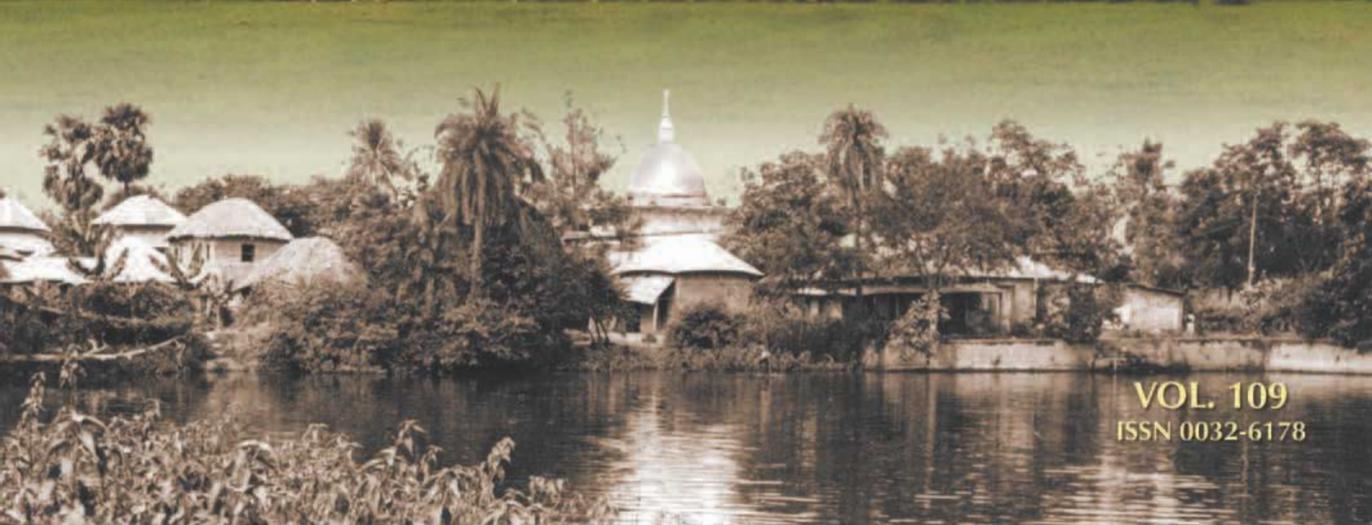


# **PRABUDDHA BHARATA** *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**



DECEMBER  
2004

A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



**VOL. 109**  
ISSN 0032-6178



Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

DECEMBER 2004

## CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom .....	623	Transcending All 'Isms' .....	650
This Month .....	624	<i>Dr Lekshmi</i>	
<i>Editorial: The Fifth Factor</i> .....	625	Vivekananda: The Poet Saint .....	654
<i>Prabuddha Bharata-100 Years Ago</i> .....	628	<i>Radhika Nagrath</i>	
Reflections on the <i>Bhagavadgita</i> .....	630	Glimpses of Holy Lives .....	658
<i>Swami Atulananda</i>		Parabrahma Upaniṣad .....	659
Sri Sarada Devi: The Universal .....	638	<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>	
Mother .....	638	Reviews .....	662
<i>Swami Sarvagatananda</i>		Reports .....	669
Before You Visit A Hindu Temple .....	644		
<i>Rada Krishna</i>			



Internet edition at: [www.advaitaonline.com](http://www.advaitaonline.com)

Editorial Office:  
Prabuddha Bharata  
Advaita Ashrama

P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat  
Dt. Champawat-262 524  
Uttaranchal

E-mail: [awakened@rediffmail.com](mailto:awakened@rediffmail.com)

Publication Office:

Advaita Ashrama  
5 Dehi Entally Road,  
Kolkata 700 014

Ph: 91-33-22440898 / 22452383 / 22164000

Fax: 22450050

E-mail: [pb@advaitaonline.com](mailto:pb@advaitaonline.com)

**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

DECEMBER 2004

No. 12

↔ Traditional Wisdom ↔

## MENTAL STRENGTH

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः ।  
योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥

The firmness that is accompanied by unwavering concentration, and by which one controls the activities of the mind, pranas and the senses—that firmness is of sattvic nature. (*Bhagavadgita*, 18.33)

Through the discipline of constant practice one is able to give up attachment to 'woman and gold'. That is what the *Gita* says. By practice one acquires uncommon power of mind. Then one doesn't find it difficult to subdue the sense-organs and to bring anger, lust, and the like under control. Such a man behaves like a tortoise, which, once it has tucked in its limbs, never puts them out. You cannot make the tortoise put its limbs out again, though you chop it to pieces with an axe. (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 179)

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life; think of it; dream of it; live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced. Others are mere talking machines. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.177)

It is the nature of the mind to flit from object to object. It does not remain steady. Even in sleep it wanders about and conjures up fantastic dreams. Diverse thoughts will distract your mind and you will feel exasperated. But do not give up the spiritual struggle. It is hard to control the mind; but it must be done. There is no other way. The more you think of the Lord, the more the other thoughts decrease. ... Through ceaseless effort one must bring the mind back if it wanders away and fix it on the Chosen Ideal. (Swami Saradananda)

---

---

## ∞ This Month ∞

**The Fifth Factor**, this month's editorial, analyses the most important factor associated with work.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** features (1) an article titled 'Essentials of Religion' by Swami Prakashananda and (2) a clipping from 'News and Miscellanies'.

**Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*** is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on verses 22 to 42 of the tenth chapter of the *Gita*. With this instalment comes to an end the tenth chapter, which describes God's greatness manifest in everyday life.

**Sri Sarada Devi: The Universal Mother** is an edited transcript of a talk by Swami Sarvagatanandaji given at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston, on 28 December 1986. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and former head of the Boston and Providence centres, the author depicts here various facets of Mother's personality: how she held back her spiritual greatness and served everyone with her all-embracing motherly heart, how she was more an exemplar than an instructor, and her silent service that did not distinguish between the sacred and the secular. We are grateful to Dr Umesh Gulati, one of our contributors from the US, for making the transcript available to us.

**Before You Visit a Hindu Temple** is the text of a talk by Mr Rada Krishna at the Hindu-Catholic Dialogue meeting at Los Angeles on 14 June 2004. The article explains what a Westerner needs to know about Hindu temples. Outlining the possible misconceptions the variety of Hindu images could trigger in a Western mind, the author de-

scribes the role of temples in a Hindu's spiritual life and underlines the need for an open mind to appreciate cultures different from our own. A retired engineer, the author came in contact with the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Mysore around 1945. He has been in the US since 1971 and occasionally gives talks at the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

**Transcending All 'Isms'** by Dr Lekshmi is an appreciation of Swami Vivekananda's Spirit-centred humanism that formed the basis of his message of man-making education and man-making religion. The author is a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Kerala.

In her article **Vivekananda: The Poet-Saint** Ms Radhika Nagrath studies Swamiji's personality through his poems, which were the outpourings of one who had seen God face to face. A devotee of the Ramakrishna Mission, the author is a research scholar of the English department at Garhwal University, Srinagar, Uttaranchal.

Those who worship God with one-pointed devotion and without any other thought, the Lord promises in the *Gita* that He would protect what they have and supply what they lack. **Glimpses of Holy Lives** features an incident from Sant Eknath's life that validates this divine promise.

**Parabrahma Upaniṣad** is the sixth instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidya-mandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

---

---

# The Fifth Factor

## EDITORIAL

**E**ven properly planned and executed projects sometimes go awry. There are occasions when the end does not come as expected even when the means are apparently taken care of. Nothing could be more frustrating. What could be the explanation for unexpected turns of events? In other words, why should things go wrong?

Murphy's Law states that 'If something can go wrong, it will.' This law is often illustrated by a buttered toast always falling to the ground with its buttered side down. Acceptance of the law may, to a certain extent, prevent our being swept off our feet. But the law may mostly mean just a humorous way of looking at things or a sort of letting go of them.

The *Bhagavadgita* offers a plausible explanation for why things go haywire despite care and precaution. According to it there are five factors involved in any work, physical or mental, good or bad.<sup>1</sup>

### The Fivefold Factor

(1) *The body*: The body is an instrument for action, karma. According to Vedanta, ignorance (*avidyā*) leads to desire (*kāma*), which in turn leads to karma, for the performance of which we assume a human body.

(2) *The sense of agency*: The feeling 'I am responsible for this work' accompanies all our activities. This sense of agency must inevitably bring with it the fruit of action, or *karma-phala*. Selfless work and that done by jnanis, or men of spiritual wisdom, are not accompanied by this sense of agency. Such work cannot be truly called work. Says Sri Shankara, 'Work done by a jnani is not really work, for he has realized the Atman, in which there is no action.'<sup>2</sup> In other words, the jnani is detached from the activities of his body and mind, since his iden-

tification is with his inner Self, the Atman.

(3) *The different instruments of action*: According to the commentators, one or more of the following twelve instruments are involved in all actions, physical or mental: *jñānendriyas*, or the five organs of knowledge (ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose); *karmendriyas*, or the five organs of action (mouth, hands, feet, the organ of evacuation and the organ of generation); *manas* (the deliberative faculty); and *buddhi* (the determinative faculty).

(4) *The different movements*: The commentators explain that these refer to the actions of the five pranas, or vital airs: *prāna*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna* and *samāna*. By implication, these movements denote any physical or mental action in view of the involvement of prana in any action. Our *jñānendriyas* and *karmendriyas* are instruments for physical movements. Our thoughts, emotions and feelings and, more important, the pull of the subtle sense organs and the mind towards objects of enjoyment—all these constitute mental movements.

(5) Divinity, or *daiva*, is the all-important fifth factor. Sri Shankara says this refers to the deities that preside over various sense organs, like the sun, which presides over the eyes, and Indra, who presides over the hands. According to Sri Ramanuja, *daiva* refers to the supreme Self, referred to as the Paramatman or the *antaryāmin* (Inner Controller), which is the supreme Cause in completing an action.<sup>3</sup> The Paramatman is the supreme Cause in that It is the unmoving substratum that makes any action possible. A common analogy is the screen on which a movie is projected. The movie is possible because of the screen. Though It is the substratum for any work, the Paramatman is unaffected by its positive or evil nature even as the screen is not affected by the pleasant or

gory happenings on it. Says the *Gita*, 'Since It is without beginning and without gunas (attributes), this immutable Paramatman does not act, nor does it get affected [by anything] though dwelling in a body.'<sup>4</sup> Sri Ramakrishna explains this truth with the example of a lamp, which remains unaffected by the noble or fraudulent actions performed with its help.<sup>5</sup>

Incidentally, *daiva* also means 'destiny' in some contexts, but not here. Dependence on destiny is a sure invitation to inertia and fatalism. A true worker makes his own destiny by dint of self-effort. 'Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, goes to the man endowed with self-effort. Only cowards harp on destiny. So ignore destiny and manifest your manliness by the power of your Self. If despite your best efforts success eludes you, what does it matter?'<sup>6</sup>

### Implications of the Fifth Factor

*Remembering God amid one's work:* Sri Krishna advised Arjuna to 'Remember Me and fight.'<sup>7</sup> Sri Ramakrishna illustrated this with the example of a tortoise that moves about in water but has its thoughts on the bank, where her eggs are lying.<sup>8</sup> A second example he gave was that of a man with toothache. Though busy with activities, his mind always dwells on the pain.<sup>9</sup> In practical terms this means working with our whole being, conscious of a reality transcending our body and mind, and not letting the mind flit from thought to thought during work. Swami Vivekananda calls this 'self-conscious activity' and recommends it for rousing the hidden powers of the Self.<sup>10</sup>

*Offering the fruits of actions to God:* God is the Prime-mover of all actions and He Himself unceasingly works without motive.<sup>11</sup> Being of the nature of God in our true Self, selfishly arrogating to ourselves the fruits of actions cannot conduce to the manifestation of the divine powers potential in us. Mentally offering to God the fruits of work is the way to deification of work; it insulates the worker from the good or bad effects of work. 'Every work is associ-

ated with some defect or other even as fire is enveloped by smoke,' says the Lord in the *Gita*.<sup>12</sup>

*An attitude of surrender:* The *Chandogya Upanishad* mentions three important factors to make work effective and strengthening: knowledge, faith and meditative awareness.<sup>13</sup> *Daiva*, the fifth factor, can be taken to be the fourth essential to effectivity. We assume that a cause 'A' always leads to an effect 'B'. Mystics tell us that 'one cause-one effect' is not true; it is a malobservation. Numerous factors influence the outcome in any situation. Each effect is the product of a multiplicity of causes. It is impossible to locate all of them with our limited intellect. Nor can we determine the resultant of all the causes. *Daiva*, divinity or, better still, the divine will, is that unknown cause that specifies the final resultant. God's will is always just, never arbitrary. He *knows* and therefore allows things to happen according to the resultant. He never makes a mistake; only in our ignorance we think He is unjust if things do not happen as we wished. Hence wisdom consists in our accepting God's will unreservedly in all situations.

In our prayers to God we ask for many things not knowing whether they will really benefit us. We seek what is pleasant (*preyas*) instead of what is beneficial (*shreyas*). We might foolishly ask for a wrong boon and, well, it might be granted too. Says Holy Mother, 'How little intelligence a man possesses! He may want one thing, but asks for another. He starts to mould an image of Shiva and often ends by making the likeness of a monkey! It is therefore best to surrender all desires at the feet of God. Let Him do whatever is best for us.'<sup>14</sup> This is an echo of a prayer from the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad*: '*Yad-bhadrāṃ tanma āsuva*; Bring to me what is beneficial.'<sup>15</sup>

This precious surrender to the Divine, *śaraṇāgati*, is the main implication of the fifth factor.

### The Upshot of Taking *Daiva* into Account

*Freedom from tension and anxiety:* Taking *daiva* into account does not imply or justify lack of effort, sloth or slovenliness. A true sense of surrender is possible only when one has fully exhausted one's physical and mental resources. Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this with the parable of a bird on the mast of a moving ship that flew in all the four directions in search of land and finally settled on the mast of the ship, finding no sign of land anywhere.<sup>16</sup> A worker who is conscious of *daiva* tries to be sattvic, free from attachment and egotism. He is endowed with fortitude, enthusiasm for work and even-mindedness—attributes of a sattvic worker described in the *Gīta*.<sup>17</sup> Work done in this spirit is meant to free man from the anxiety and tension concomitant with attachment to the result of action.

*Purification of mind:* Repeatedly offering to God one's own body and mind and the fruits of work leads to purification of mind, by freeing the buddhi from the hold of desires. This mental purification is basic to any meaningful spiritual endeavour. God happily accepts whatever we offer Him as long as it is laced with purity and devotion: 'Whoever offers Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water—I accept that devoted offering of the pure in heart.' (9.26)

*Equanimity:* Sri Krishna defines yoga as equanimity. (2.48) And equanimity signifies viewing alike the dualities of life: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat. (2.38) A mind that depends on God for the outcome of work is free from anxiety and better equipped to brave the vicissitudes of life.

\* \* \*

Divinity is the fifth and most important factor in work. Being conscious of it calls for spiritual discipline. That discipline is not something reserved for the evening of one's

life. The earlier one makes it a part of life, the better for one's inner growth. Sri Ramakrishna taught his devotees, 'Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands.'<sup>18</sup> Work becomes a spiritual discipline if the fifth factor is not lost sight of. \*

### References

1. *Bhagavadgīta*, 18.14.
2. *Vidusā kriyamāṇam karma vastutaḥ akarma eva, tasya nīskriyātma-tattva-darśana-sampannatvāt.*  
—Sri Shankara on *Gīta*, 4.20.
3. *Atra karma-hetu-kalāpe daivam pañcamaṁ paramātmā antaryāmi karma-niṣpattau pradhāna hetuḥ iti.*  
—Sri Ramanuja on *Gīta*, 18.14.
4. *Gīta*, 13.31.
5. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 102.
6. *Udyoginam puruṣasīṅham-upaiti lakṣmīr-daivam hi daivam-iti kāpuruṣā vadanti; Daivam nihatya kuru pauruṣam-ātma-saktyā yatne kṛte yadi na sidhyati ko'tra doṣaḥ.*  
—*Subhāṣita*.
7. *Gīta*, 8.7.
8. *Gospel*, 81.
9. *Ibid.*, 605.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.193.
11. *Gīta*, 3.22.
12. *Ibid.*, 18.48.
13. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 1.1.10. For a discussion on these factors see 'Essentials for Effectivity', editorial for September 2004.
14. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), 230.
15. *Mahanarayana Upanishad*, 39.3.
16. *Gospel*, 792.
17. *Gīta*, 18.26.
18. *Gospel*, 138.

Chance is the pseudonym of God when He did not want to sign. —*Anatole France*

---

# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

December 1904

## Essentials of Religion

Religion has its essentials and non-essentials. In non-essentials one religion differs from another, but the essentials are found to be the same in all. The votaries of different religions might have to worship in different temples, churches or mosques, in different postures and facing different directions, to bathe in different rivers, to go to different pilgrimages and to observe different rituals and ceremonies, but truth, purity, discrimination, dispassion, renunciation, love of God, concentration of mind, unselfishness and so on are common in all, though called by different names.

Men fight over creeds, doctrines, forms and ceremonies, which are but secondary details. Few care to find out the common bases of religions, which are the primary things. Many sectarian quarrels would have ceased, much bloodshed would have been averted, many lives would have been spared, had men cared to open their eyes to see the fundamental truths in all religions.

Truth and purity in thought, speech and act are regarded by all as the first steps in religion. Misrepresentation and exaggeration are standard human proclivities most injurious to the forming of a truthful mind. Many are found to rigidly observe caste rules, rituals and so on but they lack awfully in truth. So the importance of truth is recognized by the prophets of all religions. If we indulge in falsehood, how can we hope to realize the true nature of Self and of God, who is the embodiment of truth? Purity is one of the primary conditions of spiritual realization. A true reflection is not possible if a mirror be covered with dirt. The light of God can never penetrate our hearts unless they become pure. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' is a precept we find in all religions.

