pp. Rs
495.

This book makes an excellent attempt to bring out the connection between mathematical logic and metaphysical truth. Its origin is due to the Sanskrit aphorisms and geometry presented by the Swami Kalyanananda Bharati in his book *Pūrṇamīmāṃsādarśanam*.

The importance of the book under review is that it shows how mathematical subjects like geometry, trigonometry and algebra can be used to understand the philosophy of life. This the author expresses through 108 Sanskrit aphorisms. He points out hidden truths revealing a deep relationship between a number, the figure of a circle and God, and brings to light the significance of complex ('auspicious') numbers, n and the n th roots of unity to understand metaphysical ideas. In the theory of complex variables the concepts of Riemann sheets occupies a very important place, and this idea is used to compare the well-known Vedic verse that says, 'The full comes out of the full; taking the full from the full, the full alone remains.'

Mr Murthy draws our attention to the number theory to point out the metaphysical truth that each and every step in the universe is directly connected to primordial duality, which is, however, not absolute because it itself depends on '1'. Two imaginary characters—a mathematician and a Vedantin—vigorously debate the author's 108 aphorisms and their explanations. Their discussions centre round the notion that a circle has features that qualify it to represent the Godhead. In sum, the book seeks to express the spiritual truths of the Upanishads and the *Bhagavadgīta* through mathematical and metaphysical concepts.

Paratattvagaṇitadarśanam opens with the aforementioned discussion between the mathematician and the Vedantin concerning the role of mathemat-

ics in the study of the world we live in. Then come the aphorisms, setting forth metaphysical ideas in mathematical language. A commentary in the form of a dialogue follows the aphorisms. Lastly, spiritual truths are unified in mathematical language in the context of the various schools of Vedanta.

The book is sure to be enjoyed especially by mathematicians, going as it does through a number of knotty problems that might have bothered them at one time or other in their lives. The several appendices it contains fill in gaps in mathematical knowledge and help us understand philosophical truths. And the long list of references, besides exhibiting the author's command of his subject, gives the general reader an idea of the wide horizon of this branch of knowledge. If we are really serious about propagating Vedic culture, books of this kind must be made available in all our colleges and universities.

Prof P R Vittal
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Chennai

The Divine Dialogue. Surendra Singh Yadav.
DK Printworld, Sri Kunj, F-52 Bali Nagar,
New Delhi 110 015. E-mail: dkprintworld@vsnl.net. 2003. xiv + 150 pp. Rs 160.

The *Bhagavadgīta* is perhaps the only book after the Bible to be translated into many languages around the world. The book under review is another pious attempt at an English translation of the immortal work.

The book begins with a foreword by L M Singhvi, a former ambassador to the US and Rajya Sabha MP, after which come the author's prologue and a description of the circumstances in which the Lord taught the *Gīta* to Arjuna. Then follows the translation, chapter by chapter, in free-flowing, everyday English. A positive aspect of this translation is that it is lucid enough for even a teenager to understand the thought of this great scripture—and

that is quite encouraging.

The book has been decorated very beautifully. One feels charmed and enamoured as one flips through it: all its pages are bordered artistically and aesthetically. A beautiful English rendering of the *Gīta*, the book is printed in red on cream-coloured paper. It is significant that each page has a background picture of Lord Krishna blowing the conch (though it gives a wrong impression to show Him carrying a sword, because He had only promised to be Arjuna's charioteer). It is these embellishments that have made the book pricey.

Santosh Kumar Sharma
Kharagpur

Photographs of Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi. *Researched by Swami Vidyatmananda and Dr Purba Sengupta.* Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: *srkmath@vsnl.com*. 2003. 92 pp. Rs 50.

They came, Mother Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna, into the little room of worldly life like a pair of swans from the Manasa Lake, Mother with her broad forehead of calm, the Master with his twinkling eyes looking into the mystic beyond. Even without any of the photos found in this wonderful volume, still our Master and Mother would have been cherished by us as the architects of our grace-laden lives. Such was their celestial gliding on this earth.

