



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

FEBRUARY 2006

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Cover: Sunset over the Garhwal range, Himalayas, with Swami Vivekananda's quotation in the foreground

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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

Vol. 111

FEBRUARY 2006

No. 2

Traditional Wisdom

VIVEKANANDA'S IDEAL OF SERVICE

जीवसेवाव्रतं यस्य लक्ष्यमासीन्महीतले ।
ज्ञानमात्मगतं यो वै तेन मार्गेण सङ्गतः ॥
कर्मिणे ज्ञानिने चैव भक्ताय स्वामिने पुनः ।
विवेकानन्दरूपाय भूयो भूयो नमाम्यहम् ॥

One whose aim was to serve the jivas (as Shiva) on this earth, and who realized the knowledge of the Atman treading this very path—that Swami Vivekananda, a man of action, a jnani and a bhakta, I salute again and again.

यत्सेवाव्रतमामनन्ति मुनयो बुद्धो जिनः शङ्करः ।
श्रीरामः कमनीयदण्डकवने वृन्दावने माधवः ॥
जाह्नव्याः सुतटेषु गौडगहने गौराङ्गदेवस्तथा ।
तत्सेवाव्रतमद्य साधकवरः स्वामी पुनर्घोषते ॥

That path of service which was declared by the seers, Buddha, Mahavira and Shankara, by Rama in the lovely forest of Dandaka, by Krishna in Vrindavana, and by Chaitanya on the shores of the Ganga in the heart of Gauda—that same path of service has again been proclaimed by Vivekananda, the prince of sadhakas.

चण्डालो ब्राह्मणो वा गुरुरुत वयसा लाघवः पण्डितो वा
मूर्खो दीनो धनाढ्यः सकलगुणगणैरन्वितो निर्गुणो वा ।
सर्वे नारायणास्ते वयमपि च तथा यूयमप्यत्रभूता
आत्मा नारायणोऽयं प्रचरति बहुशः सेव्यतामात्मरूप ॥

Be it an outcaste or a brahmin, elderly or young in age, learned or ignorant, poor or rich, possessing a wealth of virtues or bereft of them—They are all Narayana, so are we, and you who are here; this Atman, which is verily Narayana, moves about in manifold forms. Serve them, you who are the Atman!

—adapted from Dakshinaranjan Bhattacharya, 'Sri-Vivekananda-Stotram'

∞ This Month ∞

The inspirational quality of Swami Vivekananda's message has been universally acknowledged, although the reasons for this have been varied. This month's editorial explores some reasons why Swamiji and his message have remained **A Perennial Inspiration**.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago presents extracts from Justice N G Chandavarkar's much acclaimed Social Conference address at Benares in 1905.

Prof. Urmila Srivastava, who holds the Vivekananda Chair at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, presents a lucid summary of Swamiji's life and message in **Swami Vivekananda and His Universal Gospel**.

'One of the most fascinating developments is the increasing visibility of the linkage between Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta and almost all fields of human concern', says Prof. M Sivaramkrishna, former Head of the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad. He plans to explore this in his new series, **The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta**.

After Sri Ramakrishna's Passing Away is Swami Chetananandaji's translation of four of M's (Mahendranath Gupta's) diary entries that were first published in the Bengali monthly *Navya Bharat* in 1904, but have not as yet been included in the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The translator is Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis.

In the first instalment of his article **Understanding Vivekananda**, Swami Sandarshanandaji of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith,

Deoghar, underscores the pragmatism and the ideal of discipleship that characterize Swami Vivekananda's personality.

Dr C V Madhava Reddy of the Department of Philosophy, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, has given us a succinct account of the philosophical basis and practical implications of **Swami Vivekananda's Ideas on Practical Vedanta**.

Sri M M Barik, Senior Teacher in English at the Ramakrishna Mission school in Along, has beautifully outlined how Vedanta, Shakti worship and a man-making education went into the making of **Swami Vivekananda—the Epitome of Strength**.

Westerners Who Saw Sri Ramakrishna is a well-researched article about the life and works of some important westerners who had occasion to meet Sri Ramakrishna. The author, Dr Gordon Stavig, is a researcher from Hollywood.

Swami Tathagatanandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society, New York, concludes his interesting study of **Dhan Gopal Mukerji and The Face of Silence** by exploring how the meeting between Mukerji and Romain Rolland culminated in the latter's famous biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and how these found their way into Soviet Russia.

Anger, as an emotion, is as ubiquitous as it is destructive. It wreaks havoc on its subject as well as on the surroundings. The Bhagavata story of King Ambarisha underscores this fact even as it highlights genuine devotion. **Wages of Wrath** is an insightful retelling of this popular legend by Sri N Hariharan of Madurai.

A Perennial Inspiration

EDITORIAL

Role Models of Indian Youth

A 2003 *Hindustan Times* survey identified parents, Sachin Tendulkar, Amitabh Bachchan and Swami Vivekananda as the most important role models of Indian youth. That youth in India consider parents as primary role models certainly lays to rest speculations that family values have been irreparably damaged. Family bonds remain a significant determinant not only of social values and interactions but also of political alliances and business transactions—areas where filial affiliations may be supposed to play a less important role. And this holds good for the whole of Asia, where a middle-aged son is still likely to consider his mother his best friend.

That a celluloid icon or the country's most prominent sports personality should act as a role model for youngsters is in keeping with the disproportionately large media coverage given to these figures—the larger-than-life dramatic images and the subliminal effects of publicity and crowd adulation. This form of hero-worship is a global phenomenon.

Our interest here lies in Swami Vivekananda. Why should Indian youth look up to a person—that too a monk—who passed away more than a hundred years ago? What makes for his enduring appeal?

The Power That Was Vivekananda

Both during his *parivrajaka* days and on his return from the West in 1897 Swami Vivekananda generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the youth. They would attend to his needs, take his advice, argue with him, collect funds for his travel, work out his instructions and give him mammoth receptions.

But appraisals of the reasons for his appeal varied. He had a remarkable physical appear-

ance that would make him stand out anywhere. Annie Besant found in him 'a striking figure, clad in yellow and orange, shining like the sun of India ... a lion head, piercing eyes, mobile lips, movements swift and fast. ... Purposeful, virile, strong, he stood out, a man among men, able to hold his own.' There were others who saw in him 'a God of Greek sculpture'. There have been numerous comments on the 'power of his eyes' of which 'no photograph or description can give a correct idea'. According to Srinivasa Pai, 'like the "Ancient Mariner" in Coleridge's famous poem he "held you by the eye".'

However, in the words of Sister Christine, 'it was not this which made the first outstanding impression. ... It was the mind that made the first great appeal, that amazing mind! ... It was a mind so far transcending other minds, even of those who rank as geniuses, that it seemed different in its very nature. Its ideas were so clear, so powerful, so transcendental that it seemed incredible that they could have emanated from the intellect of a limited human being.'

To his disciples who saw him during the *parivrajaka* days in Madras, 'the Swami's personality towered over everything. His thrilling musical voice, his songs, his strength of soul, his power of intellect, his luminous and ready replies, his scintillating wit, his epigrams and eloquence—these all held his hearers spellbound.'

To the young collegian Kamakhya Nath Mitra, 'his awakening power was incredible. ... Here was a man of faith in an age of doubt, sincere to the backbone, a dynamo of supernal force. To have seen him was education. To have heard him was inspiration.'

'On the platform another side came out', adds Annie Besant. 'The dignity and the in-born sense of worth and power still were there,

but all was subdued to the exquisite beauty of the spiritual message which he had brought ... the wondrous teaching of the Self.' To Mary Funke, to be with the swami at Thousand Island Park was an extraordinary experience: 'Even in my wildest dreams I could not imagine anything so wonderful, so perfect. To be with Vivekananda! To be accepted by him! ... I feel that I shall never be the same again for I have caught a glimpse of the Real. ... We are taught to see God in *everything* from the blade of grass to man—"even in the diabolical man". ... In his talks he may go ever so far afield, but always he comes back to the one fundamental, vital thing—"Find God! Nothing else matters.'" Thomas Allan, who heard the swami lecture at Oakland, was convinced that he had heard 'not a man, but a God!'

The Power That Is Vivekananda

To have met Swami Vivekananda in person was obviously an unforgettable experience. But human memory is short, and heroes rarely survive their lifetimes. If they do, their charisma clearly lies beyond their physical person. According to Sri Aurobindo, 'It was the spirit of Vivekananda who first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. ... He visited me for fifteen days in Alipore jail and, until I could grasp the whole thing, he went on teaching me and impressed upon my mind the working of the Higher Consciousness—the Truth-Consciousness in general—which leads towards the Supermind.' This event took place more than six years after Vivekananda's passing. If there have been other reports of such supernatural appearances, they have not been all too common. But Aurobindo was himself to state in his later years: 'We perceive his influence working gigantically, we know not well how, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India, and we say, "Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children."'

When Subhas Chandra Bose was under-

going tremendous mental struggle as a precocious adolescent, he happened to chance upon the works of Swami Vivekananda at a neighbour's house. Having leafed through a few pages he realized that this was precisely what he had been seeking for long. These words provided an ideal to which he could dedicate his entire being. He wrote, 'I was barely fifteen when Vivekananda entered my life. Then there followed a revolution within. ... It was, of course, a long time before I could appreciate the full significance of his teachings or the greatness of his personality, but certain impressions were stamped indelibly on my mind from the outset. Both from his portrait as well as from his teachings, Vivekananda appeared before me as a full-blown personality. Many of the questions which vaguely stirred my mind, and of which I was to become conscious later on, found in him a satisfactory solution.' These books led Subhas Bose to Vivekananda the person. So in 1932 he could say: 'I cannot write about Vivekananda without going into raptures. ... His personality was rich, profound and complex and it was this personality—as distinct from his teachings and writings—which accounts for the wonderful influence he has exerted on his countrymen. ... Reckless in his sacrifice, unceasing in his activity, boundless in his love, profound and versatile in his wisdom, exuberant in his emotions, merciless in his attacks but yet simple as a child—he was a rare personality in this world of ours.'

Lal Bahadur Shastri said, 'I remember, I was deeply attracted by reading Swamiji's lectures as a student. It so influenced my mind that it changed my outlook, and brought a different perspective upon life.' The famous linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee was introduced to Vivekananda at thirteen through such texts as *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. And what did he receive from him? 'It was, in the first instance, a sense of the Infinite, and a necessity and duty of man to realise within himself this Infinite and at the same time to put himself in tune with It by leading a normal—a moral and a natural and altruistic—life. Vivekananda ap-

peared to me immediately to be a man who was intensely moved by the sufferings of Humanity.’

The Power of His Message

It has been pointed out that one comes across several apparent contradictions as one goes through the works of Swami Vivekananda. ‘It is difficult, for instance,’ writes Swami Shuddhananda, ‘for many to find out, whether Swamiji was a champion of orthodoxy or social reform; whether he was a staunch advocate of political freedom—whether he was a nationalist or internationalist; whether he was an advocate of the caste system or against it; whether he was a supporter of vegetarianism or meat-eating; whether he advised meditation in solitude or work in the bustle of society as the best method of realising God; whether he favoured organisation or wanted individual spiritual culture in preference to any organisation, etc.’

It is curious that it is precisely in that which the pedant considers confusing other brilliant minds have discovered the power of Vivekananda. ‘One of the most enchanting things about Vivekananda’, writes Christopher Isherwood, ‘is the way he was eternally changing sides when he was speaking to different people; he could denounce the British in words of fire, but again he would turn on the Indians and say, “You cannot manufacture one pin, and you dare to criticize the British!” And then he would speak of the awful materialism of the United States, and on the other hand, he would say that no women in the world were greater, and that the treatment of women in India was absolutely disgraceful. And so in every way, he was integrating. ... I’m quoting all this because by considering all these different attitudes that Vivekananda took, one sees the immense scope and integrity of his good will.’