A truly religious man has discrimination and dispassion as his vade mecum. They are the sure guides in the thorny path of life. There are many intricacies and pitfalls in religion where aspirants may lose themselves and wreck their lives without the light of discrimination. Dispassion cannot be too much laid stress upon. Without it the realization of the highest is a dream. Unless one sees through the impermanency and illusiveness of the sense objects how can one cut off all attachment to them? If sense objects with their vain charms do not cease to affect one's mind, how is it possible for one to withdraw the whole mind from them and direct it towards the ideal? It is therefore that the great Shankaracharya has so emphatically laid down that one gains the right to ask about Brahman only after performing the four sadhanas, the first two of which are discrimination between the real and the unreal, and dispassion for the objects here and hereafter.

We come across in all religions the examples of great spiritual giants, who, rising above the ordinary cares and pleasures of the world, boldly give up all wealth and position and tear themselves off from the tenderest ties, for the realization of God, the highest ideal in life. We read with wonder about the Prince of Kapilavastu renouncing all to seek the truth. The voice of the great prophet of Nazareth telling his disciple 'Go and sell that thou hast, ... come and follow me' comes to us through the centuries as potent as ever. Is there not a galaxy of Hindu saints who renounced everything for Self-realization? We find great men in all religions who made the realization of the highest the be-all and end-all of life. True religion does not begin until one is ready to discard all for God. Therefore has every religion held aloft the ideal of renunciation as the commencement of spirituality.

A wholehearted devotion is one of the essential conditions of religion. A man may not have the

knowledge of the shastras, may not belong to a high caste, may not observe any ceremonials or social customs, but if he possesses true bhakti, he is a truly religious man. If he has an intense longing to see and realize God, he has advanced a great way towards spirituality. Half-hearted devotion does not amount to anything. To learn a science one has to devote one's whole heart to it; what a tremendous devotion is wanted in religion, which is the science of all sciences! The realization of the highest is far off until one can cry with Buddha, 'Let my body be reduced to a skeleton in this posture; let my skin, bones and flesh be dissolved. Without attaining the knowledge which is difficult to attain even in many years, my body shall not move from this posture.' A disciple once asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Master, why is it that I don't realize God?' In reply he said, 'My son, do you feel at least so much attraction for the Lord as you have for your children? The question is, do we really have devotion? We like to possess a thing without taking the trouble to earn it. When an aspirant is drawn to God with the attraction that a miser has for his gold, or a devoted wife for her husband, or a worldly-minded man for sense objects, his realization is near at hand. Such madness of love changes the whole nature of the devotee. His mere presence induces spirituality in others. We often talk about religion and give too much importance to shastric learning, but never lay stress on realization.

Concentration of mind is a great factor in religion. Can we withdraw our whole mind from other things and concentrate it on our ideal? Do we forget our body consciousness at the time of concentration? Until we acquire such concentration, religion is mere talk.

A religious man must be unselfish. 'For the freedom of self and for the good of the world' is the life of a religious man. He should efface his self by serving others. His helping hand ought to be stretched towards all. His presence should be a blessing to all. In short, his life should be merged in the lives of all.

Popularly it is supposed that fasting on particular days, bath in particular rivers, or performance of certain rituals, can secure mukti. Unfortunately, the religious energy of the masses, worthy of a greater cause, is wasted in this way. Whoever has found a man attain freedom by following these outward observances? Some go to the length of saying that religion will be gone if these rituals and ceremonies are not observed. To them we say that instead of suffering, religion would be better and stronger if these were clipped and pruned hard back. These are only the non-essentials and their rank growth has jeopardized the life of the essentials, such as the purification of the heart, bhakti and jnana.

Customs and *acharas* are different in different countries and vary with time and change of circumstances, but the essentials of religion are eternal and unchangeable. So instead of cultivating these *deshacharas* and rituals which fill the country with hatred, ill-feeling and sectarian fight, the great essentials of religion should be held aloft, which are not the exclusive possession of any one religion but the common property of all, which bring real peace to man and give him strength to remain firm in his faith in adversity as well as in prosperity.

—Swami Prakashananda

**T**he extraordinary resuscitating power of light recently received a curious illustration in the silver mines at Laurium. A mine had been abandoned for 2000 years, and the seed of some poppies was found beneath the slag of a species which had disappeared for twenty centuries. The slag being removed, in a short time the entire space was covered with the most gorgeous show of poppies. After their twenty centuries' rest they had bloomed as vigorously as ever without air or water.

—from 'News and Miscellanies'

---

---

# Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

## Chapter 10 (*continued*)

**22. Of the Vedas I am the *Sāma Veda*; of the devas I am Vāsava (Indra); of the senses I am the mind; and in all living beings I am the consciousness.**

**O**f the four Vedas I am the *Sāma Veda*. The Vedas are divided into four parts: the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Atharva Veda* and the *Sāma Veda*. Of these four, I am the

*Sāma Veda*, which contains beautiful hymns and chants. Among the gods, I am Indra, their king. I am the mind; I am the consciousness. And so Sri Krishna goes on:

**23. Of the Rudras I am Shankara; of the Yakshas and Rakshasas I am the Lord of Wealth; of the Vasus I am the Fire-god; among the mountains I am Meru.**

**24. O Partha, know Me to be Brihaspati, the chief priest; of generals I am Skanda; among waters I am the ocean.**

**T**he Rudras are the twelve gods of knowledge. Yakshas are sensual spirits. Rakshasas are evil spirits. Meru is the celestial

mountain where the gods dwell. Skanda is the leader of the celestial hosts.

**25. I am Bhrigu among the great rishis; of words I am the monosyllable Om; of yajnas (sacrifices) I am japa-yajna; of the immovable I am the Himalayas.**

**T**hink of Me in all these different forms. If you do that, you can never forget Me, for someone or other of these examples will be before you always. If it is not the sun, then it is the moon, or it is something else. When you meet a person remember quickly that I am that which is the consciousness in him. See Me at the back of the person, the Source of his being and his power and energy. Then you can never be angry with him or you cannot think of him in any unkind way. Now, I am also the syllable Om, the most sacred word in the Vedas, the root of all sounds and the highest symbol of God. And I am japa, that is, the practice of repeating silently certain mantras, holy texts or some sacred word or the name of God. Some devotees spend many hours in that practice every day. They will repeat mentally 'So'ham, I am He', or 'Shivo'ham, I am Shiva', or the name of God: Rama, Krishna and so on.

This silent repetition and meditation on the meaning of the word is considered a higher practice than verbal repetition. It is looked upon as a form of sacrifice (as all practices are), and as it does not require killing or injuring of any creature (as some other sacrifices do), Sri Krishna says, 'Think of Me whenever you see anyone practising this japa.'

The meaning in all these verses is that wherever our eyes roam we should be able to find something that reminds us of God. Think of the stability of the Himalayas, the mightiest of all mountains. Nothing can shake or disturb them. They stand through all ages, pure and steadfast. 'Let that remind you of Me, the Rock of Ages, the Unchangeable, the refuge of My devotees. Aeons go by, but I change not. Worlds come into existence and perish, but I am the same for ever and ever.'

**26. I am Ashvattha among all the trees; Narada among the Devarshis; Chitraratha among the Gandharvas, the sage Kapila among the perfected ones.**

**D**evarshis are devas who are at the same time rishis, or seers of mantras. There are three classes of illumined sages, or siddhas. First, those born perfect without reference to any prior event. Second, those born perfect in consequence of perfection previously attained. Third, those who become perfect after birth, in consequence of illumination

attained during life. Kapila, the revealer of the Sankhya philosophy, belongs to the first class. He was born with knowledge, power, virtue and dispassion. Think of Me when you hear his name or study his work. Gandharvas are celestial musicians; they sing and dance in the court of Indra.

**27. Among horses know Me as Uchchhaishravas, born of nectar; among the lordly elephants as Airāvata; and among men as the monarch.**

**U**chchhaishravas is the name of the horse that came up from the ocean when the gods and the demons churned the ocean in order to obtain the nectar

hidden in its depths. Airāvata is Indra's elephant. And think of Me when you see a king or leader among men.

**28. Among weapons I am the thunderbolt; among cows I am Kāmadhuk. I am Kandarpa, the cause of offspring; and of serpents I am Vāsuki.**

**K**āmadhuk was the cow of Sage Vasishtha that yielded all desired objects. Kandarpa

is the god of love. Vāsuki was a celebrated poisonous serpent and king of snakes.

**29. I am Ananta among the snakes; Varuna among water-beings; I am Aryaman among ancestors; and Yama among rulers.**

**A**nanta is the king of non-poisonous snakes. Ananta means eternity. In eternity the world rests. Varuna is the king of water-gods. Yama is the ruler of the dead, the judge of all judges.

All this is very interesting for those who are acquainted with the history and mythology of the Hindus. Otherwise these examples do not carry much meaning and are not so well fitted for others. But anyhow, we get the idea. Whatever is the best and highest in its

class should call the Lord to our mind, so that we do not go through life heedlessly. When we understand this, then we can work it out ourselves, in our own way. We know how different things call up holy associations and holy thoughts: a church, incense, a bare-footed monk, a cross, a golden sunset, flowers offered on the altar—we can extend the list as far as we please, and the farther the better. It helps to create the habit to watch and pray without ceasing.

**30. I am Prahlada among Daityas; of measures I am Time; among wild beasts I am the lord of beasts (the lion), and among birds I am Vainateya (Garuda).**

**T**he Lord says, I am Prahlada among the Daityas (sons of Diti); you can find Me even among these wicked beings. For I am Prahlada, the saint among the Daityas (demons). Perhaps we remember the story of the saintly boy Prahlada. Well, the Daityas are an

order of superhuman beings. The gods (devas) and the demons are always at war with each other. The demons have no part in the oblations of men, as the gods have, nor have they a share in the governance of the world. Sometimes they drive the devas from heaven, take

possession of their throne, and rule until the devas conquer them again. Prahlada was the son of King Hiranyakashipu, who had once again conquered the gods. He ruled over the three worlds, namely the world of men and animals, the world of the gods and deva-like beings, and the world of the Daityas. He was a very proud king and proclaimed himself God of the universe. He ordered his subjects to worship him instead of the omnipotent Lord Vishnu.

Now it happened that his little son Prahlada was a devout worshipper of Lord Vishnu, even from his very birth. Seeing this evil spring up in his own family, the king got frightened and gave his son in charge of two teachers, with the instruction to correct this tendency in the boy. But no matter how severely the teachers punished Prahlada, he would worship his beloved Vishnu. Not only *that*, he would also teach the other pupils to worship Vishnu. When the king heard this, he was enraged. And as the boy refused to worship his father instead of Vishnu, the king tried to kill the boy. But it was of no avail. Vishnu Himself protected the child-saint, and the boy survived all the king's attempts to destroy him.

The boy would always pray to Vishnu, 'Salutation to Thee, Lord of the universe, beautiful and beloved Vishnu.' And then he would meditate on Vishnu: forgetting that he was the boy Prahlada, he would identify himself with his Lord.

One day the king saw again Prahlada wor-

shipping Vishnu. He had coaxed, threatened and punished; now he was furious. He sprang at the boy, sword in hand. 'Where is your Vishnu?' he cried out. 'If he is present everywhere as you say, then he must be in this pillar also.' And saying this, he struck the pillar a terrific blow. Then the pillar split asunder and from it emerged the Nrisimha incarnation of God, half man and half lion. It attacked the king and after a fierce fight destroyed him. Vishnu had taken this terrible form to protect his young devotee.

Then the gods came and worshipped Vishnu and Prahlada. And a voice came from heaven: 'Ask a boon, O Prahlada, any boon you choose.' But Prahlada said, 'Lord, I have seen Thee; what else do I want? Please do not tempt me.' But the voice said, 'You *must* ask a boon.' And with his heart overflowing with devotion, Prahlada said, 'O Lord! That intense love which worldly people have for sense objects—may I have that intensity of love for You and that, only for love's sake.' Then the Lord blessed him saying, 'By My command enjoy the blessings of this world till the end of this cycle. Perform religious acts with your heart fixed on Me, and after the dissolution of the body you will attain Me.' Then the gods installed Prahlada on the throne of the Daityas, and returned to their respective spheres.

So Sri Krishna says, 'I am Prahlada. And I am Time, the great reckoner of all. And I am Garuda (the celestial bird, attending upon Vishnu).'

**31. Among purifiers I am the wind; among warriors I am Rama; among fishes I am the shark; and among streams, I am Jāhnavī, the Ganga.**

**R**ama was the Lord incarnate. He was a king and a mighty warrior. There is an interesting story of his strength and prowess.

Sita, the daughter of King Janaka, was the most beautiful and the cleverest princess in the land. Many were the princes who had asked for her hand. But none of these could

win her, as Sita was not satisfied with her suitors. She wanted to be wedded to the most valiant prince of the domain. To test the strength of the claimants, Janaka had proclaimed through all the land that only he who would succeed in stretching the gigantic bow of Shiva would be accepted by his daughter as her husband; none other need apply. Now princes

and warriors came from all directions, for Sita was the jewel of the land. They all tried their valour at the bow. But so big and heavy was the bow that some could hardly lift it off the ground, not to speak of stretching it. Others were more successful. They succeeded in stretching the bow halfway. But so terrific was the force that when they let go of the string, the vibration threw them back on the ground, and many were quite stunned by the blow.

At last came Rama's turn. Already it was whispered about that Sita did not want to marry and that therefore she had devised an impossible test. Disheartened, one after an-

other the princes returned home. But Rama was in no way dismayed. He entered the field, took hold of the bow, lifted it off the ground and stretched it. Such was his strength that the bow snapped in two in his hands. A thunder-like sound filled the air, and the world trembled.

The king was much pleased with this feat of strength and gave Rama his daughter Sita as wife. And with her he gave him half the kingdom. And Sita was very satisfied. They were worthy of each other.

'I am that Rama,' says Sri Krishna. 'And I am the Ganga, the most holy of all rivers.'

**32. O Arjuna, of all creation I am the beginning, the middle and also the end; of all sciences I am the science of Self-knowledge; among disputants I am *vāda*.**

'Of disputants I am the disputant who is sincere and truthful.' Discussion is classified under three heads in Sanskrit treatises. They are called *vāda*, *vitanda* and *jalpa*. In the first, the object is to arrive at truth; the second is idle carping at the arguments of another without trying to establish

the opposite side of the question. And the third is the assertion of one's own opinion and the attempt to refute that of the adversary by overbearing reply or wrangling rejoinder.<sup>1</sup> Sri Krishna is the first: truth-seeking argumentation.

**33. Of letters I am the Sanskrit letter *a*; of all Sanskrit compounds *dvandva* (which keeps intact the meaning of its component parts). I am the inexhaustible Time, and the Sustainer (by dispensing the fruits of actions) facing everywhere.**

**34. I am all-seizing Death; the prosperity of those who are to be prosperous. Of the feminine powers I am fame, prosperity (or fortune), speech, memory, intelligence, constancy and forbearance.**

I am all-seizing death, the producer of universal dissolution. And I am the means of attaining prosperity in future

periods of creation. Of the feminine powers I am the goddess of fame, presiding over great deeds of righteousness.'

**35. I am the Bṛhat-Sāman of the Vedic hymns. I am Gayatri among metres. Of months I am Mārgaśīrṣa and of seasons I am the flowering season.**

I am the Bṛhat-Sāman, which reveals the path of nirvana. Of months I am the har-

vest month and of seasons spring.'

**36. I am gambling among the fraudulent; the prowess of the powerful. I am victory; I am perseverance; I am the sattva of the sattvika.**

I am gambling among the fraudulent, the wicked means of amassing or losing fortunes. I am the victory of the victorious and perseverance of those who make an effort.

I am the sattva of the sattvika.'

Arjuna is to think of the Lord always, so that his mind may not go astray. But how can we think of the Lord when we see so many evil

***When we play different musical instruments, they emit different sounds. But the air that enters the instruments and causes the sound is the same. So it is with God's power. 'See Me as the manifestation of that power through different instruments; even call it good or evil, not according to the power but according to the instrument.'***

side of Me. The same flow of power runs through saint and sinner. The one will use it to worship Me, the other to commit sin. It is a question of the use or abuse of that power, which comes from Me.' When we play different musical instruments, they emit different sounds. But the air that enters the instruments and causes the sound is the same. So it is with God's power. 'See Me as the manifesta-

things. Sri Krishna says, 'Do not think of the evil things; think of the power behind them.' 'Of all ways of deceiving, gambling is the strongest, the chief deceiving-power, and that I am,' says the Lord. 'My power works through all, good or bad. Nothing can happen without Me. The leaf that falls to the ground falls through My power. Man becomes king or beggar in a moment of time through gambling. That is also My power. Do not do things you call evil because they will involve you more, but know the Truth. Know that I am the power, the energy of all deeds, the noblest and the meanest. No power exists anywhere out-

tion of that power through different instruments; even call it good or evil, not according to the power but according to the instrument. Try to see Me even in evil.' When Pavhari Baba was bitten by a snake, he said, 'A messenger had come from my beloved Lord.' He recognized the power of God in the snake. And when Sri Ramakrishna inadvertently met some prostitutes, he bowed down to them and saluted in them his Divine Mother. The Lord is all in all and everywhere present, but only the free soul can see Him. To gain that power of vision, all these examples are given.

**37. Of the Vrishnis I am Vāsudeva; among the Pandavas I am Dhananjaya; among the saints I am Vyasa and among the seers I am Ushanas the seer.**

**V**āsudeva is Sri Krishna Himself. Vyasa is the author of the *Mahabharata*. He was a muni, a saint who is engrossed in

meditation, and a knower of the Vedas. Ushanas was a muni, the first teacher of ethics and politics and an inspired poet.

**38. I am the rod of the disciplinarians; the statesmanship of the seekers of conquest; silence among secret things; the wisdom of the wise.**

And to conclude the present section, the Lord finally summarizes His attributes:

**39. O Arjuna, whatever is the seed of all beings, that also am I. There is no being, moving or unmoving, who can exist without Me.**

**T**here is no being without Me. How could there be? For anything into which I have not entered would be without its real Self, without its Spirit, without the Atman. That cannot be. It would be a void, without existence. We cannot think of fire without heat.

Heat is the soul, the life of fire. So we cannot imagine anything existing without Reality as its centre, from which proceed its life, power and consciousness. That is why, 'Everything is of My nature,' says the Lord. 'I am the essence, the seed and the very cause, the beginning of all.'