But the photographs—however pale some of them may be, they are a reflection of the original glory and therefore good—help us imagine these harbingers of the new future for man as branches of the *kalpavriksha* transplanted into human soil. The researchers Swami Vidyatmananda and Dr Purba Sengupta have chosen for the epigraph an astonishingly appropriate verse from the *Saundarya-lahari*: 'O Mother! I adore the pair of Swans (Shiva-Shakti), who take delight in imbibing the honey of the full-blown Lotus of Consciousness, and who swim in the lake of the mind of enlightened ones. Their mutual conversation is what has become the eighteen Vidyas, and they separate good from evil, as milk from the water (as swans do).'

Both the Master and Mother seem so close to us because of the utter simplicity of their physical presence. That was their divinity. That was their yoga. That was their *karuna*. Look at dear Mother

cleaning orts and chiding her niece Nalini for her casteism: 'Where do you find a multitude of castes? They are all my children.' In fact, this photograph by Ganendranath, taken in Jayarambati, could well be a symbolic representation of the Vedic 'Bhūsūkta'. Here Mother sits, patient and compassionate, cleaning the place, surrounded by baskets and plates of foodstuffs like Vasundhara, the Bhudevi, who never tires of cleaning up the atmosphere and coming up with life-giving crops to sustain her children, without fail.

Once we are drawn to the portraits in terms of such familial resemblance, there is no going back. The two researchers have made excellence their motto. It is with reluctance that we turn the pages. Abinash Chandra Dahn's 'worshipped pose' of our beloved Master has given generations a peace that passeth all reasoning when we have sat in bhajans and meditation. Mother and Sister Nivedita, the coming together of a *tapasvini* and an *arpita*—the photographs are not simply collector's items but an aspirant's notes for the higher life. The brief write-ups pack plenty in a short space as when Mother indicates the Master as one laved in the Delight of Existence: 'I never saw the Master sad. He was joyous in the company of everyone, were he a boy of five or a man of ripe old age.'

And the back cover depicts Surendra's painting, 'Harmony of Religions'—a sheer leap of hope for the future. The Master's eloquent gesture with his hand is a sure blessing that all will be well for the future of mankind.

Dr Prema Nandakumar
Researcher and Literary Critic
Srirangam

Philosophical Reflections. *Dr Abdul La-thief.* Mulberry Publications, PB No 159, 25 Arya Bhavan, SM Street, Kozhikode 673 001. 2002. 165 pp. Rs 75.

Since the Vedic sages sang their hymns to Varuna and Indra, philosophy has continuously been an occupation of the human mind. For the last 2500 years or more, man is wrestling with the problems of origin, reality and worth of the world he has found himself in. But gradually there has occurred a differentiation through which the problems regarding the origin, reality and worth concerning the cosmos have been separated from the problems concerning reality as a whole. The former is known

as science; the latter, philosophy. Since its very inception, philosophy has claimed to be knowledge rather than opinion. Philosophers have not been unaware of each other's arguments, and reason has claimed to be the universal as opposed to the indefinite particularity of sense perception. Though it has been an organon of philosophy both ancient and modern, it has seldom resulted in the philosophers being convinced of one another's arguments. While thinkers like G E Moore seem to be of the opinion that philosophy is merely a correct analysis of propositions that we know to be true, Collingwood and Croce are convinced that philosophy is identical with history. Whitehead conceives of it as a general speculative scheme of reality that might apply to and explain every phenomenon or fact. On the Continent, persons like Husserl think of philosophy as an articulation of transcendental eidetic structures involved in all knowledge. The Existentialists, on their part, are concerned with the problems of life and death. With them, philosophy is a living consideration of life's problems—problems that arise from the very situation of man in the universe. Even Marx, who said, 'Philosophy tries to interpret the world, while our task is to change it', gave it an importance in his system that is second to hardly anything else even in his revolutionary strategy. As a matter of fact, it has been a debatable question whether Marx's philosophy was a theoretical adjunct or his revolutionary effort merely a practical consequence of his philosophic thought.