The reason for the ‘irresistible appeal’ that Gandhiji found in Vivekananda’s works is probably best summed up by Rabindranth Tagore: ‘This message has, at one and the same time, imparted dignity and respect to man along with energy and power. ... It has indeed

invested his life with a wonderful dynamism in various spheres. There at the source of the adventurous activities of today’s youth of Bengal is the message of Vivekananda—which calls the soul of man, not his fingers.’ Jawaharlal Nehru observed: ‘What he wrote or spoke about dealt with certain fundamental matters and aspects of our problems or the world’s problems. Therefore they [his writings and speeches] do not become old. ... Directly or indirectly he has powerfully influenced the India of today.’

‘Vivekananda may have ostensibly preached religious reform, social reconstruction as well as crusade against poverty,’ notes the reputed sociologist, Benoy K Sarkar, ‘but it is the making of individuals, the training of manhood, the awakening of personality and individuality on which his whole soul was focussed. ... The objective of his diverse treatises on Yoga is none other than the “chiselling forth” of such individuals as may be depended on as “divinities on earth”, as persons who are determined to master the adverse conditions of life and conquer the world.’ Swami Vivekananda continues to provide direction to the youth of today—a sense of purpose that is hugely sought after but scarcely available in today’s postmodern world.

But even this does not exhaust the possibilities of Vivekananda’s works. Swami Vivekananda had said to Hemchandra Ghosh, who later went on to become a noted revolutionary leader, ‘It is as clear as daylight that the entire Orient will have a resurrection to build anew a human world. Lo! The future greatness of China, and in the wake of it of all Asiatic nations. ... You take it from me, this rising of the *Sudras* will take place first in *Russia*, and then in *China*. *India* will rise next and will play a vital role in shaping the future world.’ Has there been a better prediction of the course of global events over the last hundred years? It is this unerring vision that sets Swami Vivekananda apart as a guide, as our youth try to set personal and social goals for themselves. In uncertain times a beacon light such as this can hardly be dispensed with. *

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

February 1906

Mr Chandavarkar's Social Conference Address

The ancient world, said Mr John Morley, thought that Man existed for the State, whereas we in modern times think that the State exists for Man. 'The relation of man to humanity at large, to the Universe of which humanity is but a part, was not an integral factor of the common morality of the ancient world', though 'Socrates made an approach towards universal morality.' The same opinion is shared by other thinkers of our times. For instance, Mr Bernard Bosanquet remarks that the conception of a universal humanity, that humanity has a birth-right, is absolutely modern and is the outcome of the conviction that 'a single principle or will lies at the root of nature and is also embodied in the minds and actions of men'.

These remarks are suggestive of the question, whether the ancient Hindoos fall within the description of Mr John Morley and Mr Bernard Bosanquet. I am not the man to go into hysterics over our ancient civilization and paint it in colours of exaggeration, because it suits our pride at the present moment; but, viewing it in a spirit of calmness and making due allowance for its defects, it appears to me that the *Rishis* of old, who laid down our laws and conceived the ideas, out of which ancient Hindoo society emerged, started with the conception of a universal morality and the birth-right of humanity as the deep-down basis of life. What is familiar to us in these days as 'the eternal verities', or, as 'the Everlasting Yea' and 'the Everlasting Nay', in the expressive language of Carlyle, had found its eloquent exponents in the *Rishis*, who never tired of their faith in the principle of unity underlying the mind and actions of men as well as the mind and actions of Nature. They gave it the name of 'SANATANA DHARMA' or *Shashwata Dharma*, i.e. the religion of the Eternal Verities unconditioned and applicable to all human beings of whatever caste, class, or creed, embodying the laws of the universal mind, and the principle of universal morality, as distinguished from the *Varnashrama Dharma* or the laws applicable to particular castes or conditions of life. For instance, in the *Apaddharma Parva* of the *Shanti Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, *Truth* is represented as the *Sanatana Dharma* or the religion of the Eternal Verities and *Truth* is described as comprehending the virtues of *Samata* (equity or justice), *Dama* (self-control), *Amatsaryam* (freedom from jealousy), *Kshama* (mercy), *Hri* (self-respect), *Titiksha* (patience), *Anasuyata* (freedom from fault-finding), *Tyaga* (liberality), *Dhyana* (meditation), *Aryatva* (magnanimity), *Dhriti* (resolution), *Daya* (sympathy), and *Ahimsa* (humanity). And in the *Bhagavad Gita*, God after saying that He has established the *Dharmas* of the four castes, according to qualities and actions—not, mind you, according to birth—declares that He is the Creator and Founder of the *Shashwata Dharma*, i.e. the religion of the Eternal Verities or Universal Morality. this conception of the fundamental unity and universal morality is acknowledged by Emerson as finding 'its highest expression' in our *Vedas*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Vishnu Purana*. ...

Starting with this idea of fundamental Unity and universal morality, the *Rishis* conceived of man, as a spiritual being, standing for the spiritual interests of the world. Get into the heart of the best of their descriptions of *Man* in relation to the universe surrounding him, pore over their subtlest analysis of his actions and emotions and you find that *Man* the *individual* stood to them not as 'a mere fraction of society', or, what the ancient Greeks and Romans, according to Mr John Morley, regarded 'as a mere cog or pinion on the vast machine of the State'; but as an 'epitome' of Society and of the State as well. *

Swami Vivekananda and His Universal Gospel

PROF. URMILA SRIVASTAVA

Swami Vivekananda and his universal gospel, which has heralded the beginning of a new era, are widely recognized as instruments for the renovation of India and for the revival of the world. Though Swamiji lived a very short public life he achieved a great lot within that period of less than a decade. The work done by him during that period and the remarkable reform movement led by him in the form of the Ramakrishna Mission still occupy the same status they had in the past and will survive through centuries. A chosen instrument of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, his proclamations have helped generations to wake up from their age-long sleep with an unfading freshness and everlasting warmth.

The Genius Unfolds

The future hero Swami Vivekananda was born in the famous Datta family of Calcutta in 1863 on 12 January. His childhood name was Narendranath Datta and as Swami Vivekananda he appeared on the stage of Indian national life to remind people that the purpose of life was to develop the potentiality to transform one's self into the Divine, for man is but a spark of the supreme Divinity. All the functions of the human mind such as thinking, feeling and willing must support this evolutionary process of spiritual growth.

Narendranath's mother had a great influence over his personality throughout his life. Swamiji used to recall memories of events of his life associated with his mother. In his younger days he liked to play the game of meditation. Though it was only play, sometimes it carried him into deeper states of mind when he became unaware of the outer world. Once he lost himself in such a meditative condition in a lonely part of the house. His family members had to

enter the room after smashing the door latch and shake him out of his meditation.¹

Besides this calmness there was another side to Narendranath. He had great respect for elders and love for his playmates. He was the soul of social circles, a sweet singer, a brilliant conversationalist and a meritorious student. And above all he possessed an ascetic instinct beneath the surface of his normal attitude. When the matter of his marriage arose in his family, he rebelled, and strange to say, some unforeseen difficulty always obstructed the negotiations of marriage.

As a young man when his intellectual horizon began to widen, some doubts and questions regarding orthodox beliefs haunted him. He had faith and devotion for his family religious traditions, but he needed reasons to support them. At this time the renowned leader of the Brahma Samaj movement, Keshab Chandra Sen, captivated him with his lectures and writings. It was the aim of the movement to protest against orthodox tenets of religion, polytheism, child marriage, idol worship and the caste system, and to encourage women's education. It is not surprising that this movement had influenced young Bengali intellectuals. Narendranath was also imbued with the same thinking as the Brahma Samaj leaders, who hoped to find revolutionary solutions to social evils.

Looking for satisfactory answers to the questions tormenting his mind, he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who had realized the living presence of God in the image of Kali through intense spiritual disciplines. Narendranath was conquered by Sri Ramakrishna's love. It is difficult to describe the sweet relationship that existed between the two. The master was a living example of genuine spirituality and the disciple was 'a thou-

sand-petalled lotus' (1.91). The future of India was being moulded in the shape of young Narendranath by his teacher through discourses on spiritual practice. In the last days of his life, Sri Ramakrishna initiated Narendranath into monasticism and actually commissioned him for his future mission. As a tribute to his teacher, the young monk used his organizing capacity to set up a monastery in Calcutta in 1886 in order to promote the Hindu religion in accordance with the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji considered himself the most obedient servant of his great master. He laid no claim to his merits; it was all his master's training. He said:

If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself.²

As was the custom with monks, Swami Vivekananda left Calcutta and roamed all over the country to experience first-hand the unknown and difficult path of a monk's life. He wandered free of any plans and with the thought of God constantly in his mind. In the course of his pilgrimage he met all sorts of people in all conditions of life. Some days he spent with despised beggars and others as a guest of maharajas.

He sailed from Bombay to Chicago in 1893 to attend the Parliament of Religions and with some difficulty secured entry. Dr J H Wright, a professor of Greek classics at Harvard University, was so deeply impressed by Swamiji's rare abilities that, recognizing his genius, he said, "To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!"³—meaning that the flame had reached its full splendour and would shed its lustre for thousands of years. As it happened, Swamiji

had a great impact on world citizens from various walks of life—inspiring them, transforming them and elevating them. Late in the afternoon when Swami Vivekananda opened his lips, hardly had he pronounced these simple opening words—'Sisters and Brothers of America'—when hundreds of deafening shouts of applause arose in the hall. The congregation went mad for a full two minutes. This was the language of affection in which Swamiji addressed his audience. When silence was restored, he presented Hinduism with its combination of love and tolerance as the mother of all religions. It was a short but profound speech. Swami Vivekananda had made his mark. All leading American newspapers gave him wide coverage and he became a reputed person. The *New York Herald* referred to him as 'undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions'. It went on to admit, 'After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation' (1.428).

Everywhere in the world, including India, the name of Vivekananda was recognized and lecture bureaus offered to take him on a tour of the United States. Swamiji took this opportunity to speak of the glories of India and the greatness of Indian culture and spirituality. He was satisfied that the ideals of Hindu religion and its philosophy of Vedanta were spreading and percolating throughout the whole thought world of America. He soon sailed to England to carry to the English people the same message which he had preached in America. His main purpose was to bring about an exchange of thought between the West and the East. The profound learning and universal teachings of Swamiji made a deep impression upon the minds of the world intelligentsia. He commanded great admiration with his brilliant, philosophical speeches, and in his home country his words were regarded as gospel truth. Then, after a short tour of continental Europe, he came back home to his beloved country via Ceylon on 26 January 1897. The whole nation received him like one man, with the most en-

thusiastic greetings. His achievements abroad had created in the average Indian mind a pride in its past and a confidence in its future, as if by a miracle.

In spite of all this recognition, applause and popularity, Swamiji never forgot his duty to the sunken masses of India. Here, in India, he had to work for the millions of his brothers and sisters who were suffering in misery and distress—for them who were the backbone of the nation because of their hard labour, but about whom nobody thought. Swamiji dedicated his body and soul to their service and reactivated, as it were, the paralysed part of the nation by circulating the blood of energy uniformly throughout the whole body of the nation. In spite of his physical ailments due to stress of work, he was ever fresh mentally and inspired his followers to start new projects to serve the motherland. Austerities, hard work, extensive travels, endless public lectures and changing environments undermined his health. At last, on 4 July 1902, at the age of only thirty-nine years, the tired child went to sleep in the lap of his Mother, never to wake up again. ‘When death is inevitable, is it not better to die like heroes than as stocks and stones? And what is the use of living a day or two more in this transitory world? It is better to wear out than to rust out—specially for the sake of doing the least good to others’⁴—that was his firm opinion till the last. The worthy son of Mother India had dreamt of rousing the land of his birth so that it could regain its high position in the comity of nations. He roared like a lion: ‘None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet’ (3.146).