**40. O Scorcher of your foes, there is no end to the manifestations of My divine power;**

what I have declared is only a partial statement of the vastness of My divine manifestations.

Says Job, 'Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?'<sup>2</sup> Indeed, who can understand? Who can know the full extent of His glories? It is not given to man. Ears have never heard it, eyes have never seen it, and the mouth has never spoken His greatness. The mind falls

***The body has a beginning and it must have an end. The body must die. But the Soul dies not. The Soul stands apart from the body. Until one sees God, one cannot help believing that the Soul is the same as the body. The idea clings to the ignorant, who have not seen God. But to him who knows, it is plain that the Soul is not the same as the body.***

back, unable to grasp it. No one can describe the greatness of Him, who is the Self of all.

**41. Whatever being there is, glorious, prosperous or powerful, know that it has sprung from a spark of My splendour.**

The Lord, Ishvara, is the source of all power. Whatever we see great and good and beautiful in any creature anywhere, let us remember that it is a part of His greatness and goodness and beauty. 'Do not, therefore, worship the unreal part in man, but worship Me in the person.' There is the body and the Soul. The body has a beginning and it must have an end. The body must die. But the

Soul dies not. The Soul stands apart from the body. Until one sees God, one cannot help believing that the Soul is the same as the body. The idea clings to the ignorant, who have not seen God. But to him who knows, it is plain that the Soul is not the same as the body.

And now in the last verse of this chapter Sri Krishna says:

**42. O Arjuna, what need is there for you to know all these details? I exist, sustaining this whole universe by a portion of Myself.**

I have given only a few examples to please My devotees whose minds are still wandering out through the gates of the senses, so that they may remember Me anyhow. But My infinite majesty reaches infinitely beyond this manifestation, which is known as the universe. That is only one small part, like the crust of ice on the surface of water. All the water in the lake does not turn into ice, only a part, and that part is all you can see of the lake; the rest is hidden under the ice.

Like the unfrozen water, the Unmanifest cannot be seen. My other parts never come within creation, within maya. That remains always free. Of a heap of earth, only the moist part can be shaped into pots. The dry part re-

mains formless. The eternal snow that covers the summit of the Himalayas only partly melts; some parts never melt. The heat does not reach there. Below that, sometimes it is frozen and sometimes it melts and forms streams and rivers. So one part of the Sat-chit-ananda upholds and forms this universe. Other parts never come into manifestation but remain the Absolute always. All these examples are only an attempt to explain that which cannot really be explained but can only be experienced and perceived directly in samadhi. All is maya after all. Bondage and freedom alike are ideas in maya. One part becomes the universe, while some parts are neither creation nor non-creation. In the Vedas it is said

***There is but one Truth, one God, one divine Spirit. But our visions of that Reality differ. Your vision may not be my vision. As long as we realize this, no harm can come. But when we think that our own vision is the only true vision, quarrels, fights and sectarianism ensue.***

that 'All beings form His foot.'<sup>3</sup> The rest of His being is never covered. Even if we know the entire Cosmos, we would know only a small part of God, only the part of Him that is caught, as it were, in the realm of time, space and causation, the part that has entered into the mind of man. What then is beyond the part we know? Nobody can tell, because nobody has ever been there. That part is ever free. Those who enter there do not return. Different philosophies try to explain that. There is only One Infinite. All else is maya, a passing delusion, and a cloud before the sun. Sri Krishna speaks all these words, only to help those who cannot grasp the highest Truth. It is an attempt on the Lord's part to lead the understanding of man, step by step, through the finite to the Infinite, through manifestation to the unmanifest Brahman. Infinity remains infinite, no matter how we try to split it up, divide it or take from it. Truth alone exists and that Truth is God. 'Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite mortal.'<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

That is the end of the tenth chapter, which shows how to realize God through glimpses of His divine glory. The next chapter, eleventh, gives a higher vision, God in His universal aspect. Arjuna's eyes are opened for a moment and he gazes into the abyss of Truth.

God is seen as the Soul of the universe.

There is but one Truth, one God, one divine Spirit. But our visions of that Reality differ. Your vision may not be my vision. As long as we realize this, no harm can come. But when we think that our own vision is the only true vision, quarrels, fights and sectarianism ensue.

We all are God, but we see Him in one of His many aspects. To see Him in Spirit and in Truth means transcending all limitations. And when all limitations are transcended we are no longer different from God, the Limitless. Then we rise beyond speech, thought and explanation. Whenever God is spoken of, He is spoken of in one of His aspects.

Sri Ramakrishna tells the story of some men who were disputing the colour of a chameleon. They had all seen it, and a dispute arose about its colour. One said, 'The chameleon is red.' 'No, you are mistaken,' said another. 'It is green.' A third person said, 'Gentlemen, pardon me, but you are both mistaken. I have seen the chameleon and it is neither red nor green. It is blue.' The quarrel grew high. At last one of the party suggested, 'Let us go to the tree on which the chameleon lives. There is a sannyasin living there and he must have seen it many times. He surely will know.'

They went to the sannyasin and put their difficulty before him. Then the holy man said, 'Every one of you is right. The chameleon is red, green and blue, and it has many colours besides. But it changes its colour. At one time it is red, at another time it is blue, and at some other time it is green. And what is more, sometimes it is colourless. Having seen it at a different time, every one of you has seen a different colour.' Then they understood how foolish their quarrel had been. They had all seen only one aspect of the little creature and thought that they had known all about it.

So it is with Truth. We get one little glimpse of God and think that we know all about Him and repudiate the testimony of others; and that is the cause of sectarianism. Different ideas may be true, but they are not the whole Truth.

Vedanta teaches about God Personal and God Impersonal; God manifest and God Unmanifest; God Absolute and God relative; God the Father, God the Mother and God beyond both. And it is always the one and the same God. 'That which exists is One, sages call it by various names.'<sup>5</sup> The Lord reveals Himself to His devotees as both Personal and Impersonal.

Let us examine some utterances of Sri Ramakrishna:

The jnani seeks to realize Brahman. But the ideal of the bhakta is the Personal God—a God endowed with omnipotence and with the six treasures. Yet Brahman and Śakti are, in fact, not different. That which is the Blissful Mother is, again, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. They are like the gem and its lustre. When one speaks of the lustre of the gem, one thinks of the gem; and again, when one speaks of the gem, one refers to its lustre. One cannot conceive of the lustre of the gem without thinking of the gem, and one cannot conceive of the gem without thinking of its lustre.<sup>6</sup>

As long as one has not realized God, one should renounce the world, following the process of 'Neti, neti'. But he who has attained God knows that it is God who has become all this. Then he sees that God, maya, living beings, and the universe form one whole. God includes the universe and its living beings. ...

It is the process of evolution and involution. The world, after its dissolution, remains involved in God; and God, at the time of creation,

evolves as the world. Butter goes with butter-milk, and buttermilk goes with butter. If there is a thing called buttermilk, then butter also exists; and if there is a thing called butter, then buttermilk also exists. If the Self exists, then the non-Self must also exist.

The phenomenal world belongs to that very Reality to which the Absolute belongs; again, the Absolute belongs to that very Reality to which the phenomenal world belongs. He who is realized as God has also become the universe and its living beings. One who knows the Truth knows that it is He alone who has become father and mother, child and neighbour, man and animal, good and bad, holy and unholy, and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

This vision realized by Sri Ramakrishna is the highest, perfect vision. God is seen in both His aspects, His inferior and superior nature. Arjuna is coming to that. Sri Krishna is leading him on. In the eleventh chapter we will read about Arjuna's vision, that wonderful revelation, the realization of God as the Soul of things.

(To be continued)

## References

1. *Bhagavadgita*, trans. Swami Swarupananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976), 235.
2. *Job*, 26.14.
3. *Pādo'sya viśvā bhūtāni*. —*Rig Veda*, 10.90.3.
4. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.24.1.
5. *Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*.  
—*Rig Veda*, 1.164.46.
6. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 277.
7. *Ibid.*, 327-8.

**T**hat one Supreme Being, the embodiment of all-pervading Consciousness, envelops all—within and without. He is the Object of knowledge of all the Vedas; He is the Creator of Vedanta; and He is also the Knower of the Vedas. One who knows this, knows Vedanta. If one does not perceive this, truly one has not understood anything about Vedanta, although one might have studied all the books.

—Swami Turiyananda

---

---

# Sri Sarada Devi: The Universal Mother

SWAMI SARVAGATANANDA

This is a very special occasion for all of us to think about Holy Mother: what she was, what she means to us now. It is rather difficult to picture her because our knowledge about her is only second-hand: we get a glimpse of her from writings on her by swamis, by others who saw her and by those who had heard about her from still others. You will be surprised and perhaps shocked to know that not many in the beginning were inclined to go to Holy Mother because they could not really *see* her, since she was always veiled and never spoke anything about philosophy, religion and the like. Not many could grasp the greatness of Holy Mother: they thought she was great because she was Sri Ramakrishna's wife.

## Coming down from Divinity to Human Level

The more I think about it, the more it seems to me that it is rather easy to get into an ecstatic mood, raise our consciousness, dwell in that highest divine realm and be lost to the outside world. But, having had the highest spiritual experience, it is very difficult to come down to the human level and work like anyone else, without betraying any traces of having had that ecstatic experience. That was the uniqueness of Holy Mother.

## Her Life Was Her Sermon

I am sure many of you know about an incident from Buddha's life. There was a hall where he addressed his monks and other disciples. One day, on entering the hall, he surveyed it in a moment to see if everyone was present. One monk was absent. And Buddha asked the others, 'What about him?' 'Well, sir, he is sick. He's staying in his room,' was the re-

ply. 'Is there anyone to serve him?' Buddha asked. 'No, sir.'

Buddha got up, slowly walked up to the sick monk's place, took a towel, soaked it in water, squeezed it and washed him and served him. When the monk was asleep, Buddha came out. The other monks were waiting for him. Buddha was about to go away without a word. Some monks asked him, 'Sir, what about the sermon?'

'I rendered the sermon,' he said. That is it. 'I rendered the sermon.' That, again, was Holy Mother. To serve others is very difficult. We can talk, we can explain things, but, with that full awareness inside, to behave just like an ordinary human being is practically impossible. That is why many could not understand her in the beginning. The more they lived with her, the more they began to understand how it was possible for a human being to serve others as she did. She was daughter to her parents, wife to Sri Ramakrishna and spiritual guide and teacher to many, but more than all this, she was a mother, unique in every way.

## Our Real Mother

She lived true to her pronouncement 'I am the Mother of all.' Anybody, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, high class or low class, known or unknown—all received from her that wonderful love and affection. That is one important thing I discover in her life. Anybody could go and feel, 'Here is someone who is *my very own*.' Day or night, people visited her. Slowly her name spread, and more people started coming. Without exception all felt that she was heavenly. That is why I say she is holy and she is motherly. Everyone had that kind of feeling—monks, devotees, the Western disciples of Swami Vivekananda who accompa-

nied him to India, and those who visited India after his passing way. Their common refrain was, 'She is our real mother.'

### **Motherly, Compassionate and Forgiving**

We could love others like a mother for a day, or maybe for some days, but throughout our life? That is very difficult. Even when she was sick, she was ready to help anyone. In the *Chandī* we read about the glory of the Divine Mother: 'Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu mātṛrūpeṇa saṁsthītā; ... Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu dayārūpeṇa saṁsthītā; ... Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu kṣantirūpeṇa saṁsthītā; Namastasyai. Namastasyai. Namastasyai namo namaḥ.' ('Salutations to the Divine Mother, who dwells in all beings as mother, as compassion, as forgiveness.')

God as mother, as compassion, as forgiveness—all this we *hear* about. Well, maybe we also try to *imagine*. Until we see a person translating these things into action, we don't really *understand*. Holy Mother was such a person. She was not only motherly to everyone, but also compassionate and forgiving.

There is not one but many incidents in her life to illustrate how people received her blessings. Of all those who received her grace, that Muslim robber comes to my mind again and again, the one who went to jail many times. He was not allowed to even reach and see her. One day he climbed the wall and jumped into the place just to have a glimpse of Mother when she was sick. As he stood before her, she asked, 'Baba, where were you all these days?' 'Oh, I did some robbery and then I was caught and was put in the jail. Just the other day they released me,' he said. And she made him sit there and served him.

A devotee once asked her, 'Mother, why do you waste so much time for him?'

'Because he is lost.'

'Do you know he robbed such and such a

place the other day?'

'What else can he do? They have lost their jobs.' (They used to work in a silk industry. Due to an unfortunate competition, that industry was dead. And all those workers, very strong Muslims, had nothing to do. Therefore, they took to robbing others.) 'If you give him some work he will certainly do that. When there is no work, how does he maintain his family? So robbing has become his profession. And therefore he comes here. I cannot say no to him.' Look, Mother did not take it very badly!

### **Whatever Was Hers Was for Others**

Imagine, if any robber comes from jail and walks into your house, how would you feel? Mother felt at home with him, not once, but many times. There are so many such incidents in her life. In the *Bhagavadgita* there is a

***God as mother, as compassion, as forgiveness—all this we hear about. Well, maybe we also try to imagine. Until we see a person translating these things into action, we don't really understand. Holy Mother was such a person. She was not only motherly to everyone, but also compassionate and forgiving.***

nice saying from Sri Krishna: 'Four types of persons worship me: those who are in distress, those who seek material benefits, those who are seekers of truth and those who know me (jnānis).<sup>1</sup> All these people worship the Lord. Now, we all do it. All religions have this kind of approach. It is easy to go to a shrine or a chapel and sit down and say, 'Oh, God ...' and submit our petition to Him. And then, maybe our prayer is sanctioned or maybe not, but we live on faith and hope. With Mother, it is not like that. You go with all these things to her, someone sitting before you in flesh and blood. And whatever you want, you ask her.'

It is easy to pray to a deity and expect that something will happen after some time. Here it is not like that. To a living person you say this and get the things done. That I call impossible in this world, but she did it. People used to go to her for many things. If she had what they wanted, she immediately gave them that. Otherwise, she made them sit, procured the thing and gave it. She never denied anyone anything. Where do you have another like her?

Once it so happened that somebody came to her clad in a small length of cloth. Mother had no money to purchase cloths. Somebody had given her a new cloth. It was on the clothesline, washed, dry and ready to wear. She immediately brought it, folded it

***And she was not particular about any place for initiating people. They could meet her anywhere: at the railway station or at the roadside adjacent to the fields. Wherever she was, that place was holy. And there she welcomed them, instructed them, guided them and bade them farewell.***

and gave it to the person. If she had anything, it belonged to people. She was always concerned about others. She was a nurse, maid, mother—all in one. And she served everyone, day or night.

### **Service with a Difference**

A family came to her one day, travelling a long distance by bullock cart. One of them had malaria. Jayrambati was a very bad place for the disease. The patient was shivering and didn't know what to do. They were to go away right after seeing Mother and receiving her blessings. But he had to stay back. Now, how to provide for all of them in the house? Those who were helping Mother said, 'Let them go to the next village and stay in such and such a place.'

'But I can't send them out,' said Mother. Mind that, that night she cooked for them, served them, and served especially that diseased man. She brought some ingredients, prepared some kind of paste of them, poured some milk into it and gave it to him. Next morning, she sent him back in a bullock cart. And she herself was sick for a few days.

It was not once, but it happened many times. People came there *quite* healthy, but since that area was not conducive to good health, they fell sick. And she was there on the spot to serve them. 'He's my child,' she used to say. 'I shall do what I can for him or her.' This is what I call really impossible. What is important is, she served others not just in a human way, but with a spiritual background, with total identification with them.

### **She Made Everyone Her Own**

'Make everybody your own, nobody is a stranger, the world is yours'—Mother did not say that from imagination or for the good of the world. She *was* like that: she made everybody her own—no distinction.

In those days of the beginning of the twentieth century, caste restrictions in society were rigid, particularly with regard to Muslims and untouchables. Orthodox people never allowed them inside their house. Mother not only allowed them inside, but served them food, cleaned the area herself because others refused to do it. They would tell her, 'You are a brahmin; you should not touch those things.' She removed the leavings and cleaned the place after her children ate. Somebody said, 'You will lose your caste.' 'I have no caste,' she said. What caste? Being unorthodox in that orthodox area and keeping her head high at the same time was very difficult. She served everyone and made them feel that she was their mother.

### Her Spiritual Ministry

And this is only the empirical side of her personality. To speak of her spiritual service: People come to her with so many doubts, with so many images in their mind, and told her their problems. Mother gave them spiritual instructions suitable and natural to each according to his stage in life.

And she was not particular about any place for initiating people. They could meet her anywhere: at the railway station or at the roadside adjacent to the fields. Wherever she was, that place was holy. And there she welcomed them, instructed them, guided them and bade them farewell. One needed just to say, 'Mother, please instruct me', and she was ready. As a spiritual guide, she observed no restriction. Her refrain was, 'They have come all the way; I need to help them.'

### Awe-inspiring Spiritual Greatness

In her spiritual service she stands above many people. Many of the later seniors of the Ramakrishna Order were her disciples. Once, when two disciples of Swamiji came to meet him, he said, 'Go to Mother. Receive her blessings first and then come here.' Swamiji had been to the Western world and conquered the hearts and minds of many people. When he went to Holy Mother, he was just like a humble soul: standing before her, waiting for her orders. Others could not understand Mother's greatness, but Swamiji did. Other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna could not imagine how great she was. One day, Swami Vijnanananda, a brother disciple of Vivekananda, went to make prostrations before Mother. He saluted her briefly from a distance and came away. Swamiji said, 'Come here, you don't know whom you are approaching. Is that the way to salute her?' And Swamiji showed him how to salute her by prostrating full length before her. 'Just do like that. You

will be blessed, I tell you,' he said. And mind that, the person was another disciple of Ramakrishna.