In *Philosophical Reflections* Dr Abdul Lathief has made an honest attempt to analyse some of the metaphysical, psychological and religious problems vis-à-vis ethical ones discussed from time immemorial by both Eastern and Western philosophers. He has started his deliberations by defining ultimate reality as prior to physical as well as spiritual existence. According to the author, this state, however, is indefinable and unknowable. But what is this state of existence? What he means by First Logos or essential being or essential existence has not been made clear by the author. Although he has given a summary of the evolution of the world from the primordial physical existence to human existence through a series of existences like astral existence, vegetative existence and animal existence, the author's intention is not quite clear. Dr Lathief has only said this much, that in human beings every individual is represented by his own essence and spirit. Now, in a perfect or Self-realized man the

perfection or the complete nature of the essence gives him complete knowledge in mental existence. This will make him identify his self with the self of the creative Being and hence with the whole creation. This produces unconditional love in astral existence and transforms activities, augmenting the whole evolution in material existence.

But complete self-expression depends on the knowledge of the real nature of our Spirit and only by Self-realization is complete self-expression possible. Self-realization is something spontaneous—it cannot be guaranteed by any method. Dr Lathief rightly points out that there are multiple factors that determine a man's Self-realization at a particular stage in his life. He has devoted the first eight chapters to ascertaining the true nature of reality.

In his pursuit of reality, Dr Lathief has made a very brief historical survey of the Western philosophers, right from pre-Socratic philosophers to modern Existential thinkers. But he has not been able to establish a clear concept of reality, because he discovers for himself an apparent contradiction in man's nature while describing the different means for the complete expression of man's essential nature. He has time and again referred to 'dynamic quality' and 'static quality' in making a distinction between 'self-consciousness' and 'discursive consciousness'. But he is not vocal enough about his actual intention.

The author has also undertaken the important task of reviving both faculty psychologists and association psychologists for the discovery of self-consciousness in man's free will. Such a man, he says, ensouls the whole creation and his will is absolute will and he acts for augmenting the whole creation.

But I fail to understand how Dr Lathief could describe the different systems of Indian philosophy as mystical. He has made a very cursory analysis of the different systems of Indian philosophy, from Buddhism to Advaita Vedanta. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 'true mysticism is the consciousness that everything that we experience is an element and only an element, ie that in being what it is, it is symbolic of something else.' Neither in Buddhism nor in Vedanta do we find this sort of mysticism. Of course, there is some scope for mysticism in Sufism, where the world is viewed as a successive emanation of God Himself and is symbolized by a pyramid. This is otherwise known as the theory of emanation.

The author has concluded his observations on philosophy with some amount of compassion. The true philosopher with his moral attitude and final goal will lead others to Self-realization. Today, at the gateway of the twenty-first century, we require such rational persons to counter all kinds of fundamentalism and political mockery. The general reader, however, will find this book entertaining, informative and useful. There are a number of printing and spelling mistakes, which I think the learned author will be very careful to rectify in the next edition. I congratulate Dr Lathief for bringing out such a vast subject within such a small framework.

Prof Amalendu Chakraborty

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Shafts of Light. *Comp. and ed. Sister Gargi and Shelley Brown.* Kalpa Tree Press, 65 East 96th Street, Suite 12D, New York, NY 10128. E-mail: *kalpatree@aol.com*. 2004. xxii + 165 pp. \$ 12.95. Copies available at Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014. E-mail: *advaita@vsnl.com*. Rs 225.

This book consists of spiritual teachings and practices based on Vedanta. It is meant for those who have developed distaste for a worldly life, characterized by sense enjoyments, and are, therefore, seeking the true meaning and purpose of human life. Equally useful for beginners as well as advanced aspirants, the book does shed shafts of light, dispelling the darkness of ignorance from the reader's heart. For a beginner, the book is a path-breaker; for an advanced aspirant, reassuring and strengthening; and for one already established in the goal, well, it should be a sheer delight. The book will benefit aspirants at any level, since it deals with Self-knowledge and the means to attain it.