Vedanta: the Universal Gospel

Man suffers under the crushing weight of his own self-image, his own limited ideas and attitudes. Nevertheless, he can outgrow this narrow disposition. Here lies the relevance of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings of Vedanta

philosophy, the inspirational quality of which can never fade. It is a philosophy which will enable us to face the challenges of today’s complications brought about by scientific and psychological advancement; it is a philosophy which is capable of uniting all life, which has a vision of universal religion and universal brotherhood; it is a philosophy which offers us a peculiar way of life which vibrates with rhythms of harmony and love. In fact, a new reformation of mankind could be achieved by teaching the universal doctrines of Vedanta and keeping these as the background of all our dealings. Then the result would be a simultaneous development of both the individual and society at all stages of evolution. The basic premise of Vedanta is that ‘Atman, the reality underlying man’s consciousness, is non-different from Brahman, the reality underlying the whole universe.’ It then asserts that man’s real nature being divine, the aim of human life is to unfold and manifest this divine nature. This universal truth is the central tenet of Vedantic religion and helps the process of human development by aiding it in the attainment of salvation. Thus human development and the ultimate object of human life are inseparably united. All religions, philosophies, theologies, rituals or dogmas are to be valued only to the extent they help mankind realize and manifest its latent divinity. This was the universal philosophy that Swami Vivekananda preached under the banner of Vedanta in order to establish harmony and mutual goodwill in these times of religious pluralism. He was of the opinion that the basic structure of any practical philosophy of life ought to include these four principles: i) divinity of the soul, ii) brotherhood of man, iii) universal outlook, and iv) service to mankind. And this was all the more true in the context of Indian national regeneration.

The demon of materialism is on the rampage and is devouring culture, a state of life in consonance with natural laws. Society and social relationships are all coming under its evil grip. Swami Vivekananda’s message warns mankind against the threat of losing cultural

values in day-to-day life. In keeping with the Hindu scriptures, he never opposes man's worldly pursuits but he resists man's materialistic mentality that increases selfishness and greed. For these two are the cause of total disruption of individual and social relations, a complete imbalance between man-made and natural laws. A universal spiritual gospel of the kind that Swamiji delivered is a necessity in these circumstances and can liberate people right here in the world and also lead them beyond it. So Swamiji exhorts humankind to recognize the call of its innate divinity, as it is an essential preparation for spiritual development. If we are to survive our present mode of life, a realistic philosophy with a broad vision of universal brotherhood has to emerge and pave the way to a new culture of humanism. Since India is a treasure chest of culture and spirituality, it is for this country to bear the lion's share of the responsibility of providing leadership in this cultural transformation.

Today humanity needs Swami Vivekananda's universal gospel in order to face the challenges perplexing it, because the only way to deliverance is the realization and manifestation of the divinity existing within us. If we succeed in doing that, peace and harmony in society would be assured and mankind will move onward until the goal is reached. Swamiji said: 'Men, men, these are wanted: everything else will be ready, but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. A hundred such and the world becomes revolutionised' (3.223-4).

Man-making: Individual Transformation

Swami Vivekananda's teachings are more than enough to inspire the youth to achieve glorious ends, but they need to be guided by spiritual people whose power can be directly transmitted to their souls. Based on such spiritual strength the enlightened youth can then take the right decisions in life. The divine touch of an illumined soul deeply affects the human personality, giving rise to gentleness, kindness and

egolessness. Such a soul only desires to help the world, sacrificing oneself for the welfare of humanity. This silent influence effects a tremendous change for good.

The best way to transform society is to purify oneself; the world will change of itself if the individual is changed. When the individual is noble, society improves and the nation automatically attains a higher level of civilization. We are the means and so the change should occur within ourselves first; then everything in the world will be in order. The transformation of individual character is the most effective means of bringing about peace in the world.

The irony is that we think of transforming others, instead of changing ourselves. We do not have the power to change others but we certainly have sufficient power to bring about change within ourselves. This is the only solution to the problem: we must discover the divine life first and foremost within our own being. As Swamiji said, 'Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity' (3.193), and that will certainly change the world. It is this inner victory that conquers the world. The gospel of Swami Vivekananda provides a comprehensive, practical philosophy of life which shows us how to realize our own divinity and promote the welfare of others.

Swami Vivekananda wanted to rouse men to the glory of the divinity within. The removal of human problems lies in becoming men in the true sense, men without weakness—shining stars that can help others shine! 'Be and make; let every one be taught that the divine is within, and every one will work out his own salvation' (4.351, 3.246). His message to India was meant to infuse life into her people, to add vigour to the national life, to shake the people of the country out of their ages-long lethargy and to make them appreciate their great destiny. He studied in depth and explained to people the causes of India's ills, which were eating into her

vitals and which had led to her downfall. In this way, Swami Vivekananda not only made Indians conscious of their past glory and present strength but also pointed out their defects and drawbacks. Indians were steeped in ignorance and mistook weakness for non-attachment and renunciation. He made people aware of this wrong notion and taught them how to break out of it and stand erect: 'A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising-up—the gospel of equality' (5.15).

In order to manifest the divinity in man Swami Vivekananda advocated the fourfold path of yoga based on reasoning, devotion, meditation and selfless action. These four ways of yoga—jnana, bhakti, dhyana and karma—supplement each other. Anyone can practise any of the yogas according to his temperament and tendencies: jnana yoga sharpens the intellect and transforms it into intuition; bhakti yoga purifies the heart and sanctifies the emotions; raja yoga spiritualizes human behaviour; and karma yoga inspires one to discharge one's duties selflessly. The practice of these yogas reminds one to achieve the purpose of life and the integration of one's personality. The combination of this fourfold path of yoga makes a man free from possible defects and produces a balanced character by harmonizing intellect, intuition, emotion and action. In short, Swamiji laid emphasis on the ideal combination of head, heart and hand.

Throughout the world Swami Vivekananda is regarded as a saint and a patriot, as a teacher and a reformer. His personality, with all

its charm and force, impresses people everywhere. His sayings and writings all illumine human minds with a divine light. He was God's precious gift to the whole world, not just to India. In the words of Sister Nivedita, 'The Shastras, the Guru, and the Motherland are the three notes that mingle themselves to form the music of the works of Vivekananda. ... These are the three lights burning within that single lamp which India by his hand lighted and set up, for the guidance of her own children and of the world' (1.xvii).

The Clarion Call

Swami Vivekananda was born to proclaim to the Indian youth this message of fearlessness: 'Arise! Awake!' He said, 'Be you my helpers in this work! Go from village to village ... and preach this message of fearlessness to all. ... Tell each and all that infinite power resides within them, that they are sharers of immortal Bliss. Thus rouse up the Rajas within them' (7.182). Himself a dynamo of spirituality, Swami Vivekananda wished to see men and women of character imbued with strength and spirituality in all conditions and circumstances. Man-making was his mission in life and he wanted his followers to try to turn this mission into reality. He said, 'The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new gospel' (8.264). *

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One of the main results of his [Swami Vivekananda's] historic visit to the United States of America ... was the finding of a synthesis between India and the United States, and through it, between Asia and the West. To understand Swami Vivekananda, it is very important to understand the cultural and spiritual background of India and Asia.

—U Thant

The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta - I

DR M SIVARAMKRISHNA

In his collection of essays on Hinduism the German scholar Heinrich von Stietencron points out:

Hinduism, ... which all books term the religion with the third-largest number of adherents in the world, is not really one of the religions. It is a civilization or culture containing several religions. Precisely this fact is what makes Indian culture so interesting and so attractive to many young people from the West today: that here a culture remained vibrant that has been based on the principle of free religious pluralism for a very long time, and which thus places great importance on tolerating the values and peculiarities of the Other.¹

A good starting point for taking a glance at some recent studies which cite Sri Ramakrishna (and Swami Vivekananda) in varied contexts and themes. One need not confine his significance to 'free religious pluralism'. Books that treat subjects as varied as photography and sea travel also cite the Great Master. In short, one of the most fascinating developments is the increasing visibility of the linkage between Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta and almost all fields of human concern.

To begin with, I idly glanced through a fascinating study entitled *Yankee India*. I was intrigued by the title. The subtitle gave me some clue: *American Commercial and Cultural Encounter with India in the Age of Sail*. The words *Yankee* and *sail* reminded me of the well-known travelogue *A Yankee and the Swamis* by John Yale.² And Swami Vivekananda sailed to the US of A. I thought there must be some reference to Swamiji. My hunch proved right. It was there: 'Indian religious teachings have attracted followers in the United States since the impact of Swami Vivekananda at the 1893

World Congress of Religions in Chicago; today Hindu philosophy and practice is well established with large number of admirers who are not of South Asian origin.'

This really roused my curiosity. For today scholars do not study anything in isolation. They believe in what is called 'thick description' of a subject. A chosen theme is looked at not merely in terms of its specific area but also in the context of related studies. Or they attempt to relate their specific subject to other areas. These are intertexts which illumine the text from varied but related perspectives. In the Indic exegetical traditions there are the *anubandha chatushtaya*—*adhikari*, *sambandha*, *visahaya* and *prayojana*. What I refer to here is, perhaps, *sambandha*: interrelatedness of one subject to all others—the centre and the margins.

Then I thought, if Swamiji appears, surely his guru *must* be there in that study. Yes, Susan S Bean, the author, did not overlook or bypass the Master. The Great Master appears in the context of—of all things—the then medical scene. Among a contemporary homeo physician Rajendra's patients was, Bean tells us, 'the great religious leader Sri Ramakrishna'. But what she added to that fact is a bloomer: Sri Ramakrishna, 'founder of the movement that became International Society of Krishna Consciousness', she says.³ A charming mistake.

How lucky the ship that carried Swamiji across seas to land in that fascinating cross-cultural cauldron, the United States! In this history of sailing by which thousands of travellers went to the US, only the most illustrious appear and Swamiji's mention is right in tune with it. And, one may add, untold numbers of 'Yankees' now find inspiration in the Ramakrishna-Viveka-

nanda Vedanta. Like the sailing over stormy seas, this tradition perhaps has its own tempestuous waves, torrential rains but always with assured 'safe landings'.

The next book is also equally in the line of significant intertexts. It is entitled *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*.⁴ Like *Yankee India*, this is 'a lavishly illustrated' study of perennial fascination to both photo- and other image-watchers as well as political and social analysts in India. It 'examines the history of the printed image in India from the beginnings in the 1870s to the present day. Using many intriguing and unfamiliar visuals, it shows how printed images have been pivotal to the constructions of new forms of religious identity and the struggle for political independence in India' (blurb).

Christopher Pinney, the author, is Senior Lecturer in Material Culture, University College, London. The year 1870 struck me as significant and I felt that there *must* be something about Ramakrishna, the simple logic being: he was among those who were photographed during that period. But it was not just the context of photographs but the place of Ramakrishna in the theme of political struggle in India that the books tries to explore which interested me.

Pinney suggests that during that period, 'alongside the enchantment with a western rationalism was a growing disdain for the eulogization of the colonizer's culture. This *revolt* was most clearly crystallized around Ramakrishna and would find a very precise articulation in the writings of one of his followers, Swami Saradananda.' Pinney quotes a passage from *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*: 'There arose a clamour on all sides ... the spread of Western ideas and ideals, instead of curing the disease, was on the point of killing the patient.'