On another occasion, I heard, Swami Brahmananda went to see her. He washed his hands three or four times with Ganga water, sprinkled it on his body and stood shivering before her. He returned after a quick prostration. That was because her spiritual stature was so high. We could perhaps understand Sri Ramakrishna's stature, because it was evident and could be felt. But Mother's was absolutely concealed. Therefore, they were awed of her. Her one word was law and obeyed as an order in the entire Ramakrishna Order. So thoughtful, so wise was her intuitive counsel. She could say things straight to even great swamis

***The Ramakrishna Order is one place where none should feel isolated. She was so broad, so universal and so calm and sublime at the same time. This combination is very difficult. It is the highest spiritual achievement.***

like Brahmananda and Vivekananda, and, on occasion, to even Sri Ramakrishna if she felt that her motherhood was questioned. She was the only one who could say no to Sri Ramakrishna, because she had that motherly feeling: for the sake of my children, it must be done, it must be so—no discrimination.

### An Exemplar, Not an Instructor

She never encouraged any narrowness in the administration of the Ramakrishna Order. If someone wanted to do something that might not have universal approval and said, 'Our custom tells us to do this', she would say, 'No, this Order belongs to the whole world. You should do everything in such a way that everyone will have a place here.' She did not approve of political affiliations either. The Ramakrishna Order is one place where none

***One of her disciples once told us, 'You need not do anything. Just be unselfish, don't seek anything and be motherly to all. You will see a miracle happening in your own life.' Purity of heart is a big thing, practically impossible in this world. You can have that purity only through unselfishness and love.***

should feel isolated. She was so broad, so universal and so calm and sublime at the same time. This combination is very difficult. It is the highest spiritual achievement. And again, coming down to the lowest level of humankind and behaving with them without losing her spiritual stature is something very difficult. What you find in her teachings, she followed it all *exactly*. That is why I say she is an exemplar, not an instructor. She never *talked* about things. She *did* them and observing her, people learnt from her.

Once a lady came to her from a long distance to get some instruction from her. Mother said, 'Come in.' And she was talking to Mother and Mother was doing her job, cooking and keeping things ready. 'Mother, won't you please tell me something?' Mother replied, 'Don't you see me?'

### **Universal Motherly Love**

To many of us religion means rituals, going to a shrine, a chapel and bowing down many times. No doubt, they have their rewards. But do you feel for people? Do you care for them? Do you love them? Do you identify yourself with others? That is real religion.

You all know, after the Last Supper, Jesus Christ spelt out the essence of Christianity. 'As I love you, you love one another. As I serve you, you serve one another.' To love and serve was the theme of Holy Mother's life. She loved and served others and ministered to their needs. None ever went away from her without being satisfied. That is what is called a univer-

sal motherly attitude

### **Silent Service**

Somebody asked me the other day, mentioning a great soul who is highly honoured. 'Don't you see, swami ...?' 'Well, for me it is easy to *understand*,' I said.

'How?'

I have known another person who was steeped in spirituality, but kept herself busy serving people; serving them herself, not through somebody.'

That person is Holy Mother. Her whole life is nothing but the expression of that motherly attitude. Even when she was a little girl in Jayrambati, everybody thought she was a grown-up girl. She was just five or six years old. She felt for everyone, carried things from her house and gave them. Her parents never objected. When she grew up and came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, then again the same thing. Not only did she serve Sri Ramakrishna, but she served all people who came there. And mind you, all that silently. The man who was in charge of the temple said one day, 'Yes, some people say she is here, but I have never seen her.' Absolutely silent service, unseen by others—that is not easy.

All these monks and disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had experienced her service. When Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Don't feed them too much', she said, 'No, leave that to me. You give them spiritual instructions, but the question of their health is my concern. I know who needs what and how much.' And she did not even mind what Ramakrishna said. She did her things in her own motherly way. Some need more, some less. You cannot make a rule: only two chapatis for everyone. Sri Ramakrishna made a rule, you know, that monks should only take two chapatis at night, nothing more. But mother used to serve them two, three or four, according to their need and ca-

capacity. Ramakrishna could say nothing more. She was a mother to everyone from the very beginning. See that holiness and motherly attitude, a beautiful combination in one soul. And her spiritual illumination! Concealing all that and serving others was something natural to her.

I remember an incident in the life of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Once, I think an American gentleman went to see him. Someone told the visitor, 'You go to that hall; Maharshi is there.' He entered the hall and found many people cutting vegetables. And he asked someone, 'I would like to see the great Ramana Maharshi. Will you please lead me to him?' And Maharshi was sitting right there peeling potatoes. He looked at him and said, 'Sit down.' He pushed a few potatoes before the visitor. 'Come on, take them and start peeling them.' To Maharshi, spiritual life was not something separate from secular life. Life is One. 'Come, join us,' he said. The visitor could not understand. Here is a man to meet whom people come from all parts of the world. Was he standing there, giving lectures? No, he was just like anyone else.

And Mother was just like that throughout her life. We have seen many great saints going to different places and performing some austerities, but Mother, never. One attitude purified her completely: 'I am the Mother of all.'

One of her disciples once told us, 'You need not do anything. *Just be unselfish, don't seek anything and be motherly to all. You will see a miracle happening in your own life.*' Purity of heart is a big thing, practically impossible in

this world. You can have that purity only through two things: unselfishness and love, as a mother loves her children.

'Not me, but Thou.' Develop this attitude and you don't need to believe in any God, said a disciple of Swamiji. And Swamiji himself says in his 'Karma Yoga':

Although a man has not studied a single system of philosophy, although he does not believe in any God, and never has believed, although he has not prayed even once in his whole life, if the simple power of good actions has brought him to that state where he is ready to give up his life and all else for others, he has arrived at the same point to which the religious man will come through his prayers and the philosopher through his knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

And Mother translated that into action throughout her life. Unselfishness and service; to love and serve: Swamiji made that the motto of the Ramakrishna Order. It is based on Mother's life and actions. 'He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased really worships Shiva,' he proclaimed.<sup>3</sup> To me, Holy Mother is the most holy, the most motherly.

May we follow in her footsteps; may we gain some purity that comes out of that love and service, and gain some kind of illumination in this very life—that is my prayer. \*

## References

1. *Bhagavadgita*, 7.16.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.86.
3. CW, 3.142.

'**M**ithiláyám pradagdháyam na me dahati kinchana; Even if the whole of Mithila burns, nothing that is mine burns'—what a grand idea of unselfishness expressed in that one line! It is so difficult to be rid of the *aham*, the sense of 'I', which is so deeply implanted in the human mind. But by the grace of Mother anyone can eradicate it if he works hard, sincerely and with unbounded patience. Mother Herself obliterates it with Her own hand if the aspirant gives himself up to Her fully and unconditionally.

—Swami Turiyananda

---

---

# Before You Visit a Hindu Temple

RADA KRISHNA

## Difficulty in Comprehension

It was in the early 1950s, long before the advent of TV in India. I had heard the story of an Indian villager who came to a nearby small town. His ancestors had barely travelled outside his village for hundreds of years. He had little ability to read even his local language, but somehow managed to learn to recognize the English alphabets. His friend in the town pointed to a small church nearby and told him, 'Go and see the temple in which the Christians worship.' He went in and came out in forty seconds and said, 'No, that is not a temple. I see no divine images, no flowers, no bells to ring, no light, nothing. I see a few rows of benches like in a school. That must be a classroom.' His friend took him back to the church, walked over to the altar, pointed to the wooden cross and said, 'There, that is the God's image they worship. These are benches for the devotees to sit.'

The horrified villager exclaimed, 'They worship wood? Why, it looks like the English letter "T"! Do they worship that—wooden letters?'

Some such reaction is to be expected from a Westerner who visits a Hindu temple in America for the first time! In addition, most of the temples built in the US have a large number of images on the altar to satisfy the needs of Hindus who migrate from different parts of India. Out of the 1.1 billion people in India, over 800 million are Hindus, and Hinduism is a fascinating, unorganized religion!

The early Westerners who came to India were traders and travellers. They were astonished to see the large number and types of temples. The multitude of images, the many shapes and sizes of gods and goddesses with many hands and expressions and with their

own Mercedes and Cadillacs (read vehicles of transport), and some images even partly like animals—the Westerners were fascinated by all this. To some they were even repugnant! With the cultural arrogance of the times, they even dubbed the Hindus 'idolators', 'primitive worshippers of crude, unnatural objects'.

Luckily, times have changed. At least the educated and the open-minded have understood that each culture and religion is different, having its own symbology and philosophy. One has to study and ponder other cultures to comprehend and appreciate a little, if not understand them fully.

On 9 June 2004 we saw the picture of President Regan's coffin in Washington DC in a gun carriage drawn by horses. One of the horses did not have a rider, but had a pair of cowboy boots hung in the reverse direction from the empty saddle! What is that picture to convey to one who is unaware of the military traditions of the USA?

I wonder what that villager would think if he now comes to my house and sees my computers, scanners, printers, speakers and mouse, with lots of wires hanging around in a mess. If I told him that all these are communication tools, he would have said, 'What? These wires and plastic boxes and a few cute, coloured lights—how *can* you communicate with these?'

## Problems Posed by Hebraic Antagonism to Imaging the Divine

Added to the problem of understanding Hindu temples we have the following, says Diana Eck:

The bafflement of many who first behold the array of Hindu images springs from the deep-rooted western antagonism to imaging the di-

vine at all. The Hebraic hostility to 'graven images' expressed in the Commandments is echoed repeatedly in the Hebraic Bible. 'You shall not make for yourself a "graven image", or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.'<sup>1</sup>

Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the three major religions that originated in the Arabian Peninsula, trusted the 'word' more than the 'image': 'Meanwhile, back on Mount Sinai, Moshe, who now has the Ten Words in written form—the two tablets of Testimony—is told by God.'<sup>2</sup> 'The double corpus of sacred writings formed by the Old and New Testaments has always been regarded as regulating church life, and as the ultimate source of Christian doctrine.'<sup>3</sup> 'He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.' All but one of the Koran's 114 Suras begin with the phrase, 'In the name of God, the Compassionate and Merciful'.<sup>4</sup> Words were more trusted than the eyes!

Hinduism is an imaginative, image-making religious tradition in which the sacred is seen as present in the world around us. Alain Danielou says, 'The complexity of Hindu polytheism is mainly due to the number of attempts at explaining in different ways the universal laws and the nature of the all-pervading principles.'<sup>5</sup>

### **Are Christianity and Islam Completely Free from Images?**

Hardly! The verbal icon of God as 'Father' or 'King' had considerable power in shaping the Judeo-Christian religious imagination, says Eck: 'The Orthodox Christian traditions, after much debate in the eighth and ninth centuries, granted an important place to the honouring of icons as those "windows" through which one might look toward God. In the Catholic tradition as well, the art and iconography, especially of Mary and the saints, has had a long and rich history.'<sup>6</sup> When you travel in Europe, among the very important

places to visit are the large number of museums. The Vatican museums in Rome, Louvre and Sacre-Couer in Paris, St Mark's in Venice, Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the rich and huge Hermitage in Russia—all these, just to name a few, are loaded with marvellous statues and paintings depicting Christian personalities. When I wandered through the endless galleries and corridors, one question kept popping up in my mind: 'Are these graven images? Is this idolatry? Why then did the early travellers and visitors and even the current crop of ignoramuses call the Hindus idolaters?'

Many Muslim families decorate their homes with wall hangings of cloth or paper panels showing beautifully written texts of the Koran. Pictures of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem or of other important mosques or shrines are quite common. Shi'ite households frequently have pictures of Ali, his two sons Hasan and Husayn, and sometimes of famous imams and their burial places. Muslim households will not display a picture of Mohammed. Some families put the Koran centre stage during Ramadan.

All the three traditions of the 'Book' have developed the art of embellishing the word into a *virtual* icon in the elaboration of calligraphic and decorative arts, points out Eck.

### **Are Hindus Idolaters?**

Webster's definition of *idolatry* is 'the worship of a physical object as a God'. The fifteenth-century singer-saint Tukaram wrote: 'I made an earthen image of Shiva/ For the earth is not Shiva./ My worship reaches Shiva/ The earth remains the earth it was!' I have yet to see a Hindu (or, for that matter, the follower of any religion) pray, 'O God Marble or Granite, grant my prayers!' or 'O Saint Stained Glass, save me!' Idolatry is the name wickedly hurled at the symbols and visual images of cultures other than ours! The great American sociologist Theodore Roszak locates the 'sin of idolatry in the eye of the beholder'.<sup>7</sup>

Again, 'The image is a window, not an

object. The eighteen-foot image of Vishnu is no more an idol than the cross, the "Our Father" or the bread at Holy Communion. And no less.<sup>8</sup> There is no idolatry even among the so called nature worshippers as in Shintoism. John Reynard says:

If one were to produce a brief Shinto creedal affirmation it might go something like this: I believe that sacredness surrounds me, that it pervades all things including my very self, and that the all-suffusing divine presence is ultimately benevolent and meant to assure well-being and happiness for all who acknowledge it and strive to live in harmony with it. The word idolatry seems to be a hang-up prevalent in some parts of the world.<sup>9</sup>

But, it is a fact that even intelligent and thoughtful viewers may fail to grasp or understand images as 'alien' as the images we find in the religious landscape of the Hindus. To see meaning in them we have to read, think and look with tolerance and imagination. Otherwise they become inaccessible to us. Also, if we do not see them as in any sense divine, we miss the essential meaning. Looking without insight, without informed perspective, is mere 'passive viewing'. That is useless. It has to be replaced by 'creative seeing'. 'If we do the *kind* of seeing which could change our minds, we might eventually gain a glimpse of the divine in one of the myriad images of India's multitude of gods.'<sup>10</sup>

Hindu temples are totally unlike other places of worship. The visual articulation is intricate, extensive, and not self-evident. The shapes and forms of art, iconography and rituals are not easily discerned and are a closed book for the casual onlooker.

Buddhists do not believe in God at all. Yet, no religion has existed in such disparate cultures as a major influence for so long. Over fifty per cent of the world population lives in areas where Buddhism has at some time been the dominant religious force. What do you see if you visit a Buddhist temple? A lot depends on where you are and the size of the temple. A

large image of the Buddha or a major bodhisattva stands or sits atop an altar, sometimes in the company of several smaller images. Side altars dedicated to bodhisattvas or holy persons such as founders of the various lineages are not uncommon. Buddhist sculpture and painting have evolved in many different styles. Each denomination has a number of symbols and signs to which it assigns special meanings. 'Nepal, officially the only Hindu kingdom in the world, is a collage of cultures, with some aspects differing as much from each other as they do with us.'<sup>11</sup> There is a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism with their rich treasure of images of gods and goddesses and ritual objects, many of them unique to Nepal.

### Starting Point of Learning

So, to the thinking mind, the visible world of Hindu and Buddhist temples, and the large number of images, raises a multitude of questions. 'These very questions should be the starting point for our learning. Without such self-conscious questioning, we cannot begin to "think" with what we see, and we simply dismiss it as strange. Or, worse, we are bound to misinterpret what we see by placing it solely within the context of what we already know from our own world of experience'<sup>12</sup>

### Do Hindus Believe in So Many Gods?

This question was asked about three thousand years ago! The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* discusses this very question. A person asks Sage Yajnavalkya, 'How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?'

*Yajnavalkya*: '303 and 3003.'

*Questioner*: 'That many?'

'Thirty-three.'

'Really?'

'Six.'

The person questioning knew that there was something deeper. So he persisted.

'Is it six?'

'Three.'

'All right, how many *are* there?'  
 'Two.'  
 'All right, so how many *are* really there?'  
 'One and a half!'  
 'Finally, how many?'  
 'One!'  
 'Then what are all the other numbers?'  
 'They are all but manifestations.'<sup>13</sup>

To the Hindu it is like going to the ocean with a variety of vessels to collect the water. The shapes and sizes of the vessels make the water inside look different, but the content is one.

Again and again we come across this metaphor of the ocean. Sri Ramakrishna says:

Satchidananda [the ultimate Reality] is like an infinite ocean. Intense cold freezes the water into ice, which floats on the ocean in blocks of various forms. Likewise, through the cooling influence of bhakti [devotion], one sees forms of God in the Ocean of the Absolute. These forms are meant for the bhaktas (devotees), the lovers of God. But when the Sun of Knowledge rises, the ice melts; it becomes the same water it was before. Water above and water below, everywhere nothing but water.<sup>14</sup>

How many different shapes and forms of ice blocks are possible in the oceans of the world!

### **The One and the Many Are Not Incompatible**

Another interesting point about the Hindu psyche is that the 'manyness' of the Divine is not superseded by the oneness. Rather, the two are held simultaneously and are inextricably related. A Hindu will say, it is like seeing an album of 100 pictures—all of you only, but in different dresses and costumes, maybe some like Mickey Mouse, some in your tuxedos, some in your Halloween costume and some with a graduation headgear—but it is all you!

Simultaneously the Hindu knows the limitations imposed by the human condition. That

was primarily responsible even for his having the images and the rituals. As one of the great prayers says, 'O Lord, in my meditation I have attributed forms to Thee who art formless. O Thou Teacher of the world, by my hymns I have, as it were, contradicted that Thou art indescribable. By going on pilgrimage I have, as it were, denied Thy omnipresence. O Lord of the universe, pray, forgive me these threefold faults committed by me.'<sup>15</sup>

### **Is the Knowledge of the Gods Necessary to Achieve the Hindu ideal?**

Troy Wilson Organ discusses this issue in his book *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man*:

Are the gods necessary at all? They are not needed for creation, for salvation, for moral ideals, nor for moral sanctions, but they do enrich man's understanding of the world. They dramatize the environment in which the human lot is cast. They inspire man to aspire for ideality. If they are not metaphysical necessities, at least they are axiological assets. Hinduism would be possible without its gods, but it would be much impoverished. The Hindu gods demythologized are symbols of the full realization of man's potentialities. A god may be a symbol of self-realized man. The word 'god' is adjectival, not nounal. ... God-realization is but a poetic metaphor for Self-realization.<sup>16</sup>

### **Why Does a Hindu Visit Temples?**

Hindus do not generally say, 'I am going to worship.' They are more likely to say, 'I am going for darshan.' What is darshan? The

***Human beings generally need something more tangible, something that engages the feelings and imagination as well as the logic-bound mind. Hindu tradition acknowledges that one can approach the truth by considering God as Brahman with attributes or qualities (Saguna Brahman).***

word has many meanings, but here we mean 'beholding' or 'seeing'.