A strong adherent of monistic Vedanta, Swami Ashokanandaji was a distinguished monk of the Ramakrishna Order. He headed the Vedanta Society of Northern California from 1932 until his demise in 1969. He was one of the trailblazers in the

Vedanta movement in America. The teachings in this book were noted down by his disciples from his class talks and lectures delivered over a period of three decades. Sister Gargi compiled them in this book, which has three parts: spiritual perspectives, spiritual practice and the experience of God.

The first part deals with the seminal question 'Am I this body, mind and ego?' Man's life takes a new turn with the dawn of this question, and at this juncture he is bound to find the catalyst, the guru. 'Welcome life, welcome death, don't dance to a little tune,' says the guru, who puts him on the path to Self-knowledge. Then begins a great process of unfolding.

The second part deals with this beginning of the search for the Spirit, inside and out, and the practices that equip the aspirant with strength and stamina to undauntedly traverse its difficult terrains. There he is told to 'burn out the clutter in his consciousness and not to be afraid of the struggle'.

In the last part, the swami's teachings are directed towards experience of the Self: a process ending in the permanent extinction of all processes. 'When God is both within and without, even God is gone. What is left is beyond words,' says Ashokanandaji.

Sister Gargi, the compiler of these teachings, needs no introduction. She has carved a permanent niche for herself in the literary world of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda through her six-volume magnum opus *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. In compiling the present book, the last of her works, she gave to the spiritual world some of the fine spiritual directives Ashokanandaji gave to his disciples, she herself being one of them.

These meticulously recorded sayings have a rare appeal; their conversational tone and their superb topical classification make this book a spiritual manual of rare worth. There is a clear and steady flow in the subject from the beginning of the spiritual pursuit to its end.

Inspiring and illuminating, this book is highly commended for anyone who has heard the call of the Spirit.

Swami Shuddhidananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

At times it is better to keep your mouth shut and let people wonder if you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.

—James Sinclair

❧ Reports ❧

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar; by Lt Gen (retired) Ajai Singh, Governor of Assam; on 2 July.

Inaugurated. Vivekananda Tapovanam, a landscape garden at Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad; by Dr Y S Rajasekhar Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh; on 2 July (Guru Purnima). Dr Reddy also unveiled a fibreglass image of Swami Vivekananda at the Tapovanam.

Presented. A dramatic performance on 'The Life of Holy Mother' in connection with the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi;



Drama on Holy Mother

by the children of the Balaka Sangha run by Ramakrishna Mission, Chandigarh; on 11 July.

Won. A bronze medal; by a student of Ra-

makrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, who represented India at the International Biology Olympiad held in Brisbane, Australia, from 11 to 18 July. In recognition of the boy's outstanding performance at the international forum, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India, honoured him at the Independence Day reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan and presented him with a cash award of Rs 20,000.

Organized. District-level inter-school sports tournaments; by Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai; from 21 to 24 July. 1130 students from 100 schools took part in the tournaments, which formed a part of the Home's centenary celebrations.

Organized. The inaugural programme of its golden jubilee celebrations; by Ramakrishna Mission Shilpamandira, Belur; on 24 July. Sri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Chief Minister of Bengal, and Sri Bansagopal Chaudhury, Minister for Technical Education and Training, Government of West Bengal, spoke at a meeting held in this connection. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the meeting. A souvenir was released on the occasion.

Conducted. A 2-day regional workshop on nursing; by Vivekananda Polyclinic, Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow; on 31 July and 1 August. Attended by 200 nurses from various institutions in and around Lucknow, the

workshop highlighted the role of the nurse as a crucial interface between the doctor and the patient. Among the participants were Ms Manju Nandi, Chief Matron, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi; Ms Shashi Chugh, Secretary, Indian Nursing Council, New Delhi; Dr Nitya Anand, Chairman, Indian Pharmacopoeia Committee; Ms Amiya Pradhan, Principal, Vivekananda Polyclinic School of Nursing; and a team of panellists from the Command Hospital School of Nursing, Lucknow.