Apart from a challenge to rationalism, Pinney also notes that Ramakrishna brought a sense of the sacred to theatre. Elaborating this he says: 'Perhaps the most remarkable incident during Girish Chandra's tenure at the Star Theatre was the visit to a performance of *Chai-*

tanya Leela on 24 September 1884, an event which led to a *rapprochement* between the previously morally marginalized public theatre and religious respectability' (emphasis added; 39).

Moreover, '*Chaitanya Leela*, which capitalized on this renewed interest, was a hugely successful play and Ramakrishna's experience as a spectator was to play a part in the new relationship between the public theatre and religious respectability ...' In short, one historian whom Pinney quotes epitomized the whole event of Ramakrishna going to the theatre as 'a saint in the hall of Satan!' (140), or, as Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay, quoted by Pinney, says, 'one might see here the transformation of originary Western theatre as a sign of colonial purity into a hybridized *jatra* or local theatrical, devotional performance' (43).

But Pinney says that the most remarkable aspect of Ramakrishna vis-a-vis the theatre is that 'he did not simply bestow respectability on popular theatre. It is probable that a much more profound validation occurred since ...', for Ramakrishna witnessing the play entered into a state of samadhi or divine ecstasy and 'the attainment of such states of yogic oblivion had by this stage become defined as Ramakrishna's response to divinity' (40). No wonder, says the author, 'Ramakrishna's devotional ecstasy is a hugely popular subject in current Bengali chromolithograph production' (ibid.).

Similarly, Pinney sees Ramakrishna's blessing the 'many pictures of gods and goddesses' in Nanda Bose's house (the goddesses pictured there include Dhumavati, Shodashi, Bhuvaneshvari, Tara and Kali apart from lithographs of many scenes from dramas) as the Western art-production strategies 'being put to new and unexpected uses'. Indeed, though one may not see the point behind, all this could as well mean 'a part of what was inevitably the political project of being "a real Hindu"' (43).

Pinney extends his response to Ramakrishna's experience of the 'mythological-real' as 'alternative modernity as distinct from a non-modernity' which 'takes the form of popu-

lar historicity configured by a rejection of arbitrary colonial signs in favour of a dense “semioticity” (204). To put it simply, Ramakrishna’s blurring of the distinction between the real and its image is ‘a rejection of colonial rationalities’. If you are deterred by all this and you are a devotee, the book is still dazzling for its illustrations, and the one calendar picture of the Great Master reproduced (on page 41) is simply enchanting (in the background is Kali Ma).

I would like to mention one more response: Sumanta Banerjee’s mention of Ramakrishna in essays entitled *Logic in a Popular Form: Essays on Popular Religion in Bengal*.⁵ I felt that his contrastive study of Bamakshepa, the Bengali mystic of Tarapith, and Ramakrishna, though not very convincing in certain aspects, is still a pioneering study in this area. What he says about the ethos of Bengal at that time applies to both: they ‘dramatized’ in a fascinating way both the conflict and the conciliation between the values and norms of a traditional rural belief-system on the one hand, and new articles of faith encouraged by colonial, commercial needs, administrative requirements and beliefs in the invincibility of modern science and medicine on the other (147). But the most important aspects of the book of critical significance for Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta are those on Kali and the role of institutionalization in the context of making a tradition enduring (187).

Finally, in a volume entitled *Spiritual Innovators: Seventy-five Extraordinary People who Changed the World in the Past Century* one finds an entry on Vivekananda in the third section, entitled ‘Their Presence Changed the World’. The book is described by Bob Abernethy, Executive Editor, *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, PBS, as ‘a wonderful, provocative collection of short biographies of seventy-five reformers, scholars, martyrs and mystics ... who shook up religious thought and practice in the twentieth century’. It is a short write-up which consists of three pages and gives the reader a summary of Vivekananda’s life, two extracts from his lec-

tures, a short bibliography and the address of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York for further information. The writer describes Vivekananda as ‘the first teacher from the Hindu tradition to bring to a large Western audience the teachings of Vedanta, a philosophy of the divine nature of all things based on the Vedas, the Bhagavad-Gita and other Indian scriptures’, and points out that Vivekananda’s decision that ‘it was necessary to take Vedanta to the West’ was ‘revolutionary at the time’ (100).

Incidentally, the book is a publication, in 2002, of SkyLight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, who also published two other volumes of similar interest: *Selections from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* annotated and explained by Kendra Crossen Burrough (2002) and *Meditation and Its Practices* by Swami Adiswarananda (2003). Edited by Ira Rifkin and others, *Spiritual Innovators* is a sumptuous volume of 300 pages. Looking at all this, one can only repeat Vivekananda’s words (with a variation): Ramakrishna Vedanta is ‘like the gentle dew that drops unseen and unheard’ but is bringing into blossom countless seekers of varied colours in both the East and the West. ✱

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After Sri Ramakrishna's Passing Away¹

M (MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA); TRANS. SWAMI CHETANANANDA

The five volumes of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, recorded by M (Mahendra Nath Gupta) in Bengali, were not written in chronological order. At the end of the first four volumes, M added some information about the disciples of the Master and the Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore that was established after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away. A few years ago, some researchers discovered that four of M's diary entries (25 August 1886, 2 September 1886, 12 October 1886, and 17 February 1887) had been published in 1904 in the Navya Bharat (Jyaishta-Asharh 1311 BE), a monthly magazine. Perhaps M intended to add these entries at the end of the fifth volume of the Kathamrita, but unfortunately that volume was only published posthumously. I have translated this newly found material from Bengali into English. I must acknowledge that I have used some songs from Swami Nikhilananda's translation, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, which I have referred to in the endnotes. In this precious historical record we learn that the Ramakrishna Math at Baranagore was inaugurated sometime before 12 October 1886.

—Translator

Chapter 1

Wednesday, 25 August 1886

It has been ten days since Sri Ramakrishna went to his own abode, leaving his devotees behind. Imbued with renunciation, Narendra and his brother disciples have been practising sadhana.

Narendra and the Master's devotees have assembled in the parlour of Balaram Basu's house in Calcutta. They are like motherless orphans. By merely looking at them, one can feel their intense grief, the result of the Master's passing away. One thought fills their minds: The Master has gone to his own abode; what should we do now? The devotees have no place where these young disciples can stay together. They are forced to return home for food and shelter every day. The thread holding the pearls together as a necklace has broken, and the group is about to fall apart. The disciples continually think: Where shall we go? What shall we do? Sitting in seclusion, they think of the Master and cry for him.

Narendra, Rakhai, Kali, Sharat, Shashi,

Tarak, Gopal, Bhavanath, and M arrived first, and later Niranjana came.

Everyone looks to Narendra. He is planning to send some of his brother disciples to Vrindaban, so he has been collecting some money from the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna's Advice: Renounce 'Woman and Gold'

Narendra leaves for Girish's house nearby, accompanied by some of his brother disciples. He and M talk on the way.

Narendra (to M): 'Sir, please pay for a one-way fare for Baburam.'

M: 'Certainly. I will pay.'

Narendra: 'Right now, if you would, please.'

M: 'Right now?'

Baburam is one of those who has been chosen to go to Vrindaban. The group of devotees arrives at Girish's parlour. Narendra asks Girish for money.

Girish: 'I don't have much money with me

at present, but if you want I can contribute ten or eleven rupees right now. Why are they going to Vrindaban?’

Narendra (*gravely*): ‘The Master has told us to renounce “woman and gold”.’

A Devotee: ‘Are you also going away?’

Narendra: ‘Let us all move out. I have some business at home. The litigation has not yet been settled. (*After some thought*) Let the litigation take its own course. I haven’t understood the truth. Getting involved in this family affair is useless.’

Rakhal: ‘If I stay here, I shall feel pulled by my family.’

Narendra’s father has passed away, and he has two younger brothers and sisters. They have no guardian and no means with which to purchase food and clothing. Narendra has passed his BA examination, and if he so wishes, he can get a job to maintain his family. Rakhal has his father, wife and child at home.

The topic of the Kankurgachhi garden house arises and they discuss how the trustees should be appointed.

Rakhal: ‘We will be pleased if they make Narendra a trustee.’

Narendra: ‘No, no. What good is there in being a trustee?’

When everyone asks Narendra to be a trustee, he tells Girish: ‘All right. Let it be so.’

But Narendra is not appointed.

Devotees Are Grief-stricken because of the Master’s Passing Away

In Girish’s room Mani² and a devotee begin to talk.

The devotee heaves a sigh and says: ‘I shall not pray to the Master for anything.’

Mani: ‘Not for anything?’

Devotee: ‘No, I will not pray for anything—neither for devotion nor for my family.’

Having thus spoken, the devotee again sighs deeply.

Devotee: ‘The Master said: “Why so much milk? Devotees have their families; how can they afford to pay for it?” How painful! I will never forget it.’

While the Master was suffering from cancer at the Cossipore garden house, the household devotees had borne all the expenses for the Master’s service. The Master was always watchful, so that they might not spend too much money.

Devotee: ‘I wanted to engage a full-time doctor to treat the Master, but I couldn’t do it.’

The devotee remains silent for a while and then says: ‘Well, do you think that I would try to improve the condition of my family by chanting the Master’s name? What do I care whether people call me good or virtuous?’

Chapter 2

Thursday, 2 September 1886

Shashi has come to M’s house on Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane in Calcutta. He and M are seated on a wooden cot in the study. Shashi and Sharat live in their family home at Pataldanga. Today Shashi wears clean clothes and carries a new umbrella. Shashi and M begin to talk about the Master.

M: ‘The Master told me that Narendra was the main disciple among the group.’

Shashi: ‘I vividly remember that the Master said that Narendra would be our leader.’

M: ‘Do you remember what the Master said about further study?’

Shashi (*with a smile*): ‘Yes, I distinctly remember that the Master told Narendra one day, “Don’t allow them [the young disciples] to study in school any more.”’

M: ‘What about Kali?’

Shashi: ‘Yes, the Master scolded Kali and said to him, “You have introduced studies here.” I had begun to study the Persian language, and as a result I got a scolding from him.’

Then Sharat and Narendra arrived, and

they all began discussing when Sri Ramakrishna's message would be preached. Who would preach it first?

M: 'Who has understood the Master? Do you remember what the Master said about Vaishnavcharan's writing?'

Sharat: 'Yes, I remember. The Master said: "Vaishnavcharan understood every one of my

spiritual experiences." I thought that he would be the first to make them public.'

Narendra: 'The Master told me, "The knowledge of Brahman is the goal. Vaishnavcharan was supposed to spread the message first." But it didn't work out. Keshab Sen was first to make the message public.'

Chapter 3

Sri Ramakrishna's First Monastery at Baranagore

12 October 1886

Nearly two months had passed since the Master left this world, after binding his devotees with a cord of love. Where would they go now? They could no longer enjoy staying at their homes. They wanted to be together always and to spend their days and nights thinking of him and talking about him. Two or three of the disciples had no home. At this juncture Surendra came forward and told them: 'Brothers, you have no place to live, and we have no place to give rest to our hearts. Let us rent a house in Baranagore, where you will live, and we shall visit from time to time.'

Surendra used to pay fifty rupees every month for the Master's service at the Cossipore garden house. He now said: 'Brothers, I used to contribute a little money for the Master's service. I shall provide that amount to pay the expenses of this house in Baranagore.'

Gradually, Narendra and the Master's other unmarried disciples moved to the Baranagore monastery and they did not return to their homes. The number of monastic brothers increased over time, and eventually Surendra was donating one hundred rupees per month.