The central aspect of Hindu worship for the lay people is to stand in the presence of the deity and behold the image with their own eyes. It also means to be seen by the deity. It is a two-way interaction: to see and to be seen. In the Hindu context 'seeing' is a kind of touching. The famous art historian Stella Kramrisch writes, 'Seeing according to Indian notions is a going forth of sight towards the object. Sight touches and acquires its form. Touch is the ultimate connection by which the visible yields to being "grasped"'. While the eye touches the object, the vitality that pulsates in it is communicated.'<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, visual perception is integrally related to thought. So it becomes a form of knowing! Thus darshan, seeing, is not a passive collection of visual data, but it is active 'focusing', 'touching' and 'knowing'.

### **The Hindu's Mental Attitude When He Goes for Darshan**

His attitude is generally one of the two: (1) The Sanskrit word for image (not an exact translation) is *vigraha*. The word itself means 'to grasp'. In practical Hindu spirituality there is a lot of stress on developing a power of concentration. The image is primarily looked upon as a focus for concentration. (2) The second is looking upon the image as one of the embodiments of the Divine.

Human beings generally need some-

***Temples, like churches and mosques, are really a recognition by man that there is a higher Reality, and the concrete and the visible is a feeble attempt to grasp and communicate with that Reality. Human beings use different approaches to the Divine, and all do not have to follow only one path.***

thing more tangible, something that engages the feelings and imagination as well as the logic-bound mind. Hindu tradition acknowledges that one can approach the truth by considering God as Brahman with attributes or qualities (Saguna Brahman). In this approach (which is really a concession to the human need) the Lord becomes accessible to men and women, evoking their affections. How is this expressed? Hindus not only show the gestures of humility, but also utilize the entire range of intimate and ordinary domestic acts as part of rituals. These rituals are common affectionate activities directed to the deity. They are simple yet powerful: washing and bathing the deity, cooking for Him, serving Him, offering food to Him, arranging for His rest and sleep, waking Him up, offering Him food, flowers and drink, and so on. The Hindu worship you notice in temples is not only one of honour but also of affection, which brings an attitude of someone close and dear.

There are many other aspects related to Hindu temples, and the deities like iconic and aniconic images, representational and symbolic images. In addition is the vast field of temple architecture, its many schools, evolution and so on. I am not covering them here. These temples and images constitute a considerable heritage of human imagination over centuries. 'One must learn to read these "visual" texts with the same insight and interpretive skill that is brought to the reading and interpretation of scriptures, commentaries and theologies,' says Eck.<sup>18</sup>

A question may come to one who feels overwhelmed by the task of studying and understanding this different language, the language of the rituals and symbols in Hindu temples with all the trappings of Hindu cultural and traditional values.

## Is It Possible to Know the Core of Hindu Philosophy without the Trappings of Popular Religion?

Is it possible to attempt the attainment of Self-realization without having to know these trappings? The answer is a definite yes. None has answered this question more succinctly than Swami Vivekananda:

Each soul is potentially divine.

The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more or all these—and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.<sup>19</sup> (Emphasis added)

## Is Going to a Temple Mandatory for a Hindu?

Are any of the common rituals like marriage or naming a baby necessarily done in a temple? No, it is not mandatory to go to a temple for rituals connected with the rites of passage. In fact, one can consider oneself a Hindu even if one never sets foot in any temple in one's entire life!

## Summary

One has to have an open mind to understand the institutions, symbols and practices of other cultures, as human minds are conditioned by cultural and other prejudices and preconceived notions. A thoughtful and understanding attitude is needed, recognizing that there is a fascinating diversity hiding the underlying unity of all existence.

Temples, like churches and mosques, are really a recognition by man that there is a higher Reality, and the concrete and the visible is a feeble attempt to grasp and communicate with that Reality. Human beings use different approaches to the Divine, and all do not

have to follow only one path. Beliefs and practices may vary, but the ultimate goal transcends all human limitations. \*

## References

1. Diana L Eck, *Darsan* (Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1985), 18.
2. Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews* (New York: Nan A Talese, 1998), 150.
3. *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. John R Hinnells (New York: Penguin, 1997), 113.
4. John Renard, *Responses to 101 Questions on Islam* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998), 36.
5. Alain Danielou, *The Myths and Gods of India* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1991), ix.
6. *Darsan*, 21.
7. Theodore Rozsak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1990).
8. Diana L Eck, *Encountering God* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 78.
9. John Reynard, *The Handy Religion Answer Book* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2002), 487.
10. Robert A McDermott and Harry M Buck in their Foreword to *Darsan*.
11. John Burbank, *Culture Shock* (Portland: Graphic Arts Center, 1992), 5.
12. *Darsan*, 17.
13. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.9.1-2.
14. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 191.
15. Swami Yatiswarananda, *Universal Prayers* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977), 239.
16. Troy Wilson Organ, *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994), 183.
17. Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 1.136.
18. *Darsan*, 13.
19. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.124.

The kindest word in all the world is the unkind word, unsaid.

---

---

# Transcending All 'Isms'

DR LEKSHMI

**M**an, manliness, man-making, man-making religion, man-making education, man-making theories, Nara-narayana, Daridra-narayana—thus go the ever-vibrating mantras on the lips of a great sannyasin and yuga acharya, the like of whom the world has never seen before. Unlike other great spiritual illuminators, his object of meditation was neither a God enshrined in the temples nor the One far above the heavens; unlike other sannyasins, one very rarely saw him in crossed legs and closed eyes but with his eyes open, wandering, worshipping and serving the living God in and around him. That great yuga acharya is none other than Swami Vivekananda, the wandering monk who, by his life and teachings, has opened new vistas for an epoch-making humanism.

## Beyond All 'Isms'

In fact, Swamiji paid the least attention to finding out a catching ideology for his message. He said once, 'I will neither Hinduise my message, nor Christianise it, nor make it any "ise" in the world. I will only my-ise it and that is all.'<sup>1</sup> 'He plainly "my-ised" his humanism, calling it, among other things, "man-making religion".<sup>2</sup> He always exhorted, 'It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want.'<sup>3</sup> Thus one can say that humanism is the catching ideology for Swamiji's teachings, though on deeper analysis one realizes that it goes far beyond all 'isms'.

## Swamiji's Humanism

Humanism is the sound idea which holds that man is the chief concern and centre of all our thinking and activities. Its roots can

be traced to the philosophical traditions of India, China, Greece and Rome. In Western humanism man's quest for the dignity of the individual is the central theme. The main thrust of Chinese humanism is the codification of social ethics. The Vedantic, spiritualistic humanism of the Indian tradition holds that man is integrated with the cosmos, which gives him the capacity to see life as a whole. It goes beyond all sectarian views, believes in human freedom, dignity, responsibility and reason, and summons man to attain the eternal and permanent Reality, which lies both within and without. Thus Indian spiritual humanism offers a clear and stable foundation for the harmonious existence of many nations and civilizations. The humanism of Swamiji, which is metaphysically rooted in the Vedantic vision of man as Atman, is thus essentially rational, spiritual, universal and integral.

Swamiji's humanism is nothing but a spontaneous outflow of his own inner realization of the oneness of all existence. He realized that divinity is both outside and inside and that it is both physically and spiritually omnipresent. Unity was the background of his philosophical learning. To him, the many and the One were the same Reality, the same Truth perceived by the mind at different times and with different attitudes. He could well demonstrate in the most convincing manner that that the three systems of Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita are but three phases or stages in the development of the soul. He held that pluralistic vision must end in monistic vision. Such a seer sees unity in diversity, and God, self and the universe as one.

## Oneness with All Life

Swamiji could feel his oneness with all

life, under whatever appearance it revealed itself. His thoughts and feelings were universal. He felt in himself the needs and sufferings of every individual. Romain Rolland, a biographer of Swamiji, observes, '... there was no single hour of his life when he was not brought into contact with the sorrows, the desires, the abuses, the misery and the feverishness of living men, rich and poor, in town and field; he became one with their lives; the great Book of Life revealed to him what all the books in the libraries could not have done.'

### **Trained by His Illustrious Master**

In fact, this Advaitic consciousness was aroused in Swamiji by none other than his own master Sri Ramakrishna. With his grace Advaitic truths became first-hand experience for the disciple. He importuned Sri Ramakrishna to lead him to nirvikalpa samadhi and expressed his longing to remain in that state for ever. Nothing seemed more unfortunate to the master than this, because he had visualized his beloved disciple to be the spiritual rejuvenator and redeemer of suffering humanity. He burst out, 'You are a fool. There is a higher state than that even. Don't you sing—Whatever is, is Thyself? Come here after making provision for your family, and you shall get a higher state than even Samadhi.'<sup>4</sup> This incident opened the eyes of the disciple and made him dedicate his life to the spiritual rejuvenation of humanity.

Once, in an ecstatic mood Sri Ramakrishna gave an important message that formed the seeds for the genesis of Swamiji's doctrine of service to humanity. While explaining the Vaishnava cult to his disciples, Sri Ramakrishna said that the cult enjoins 'compassion' for all living creatures. This expression at once took him to the state of samadhi and in that state of divine consciousness he uttered, 'Compassion for creatures! Compassion for crea-

***It is true that Swamiji loved India and her people, but this love was only a part of his universal love. He loved India deeply, but he also loved humanity at large with equal passion.***

tures! You fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, you to show compassion to others! Who are you to show compassion? No, it cannot be. Not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognizing him to be a veritable manifestation of God.'<sup>5</sup> This message of humanism was fulfilled through the life mission of Swamiji.

### **A Heart that Bled for Others**

A total transformation came over Swamiji under the training of his great master. His mind was completely absorbed in the thought of the uplift of suffering humanity. As he came closer and closer with his countrymen, his concern for them grew deeper and his heart bled at the thought of the misery of India and her people. Swami Turiyananda, one of his brother disciples, recalls:

I vividly remember some remarks made by Swamiji. ... The exact words and accents, and the deep pathos with which they were uttered, still ring in my ears. He said, 'Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion.' Then with an expression of deep sorrow on his countenance and intense emotion shaking his body, he placed his hand on his heart and added, 'But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed.'<sup>6</sup>

It is true that Swamiji loved India and her people, but this love was only a part of his universal love. He loved India deeply, but he also loved humanity at large with equal passion. His programme of human development in his own country was thus designed to be achieved not in an isolated, exclusive, national context but in the broadest context of international co-

operation.

### **Man-making Was His Chief Task**

A most authentic man with an inner vision, Swamiji wanted to awaken what is most authentic in every human being: the Atman, man's divine nature. That was his method. He wanted to work from grass-roots level and not on the peripherals so that something enduring could be done for the alleviation of human suffering. He held 'man-making' as his central task, for he saw a logic behind it. If the manhood of man is not awakened, whatever else is done for him is of no use. If manhood could be inspired among the millions, and from among them a hundred thousand specially trained for the same task to be carried forward, then there would be nothing unachievable in the world. Therefore he pointed out, 'One must admit that law, government, politics are phases not final in any way. There is a goal beyond them

***The concept of divinity of man cuts across all creeds and nationalities and embraces within its ambit the entire human race. To enlighten the spirit of humanism it is necessary that man should strive hard to eliminate the little 'I' in every respect.***

where law is not needed.'<sup>7</sup> 'And that is why religion is of deeper importance than politics, since it goes to the root, and deals with the essentials of conduct.' (5.200)

The man-making message was delivered by Swamiji at the turn of the nineteenth century. But its openness, rationality, practicality, universality and authenticity make it ever-green in the living force-fields of man-making. The divinity and dignity of man, freedom, the power of his will in making his own destiny, love for others, service to humanity, self-confidence, courage, truth, perseverance, concentration of mind, continence, cheerfulness, positive attitude towards life, absence of jealousy,

absence of selfishness and narrow-mindedness, the power of sacrifice and renunciation, the ability to appreciate any form of goodness in others, self-restraint, charity, dedication, obedience, strength, humility—these are some of the beautiful ideals of Swamiji's man-making humanism.

He magnified and fructified his ideas of man-making through two important channels: religion and education. Both these fundamentally aim at man-making. He defined religion as 'the manifestation of the Divinity already in man' and education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man'. (4.358) Thus both these ideals aim at bringing out what is excellent in man, calling for the manifestation of total human excellence.

### **True Individuality Only in the Spirit**

The concept of divinity of man cuts across all creeds and nationalities and embraces within its ambit the entire human race. To enlighten the spirit of humanism it is necessary that man should strive hard to eliminate the little 'I' in every respect. But man is fearful of losing his little 'I', for he thinks that it will destroy his individuality. The only individuality worth of the name, Swamiji held, must be universal.

'He alone lives whose life is in the whole universe, and the more we concentrate our lives on limited things, the faster we go towards death. ... It is only the Spirit that is the individual, because it is infinite.' (2.80-1) The divinity of man carries with it the message of the dignity of the individual. It assures him the power of the will to mould his own destiny. Remembrance of one's inner, infinite, divine nature charges one with the power of strength, self-confidence, courage, truth, unselfishness, continence, the power of sacrifice and renunciation. Thus Self-knowledge has the power of imparting and bringing into expression all the

excellent aspects of an individual.

### All-round Excellence

Perhaps, the most significant aspect of Swamiji's humanism is his call for total human excellence. He stood for the integration of human personality. He wanted material development, intellectual progress as well as spiritual advancement by the application of the power of the Spirit at all levels of life. He found education to be the most effective tool for bringing this about. He viewed education as 'man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas'. (3.302) He said, 'What we want are Western science coupled with Vedanta, Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also Shraddha and faith in one's own self.' (5.366) These constitute the mechanism by which perfection or goodness is realized in individual and social life. His educational scheme implied a perfect harmony of body, mind and soul in their properly developed state.

In the context of the life of an individual, Swamiji's gospel takes the shape of a powerful call to the person to arise, awake and move on constantly towards the highest state of his being. But he held that one has to move towards the highest state in a manner that will help others also move in the same direction. The true evolution of humanity, as he elucidated, must be in doing good to others. His concept of a bhakta emerged out of this sense of God in man, Nara-narayana or Daridra-narayana. He always urged for a new man who is pure in heart, scientific in temper and unselfish in motive. In his view, such a new man is the only hope of the world.

\* \* \*

Man-making, the primary need of the hour, has been kept before us by Swamiji in his

***Man-making, the primary need of the hour, has been kept before us by Swamiji in his scheme of religion and education. Modern times demand an integral humanism that aspires for the fullest development of man in all spheres of life.***

scheme of religion and education. Modern times demand an integral humanism that aspires for the fullest development of man in all spheres of life. It stresses the need for achieving a balance between the inner and outer needs of life. This brings us to the need of the harmony of spirituality and science, which is the central message of Swamiji's humanism.

Humanism should be propounded in thought, word and deed—all three in perfect unison. What is needed is not so much the advocating humanist, but the practising humanist. Swamiji the humanist belongs to the second category. His thought, word and deed—in fact, his whole life was dedicated to humanity. His was the message not for one time but for all times, not for one aspect of life but for all aspects of existence, penetrating the walls of all 'isms'. \*

### References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5.72.
2. Dorothy Madison, 'The Humanist Forging of Vivekananda's New People' in *The Vedanta Kesari*, August 1990, 302.
3. CW, 3.224.
4. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990), 446.
5. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, vol. 1, 2000; vol. 2, 2001), 1.138.
6. *Ibid.*, 1.388.
7. CW, 5.193.

Trying to impress others does—usually in quite the opposite way. —Malcolm Forbes

---

---

# Vivekananda: The Poet-Saint

RADHIKA NAGRATH

According to the Vedic conception, a poet (*kavi*) is he who pursues the path of the right (*ṛta*) and establishes its validity on the basis of his experience, for the progressive march of human evolution. He is a seer of truth (*kavayah satyadrastārah*); he has direct vision, luminous intelligence and immediate perception; and, being a master of himself, he is able to maintain the truth in its dynamic working.<sup>1</sup>

These words can be aptly applied to Swami Vivekananda. His only God was Truth, and he did not accept in life anything till he experienced it. Whatever he wrote he did with full conviction, and that is why his words appeal to the inner conscience. 'Kali the Mother', one of his famous poems, forced itself into composition in a mood of ecstasy, after a deep spiritual experience during his Kashmir sojourn.

## Above All a Poet

Poetry and personality are not two distinct antithetical elements working apart. Rather, they are the coordinated factors springing out of the Self of the artist.<sup>2</sup> Swamiji was a flame of aspiration that rose out of the fathomless depths of the Divine and shone like a solar light with an implicit purpose to manifest the latent divinity in man and spiritualize his everyday life. His poetry expresses the aspiration of the soul to fly higher and higher and scale the heights of the inner heaven of immense possibilities, and attain perfection.

Once, in the course of a discussion with a disciple, Swamiji exclaimed, 'Don't you see, I am above all a poet.'<sup>3</sup> And realizing the underlying spirituality in poetry and art, he said in a certain mood, 'That man cannot be truly religious who has not the faculty of feeling the

beauty and grandeur of art. ... It is blasphemy to state that art is merely pleasing to the senses. One who has the mastery over the senses, who has overcome the body-idea, can alone appreciate true beauty, be it masculine, or feminine, or purely physical.'<sup>4</sup> Thus true art and true poetry must always be spiritual. Such a view requires a new metaphysics, certainly a new poetry that would, at the same time, be the speech of nature and transcend it. It involves aesthetic, emotional and religious questions, and a life based on the Vedantic teaching that man is Spirit. No ordinary poet can undertake to achieve these objectives. He cannot be just a mere imitator: he should be a creator. Though Swamiji did not write many poems, yet each of them is a masterpiece.

Swamiji's natural gifts and endowments are indeed extraordinary in every way and enable him to fulfil the role of a poet-saint. The surprising thing about him is that his evolution as a poet spanned just eight years of his life. Often Swamiji shunned superfluity or decorations in his poetry, but he created complex and rich patterns of imagery.

One has to be spiritually perceptive if one wants to read Swamiji's poems between the lines and explore and fathom the depths of their meaning and appreciate the mystical element in them. But even those without much spiritual inclination will find them strangely impressive, though simple and natural.