Convened. The annual scientific conference of the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences; by Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata; on 24 July. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the conference and Sri Somnath Chatterjee, Speaker, Lok Sabha, released the souvenir brought out on the occasion.

Secured. Second place at the All-India Cyber Olympiad, conducted by the National Science Olympiad Foundation, New Delhi; by two students of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deogarh; in July.

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong; by Smt D C Marak, Minister of Art and Culture, Government of Meghalaya; on 7 August. Smt Marak was the chief guest at a prize-distribution ceremony organized by the centre. Swami Smarananandaji presided over the function.

Inaugurated. A new dispensary building; by Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj; at the rural health and welfare centre run by Rama-

krishna Mission, Mumbai, in Sakwar; on 8 August.

Unveiled. Two images of Swami Vivekananda; by Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai; on 11 August. Revered Maharaj also declared open the Brahmananda Hall (for examinations) and the Shivananda Block (classrooms).

Inaugurated. The platinum jubilee building, Sri Sarada Dham, to accommodate guest



Swami Vagishanandaji inaugurating Sri Sarada Dham

monks; by Swami Vagishanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Mumbai; at Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur; on 12 August.

Inaugurated. Sri Sarada Sabha Bhavan; by Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj; at the matriculation school run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai; on 13 August.

Inaugurated. The golden jubilee celebrations of the girls' high school run by Ramakrishna Mission, Chengalpattu; by Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj; on 19 August. On the follow-

ing day, Revered Maharaj dedicated the centre's extended and renovated prayer hall.

Organized. The inaugural function of its centenary celebrations; by Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore; on 22 August. About 4000 devotees attended the programme, which included special worship and a public meeting.

Visited. Ramakrishna Math, Mangalore; by Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka; on 22 August.

Conducted. A seminar on 'Entrepreneurship' (accompanied by the release of a booklet on the subject); by Ramakrishna Mission Shilpamandira; on 28 August. The seminar was a part of the polytechnic's golden jubilee celebrations.

Dedicated. The extended and renovated temple; by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Math, Chandipur; on 30 August (Swami Niranjananandaji's birthday). Over 230 monastics and 15,000 devotees attended the ceremony.

Organized. Inter-polytechnic literary compe-

titions and sports tournaments; by Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai; in August. The events formed a part of the Home's centenary celebrations.

Supplied. 25,000 litres of drinking water daily; by Ramakrishna Math, Pune; to the residents of 3 villages in Ahmednagar district; from 1 to 24 July.

Distributed. 58 saris, 56 lungis, 2 dhotis, 15 tarpaulin sheets, 300 kg rice and 60 kg dal; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda; among 301 people of Sagardighi; in July.

Continued. Relief operations; by Ramakrishna Mission centres in Assam, Bihar and Bangladesh; through August. 14,306 kg rice, 1115 kg pulses, 994 kg salt, 231 litres of mustard oil, 650 kg potatoes, 800 biscuit packets, 78 kg milk powder, 200 kg flattened rice, 50 kg jaggery and 25 kg sugar were distributed among 2629 families and 300 individuals. Other things distributed were 248 kg bleaching powder, a large quantity of phenol, 37 bags of powdered lime, 10,000 water purifying halazone tablets, 400 packets of candles, 54 towels and 2200 items of clothing among over 1845 families and 16 schools. Medical relief was also provided, the number of patients treated being 7924. *

Manners

A Christian farmer spent the day in the city.

In a restaurant for his meal, he sat near a group of young men.

After he bowed his head to give thanks for his food, one of the young men thought he would embarrass the old gentleman. 'Hey, farmer, does everyone do that out where you live?'

The old man calmly replied, 'No, son, the pigs don't!'

—from cyberspace