Blessed Surendra! It is you who have laid the foundation of this first monastery. This ashrama owes its existence to your good wishes! Through you the Master has made it possible for his disciples to live in the world as the embodiment of his central teaching—the renunci-

ation of 'woman and gold'. Through Narendra and other young renunciants he has demonstrated the Eternal Hindu Dharma among people. Who can forget the debt owed to you? The brothers lived at the monastery like orphan boys. Sometimes they would not have the money to pay their rent; sometimes they would have no food. They would wait for you to come and settle all these difficulties. Who would not shed tears on remembering your selfless work!

Narendra and Jnana Yoga

Baranagore Math. On this moonlit night Narendra and Mani are walking on the eastern veranda of the Master's shrine. It is the night of the full moon, when the goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. Narendra and Mani converse about the Master and also about jnana yoga and bhakti yoga.

Mani: 'The Master described two paths—knowledge and devotion—and said that both lead to the same goal. The followers of jnana and the followers of bhakti reach the same place.'

Narendra: 'But the Master told me: "The Knowledge of Brahman is the goal. Devotion is meant to maintain the external aspect of life. The elephant has outer tusks and inner grinders as well. The tusks are mere ornaments; but the elephant chews its food with the grinders."'

Mani: 'The Master also said that one can attain the Knowledge of Brahman through the path of devotion. The Knowledge of Brahman can be attained from the path of knowledge as

well as from the path of devotion. Perhaps you remember that the Master also said: "After attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, some embrace devotion and live in this world. One can then ascend from the *lila* (relative plane) to the *nitya* (Absolute plane) and descend from the *nitya* to the *lila*."

Narendra: 'Were you present that day when the Master talked about the Knowledge of Brahman at the Cossipore garden house?'

Mani: 'I was not present at that time; but I heard that he talked about it for a long time. Do you remember what he said about Shukadeva?'

Narendra: 'No, I don't remember.'

Mani: 'I have heard that the Master said on that day: "Shukadeva and sages like him may have been big ants; but even they could carry at the utmost a few grains of sugar. Shiva touched the water of the Ocean of Brahman-Consciousness, or at the most drank a handful of that water." Did you hear such things?'

Narendra: 'Yes, the Master said many such things on that day.'

Narendra's Vision and Abnegation of Ego

Mani and Narendra begin a discussion about the brothers of the monastery.

Mani: 'Now everything depends on you. You will have to look after them.'

Narendra: 'The ego is very troublesome. The other day I scornfully scolded H a little. Immediately I had a vision of the Master. Do you know what he told me? He said: "What are you thinking? Know for certain that I can make any one amongst you who is the smallest, the greatest, and again I can make any one amongst you who is the greatest, the smallest."³ I have been extremely careful since I had that vision. "The least shall be greatest and the greatest, least."

Mani: 'You are right. One attains God by His grace only. He can make a person great, and also small. Can anyone attain Him by one's own efforts? One needs His grace.'

Narendra's Longing for God-vision

Narendra enters the room. It seems that

his hope for God-realization has weakened a little. He begins to sing:

Can everyone have the vision of Shyama?

Is Kali's treasure for everyone?

Oh, what a pity my foolish mind
will not see what is true!

Even with all His penances,
rarely does Shiva Himself behold

The mind-bewitching sight
of Mother Shyama's crimson feet.

To him who meditates on Her
the riches of heaven are poor indeed;

If Shyama casts Her glance on him,
he swims in Eternal Bliss.

The Prince of yogis, the King of the gods,
meditate on Her feet in vain;

Yet worthless Kamalakanta yearns
for the Mother's blessed feet!⁴

Narendra goes to another room in the monastery. What is he thinking? Has Sri Ramakrishna's loving form suddenly come alive in his heart? He again begins to sing:

Dear friend, my religion and piety
have come to an end:

No more can I worship Mother Shyama;
my mind defies control.

Oh, shame upon me! Bitter shame!
I try to meditate on the Mother

with sword in hand,
Wearing Her garland of human heads;
But it is always the Dark One,⁵

wearing His garland of wild wood-flowers
And holding the flute to His tempting lips,
That shines before my eyes.

I think of the Mother with Her three eyes,
but alas! I see

Him alone with the arching eyes,
and I forget all else!

Oh, shame upon me! Bitter shame!
I try to offer fragrant flowers

at the Mother's feet,
But the ravishing thought of His graceful form
unsettles my helpless mind,

And all my meditations meant for
the Naked One⁶ are drawn away

By the sight of His yellow scarf.⁷

After singing this song, Narendra remains silent for a while and then suddenly announces, 'Let us go to the cremation ground.' He then re-

marks: 'My goodness! It seems to be a parlour and not a cremation ground.' (*All laugh.*)

Paramanik Ghat is just near the monastery, and the cremation ground is near that ghat. The cremation ground is surrounded by walls, and there is one brick building with three rooms at the east end. Sometimes at night Narendra and others go there alone to practise sadhana.

* * *

The Holy Mother now lives in Vrindaban. Narendra and M are talking about her. One day

at the Cossipore garden house, the young devotees told Sri Ramakrishna about the Holy Mother's affection for them. At that time she was living at the garden house to serve the Master. The disciples told the Master that they had never met another woman as large-hearted as she was.

M: 'What did the Master say?'

Narendra: 'The Master began to laugh and then said: "She is my Shakti [Power]. So she loves all."'

Chapter 4

Friday, 17 February 1887

It is 12:30 p.m. at the Baranagore monastery. Narendra and the other monastic brothers are living at the monastery. Haramohan and M have arrived. Shashi is busy with the Master's worship service. Narendra is about to go to the Ganges for his bath.

Narendra: 'Krishna mainly discussed japa and austerity in the Gita.'

M: 'How is that? Then why did he give so much advice to Arjuna?'

Narendra: 'Krishna did not ask Arjuna to perform family duties.'

M: 'When Krishna asked Arjuna to fight, Arjuna was a householder. He, therefore, was advising Arjuna to perform his family duties in a detached way.'

(Narendra later changed his opinion about this. While in America he lectured on karma yoga, and there he advised his students to perform action without attachment. When Narendra first took the vows of sannyasa, he was extremely disgusted with the duties of the world, so he said that japa and austerity were the main focus of the Gita.)

A householder devotee is talking with a monastic brother; his intention is to stay at the monastery. The devotee is impressed with the spiritual atmosphere of the monastery, and family life has become distasteful to him. They

are talking on the southern veranda of the kitchen, where Niranjan is working.

The Devotee: 'If I stay in the monastery, will I be blamed for neglecting my family?'

The Monk: 'No one will blame you for living here, but you have a responsibility to look after your family.'

Niranjan (*from the kitchen*): 'Hello brother, what are you doing? What kind of advice are you giving to him?' (*All laugh.*)

Narendra and Kali have returned from their bath in the Ganges. Kali is always engaged in studying Vedanta. He does not care for the attitude: 'You are my Lord and I am Your devotee.' He reflects continually: 'I am that Brahman. I have no name and form.' So after returning from his bath, he goes to his room and starts repeating: 'I am beyond name and form. I am that Absolute Being. I salute You, I salute You, I salute You and Myself.'

The devotees sit down to have lunch. There is only one cook at the monastery. After lunch everyone clears away their own leaf-plates; but Narendra removes M's leaf-plate. When M objects, Narendra replies, 'Here all are equal.'

After lunch everyone assembles in the parlour. Some are chewing betel-rolls; some are smoking hubble-bubbles.

Rakhhal (*to M*): 'I want to visit you some

day. I am eager to hear what you are writing about the Master.'

M: 'I have decided that until my life is transformed I will not share those teachings with anybody. Each of the Master's words is like a mantra. Is it not good to translate those teachings into one's life?'

Rakhal: 'Yes, indeed. Well, how do you like your family life?'

Shashi: 'Look, brothers, Rakhal is lecturing.'

Rakhal (*smiling, to M*): 'Previously I was not inclined to come here. Now I see that the company of the brothers is beneficial.'

Narendra: 'Where is the real substance in human beings? I care for no one, except one. [Perhaps he meant Sri Ramakrishna.] Who has his own power? Every one is subject to circumstance—a slave to maya. Every one is a slave like me—a sport of circumstances.'

Rakhal smiles and whispers to Haramohan. Prompted by Rakhal, Haramohan asks: 'What about Brother X?'

Narendra: 'Brother X is a wretched fellow. If he wants to be a monk, why is he saving money? A sadhu should be penniless.'

A Monk: 'Everyone is wretched and you consider yourself great.'

Narendra: 'I am also wretched because I am a slave of circumstances. Do I have any power?'

M (*to himself*): 'Is it circumstance or God? The Master used to say, "Everything happens by the will of Rama."'

Narendra: 'How can a man who has money be a monk? Moreover, he gives lectures to people. Is he not ashamed to preach?'

Narendra and Buddha

Haramohan: 'Well, if a man experiences ecstasy or samadhi, he must be great.'

Narendra: 'Go and study Buddha. According to Shankara the ultimate spiritual experience is nirvikalpa samadhi, which is the first stage that Buddha attained.'

A Devotee: 'If nirvikalpa samadhi is the

first stage, then there must be higher stages than that. Why don't you describe a few to us? Buddha must have said something about it.'

Narendra: 'I don't know.'

A Devotee: 'If nirvikalpa samadhi is the first stage of Buddha's experience, then why did he later preach this doctrine: "Non-violence is the supreme dharma?"'

Narendra: 'It is hard to understand this view, but the Vaishnavas learned their non-violence from Buddha.'

A Devotee: 'Is it necessary for one to learn non-violence from Buddha? It often happens that one gives up eating fish without having any instruction from anybody. It may not be true that the Vaishnavas learned non-violence from Buddha.'

Narendra: 'If someone renounces the killing of animals without being asked to, then it is to be understood as hereditary transmission.'

A Devotee: 'Then what about the people in Europe who have given up killing animals? They were beef-eaters. They have not learned from Buddha.'

Narendra: 'However, Buddha discovered this path.'

M (*to himself*): 'Wonderful! Each disciple of the Master is a hero. Everyone is an independent thinker, not just Narendra. And why not? They are disciples of the Master and he trained them himself.'

* * *

Narendra is reading the Gita and explaining it to the brother disciples. He has been elucidating the following verses from the Gita (5.7-9): 'He who is devoted to yoga and is pure in mind, who has conquered his body and subdued his senses, who has realized his Self as the Self of all beings—he is undefiled though he acts. "I do nothing at all", thinks the yogi, the knower of Truth; for in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting; in walking, breathing, and sleeping; in speaking, emitting, and seizing; in opening and closing the eyes, he is assured that it is only the senses busied with their objects.'

After reading the Gita for a while, Narendra says: 'I am leaving; now you have the joyful company of M.' But Narendra cannot go.

Baburam: 'I don't understand the Gita and other scriptures. The Master said the right thing, "Renounce, renounce."'

Shashi: 'Do you know what the real import of the word 'renounce' is? It means to remain in this world as an instrument in the hands of God.'

Prasanna begins to study the Gita in Kali's solitary room; Sharat is also there reading Lewis' *History of Philosophy*. Another monk is meditating in the Master's shrine.

Narendra and the Vision of God

The discussion turns to the vision of God.

Narendra: 'The vision of God is a kind of false perception.'

Rakhal: 'What do you mean? You have experienced it.'

Narendra (*with a smile*): 'One gets such a vision because of a derangement of the brain, like a hallucination.'