Speaking on the concept of a poet, the American transcendentalist poet Walt Whitman says, 'Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man.' And to him all human beings are 'just as sacred and perfect as the greatest artist'. In his poem 'The Living God' Swamiji talks about the oneness of the sinner and the saint and the need to worship man as the liv-

ing God: 'He who is at once the high and low,/ The sinner and the saint,/ Both God and worm,/ Him worship—visible, knowable, real, omnipresent.'<sup>5</sup>

### Naturalistic Poet

Swamiji can be truly called a naturalistic poet of the nineteenth century. Naturalism was a movement in art and literature where the authors or artists claimed to be objective observers and were applying scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to their study of human beings. To Swamiji, nature was not the silent spectacle that was so dear to Wordsworth; it was for him a metaphysical concept that had no light of its own. It only appeared luminous as long as the Absolute, Purusha, was present in it. It was a borrowed light just as the moon's. In his first poem 'In Search of God' Swamiji expressed this truth: 'The moon's soft light, the stars so bright,/ The glorious orb of day,/ He shines in them; His beauty—might—/ Reflected lights are they. (7.452)

### His Philosophy of Nature

His philosophy of nature was merely a representation of the Vedantic principles. He was of the view of the other mystics that all the manifestations of nature are caused by nature itself, but nature had no purpose in view, except to free the Purusha. The Absolute reflecting through the universe is what he called nature.

Like Shelley, another naturalistic poet, there is in Swamiji a certain feeling of perpetual motion. That is, he looks at nature in its changing rather than static phases. He states that the whole of nature is without beginning and end, but within it are multifarious changes. He likens it to a river that runs down to the sea for thousands of years. It is the same river always, but, again, it is changing every minute, with the water particles changing their position constantly. The Sanskrit word for nature is Prakriti, which literally means 'differentia-

tion'. Nature is homogeneous. Differentiation is in manifestation. All is one substance, but is manifest variously. 'Day changed in night', 'melting eve', 'rushing stream of life', 'rising and falling with waves of time', 'rolling on', 'fleeting scene', 'currents' ebb and flow'—all these are images in a whirling motion.

### Ourselves in Another Form

Nature as seen by Swamiji is not only the aesthetic beauty but is ourselves in another form: 'Nature is but the mirror of our own selves.' (8.26) This identification of the poet's self with the external reality may seem beyond the bounds of logic, but as Shelley said, in the matter of poetry, logic is subordinated to the poet's will and not the other way round. In the glorious 'orb of day', 'billowy sea', 'hill and dale', 'mount and vale', 'the mother's kiss', 'babies' sweet mama', Swamiji realized the benignant manifestation of God, because what he saw in these passive phenomena was in reality the shade of his own soul. To the poet, all is beautiful. He has not to wait all winter for spring to bring its joy. Every season has the unceasing beauty and the hidden music of nature.

### A Man of Freedom

The poet-saint is a man of freedom; his pleasure does not depend on external things: landscapes, gardens, congenial company or honeyed words. His inner illumination casts a halo of beauty on all around him, and from him radiates nothing but divine love. He sees that on the physical plane the Divine expresses Itself in beauty. It is 'Thee' that he finds manifesting in nature, and the different objects—big and small, fair and foul, saint and sinner, ugly and charming—are but strange hieroglyphics indicating the absolute Reality. The things of nature are not absolutely beautiful, but in the words of Plato, they are 'stepping stones' and point to 'absolute beauty'. The beauty of objects, sights and sounds are expressive of spiritual states.

### From Nature to Freedom

In the line of naturalistic writers, who study and analyse the laws behind the forces governing human lives, Swamiji too propounded the theory that 'The whole history of humanity is a continuous fight against the so-called laws of nature, and man gains in the end. ... He, as it were, cuts his way out of nature to freedom.' (2.104) 'The man who has discovered and learned how to manipulate the internal forces [his own nature] will get the whole of [outside] nature under his control.' (1.132)

He explains his theory through the use of symbols and metaphors: 'Nature is like the Ferris Wheel, endless and infinite, and these little carriages are the bodies or forms in which fresh batches of souls are riding, going up higher and higher until they become perfect and come out of the wheel. But the wheel goes on.' (2.230) 'Nature grinds all of us. Keep count of the ounce of pleasure you get. In the long run, nature did her work through you, and when you die your body will make other plants grow. Yet we think all the time that we are getting pleasure ourselves. Thus the wheel goes round.' (4.247) '... scarce from the wheel we're gone/ When fresh, young lives put their strength to the wheel, which thus goes on.' (6.176) 'Another start, another round of this old wheel of grief and bliss?' (6.176) And, 'Until we can free ourselves from nature, we are slaves; as she dictates so we must go. ... The internal nature is much higher than the external and much more difficult to grapple with, much more difficult to control. Therefore *he who has conquered the internal nature, controls the whole universe; it becomes his servant.*' (1.257; *emphasis added*)

### No Obscurity or Uncertainty

Poet-seers have always longed to unveil the unchanging Reality in nature, which lies beneath her many apparent realities and which always remains a mystery. But with their diverse approaches of understanding,

they have only presented faint glimpses of the deep meaning that hovers over every form. Poets try to mystify nature by knitting around her a web of cryptic images that lull us into the world of abstraction and uncertainty. In Swamiji, however, there is no such obscurity or uncertainty to drag us into the antithesis of the observer and the observed. The veil of obscurity drops when duality is lost in the sea of consciousness and the poet identifies himself with the creation itself. This is the knowledge through identity, which perceives the Self in everything and everything rooted in the Self: 'And thus in me all me's I have.' (8.164) 'Before e'en time has had its birth,/ I was, I am and I will be.' (8.163) Again, 'This world's a dream/ Though true it seem,/ And only Truth is *He* the living!/ The real *me* is none but He,/ And never, never *matter* changing!' (8.166)

Swamiji says, 'Blessed am I that I know this moment that I [have been and] shall be free all eternity; ... that no nature, no delusion, had any hold on me. Vanish nature from me, vanish [these] gods; vanish worship; ... vanish superstitions, for I know myself. I am the Infinite. ... How can there be death for me, or birth? ... Nothing else exists. I am everything.' (1.501)

### To the Fundamental Mode of Consciousness

In poetry, Swamiji does not aim at the frontal view that lays stress upon the display of the form of things, but his art takes us from behind or above or within the world of movement to the fundamental mode of consciousness in its transcendental status: 'Perchance the child had glimpse/ Of shades, behind the scenes,/ With eager eyes and strained,/ Quivering forms—ready ... (5.439) And to explain the universal truths, 'Whose will resistless law? To child may glories ope/ Which father never dreamt.' (5.439)

### The Ever-free Sannyasin

At heart, Swamiji was a bold *nitya-mukta*,

an ever-free sannyasin whom no home could hold and whose mind ever longed for the limitless sky as his only roof and grass as his only bed: '... and food/ What chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not./ ... Like rolling river free/ Thou ever be, Sannyasin bold!' (4.395)

Expressing his inability to please all, to become a hypocrite, he wrote in one of his letters to Mary Hale, 'Allow me to remain as I am. "Without fear—without shopkeeping, caring neither for friend nor foe, do thou hold on to Truth, Sannyasin. ... Truth, be thou alone my guide."' (5.71) These thoughts of sainthood imbibed so much in his mind that within four months of this letter the poem 'The Song of the Sannyasin' came out: 'Whose friend, whose foe is He who is but One?' (4.393) 'All life both here and there, do I renounce./ All heavens and earths and hells, all hopes and fears.' (4.394) He was free from churches, sects and religions and books and went his own way like a true sannyasin.

\* \* \*

In nutshell, it can be said that Swamiji's saintly qualities were greatly embellished by his poetic soul. He fulfilled the purpose of literature: the good of the world. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Emerson and other well-known Western poets did not possess the illumined mind and divine ecstasy of Swamiji, who lived with God and moved in the state of samadhi with a dynamic vitality and spiritual glow. They could not live so intensely all the time and take those transcendent heights of transcendental Consciousness where one becomes what one believes in and visualizes.

Poet-saint as he was, he appears before us by no means as a literary man, but as a poet who sings the spiritual laws of life, of man and nature and of the Self and its play in myriad forms. Just as Swamiji was ever filled with

bliss and peace, even so his poems are a continual bubbling source of joy that are not tainted by a touch of the morbid melancholy of romantic art. There is clarity of thought and directness of perception in his expression. However deep, the feelings and ideas of his poems are not complex to the level of obscurity. His world is of solid reality with a bold, precise and clear outline. When one reads his poems or hears them being read, one feels that they are the outpourings of the self-evident truth. The life of this unique poet-saint can be summed up thus:

There rose the swan of the east,  
From the turbid waters of bigoted beasts;  
A warrior saint, a valiant monk  
'The Amazing Mr Kananda' as he was called;  
With the looks of McCullough's Othello,  
And a beautiful voice like a violincello;  
The awakener of India, the soul of India  
The true Indian, yet the Universal man.  
He sailed a thousand miles  
From his motherland to the West  
And the 'Magnificent Mile'  
To deliver his message best:  
'There is no evil but only good  
for the one who has clearly understood  
to discriminate between the two.'  
The true swan as he was,  
He ended the world chaos.  
His message was,  
Worship of the Spirit by the Spirit,  
'Jiva seva is Shiva seva.' \*

## References

1. B L Zutshi, *The Poet Seer: Swami Ram Tirtha* (New Delhi: Aroma Publishing House, 1990), 6.
2. *Ibid.*, 70.
3. *His Eastern and Western Disciples, Vivekananda: The Man and His Message* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), 47.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.169.

The wishbone will never replace the backbone. —Will Henry

---

---

# Glimpses of Holy Lives

## 'Yogakshemam Vahamyaham'

Eknath, a much adored saint of Maharashtra, was born in the sixteenth century. He led a life of exemplary renunciation and devotion. He served his guru Janardana Swami for six years and with his help was blessed with a vision of Lord Dattatreya. Later, as commanded by his guru, he spent a long time in austerities and meditation.

While on a pilgrimage with his guru, he visited one Pundit Chandrabodha, who recited the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavata* with so much feeling that both Eknath and his guru were moved. In deference to his guru's wishes, Eknath translated on the spot the Sanskrit verses into Marathi verses. The pundit was speechless with admiration for Eknath's prodigious achievement.

### Devotee's Debt ...

Eknath visited all the sacred rivers and shrines right up to Badrinath. He finally arrived at Paithan and stayed there in a small temple. He wanted to lead a life of total renunciation, but left the matter to his guru to decide. In deference to his wishes, Eknath married a devoted girl by name Girijabai.

Eknath once decided to celebrate his guru's birthday, which was also the day he had Lord Dattatreya's darshan. Kirtans were arranged on the banks of River Godavari, where many devotees had gathered to drink the nectar of the Lord's holy name. The huge gathering was served sumptuous prasada that afternoon. A few days earlier, to defray the expenses of the celebration, Eknath's servant Uddhava had borrowed from a landlord seven hundred rupees on Eknath's name.

On the very next day after the celebration, the landlord asked Uddhava to repay the loan, but Uddhava put him off with some ex-

cuse. The landlord smelt something fishy. He was afraid he would never see his money again. Enraged at Uddhava's evasion, he stormed at once into Eknath's house and admonished him: 'In the name of Panduranga, you shouldn't eat before clearing your debt.' Eknath did not protest. Both he and Girijabai fasted that day, and Uddhava joined them.

### ... Cleared in Full

In the dead of night, Uddhava went to the landlord's house and roused him from sleep. Terribly annoyed, the landlord shouted at him, 'What brings you here?'

'I have come to repay the debt.'

'Can't that wait till tomorrow?'

'What about my master and his wife, who have been fasting throughout the day?'

Grumbling, the landlord got up and took Uddhava to his shop. He accepted the money and gave him a receipt in settlement of the loan.

Remorseful for having been unduly rude with the saintly Eknath, the landlord visited him the next day, fell at his feet and begged his pardon. But Eknath reassured him that the fault was not the landlord's, but his own; he would resume eating only after repaying the loan. The landlord turned to Uddhava and asked him, 'Didn't you come to my place last night and wake me up with the money?' 'Certainly not,' said a puzzled Uddhava. Eknath opened his account book and found the landlord's receipt neatly placed there.

Eknath was in profuse tears when he understood that it was his beloved Panduranga who had cleared the debt on his behalf. The landlord again implored Eknath for forgiveness. Eknath's reassurance gave him peace of mind. \*

# Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

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

... य एष देवोऽन्यदेवस्य संप्रसादोऽन्तर्याम्यसङ्घचिद्रूपः पुरुषः प्रणवहंसः परं ब्रह्म न प्राणहंसः प्रणवो जीवः । आद्या देवता निवेदयति । य एवं वेद । तत्कथं निवेदयते । जीवस्य ब्रह्मत्वमापादयति ॥२॥

2. ... This *deva* (literally, 'shining being')<sup>1</sup> who [is beyond good and evil, is indeed the God of gods, superior to] other *devas* (gods), wonderfully blissful,<sup>2</sup> the indwelling Spirit regulating [everything] from within,<sup>3</sup> the uninvolved [Witness which is the veritable] embodiment of Consciousness (Pure Awareness), the *puruṣa* [described as] *harīṣa*, [who is the meaning of the] *praṇava* (*om*)—[called] *praṇava harīṣa*—the Supreme Brahman.<sup>4</sup> [It is] not the self [identified with the] vital force—[called] *prāṇa harīṣa*. *Praṇava* is the *jīva*.<sup>5</sup> That [state of Supreme Being] remains as the primordial *devatā* (self-effulgent being).<sup>6</sup> How can he who knows thus [the actual truth about *praṇava*] enunciate [the doctrine of difference between *jīva* and Brahman]? [He certainly cannot. On the other hand,] he attains [to the realization that] the *jīva* is verily Brahman [in truth and reality].<sup>7</sup>

The characteristic of the internal and external tuft and so on

अन्तर्बाह्यशिखादिलक्षणम्

सत्त्वमथास्य पुरुषस्थान्तःशिखोपवीतित्वम् । ब्राह्मणस्य मुमुक्षोरन्तःशिखोपवीतधारणम् । बहिर्लक्ष्यमाण-शिखायज्ञोपवीतधारणं कर्मिणो गृहस्थस्य । अन्तरुपवीतलक्षणं तु बहिस्तन्तुवदव्यक्तमन्तस्तत्त्वमेलनम् ॥३॥

3. Then, for this person the Truth (Reality)<sup>8</sup> is [indeed] the true import<sup>9</sup> of the inner tuft and sacred thread. The inner tuft<sup>10</sup> and wearing of sacred thread are for a *brāhmaṇa*,<sup>11</sup> that is, one who aspires for liberation. The tuft, externally visible, and the wearing of [external] sacred thread are for householders engaged in ritualistic actions. The characteristic of the inward sacred thread, however, is [that it is] not manifest, unlike the external thread. It (the inner thread) is the connecting link with the inner Reality.<sup>12</sup>

The true nature of the attributeless Brahman

निर्विशेषब्रह्मस्वरूपम्

न सन्नसन्न सदसद्भिन्नाभिन्नं न चोभयम् ।

न सभागं न निर्भागं न चाष्युभयरूपकम् ।

ब्रह्मात्मैकत्वविज्ञानहेयं मिथ्यात्वकारणात् ॥ इति ॥४॥

4. It (*avidyā*, or nescience) is neither existent<sup>13</sup> nor non-existent<sup>14</sup> nor [both] existent and non-existent.<sup>15</sup> It is not different<sup>16</sup> [from Brahman] nor is it non-different<sup>17</sup> [from Brahman] nor [is it] both [different and non-different].<sup>18</sup> It is not possessed of parts<sup>19</sup> nor is it partless<sup>20</sup> nor [is it] a combination of both.<sup>21</sup> It is sublated [that is, gets eliminated or discarded] by the Knowledge or Realization of the oneness of Atman and Brahman; for it is the cause of falsity.<sup>22</sup> Thus [it is].<sup>23</sup>

(To be continued)

## Notes

1. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin comments that accidental good and evil actions do not taint the illumined sage who meditates upon *īśvara* residing in his heart-lotus, for such a man of wisdom goes beyond the auspicious and the inauspicious, beyond the very concepts of good and bad. Such an illumined sage meditates on *īśvara* in his own heart-lotus and indeed becomes a *deva*, a veritable god, a shining being who is superior even to all the gods, like Brahmā and the rest. For the *śruti* says, '*Tam devatānām paramam ca daivatam.*' (*Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.7) Such an illumined sage is being described as wonderfully blissful, the indwelling Spirit regulating [everything] from within, the uninvolved [Witness, which is the veritable] embodiment of Consciousness (Pure Awareness), that *puruṣa* [described as] *hamsa*, [who is denoted by the] *praṇava* (*om*), to emphasize the identity of the subject of meditation (the illumined person himself) and the object of meditation (*īśvara*). The import is that although the *sādhaka* (spiritual seeker) starts with dualism (*dvaita*), recognizing the difference between himself and *īśvara*, his spiritual endeavour ultimately catapults him to the highest non-dualistic (*advaitic*) experience, where there is absolutely no difference between the subject (*jīva*) and the object of meditation (Brahman). The realization of this unity, absolute non-difference, technically called *ātma-brahma-aikya*, is the pinnacle of all spiritual striving and experience.
2. The term used in the Upaniṣadic text is *samprasāda*, which is sometimes used for *susupti*, or deep sleep (compare *Byhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.15). In this context, however, invoking this interpretation, as done by some commentators, would mean that in deep sleep, where the Atman remains in its real pristine state (*svarūpa*), although covered with causal ignorance (*kāraṇa ajñāna*), the Atman is of the nature of pure Bliss. In this sense, the Sanskrit term *samprasāda* is interpreted to mean *samyak prasannatayānandarūpaḥ*, that is, the Self is of the nature of Bliss, being wonderfully pristine and tranquil.
3. The concept of *antaryāmin*, or the Indwelling Controller, is elaborated in *Byhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 3.7.
4. Such a *deva* is indeed the inner import of the *praṇava* mantra (*om*), which is nothing but the state of superconsciousness called *turiya*. He is therefore the *turiya hamsa*, which is identical with the Supreme Brahman (*paramātman*). This term is used to distinguish It from the *prāṇa hamsa*, which is the vital force (*prāṇa*), much lower than the *turiya hamsa*, which is identical with the *paramātman*.
5. *Praṇava* (*om*) is called *jīva*, because *jīva* is the *vācya* (that which is designated, out of which it manifests) of *a*, the first letter of the *praṇava* ( $om = a + u + m$ ), the latter being called the *vācaka* (that which designates, the manifesting word). In his *yoga sūtra* '*tasya vācakah praṇavaḥ*' Patañjali clearly states that *praṇava* is the *vācaka* of Brahman conceived of as *īśvara*. See also the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*: '*Etaddhyevākṣaram brahma etaddhyevākṣaram param; Etaddhyevākṣaram jñātvā yo yadicchati tasya tat.*' (1.2.16)  
The idea seems to be that a *sādhaka* (spiritual seeker), identifying himself with his *jīva*-hood at the beginning of his spiritual striving, realizes his spiritual essence as the *jīvātman* designated by the first letter of *om*, namely *a*, and proceeding further, he ultimately realizes the identity of the *jīvātman* with the *paramātman*, which is designated by *om* in its entirety.
6. According to the Advaitic position, the Atman, or Self remaining as Pure Being (*sat*), is actually the *devatā* or God, whose existence is eternal and timeless; hence He is often called the Primordial Being. The *Gītā* speaks of Him as the *ādideva*, the *purāṇa* (primordial) *puruṣa* and *ādya puruṣa* (11.38, 15.4) Here, *ādi* does not mean beginning, but connotes timelessness. The idea is that the existence of the Supreme Being is not conditioned by time. Time is a mental concept that emanates from Him, but He is not conditioned by this concept. He thus subsumes time, space, causality and such other mental constructs, so that He is sometimes called Mahākāla.
7. The idea is that an illumined sage, who has realized the truth of *praṇava*, can never again lapse into the illusion that *jīva* (the individual self) and Brahman (the Universal Self) are different. His dualistic thinking is wiped out for ever thanks to the dawning of *advaitic* (non-dualistic) realization of the abso-

lute identity of the *jīva* and Brahman. Even the remotest memory of dualism, which conditioned him during his state of ignorance prior to the dawn of *advaitic* realization, is totally wiped out from his consciousness. He gets fully and irrevocably established in the *advaitic* unity of Consciousness.