Mani: 'Brother, whatever you may say, the Master had visions of divine forms; so how can you say that it is a derangement of the brain? Do you remember when Shivanath remarked that the Master's samadhi was a kind of nervous disorder or mental illness, the Master replied, "Does anyone become unconscious thinking of Consciousness?"'

Narendra and the other brothers have assembled in the parlour. Some are chewing betel-rolls, some are smoking hubble-bubbles. It is spring, and the nature as if is pulsating with joy. The monastic brothers are also joyful. They practise celibacy and renunciation and think of God day and night. Always before them is their great ideal, their guru, Sri Ramakrishna. Sometimes out of exuberant joy, they shout the great saying of the Sikhs: '*Wah guruji ki fateh!*—Victory to the guru! Narendra taught them this mantra, prefacing it with 'Om'.

M asks Sharat to join him in repeating

'Victory to the guru!' one hundred times, which makes him happy.

Narendra: 'It does not work to just give an order. One should first start repeating the mantra, then others will join in.'

Balaram has sent some sweets and other things from his Calcutta residence. The *kachuris* (fried bread with a spicy filling) are delicious. All of the brothers enjoy the refreshment. One brother tries to eat more than his share.

Narendra (*to the brother*): 'You greedy rascal! It is not good to eat too much.'

Vesper Service in the Monastery

It is evening. Shashi burns incense in the shrine and bows down to the Master, glorifying his sweet name. Then he visits the pictures of gods and goddesses in each of the rooms, addressing them one after another and waving incense in front of each of them. He chants in his melodious voice: 'Salutations to the guru'; 'Salutations to Mother Kali'; 'Salutations to Chaitanya taking the form of Rama and Krishna'; 'Salutations to Radha and Krishna'; 'Salutations to the beloved of Radha'; 'Salutations to Advaita Acharya and other devotees'; 'Salutations to Gopala and Mother Yashoda'; 'Salutations to Rama and Lakshmana'; 'Salutations to Vishwamitra'.

The senior Gopal performs vespers by waving the light and the devotees watch him. Narendra and M are in the main hall. M had asked Narendra to join the vesper service, but due to some work he could not do so.

After the vespers, the devotees sing a hymn to Shiva in chorus: 'Jaya Shiva Omkara, Bhaja Shiva Omkara; Brahma Vishnu Sadashiva, Hara Hara Hara Mahadeva.'

As night falls, everyone sits for a light supper, which Baburam serves. Each person is served a few chapatis, some vegetable curry, and a little bit of molasses. M is eating with them, sitting next to Narendra. When Narendra sees a couple of burnt chapatis on M's plate, he immediately replaces them with good ones. Narendra keeps a vigilant eye on everything.

After supper everyone sits together in the parlour. A monastic brother tells M: 'Nowadays we hardly get to hear any songs on the Divine Mother. Why don't you sing that favourite song of the Master's?'

M sings:

O Mother Shyama, full of the waves
of drunkenness divine!

Who knows how Thou dost sport
in the world?

Thy fun and frolic and Thy glances
put to shame the god of love.

O Wielder of the sword!

O Thou of terrifying face!

The earth itself is shaken
under Thy leaps and strides!

O Thou Abode of the three gunas!

O Redeemer! Fearsome One!

Thou who art the Consort of Shiva!

Many the forms Thou dost assume,
fulfilling Thy bhaktas' prayers.

Thou dancest in the Lotus of the Heart,

O Mother, Eternal Consort
of Brahman! (808).

While talking with M, Rakhhal says: 'I want

to visit Varanasi. I feel I should go there alone.'

Rakhhal has his father, wife, and son at home, but he has renounced everyone and everything for God-realization. He is endowed with intense renunciation. His mind is longing for God all the time, so he wants to wander alone. *

Notes and References

1. Translated from *Udbodhan*, vol. 102, no. 10 and vol. 103, nos. 2 and 3.
2. 'M' and 'Mani' are pseudonyms for Mahendra Nath Gupta, the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.
3. Compare: 'I teach the Knowledge of Brahman to the gods and human beings. I am endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman. I make a person great if I want to. I can make a person Brahma, a rishi, or a knower of Brahman.' —'Devi Sukta', 5.
4. *Gospel*, 679.
5. Krishna.
6. Shyama.
7. *Gospel*, 873.

Great Heart

(to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa)

A white flame burning in a swampy place,
Mere squelchy wilderness of weed and briar,
Tussocks and rotten turf-stuff, and the mire
That sucks and slavers round each planted pace,
The wide, unwinking sky's blind-seeing face,
Moonless, unstarred, where now and then mock fire,
Dancing, deludes wan hearts and feet that tire,
Yet deeper, deathward, lures into the maze,—
God made of thee a beacon. We to thee
Tend not, but, circling, keep upon our road.
Thou givest us the light, wherewith to see
Our stumbling-stones, and our too-heavy load,
Thou eapest. Yea, thou, standing steadfastly,
Smilest on us the sure, sweet Smile of God.

—J C Johnston

Understanding Vivekananda

SWAMI SANDARSHANANANDA

Introduction

There is perhaps no yardstick by which we can measure the greatness of a World Teacher whose teachings take millennia to flower. By this token, it is for sure that we have not yet been able to understand Buddha, Jesus or Muhammad fully, though considerable time has elapsed since they were born. Vivekananda, though modern, belongs to the same category, for his precepts have also been valued as containing the essence of time-honoured wisdom. We can therefore hardly predict how long it will take us to translate all his ideas into action. As he himself said, another Vivekananda alone could understand what this Vivekananda has done.

Interestingly, although he believed that his own life 'is guided by the enthusiasm of that great personality [Sri Ramakrishna]',¹ he also held the opinion that 'inspiration is not filtered out to the world through one man' (ibid.). Obviously, for Vivekananda Truth is inexhaustible and is not expressible in its entirety in any one single life, however great that life might be. Sri Ramakrishna's statement about Shukadeva corroborates Swamiji's assumption: 'Śukadeva and sages like him may have been big ants; but even they could carry at the utmost eight or ten grains of sugar!' Shukadeva's knowledge of God did not exhaust the latter, even though Shukadeva was a seer par excellence. Sri Krishna says: 'Neither the hosts of gods nor the great sages know My origin (or majesty); for, in all respects, I am the source of the gods and sages.'² That the mystery of God is never exhaustively known was clear to Vivekananda. He earned this conviction from his preceptor.

The Master-Disciple Relationship: Sri Ramakrishna, the preceptor, falls in the line of the great preceptors of yore, and Vivekananda

embodied the scriptural statements on discipleship. It is therefore small wonder that Vivekananda had a steady devotion to God and guru. His devotion to God is seen in his sustained urge to know Him, and his love for his guru is observed in his ability to discern Sri Ramakrishna's unwavering affection for him despite his utter indifference in the beginning. This master-disciple relationship was established through an unobtrusive spiritual process, demonstrating the truth that a competent guru is eternally linked with the competent disciple.

When a disciple is ready, he is drawn by his guru on mere approach. But this readiness is ascertained in terms of purity of heart, ability to plumb the depths of truths enshrined in the scriptures, and by the earnestness to realize God. The true guru, necessarily a realized soul, takes no time to recognize such a disciple. All these conditions are fulfilled by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The former realized God through rigorous sadhana and was eagerly expecting the arrival of the latter. Similarly, the latter was frantically in search of a guru who could show him God, for intellectually he was at a loss for such vision. When he reached Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna instantaneously knew that this was the person for whom he had been so restless. Vivekananda's appearance was marked by a detachment from the external world with most of his consciousness being pulled inward, his mind astir with questions regarding the existence of God. The spiritual evolution within that Vivekananda had been undergoing for long thus attained its culmination. He needed a perfect guru who would remove the last barrier to God-vision. Hence Sri Ramakrishna deliberately gave him a spiritual touch with a view to undoing this barrier; and immediately there dawned in him, with over-

whelming impact, the Advaitic vision. Sri Ramakrishna endowed him with the highest realization, but held the reins of his disciple's life in his own hands, for he was to use Vivekananda for his work. That he did remaining behind the scenes, while in his mortal frame as well as after his passing away.

Pragmatist Per Se

Vivekananda reflects a harmonious blend of spirituality and practicality in his character which distinguishes his persona from a host of contemporary thinkers. His originality lies in his ability to weave the social, the secular and the sacred into one parlance and comprehensibly accommodate them in a scientific synthesis. As a result, he seems interesting where others appear dull and disappointing. This is reflected in Merwin-Marie Snell's, account of the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago: 'And by far the most important and typical representative of Hinduism was Swami Vivekananda, who, in fact, was beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament. He frequently spoke, both on the floor of the Parliament itself and at the meeting of the Scientific Section, over which I had the honour to preside, and, on all occasions he was received with greater enthusiasm than any other speaker, Christian or "Pagan".³ He presented his thoughts in crystal-clear terms before audiences everywhere and caught their imagination by leading them to rethink their personal reckonings.

By his own admission, this quality he had acquired from his guru, who knew how to make his views intellectually attractive and conducive to the young and critical minds of his time. For instance, the texts of Sri Ramakrishna's interactions with Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, two intellectual stalwarts of renaissance Bengal, are as enthralling as they are substantial. The deftness with which he weaves wit and irony into these conversations makes for their impact. On such occasions he exhibited an extraordinary ability

to lift the topic of discussion from the mundane to the sublime, never in the process losing sight of the point he wanted to drive home.

Vivekananda's keenness to get to the truth in all matters marked him out from the rest even at an early age. Thus, his childhood inquisitiveness to see if smoking the hubble-bubble used by Muslim visitors in his father's parlour really violated his caste is suggestive of a seer in the making, providing a glimpse of his constant quest after truth. Likewise, as an itinerant monk, his dialogue with the Raja of Alwar regarding the concept of image worship is reminiscent of the style that Ramakrishna adopted in his conversations with Vidyasagar and Bankim. The resemblance points to a master-disciple legacy, laying the foundation of a unique culture, which was to give rise to a movement that would influence the world at large. Their down-to-earth approach has carved for them a special niche among contemporary pragmatists. Their contributions have therefore retained their relevance.

Disciple Par Excellence

That Vivekananda was no different from his master by virtue of a common earnestness in pursuit of truth becomes apparent when he narrates Sri Ramakrishna's attitude while practising the disciplines of other religions: 'He would eat and dress like the people he wanted to understand, take their initiation, and use their language. "One must learn", he said, "to put oneself into another man's very soul." And this method was his own! No one ever before in India became Christian and Mohammedan and Vaishnava, by turn!⁴ Actually, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. It is impossible to comprehend the one while ignoring the other. The impact that the latter generated while addressing the enlightened societies of the world was comparable to the aura that the former evinced while speaking to the able representatives of the intelligentsia in private. Listeners always appeared captivated—while one held them spellbound

with his keen reasoning and persuasive presentations, the other did so by the charm of his informality and a sunny sense of humour. But both kept their intuitive awareness alive in their pursuits.

The 'wonderful unconscious method' that Sri Ramakrishna was needed to be interpreted with due expertise, and this Swami Vivekananda did with all dexterity. There were three strong influences working over him: his formal education and Brahmo thought, his guru and the sacred literature of the world, and 'his knowledge of India and Indian peoples, as an immense religious organism, of which his Master himself, with all his greatness, had been only, as it were, the personification and utterance'.

How Sri Ramakrishna Taught: These are the factors that shaped his personality, but his guru's influence outweighed the others. He was convinced that Sri Ramakrishna had firmly taken hold of him, driving out everything that was left in him as a consequence of other influences. But this is not to say that his struggle was insignificant. To be shorn of skepticism, he had to deal out blows against his own avowed ideas. He abhorred idol worship and this idea was all the more reinforced by the iconoclastic Brahmo teachings. Describing the state of his mind at this time he would say later: 'How I used to hate Kali! And all Her ways! That was the ground of my six years' fight—that I would not accept Her. But I had to accept Her at last! Ramakrishna Paramahansa dedicated me to Her, and now I believe that She guides me in everything I do, and does with me what She will' (8.263). Consequently, he could appreciate the greatness of his guru and feel that Sri Ramakrishna 'never recognized any sin' in man. He was 'the quiet prophet' who 'had worked out a revolution'. He lived and loved and withdrew himself. He never said 'me' and 'mine'.

Sri Ramakrishna entered him, as it were, in order to fulfil the purpose of his advent. Hence there is an astounding similarity, even in their languages, while giving out an important

message, namely, that of the harmony of religions, under two different circumstances with almost two decades setting them apart.

Once in 1882, in an ecstatic mood at Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna said: 'Mother, everyone says, "My watch alone is right." The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Mussalmāns, all say, "My religion alone is true." But, Mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path.' This soliloquy of his is what Swamiji's proclamation echoed later on. Ramakrishna continued, 'Mother, show me some time how the Christians pray to Thee in their Churches.'⁵

Sri Ramakrishna laid stress on the idea that rites, rituals, dogmas and scriptures are matters of detail. They are aids, assisting men and women to proceed along different paths, chosen according to their aptitudes, towards a common Goal. In view of this, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism are equally valid, but to a limited extent, since they lose their identities as well as importance once their aspirants reach the point of absolute convergence and absorption, namely God, eternally poised as the ultimate End of all sacred endeavours.

Vivekananda's mind was perfectly tuned to Ramakrishna's thought current. Catching the essence of Sri Ramakrishna's dispensation, he was waiting for the right moment to come. When the opportunity arrived he explained its broad implications to the public. He laid the foundation of a Universal Religion on this very basis, drawing abundant comparisons with the concepts harboured by various religions. He showed that the extant religions had historically proved their indispensability in human life. By their prolonged existence in the march of civilizations, despite innumerable odds, they had demonstrated their worth. Swamiji contemplated the underlying principles of all religions and gave a scheme which might be universally practicable and which 'does not destroy the individuality of any man in religion and at the

same time shows him a point of union with others'. He has gone to great lengths to remove doubts from our minds while inspiring us to practise this universality. He could himself do it with perfect ease as he was trained by his master, having undergone a thorough reformation of his preconceived notions in the process.

Sri Ramakrishna applied the direct method while teaching his disciple, killing his skepticism and thereby shaping him into a fit instrument for the successful execution of his plans. Vivekananda declared: 'Mine is the devotion of the dog! I don't want to know why! I am contented simply to follow!'⁶ No wonder, therefore, later on, bereft of any inhibitions, he would say like his Master, 'I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix' (2.374). He was faithful to his guru to the core. He knew that his subconscious mind was open to the superconscious perceptions of Sri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna gathered information from the deepest recesses of Vivekananda's inner being and thus determined his future in an inscrutable mystical way.

Two Forms, One Spirit. Since Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are one in spirit, their thoughts are inextricably intertwined. The latter's feelings to this effect would sometimes get exposed. When someone asked him, 'Did Buddha teach that the many was real and the ego unreal, while orthodox Hinduism regards the One as the real, and the many as unreal?' he replied, 'Yes, and what Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have added to this is, that the Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes' (8.261). The statement under-

lines the fact that he could hardly imagine having any idea which he could claim exclusively for himself. He was always confirmed in the belief that it was his master who was relentlessly working through him. It was therefore not unnatural that when occasions arose he referred to the name of his master in the same breath as his own. In a deep sense of humility and indebtedness he says: 'If there has been anything achieved by me, by thought, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his' (3.312).

Sri Ramakrishna eliminated the ego identified with the body-mind complex and installed Mother Kali in its place. He considered himself Her instrument. 'Yes,' said Swami Vivekananda, 'I think there's no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends.'⁷

(To be concluded)

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 9.391.
2. Bhagavadgita, 10.2.
3. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 1.428-9.
4. *CW*, 9.332.
5. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 93.
6. *CW*, 9.426.
7. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1972), 165.

The message of Vivekananda, though delivered in the term of the popular Vedantic speculation, was really the message of his Master to the modern man. ... The man of religion in India had been a mediaeval man. His religion was generally a religion of the other world. ... But this was not the real message of Paramahansa Ramakrishna. He was as much a Vedantin as a Vaishnava. His ideal of piety was a synthesis between these two rival schools of Hindu religion. ... With the Paramahansa ... the real form of the Ultimate Reality is the Human Form—not the sensuous form ..., but the spiritual form which stands behind it, invisible to mortal eye. Man and God are generically one. —Bepin Chandra Pal

Swami Vivekananda's Ideas on Practical Vedanta

DR C VENKATA MADHAVA REDDY

We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose that path that suits him best.

—Swami Vivekananda¹

According to some people Vedanta is merely theoretical and speculative and cannot be carried into practice. But such a view is not true to facts. Vedanta is the most practical of all philosophies that exist in the world. It has been stated by Max Muller that 'Vedanta is the most sublime of all philosophies and the most comforting of all religions'.²

The Vedantic Ideal

In India philosophy has always been the theoretical side of religion and religion has always been considered the practical side of philosophy. According to Vedanta, the ideal of religion must cover the whole field of life—it must enter into all our thoughts and find expression in all our actions.

Generally, people are keen to know what is practical. Swami Vivekananda observes: 'If any man comes to preach to me a certain ideal, the first step towards which is to give up selfishness, to give up self-enjoyment, I think that is impractical. But when a man brings an ideal which can be reconciled with my selfishness, I am glad at once and jump at it. That is the ideal for me.'³

Vedanta is a high ideal, but Vivekananda wanted it to be intensely practical at the same time. We must make Vedantic principles part and parcel of our lives. However, they have to be put into practice without compromise or dilution. For this, the fictitious differentiation between religious life and secular life must go.

Vedanta teaches absolute oneness—one life throughout. That is why an ideal religion should not leave any aspect of life uncovered. We must reflect the religious ideal at every step in our lives.

The Divinity of Man

In Vivekananda's view the essence of Vedanta is embodied in its assertion of the divinity of man—'That thou art.' The spirit of man has always been pure and perfect. So Vedanta teaches us to have faith in ourselves first. Says Vivekananda: 'He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself' (2.301). Unbelief in the glory of the human soul is what Vedanta calls atheism.

We say the Vedantic ideal is to be made practical, but forget that it has always been so, because the Spirit is our own nature. Everything else that we perceive due to ignorance is false and untrue, and therefore weakening. And whenever we think ourselves weak and impure we throw a bad thought into the world. This we must always bear in mind that in Vedanta there is no place for such false assumptions—Vedanta gives no room for self-hypnotism. The fact is that the Spirit alone exists, and we only need to manifest it more and more. This can be done by purifying ourselves. When the veil of ignorance drops, the Spirit, shining in its native purity, manifests itself.

However, these positive teachings of Vedanta regarding our inherent power and purity should not engender in us a lack of sympathy for others—that would be weakness! We are all advancing towards the same goal, and the differences between us—of weakness or strength,

vice or virtue—are only one of degree. Vivekananda makes that clear, especially when he says that oneness is the secret of everything. He emphasizes the positive side of things and discourages the habit of dwelling on the negative side. In fact, both Vedanta and Vivekananda assert that if there is anything called sin it is only ignorance. But it is more important to know the greater truth that the human soul is divine and that nothing can affect this essential nature of the soul.

Selfless Work

The basic tenor of Vivekananda's teachings is the divinity of the human soul and the unity of all existence. But how did he make those Vedantic doctrines practical? By harmonizing the path of knowledge and the path of selfless service. By synthesizing the complementary paths of service and spirituality he has offered the idea of *lokasangraha*, welfare of the world, as an excellent form of worship of the Supreme.

The Bhagavadgita points out that nobody can live without work. None can enjoy anything unless they earn it with their own effort. All human achievements, big or small, are but fruits of their labour. No religion or philosophy has ever advised giving up action. 'If you want any good to come,' said Swami Vivekananda, 'worship the Living God, the Man-God—every being that wears a human form—God in His universal as well as individual aspect. The universal aspect of God means this world, and worshipping it means serving it—this indeed is work' (6.264).

Action has to be understood in the above spirit. What is ordinarily understood as work is prompted by selfish desires and cannot be regarded as worship. Only such actions as are good, selfless and conducive to spiritual perfection deserve to be called work, not others. Indeed, action in itself is neither good nor bad; it has no inherent moral qualities. It is good or bad, selfless or selfish according to the purity or impurity of the doer's motive. When the doer

desires his own enjoyment, his actions become selfish and they imprison him in the dark chamber of his ego. Such a person works all the time to satisfy his never-ending desires and his short-sightedness prevents him from having a glimpse of his spiritual self; he never realizes that he is greater than his desires. This is the reason why religion regards selfish action as an obstacle to universal welfare.

Selfless work, *nishkama karma*, on the other hand, is free action; it is never fettered by the desire for personal or material gain. It springs from the fullness of the heart and is an expression of bliss, *ananda*. Selfless service is nothing but spiritualized action. Only a person who has cultivated a deep devotion to Life Eternal can perform it. Such a person constantly endeavours to outgrow his narrow ego and dwell in the blissful Spirit. Really speaking, true human life is life in the Spirit; it is indeed a sin to remain confined within the shell of one's ego.

In order to attain one's full stature as a human being one has to accept the idea of self-sacrifice as the principle of life. Egocentric impulses have to be supplanted by sincere attempts at doing good to the world. After all, there is only one Reality; all life is one. Individual souls are only different manifestations of one and the same Reality and there is actually no essential difference between individuals. That being so, a person who would call himself a Vedantin should have 'Life for Others' as his motto.

Work performed with an attitude of humility, devotion and love solely for the good of others is nothing but a form of spiritual practice, *sadhana*. It too will take the aspirant to his cherished goal as surely as any other spiritual discipline. So convinced was Swami Vivekananda about this that he went to the extent of declaring that 'The Karma-Yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realising selfless-

ness; and he has to work it out himself' (1.111). All he needs to do is 'Build up your character, and manifest your real name, the Effulgent, the Resplendent, the Ever-Pure, and call it up in everyone that you see' (2.357).

Religion and Life

It is wrong to suppose that spirituality results in laziness and escapism, or that it is only fit for a race of half-starved, half-naked monks who are interested more in the other world than in this. Who ever was more concerned about the poor and ignorant masses than that paragon of Vedantins, Swami Vivekananda? To him individual spiritual progress divorced from social uplift was a contradiction; *aransa moksha* and *jagatbitta* have to go hand in hand. 'It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics', he cried (1.20). The idea that religion and spirituality are opposed to life and activity does not hold water. On the contrary, it is religion that makes us aware of our divine heritage.

As said earlier, the spiritual ideal must encompass all aspects of life, personal and social, making people strong and courageous to face the world. Their souls thus purified by spirituality, such people should return to active life with the mission of doing good to the world. Karma yogis like these see themselves in others and others in themselves. They do not neglect life, but harmonize it with the Eternal. All their dealings are grounded in the universal moral principles of truth, equality, love, forgiveness, self-control and self-sacrifice. These values must also constitute the foundation stone of our social life, for they are intimately connected with the perfection of human character. *

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A Conundrum: The Idea of Light

Someone left a light on upstairs.
 Someone went up to turn it off and never came back, but the light was brighter.
 Someone followed him with his sorrow, and came back empty-handed.
 Someone wanted to lose her sorrow, too, but didn't trust it enough to let it out of her sight.
 Someone kept searching the dark for the light.
 Someone tried to shoot out the light, but the ammunition was light, too.
 Someone thought she would recognize someone else when the light was right, but it already was.
 Someone was selling the idea of light, but the light wasn't included.
 Some people went to change the light, but trying to get to it changed them.
 Someone claimed to be the light, but the light only winked when he died.