8. The word *sattva* has been translated here as Truth (Reality).
9. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin interprets this as follows: That which is the Truth, or Reality, for a person united with Brahman on account of his realization of the non-difference of his inner Self with Brahman is verily the true signification of his inner tuft and sacred thread. The import is that it is the Knowledge of the attributeless Brahman (*nirviśeṣa jñāna*).
10. Here the inner tuft (called *antaḥ śikhā*) is explained by Upaniṣad Brahmayogin as the flash of Knowledge constantly shining in one's inner consciousness.
11. The word *mumukṣoḥ* qualifies the word *brāhmaṇasya*, meaning thereby that a *brāhmaṇa* is one who is a *mumukṣu*. It would therefore follow that any *mumukṣu*, a sincere aspirant longing for liberation, or *mokṣa*, is a *brāhmaṇa* per se.
12. The characteristic of the inner sacred thread is its invisibility to the senses, for it is of the nature of attributeless Brahman Knowledge, or *nirviśeṣa jñāna* (see endnote 9 above), which is beyond the reach of the mind, speech and the senses.
13. That which is of the nature of *avidyā* is not *sat*, or existent, because, as the cause, it is not visible.
14. It is not non-existent, since it is visible as the effect [in the form of the phenomenal world].
15. It is not both existent and non-existent because both these cannot exist together on account of their incompatibility.
16. It is not different because it has no separate existence.
17. It is not non-different since it is insubstantial—it is non-substance.
18. It is neither different nor non-different because such a situation does not obtain.
19. It is not possessed of parts because as cause it is partless.
20. It is possessed of parts since the effect is seen to be possessed of parts.
21. It cannot be both with parts and without parts, on account of the incompatibility mentioned earlier. (In fine, its indescribability [*anirvacaniyatva*] is the main purport of all these statements.)
22. *Avidyā* is thus a great wonder (*mahādabhuta*), it being of the nature of *anirvacaniyatva* (indescribability). (See Śaṅkarācārya's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 109) If such be the nature of *avidyā*, there could arise the possibility of misunderstanding that it also deserves the status of *sat* like Brahman, for both are indescribable. Lest it be thus misunderstood, it is mentioned here that its reality is only apparent, lasting only as long as the Knowledge of oneness of Atman and Brahman has not awakened in the aspirant. On the realization of the Atman-Brahman identity, *avidyā* vanishes, being insubstantial and unreal. The import is that one ought therefore to devote oneself to nothing else except the attainment of the highest state of Brahmanhood, being rooted in the knowledge that nothing else exists besides Brahman, so that everything else gets automatically rejected as unworthy of any attention. Swami Vivekananda says, 'If this (God) is true, what else could matter? If it is not true, what do our lives matter!' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997], 8.261)
23. Thus an understanding of the nature of *avidyā* leads one to the realization of Brahman.

**T**he notion 'I am the doer' is merely a delusion, because it is difficult to trace who this 'I' is. If one carefully analyses this 'I', the real 'I' dissolves in God. Our identification with the body, mind, intellect and so on is simply a delusion created by ignorance. Do they last long? Discrimination puts an end to them all. They all vanish, and there remains only the Absolute.

—Swami Turiyananda



## Reviews



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

**The Psychic Sun.** *Sridattabal.* Sridattabal Mission Divine, 22 'Kalikripa', Ruikar Colony, Kolhapur 416 005. 2001. 95 pp. Rs 150.

Sridattabal, a saint widely known in India and abroad for his lectures on spiritual unfoldment, was born in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, in 1941. This book contains Sridattabal's ideas and has been edited by Prof Kalyani Kishore and published nearly twenty years after the saint's demise.

According to the author, the supreme centre and all-powerful lord of all existence—living and non-living, animate and inanimate—is the supernatural Psychic Sun, of whom the material sun of our solar system is but a spark. The Psychic Sun is, in fact, the primordial astral matter, which is the birthplace of all other planets in the cosmos. Our own sun, rotating on its axis, is only a small generating machine manifesting the magnetic properties of the divine Psychic Sun, the homogeneous primitive cradle of existence, where every aspect of the life principle is centralized. The subtle aspects of this Psychic Sun reveal themselves only to discerning and pure minds. For Sridattabal the Psychic Sun is Parabrahman Itself, whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere.

The book begins with a short introduction about the author and is followed by a preface, which brings to the fore the essential aspects of the life which he wishes to present before his readers. Then come twelve chapters explaining the method of understanding and feeling the presence of the Psychic Sun in and around us. Even inanimate objects, Sridattabal says, have an observable psychic centre; but before this inner reality is sensed one has to empty the mind of all its contents.

Sridattabal's aim seems to be to explain the supreme Godhead in terms of modern science. As said before, he holds the psychic centre of the material sun to be the ultimate plane of existence, the place of origin of all other planes of existence. This centre generates immense magnetic force and pro-

duces 'light atoms' or 'life-trons'. The author is convinced that his 'revolutionary' findings will sooner or later be accepted by scientists.

Having read the book one can only say that *The Psychic Sun's* bold concepts are sure to startle scientists and spiritualists alike!

Santosh Kumar Sharma  
Kharagpur

**The Ásvamedha: The Rite and Its Logic.** *Subhash Kak.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. 2002. E-mail: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com). 71 pp. Rs 195.

The Ashvamedha yajna has been described as one of the most sacred and significant rituals in classical Indian texts like the Puranas, the Samhitas, the *Shatapatha Brahmana* and the Upanishads. This sacred rite offered in the name of the sun-god has also fascinated the imagination of the Greeks, the Romans, the Chinese and even the Russians. According to popular mythology, the fire coming out of the horse's mouth is described as the *vaḍavānala* (fire of the sun), which is hidden in the southern celestial hemisphere. This rite is nothing but the sacrifice of the annual renewal of the sun at the new year, accompanying a renewal of the king's rule. But its spiritual import is much more important. It is a kind of sacred and holy celebration to get reconnected to the inner sun.

The word 'sacrifice' is generally associated with the common meaning of 'killing to offer to gods and goddesses' to propitiate the spiritual hunger of sadhakas. But the Vedic yajna need not necessarily involve any killing of animals. After all, it is a highly symbolic performance—the 'animals' in the sacrifice may be made of clay, vegetables or grains; or they may just be some specific utterances. We find the best reference of this ceremonial rite in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. The word 'killing' is also described in the texts as a kind of mock killing in sacri-

fice. It is also described in the holy texts to apply equally to the pressing of soma stalks and the grinding of grains (*Taittīriya Samhita* and *Shatapatha Brahmana*). After all, the normative meaning of the word is symbolic, although the literal meanings ('animal sacrifice' and so on) are not completely ruled out. Among the Indian scholars Dayananda Sarasvati and his followers take *Rig Veda*, 1.162, to be a hymn on the heroic sacrificial horse being tended to by attendants.

The Vedic view acknowledges the truth that all creation is interdependent. The Atman contains the entire universe ('*Ayamātmā brahma*'). The sacrifice of animals is nothing but the enactment of the killing of the lower self for transformation into the higher Self. Since the higher Self cannot manifest without the lower self, one must settle for something less, a ritual rebirth of the individual. The *Taittīriya Samhita* describes the sacrificial horse of the Ashvamedha thus: 'The head of the sacrificial horse is the dawn, its eye the sun, its breath the wind, the ear the moon, its feet the four quarters of the year, ... its hair the plants, its tail the trees, its mouth Agni or Vaiśvānara, its belly the sea.' In fact, the whole universe is the sacrificial horse. Maybe the word *ashva* was a primary name of the sun that was later applied to the horse. The celestial horse was supposed to spring from the sea (cosmic waters enveloping the earth) and return to it. The Puranas also use the image of a fire-breathing mare that lives in the sea. It is a visualization of what happens to the sun as it sinks in the primal waters.

We also find references to this rite in the classical epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. But according to Prof Kak, the *Mahabharata* account is quite fragmentary. Although the fourteenth *parva* of the epic is devoted to the performance of the Ashvamedha yajna by Yudhishtira, very little is written about the rite itself. But it has been stated that the rite takes place on the full moon day of the month of Chaitra. The *Ramayana* also glosses over the ritual in just a few verses.

Scholarly studies of the concept of sacrifice, according to Prof Kak, have given rise to diverse interpretations like 'invention of scholars', 'providing a means to the community to redirect feelings of violence and aggression' and 'a social contract'. But sacrifice is not a unitary experience, and many varieties of sacrifice, including Vedic sacrifice, fall outside any stipulated theory. In the words of Antonio de Nicholas, 'To see the *Rig Veda* as a book of ritu-

als, a religio-cultural mythology, is merely to scratch its surface structure. One must take it as a linguistic whole, with the four languages of non-existence (*asat*), existence (*sat*), sacrifice (*yajna*) and embodied vision (*ṛta dhīh*).'<sup>1</sup> These four languages function as four species of discourse, four ways of viewing the world within which human action takes place. But these four aspects are interdependent; so the languages required to describe them are context-sensitive.

The author is very particular in describing the Ashvamedha rite and its symbolism. The rite has got several functions. First, it presents an equivalence of the *nakshatra* year to heaven, implying a rite celebrating the rebirth of the sun. Second, it is symbolic of the conquest of time by the king, in whose name it is performed. Finally, it is a celebration of social harmony by the transcendence of fundamental conflicts between various sources of power.

Like a true Vedic scholar, Prof Kak has devoted several chapters (2-6) to unfold the truth(s) underlying the Vedic texts and the Upanishads in connection with sacrifice (both animal and human) and ancient astronomy. He has proved his keen interest in the construction of the altar upon which most of the Vedic rituals were performed. The design of the altar is based on astronomical numbers related to the reconciliation of the lunar and solar years. Through perfect diagrams (pages 24-43) Prof Kak has directed our attention to ancient geometry, where we find that the problems of circling of a square and the squaring of a circle are the result of equating the earth and sky altars. The *Rig Veda* itself is taken to symbolize the universe. The verse count of the *Rig Veda* is the number of sky days in forty years, or  $261 \times 40 = 10,440$ , and the verse count of all the Vedas is  $261 \times 78 = 20,358$ . The subjective cosmos with its three divisions of earth (body), atmosphere (prana) and sky (consciousness) and its connections to the outer cosmos make it possible to obtain knowledge by looking within.

As to the Ashvamedha rite, the five great sacrifices (*pañca-mahāyajñas*: *brahmayajña*, *devayajña*, *pitṛyajña*, *puruṣayajña* and *bhūtayajña*) are prescribed for all people. However, each sacrifice belongs to a larger matrix of ceremonies. According to the author, the Ashvamedha rite is the ritual sacrifice of the sun (time) to regenerate it. The narrative touches upon the inner and the outer *ashvas* through the symbolism of the horse. The enactment of this rite enhances the king's fame and power. The number

of animals used is related to the numerical symbolism associated with the earth, the atmosphere and heaven. The deep cosmic basis of the Ashvamedha rite makes it certain that it could not have evolved out of a sacrifice that involved the killing of a horse. The horse merely serves to symbolize the sun, and it is evident from the texts that this representation was done with a variety of icons. Given the deep mystical foundation of the Vedic ritual, it is certain that it had the inner sacrifice as its prototype. But I do not agree with Prof Kak when he writes at the end of the book that nowadays the household ritual is declared to be thousands of times superior to the Ashvamedha. This declaration, I think, is not based on facts. Nowadays most of the rituals are performed to exhibit the performers' earthly possessions, wealth and so-called prestige. Perception of the soul and sincerity of purpose are very often missing.

The book, however, provides a glimpse of the author's scholarship and his sound knowledge of Vedic literature and astronomy. It may be regarded as a source book for research work in ancient astronomy and cosmology. I congratulate him for bringing out a book valuable for modern scholars, Indian and Western.

*Prof Amalendu Chakraborty*

Former Head of the Department of Philosophy  
Presidency College, Kolkata

**Samagra Vikas: Development with a Human Face.** Ed. P Parameswaran. Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust, 5 Singarachari Street, Triplicane, Chennai 600 005. E-mail: [vkchennai@vsnl.net](mailto:vkchennai@vsnl.net). 2003. 394 pp. Rs 125.

No other species than the Homo sapiens ever industrialized, colonized, urbanized or commercialized their social transactions; nor did other species ever found any 'isms'. The subhuman species developed and grew, but under nature's dictates. Man develops by conquering nature. However, is modern man and society truly developed? This special number of *Vivekananda Kendra Patrika* deals with this momentous issue of our times, with an apt title: *Samagra Vikas: Development with a Human Face*.

Development as a process has been going on from time immemorial in all societies and cultures. Nevertheless, the nature and course of develop-

ment in the post-Scientific Revolution era in modern history has been quite different from the preceding periods. The 'development' of our times has taken place at such a breakneck speed in a short span of 400 years that it has brought man to the end of his tether, leaving him almost on the threshold of an impending catastrophe. The modern view of development has been materialistic, objective and partial, whereas, as the title of this volume suggests, it ought to have been *samagra vikas*, all-round development, meaning development with a human face or material development complemented with human development, with due regard for the environment at the same time. In short, development must encompass the totality of life and existence. Today's partial view of development demands an urgent re-evaluation if man wishes to survive.

This special number of the *Patrika* highlights true development in about 395 pages with a wide range of material to ponder over and probe. The articles discuss development in the context of education, health, industry, environment, employment, energy, population, ecology and sociology. One gets not merely statistical figures showing the almost irreparable loss done to humanity by what man has been doing in the name of development, but also profound suggestions and remedies based on age-old traditions and practices. This subject deserves our immediate attention and worldwide response to help mankind on the path of true development. Our heartfelt gratitude to this esteemed journal for attempting to raise global awareness on such a momentous issue.

*Swami Shuddhidananda*  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

**Spiritual Experiences of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, the World Teachers.** *Swami Jitatmananda*. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Dr Yagnik Road, Rajkot 360 001. E-mail: [srkaraj\\_ad1@sancharnet.in](mailto:srkaraj_ad1@sancharnet.in). 2004. 102 pp. Rs 25.

Anyone who has read the life of Sri Ramakrishna will have understood that his transcendental experiences have gone beyond even the extraordinary. Swami Vivekananda, his worthy disciple, too, is not left behind in this area. Their experiences were meant to show humanity that there is a God,

that He can be experienced in a variety of ways and that these experiences are a million times more intense and beneficial than sensory experiences.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji came to re-establish religion, which was under a tremendous onslaught of crass and scientific materialism. This book highlights their holy lives and a few of their spiritual experiences and their impact on the world of thought. Their teachings are universal and, naturally, cut through man-made boundaries of religions, sects, doctrines and beliefs.

This book was originally read out as a paper by the author at the Indian Council of Philosophical Research in January 2004. In their proposed ninety-six-volume work on Indian philosophy, science and culture, the Council will include this paper, considering its relevance and brilliance.

To modern man, who is groping in the twilight of the artificial glitter of materialism and pseudo-philosophies, this book shows the real values governing individuals and society. Written about two towers of spirituality, strength and divinity, the book shows in modern idiom what is religion and spirituality for this age.

*Swami Satyamayananda*  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

**Days in an Indian Monastery.** *Sister Devamata.* Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: *srkmath@vsnl.com*. 2003. xvii + 326 pp. Rs 60.

Laura Glenn, or Sister Devamata as she is popularly known among the admirers of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, had the fortune of seeing Swami Vivekananda during his second visit to the West in 1899. Born of an aristocratic American family in Ohio, she joined the newly founded Vedanta Society in New York and later nurtured her spiritual life under the loving care of Swami Paramanandaji, a disciple of Swamiji. When she visited India, she had the inclination to record her experiences and decided to bring them out in book form as a travelogue. Her memoirs are different from the diary of a foreign tourist: they are unique in that they come from a person deeply devoted to spiritual life. Her keen sense of observation records even the minutest details of the Indian milieu. Her close contact with the nascent Ramakrishna movement gave her an inclusive approach to life, an attitude reflected in each page of the book. She humbly

expresses the purpose of her writing as an attempt to create a wider understanding and a deeper sense of kinship between East and West.

She prepares the mind of the reader by introducing to him the Ramakrishna movement and its ideals, and the monastic tradition in India. In twenty chapters she studies and presents some of the Hindu festivals and their significance, the education systems of the past and the present, Indian theatre and music, the caste system, the Indian housewife and about all that catches her attention. Her deep reverence for Swami Ramakrishnanandaji was instantaneous. She says, 'Quite spontaneously and involuntarily I felt surprise that he was not as tall as the monastery. He looked to me taller. With a few words he could make a universe crumble.' Indeed, the author's reminiscences vividly portray Ramakrishnanandaji as a spiritual teacher. They provide a unique insight into the God-absorbed minds and deep spiritual insights of Swamis Brahmanandaji and Ramakrishnanandaji.

The author's style is uniquely lucid and simple. A standard piece of descriptive writing, the book engrosses the reader throughout, leaving a lasting, wholesome impression in his mind. Pleasantly interspersed humour adds charm to the book. Indeed, it is difficult to lay aside the book without finishing it in one sitting.

The printing is very clear and the book very reasonably priced. The attractive cover and the photographs inside are value additions to this long-awaited first Indian edition of the book. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, deserves our gratitude for publishing this important book describing its initial days. A book that will not only be bought but read again and again for the sheer joy it brings.

*Swami Atmajnananda*  
Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore

**Naming the Nameless: 101 Vachanas.** *Rowena Hill and Prabhu Shankara.* Jagadguru Sri Shivarathreeswara Granthamala, Mysore 570 004. 2001. xxxii+60 pp. Rs 40.

It is significant that despite being identified even now as a developing nation in terms of economic growth, India has remained the only spiritually developed nation for millennia. Apart from the avatars, there have been numerous saints, mystics and social reformers promoting not only bhakti but ethical values in society. Some of them were ordinary

people with extraordinary zeal to serve society, born in different parts of the country to serve people in those regions. From time to time religious, caste and gender-based discrimination, oppression of the poor by the rich, and the aggressive priesthood inflicting indignities on some communities resulted in dissensions and, at times, revolt.

In the twelfth century, Basavanna, a poet-saint and treasurer of the ruler of northern Karnataka, founded a religious group named Virashaivas in the town of Kalyana, to rid the community of the aforementioned evils. History shows that the movement, begun with noble intentions, ended in riots, and Basavanna was left disillusioned.

In a delightful small book, *Naming the Nameless*, Rowena Hill and Prabhu Shankara have translated from Kannada into English 101 *vachanas* (spoken words) of the popular Virashaiva saints. The original text of these 101 *vachanas* in Kannada was published under the title *Sharanara Nooronda Vachanagalu*. The present book also provides the historical background and brief biographies of the saints and reformers whose *vachanas* it contains. It points out that the authors of the *vachanas*, among whom were persons from the lowest strata of society, were not poets in the conventional sense but merely conveyed their personal experiences. The *vachanas* have bhakti as the base and transcend religion, caste, gender and social barriers. Like the ancient composers of Carnatic music, the authors of the *vachanas* can be identified from their *mudra*, the name of their *ishtadeva*. The translation in English is clear, simple, reader-friendly, and capable of promoting a spirit of devotion in readers. The core of the teachings reminds us about the wisdom revealed by mystics and saints from various parts of India: Kabir and the Sufi saints of North India to Appar, Sundarar, Andal and Poonthanam in South India—to name a few.

The *vachanas* of thirteen authors are included in the book. The devotion of Akka Mahadevi reminds us, in a way, of bridal mysticism. As Mira and Andal were with Lord Krishna, Akka Mahadevi's divine Companion was Lord Chennamallikarjuna. Says she, 'Performing the eightfold worship can I make You love me, Lord? You are far from outward rituals. ... In my lotus heart can I keep You safe, Lord? The whole body is full of You. Lord, I cannot make You love me. Joy is your loving me of Yourself, Chennamallikarjuna.'

Allama Prabhu, another poet, sings about ma-

ya: 'Gold, they say, is maya; gold is not maya. Woman, they say, is maya; woman is not maya. Land, they say, is maya; land is not maya. Maya is desire in front of the mind, see, Goheshwara.' He laments, 'For desire, millions have died, for lust, millions have died, for gold, woman and land, millions have died. Goheshwara, I don't see any who have died for You!'—concepts familiar to devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

Basavanna goads us to turn to Lord Kudalasangama Deva early in life without waiting for 'wrinkled skin' and 'toothless mouth', and ridicules harsh penances without purity of soul. He submits to his Lord, 'The wealthy make temples for Shiva. I am poor, Lord, what can I make? My legs are the pillars, my body the shrine, my head the golden dome, Lord.' Opposing animal sacrifices, he visualizes a goat brought for sacrifice, consuming tender leaves unaware of its approaching end, and says, 'And those that killed it, did they survive, Kudalasangama Deva?'

Noble thoughts such as those sampled above promote not only a spiritual outlook but ethics in society. Translation of soulful lyrics is a difficult task, and the efforts of the translators are to be appreciated.

P S Sundaram  
Chennai

**Go Forward: Letters of Swami Premeshananda (Vol. III).** Comp. Satchidananda Dhar; trans. Swamis Swahananda and Sarvadevananda. Satchidananda Dhar, 95/43 Bose Pukur Road, Kolkata 700 042. 2003; pp. 127; Rs 50. Copies available at Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014. E-mail: [mail@advaitaonline.com](mailto:mail@advaitaonline.com).

A few years ago the first two volumes of *Go Forward* generated enthusiasm among the monastic and lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. These volumes were first published in Bengali and then translated into English. Though slim, the present volume will find a ready field, having the first two volumes as its precursors.

Swami Premeshanandaji was a highly respected monk of the Ramakrishna Order. He spent most of his life in the Ramakrishna Mission's branch at Sargachhi, West Bengal. The centre has been running a school and hostel for boys. The swami was

very loving and inspired many people to shape their lives in the mould of the Ramakrishna ideal. A few boys who came in touch with Premeshanandaji were in regular correspondence with him. The swami's inspiring letters to them form the contents of this book.

Besides ninety-two letters, this volume contains two special letters written by Swami Saradeshnanandaji and Swami Shantimayanandaji, both addressed to Swami Saumyanandaji. These special letters give some biographical details about Premeshanandaji. One gets to know about Premeshanandaji as he was before he became a monk and how he directed his life towards spiritual fulfilment.

The other letters were written mainly to monks and devotees many of whom are still alive. Though written to meet individual needs, the letters contain words of wisdom so profound and universal that everyone can benefit by them. The swami had great insight and humour, to which these letters bear testimony. Full of encouragement, these letters inspire everyone to live a worthy, spiritual life. Premeshanandaji was a father figure to many boys who came in contact with him.

In this slim volume readers are likely to find answers to some of their problems, be they attitudinal or practical.

*Swami Satyamayananda*  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

**Mahasaraswati.** *Dr Prema Nandakumar.* Kallai Arangam, N/5 Adyar Apartments, Kottur Gardens, Chennai 600 085. 2002. xviii + 62 pp. Rs 90.

Myths contain mystical truths; they are not fictions as generally misunderstood. They are supersensory truths clothed in symbols, personalities and legends. Every civilization has had rich treasures of such myths encoding truths. Gradually unfolding themselves in the racial consciousness over a large expanse of time, they have remained potent in governing the evolution of races.

In this wonderful book *Mahasaraswati*, Dr Prema Nandakumar traces the gradual unfolding of Saraswati, 'the Mother of all Myths' in the Aryan mind, and Her unmistakable influence on every aspect of Aryan life.

Anthropomorphized, She seems bound in the Aryan psyche. She is actually a universal phenomenon throbbing at the very heart of existence: the

*chitshakti*. She holds sway all through our massive literature—be it philosophy, music and dance, art, architecture, drama or the supreme science of Brahman. She symbolizes the power of granting the boon of excellence and covers the entire gamut of knowledge and aesthetics. This faintly hints at the vastness of the subject the author has handled. To precisely condense a subject of such vast dimensions into a booklet of sixty-two pages is a remarkable achievement.

The book has twelve small chapters, each having the potency of a seed to sprout into a volume by itself. Together, the chapters succinctly depict the gradual decoding of the Saraswati myth in the Aryan psyche with the flow of time.

The book begins with Saraswati as the river in the *Rig Veda*: 'the deity that flows'. She is *vidyā*, the Truth, one who nourishes and purifies the intellect with Her constant presence. An intellect based on Truth never falters, but unerringly leads us to the realm of Light. Directly or indirectly, all great revivals in history have had *vidyā* at their roots. This is true even at the individual level, for She is Uma Bhagavati, the *brahmavidyā* of the Upanishads, the destroyer of Indra's vanity and bestower of the supreme Knowledge. The Saraswati idea in the *Rig Veda* flows as smoothly as the river it represents, for She assumes different names like Bharati, Ila and Mahi representing Her different aspects. Later She becomes exclusively associated with *vidyā*.

She is then presented as the power of speech, the golden Vāk, the *chitshakti*, from where begins creation, the magic of the *shabda-artha* mechanism. The *sphoṭavādins* and the grammarians of India have built their grand philosophies on this. Universes bloom forth from Her, the primordial Word, the *sphoṭa*, and this world is Her sport, *vāni-vilāsa*. The *Atharva Veda* begins with mantras addressed to Vāk. Like the physical Saraswati, lying unseen beneath the earth, as Vāk She lies hidden in us as *parā* and *paśyantī*, and expressed as *madhymā* in the mind, and as *vaikhari* in the mouth, as audible speech. Human civilization is greatly influenced by the power of speech and communication, of which She is the presiding deity. '*Vāgbhūshaṇam bhūshaṇam*, embellishment in speech is the real ornament,' says Bhartrihari. (*Nītiśataka*, 14)

From Vāk, She is now seen in the background of the epic age. The author shows how there She is in transition from the river deity of the *Rig Veda* to the consort of Brahmā, the Creator. We find many in-

interesting legends associated with Saraswati, still as the river, in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, more so in the latter. The 'Shalya Parva' of the *Mahabharata* speaks of many ghats on this river where assembled great aspirants and seers. And then there is the Vasishtha-Vishvamitra strife supposed to have taken place on her banks, ending in the revelation of the supreme Gayatri mantra.

After the epic age comes the great anti-Vedic, heterodox movement, wherein also, like a lamp of knowledge, She is a cultural phenomenon, equally important to Jainism and Buddhism. Many of the Jain works in Tamil bear testimony to this, says the author. As Prajnā Pāramitā, the Mother of Perfect Wisdom, and as Chintā Devi, the Buddhist term for Saraswati, She has etched for Herself an indisputable place in Buddhist temples. These highlight Her trans-religious character.

Saraswati in the field of architecture and music is a subject in itself. Temples dedicated solely to Her are rare, yet her association with temple culture and architecture is palpable. It is more so in South India, where She is not the main deity but is seen in reliefs and panel decorations highlighting many a legend, bringing Her close to the common mind.

On the one hand, Saraswati is Goddess Sarada Devi, the bestower of *brahmavidyā*, one whom the great Adi Shankara mystically encountered, and who is the main deity in the temple he founded; on the other, there is the inspiring anecdote of Ustad Allaudin Khan's attaining perfection in music by Saraswati's grace in the temple dedicated to Her at Maihar.

The author mentions great poet-saints inspired by Saraswati, like Purandaradasa, other Dasa saints of Karnataka and Muthuswami Dikshitar, all of whose soul-stirring compositions have contributed to the rich treasure of our musical heritage. The story of Kumaraguruparar's composing *Sakalalāvalli Mālai* is another instance of Saraswati's grace making the seemingly impossible possible: the capacity to master different languages. The author focuses on the richness of Kumaraguruparar's Tamil works acknowledged today as classics. Then Subramania Bharati, one of the greatest poets of Tamil Nadu, follows the train. His account of how he fell

in love with Saraswati is a saga of how anyone consciously in touch with Her could become Her receptacle and conduit for knowledge.

She then assumes a different hue in the *Devi Mahatmya* as Chandika, the devourer of asuras. There She is also Sarada, the *jñāna-dāyini*, one who bestows *parā-* and *aparā-vidyā*. We find there a matchless and beautiful prayer of Indra depicting Her as present in everything humankind can think of. The *Saundarya Lahari* of Sri Shankara, the *Lalita Sahasranama* and the *Devi Mahatmya* are taken up as the main scriptures dealing with Saraswati upasana, beautifully highlighting their respective outlooks towards this divine phenomenon.

Thus, beginning with the Vedic river, the author shows how Saraswati flows through different transitional phases: from Vāk to the consort of Brahmā; Her golden touch transforming ordinary souls into receptacles of Wisdom Divine; and the way She etches out a permanent place in the Aryan mind to find expression in a wide range of aesthetics. The author thus takes us on an inspiring psycho-historical pilgrimage. In every chapter Sri Aurobindo's succinct and penetrating observations throw further flashes of light on the terse subject. Undoubtedly, this is a timely publication when everywhere we find Saraswati commercialized. Without *vidyā*, man is an animal, says Bhartrihari: '*Vidyāvihinah paśuh.*' (*Nitishataka*, 20) But *vidyā* for *vidyā's* sake seems a far cry today.

Seen in this light, this brilliant book reminds us of the greatest treasure in the sole possession of humankind: the ability to consciously strive for Perfection. Saraswati is its symbol and the inexhaustible source of that Perfection. The masses, especially the youth, need to fall in love with Her today, as did Subramania Bharati, for as *vidyā* She is the Beauty of all beauties. Shankara says, '*Virūpo'pi vidyāvān bahu shobhate*; Knowledge makes even an ugly-looking scholar beautiful.' In Her alone, we have a permanent panacea for all our sicknesses, and She alone can make our lives truly graceful.

*Mahasaraswati* is highly recommended for all lovers of Indian culture.

Swami Shuddhidananda  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

What is travelling? Changing your place? By no means! Travelling is changing your opinions and prejudices.

—Anatole France

---

---

## ☪ Reports ☪

**Inaugurated.** The newly built monks' quarters; by Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Math, Madurai; on 23 August.

**Provided.** The following free services to pilgrims at the Krishna Pushkar Mela: medical aid to 2000, cloak room facilities for 12,000, accommodation for 6000, meals for 50,000, buttermilk for 90,000 and milk for 20,000 children; by Ramakrishna Mission, Vijayawada; from 28 August to 8 September. The centre also organized spiritual discourses, round-the-clock devotional music and pictorial exhibitions on Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

**Won.** The CBSE Award for Teachers given by the Union Minister for Human Resource Development; by a teacher of the school run by Ramakrishna Mission, Along; on 4 September. The award is given every year to 12 teachers selected out of about 5,00,000 from CBSE-affiliated schools all over the country.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad; by Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka; on 5 September.

**Laid.** Foundation stone for a dispensary building; by Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj; at Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor; on 8 September.

**Unveiled.** A 7-foot statue of Swamiji; at Madura College Higher Secondary School, Madurai, where the citizens of the city had given a public recep-

tion to Swamiji on his return from the West in 1897; on 11 September 2004.

The statue was installed thanks to the initiative taken by Ramakrishna Math, Madurai, when it recently discovered that Madura College was originally known as The Native College.

**Inaugurated.** The newly built monks' quarters adjacent to Swamiji's Ancestral House; by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 17 September.

**Inaugurated.** Swami Vivekananda Sports Complex; by Swami Smarananandaji; at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar; on 19 September.

**Launched.** Telemedicine services linking patients in remote rural areas with city-based specialist clinicians; by Vivekananda Polyclinic, Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow; on 23 September.

**Started.** A new centre of the Ramakrishna



Swamiji's statue at Madura College unveiled

Mission; at the sacred birthplace and ancestral house of Swamiji; on 26 September. The centre has been started with the assets and properties at the premises of Swamiji's ancestral house and some adjoining areas acquired for the Mission by the Government of West Bengal.

Other than the renovated ancestral house of Swamiji with a memorial shrine at the actual place of birth, the centre has four separate buildings meant for reception, a text-book library, a research centre and a centre for rural and slum development. (See 'A Memorial to Swami Vivekananda' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, November 2004.)

The address of the centre: Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, 3 Gour Mohan Mukherjee Street, Kolkata 700 006 (Phone: 033-22192030).

**Observed.** Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi; in September. The centre's programme included processions; public meetings and devotees' conventions addressed by Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Swami Smarananandaji and the Governor of Jharkhand; release of a book and a souvenir on Holy Mother; a seminar on 'Great Women in World Religions'; and symposiums for school teachers, women's self-help groups and women health workers.

**Visited.** Belur Math; by Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India; on 1 October 2004. Dr Kalam met Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

**Continued.** Relief operations; by Ramakrishna Mission centres in Assam, Bihar, West Bengal and Bangladesh; through September. 4927 kg rice, 1834 kg pulses, 3396 kg salt, 675 kg flour, 16,595 kg flattened rice, 450 kg puffed rice and 3197 kg jaggery were distrib-

uted among 3836 families. Cooked food was also served to 4000 persons daily for 7 days. Other things distributed were 325 kg bleaching powder, 5,50,000 water-purifying halazone tablets, 216 matchboxes, 125 mosquito-nets, 455 dhotis, 465 lungis, 1774 saris and 61 cartons of assorted clothing, among 4861 families. Medical relief was also provided, the number of patients treated being 2356. The houses of 4 families were repaired.

**Distributed.** Rice, pulses, potatoes, mustard oil, salt, spices, utensils and bedding; by Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti, Karimganj; among five families of Kayasthagram whose houses were gutted in a fire accident.

**Organized.** 'Sarada Jnana Sudha', a quiz contest on the life and message of Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother; by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore; for students of standards 6 to 12; throughout Karnataka.

The competition drew an overwhelming response. Against 63,000 sets of books and question papers issued to aspirants from 640 schools, 52,950 answer papers were returned, which were then evaluated at three different levels by devotees, teachers and monks. 250 papers made it to the shortlist, and a rigorous final scrutiny yielded the top 9 prizewinners. Besides this, 2485 Prizes for Excellency were also awarded to the top 5% of students from each competing school. Prizes for principals, headmasters and teachers were decided automatically by the number of students/prizewinners representing their respective institutions. The value of the prizes ranged from Rs 2500 to Rs 500 and included cash, books and certificates. Sri Guru-rajaji, a noted educationist and Director, International Academy for Creative Teaching, Bangalore, gave away the prizes on 2 October 2004. On the occasion 2 new Kannada publications were released: (1) on Swami Vivekananda titled *Sphuritiya Chilume* and (2) on the *Mahabharata*. \*