—Hiranyagarbha

• • Your Views, Please! • •

'Someone tried to shoot out the light, but the ammunition was light, too.' Well, what exactly does the line mean? It will mean different things to different minds, of course; in fact the whole poem seems to lend itself to a number of interpretations. We would like to know your interpretation of the words *shoot*, *light* and *ammunition* in the above line. Your readings of the entire poem are also welcome. We would like to have your explanations by mid-March.

Swami Vivekananda—the Epitome of Strength

M M BARIK

Swami Vivekananda, a paragon of human excellence, is the epitome of strength. This element has lent his personality an aura of divine radiance and won him worldwide charisma and appreciation. Just as each and every crawling oyster on the ocean floor does not beget a pearl and each and every piece of wood is not sandalwood, similarly each and every man is not a great man like Swami Vivekananda. His garland of thoughts, ideas and ideals, garnered from the depths of the Vedas and Upanishads and enshrined in his writings and sayings, sparkle like pearls of wisdom and distil the rare perfume of purity and strength.

Swami Vivekananda, the Vedantist

Swami Vivekananda, a staunch advocate of Vedanta, is undoubtedly a symbol of leonine strength. For him Vedanta is a veritable mine of inexhaustible strength. Vedanta gives us an inkling of our inner core by proclaiming that we are not merely the body and mind but the effulgent Spirit—infinite and eternal, stainless and sinless, and a fountain of perennial bliss, knowledge and power. Swamiji ignited the divine spark within himself and drank the nectarean sweetness of the ocean of divinity. He harnessed it for the betterment of society and the uplift of humankind, and reaped rich dividends in the form of glory, goodness, greatness, power and excellence. So he wants everyone to rouse their sleeping soul and become conscious of the divine flame within. If we do that, the concomitant result will be that the rumblings of war will no longer be heard. The canker of jealousy, envy, hatred and suspicion will no longer corrode the corridors of our mind. A gentle breeze of mercy, kindness, love, fellow feeling, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation will blow in all directions, and an aroma of sweet in-

terpersonal relationship will spread everywhere. Just as heavenly bodies shine together to illumine the earth, similarly all the religions of the world will sacrifice their artificial barriers and chime together in the symphony of unparalleled music, when each individual is imbued with spiritual illumination.

Swami Vivekananda, the Shakti-worshipper

Swamiji dreamt of a brave new India in which every young man and woman would be glowing with vim, vigour and vitality. He said, India needed ‘muscles of iron and nerves of steel’. He could visualize with his foresight and vision that the future of India would be doomed to darkness if her citizens were weaklings. That is why he said, ‘You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita.’ Thus he gave greater priority to the development of physical strength, because it leads to the culture of the mind and ultimately to the enlightenment of the soul.

As Swamiji was a worshipper of Shakti, to him all that was positive represented strength: spirituality was strength, courage was strength, faith was strength, truth was strength, character was strength and education was strength. Spirituality is strength because it is illumination, a fountain of inspiration and a beacon in times of vicissitudes. As religion lies not in theory but in practice, according to him, it unveils the divinity within. So he exhorted us to respect the divine spark within all and serve God in the poor, the downtrodden and the destitute. Faith also unlocks the door of the temple of God within. So we have to nurture faith in the divinity within. Once the individual is spiritually permeated, he will shed all fear. He will bow his head to none else except the Almighty. He will feel lion-like courage and virility within.

For Swamiji, truth is also strength as it does not pay tribute to anybody but everyone has to pay tribute to it, for truth is just another name for God, the cosmic Ruler. A truth-loving person fears none but God.

By character Swamiji means the sum total of ideas, both positive and negative, accumulated in an individual. The former exert a benign impact on society while the latter have a malignant effect on it. Positive character implies chastity of thought, word and deed. Neither a nation nor an individual can thrive or flourish in the absence of unalloyed character. Character is also destiny. A person of exemplary character moulds the destiny of a nation. Such a person is like a human magnet, a precious ornament of society and a valuable asset to the nation. A pure character is like a rare diamond. Just as a diamond adds to the beauty of a gold ring, so character adds to the glory of a human being. It is the sole responsibility of parents and teachers to mould the character of our youth.

Courage is another aspect of strength. It is the wellspring of joy and success, whereas weakness is death and defeat. Courage is the badge of honour and weakness is a sign of sin and ignominy. Only courageous children can crown Mother India with the diadem of victory. Swamiji abhorred cowardice as it is a stigma on the fair name of our nation.

Education, the Basis of Strength

Education is a shield that protects us like a never-failing friend. Knowledge that remains hidden like arrows in a quiver and does not enkindle the divine spark within or enlighten others, does not deserve to be called education. Such an education only encourages the devil's dance of destruction. Swami Vivekananda said that an 'excess of knowledge and power, without holiness, makes human beings devils'. He called this type of education a negative education. That is why he wanted a man-making, character-building and life-giving education by which strength of mind is increased and the intellect expanded. By education he did not mean

mere collection of facts or accumulation of information or even development of skills; he implied an orientation to socio-ethical, moral and spiritual values. He said education is a kind of 'training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control'. Really, self-control is strength, will power is strength. Only that person can be called a conqueror of the world who has conquered himself, not one who has won wars. It is rightly said that self-discipline, self-control and self-direction lead a person to sovereign power. Will power can also work miracles if it is seasoned with rationality. A person can reach the pinnacle of success if he can channelize his will power in the proper direction. Also, Swamiji does not ignore the power of words. Every word that an individual uses, every thought he gives tongue to can also work wonders, if tempered with reason.

According to Swami Vivekananda, education will only then emit its sweet fragrance when the divine lotus lying dormant within unfolds its golden petals and when it is perfumed by an individual's selfless interest in society. It will not be irrelevant to quote one of his oft-quoted ideas on education in this connection: 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' Hence genuine education must help discover the covered human being, as 'each soul is potentially divine'. When this sleeping soul is awakened, one will feel within oneself a tremendous flow of dynamism, which can make the impossible possible, be it in the matter of one's own salvation or collective welfare.

A Prayer

Let every word emanating from our humble lips be a paean to Swamiji and a fitting tribute to this great son of Mother India! Let every grain of Indian earth, every little ripple on the Indian Ocean sing the glory of this mighty hero! If we follow his ideas and ideal in letter and spirit, we will be assured of supernal bliss. Let us offer our prayerful salutations at his lotus feet! *

Westerners Who Saw Sri Ramakrishna

DR GORDON STAVIG

The *New Dispensation* was a publication put out by the Brahma Samaj under the leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84). In the 26 February 1882 edition it was recorded that,

On the Thursday last [23 February] there was an interesting excursion by a steam launch up the river to Dakshineswar. The Rev. Joseph Cook, Miss Pigot, and the apostles of the New Dispensation together with a number of our young men embarked at about 11 o'clock. The revered Paramahansa of Dakshineswar [Sri Ramakrishna], as soon as he heard of the arrival of the party, came to the riverside, and was taken on board. He successively went through all the phases of spiritual excitement which characterizes him. Passing through a long interval of unconsciousness he prayed, sang, and discoursed on spiritual subjects. Mr. Cook represented the extreme culture of Christian theology and thought. The Paramahansa represented the extreme culture of Indian Yoga and Bhakti, in short the traditional piety of the East. And the apostles of the Brahma Samaj in bringing together the two proved that they combined both in the all-inclusive harmony of the New Dispensation.¹

An obituary for Sri Ramakrishna published in the *Indian Mirror* on 10 September 1886 mentioned that 'Mr. Cooke, the American evangelist, who came to this country a few years ago, once witnessed Ramakrishna's divine exercises and he expressed his great surprise at it and remarked that he was not aware before that a man could become so much immersed in divine spirit as to lose all perception of the external world'.²

Reverend Joseph Cook's meeting with Sri Ramakrishna is described in the *Great Master*. Sri Ramakrishna mentioned that Keshab Sen let him know in advance that he would bring a westerner with him and that they would take a voyage in a steamer on the Ganga River. Appar-

ently, the Master was unconscious of the external world during the entire period of Cook's visit, yet he spoke 'a ceaseless flow of words'. Later he was told that he 'imparted much instruction', but he knew nothing of it.³

Joseph Cook (1838-1901) was a prominent Christian evangelist. In 1878 in a period of about seventy days he delivered forty-three lectures in ten different states in the US, speaking to 50,000 people. He authored over three dozen books. His 'Boston Monday Lectures' which ran for a series of years drew audiences of 3,000 people. In March 1887 Pundita Ramabai Sarasvati (1858-1922), the social reformer from Bombay, lectured as Cook's guest to a Boston audience on 'High-caste Hindu Widows'. Cook's organization later published and sold her speech and recommended purchasing her book on the same subject.⁴ Six years later, in a letter to Alasinga Perumal dated 20 August 1893, Swami Vivekananda mentioned that he was going to Boston 'to speak at a big Ladies' Club here, which is helping Ramabai'.

Although Rev. Cook did not agree with Keshab Sen's Unitarian theology, he greatly admired his spiritual nature. Cook provides us with some insights into the mystical nature of Keshab Sen, who was visiting Sri Ramakrishna at that time. He wrote that 'it was Mr. Burlingame, I believe, who said that in Asia there are at least ten thousand Emersons. The characteristic type of mind in India is the intuitive and not the philosophical. Mr. Sen speaks through his lofty moral feelings. He sees religious truths through his conscience, rather than through mere reason.' Keshab Sen 'feels the touch of God within him, as the Oriental always has done at his best. He listens to the Inner Voice with the devoutness of one of the best of the Quaker mystics. ... He is perpetually inculcat-

ing the duty and blessedness of prayer and of self-surrender to all the loftiest impulses of conscience, which, as he teaches, are really supernatural touches of God upon the spirit of man.' 'He is unquestionably the most eloquent Asiatic I have ever heard. ... He usually fascinates every one who comes near him.' 'Keshub Chunder Sen was not a reformer and orator merely; he was also a religious seer. When his influence over his followers is closely analyzed, it will be found that his deep communion with the unseen world was the chief source of authority he was allowed to exercise among his friends and disciples.'⁵ 'He depends for his knowledge of religious truth on religious exercises continued through three, four and sometimes five hours a day. I thoroughly believe him to be an honest and devout man. My feeling is not that he should pray less, but that he should study more.'⁶ At the news of Keshab's death Cook wrote, it 'overwhelms me with a more profound sense of personal bereavement than I can now remember to have felt before at the departure of any public man'.⁷

It was Harold French who made the discovery that the missionary Cook mentioned in the *Great Master* was the same person who was a good friend of Keshab Sen in India, and who was a speaking delegate at the Parliament of Religions in 1893. Cook was politically liberal, favouring the rights of labourers, women, children, and ethnic minority groups. Conversely, he was a religiously conservative representative of orthodox evangelical Protestant Christianity, being critical of the Mormon, Catholic and Unitarian Churches.⁸ Consequently, at the Parliament, Reverend Cook was an adversary of Swami Vivekananda. Near the end of the Parliament, they got into a heated debate over the question of the origin of the universe. Swami Abhedananda in a lecture on 'What Is the New Pantheism' (1902-03), referred to a critical statement made by Joseph Cook of Boston, who referred to Emerson as a pantheist.⁹

Miss Pigot, who accompanied Cook, had the privilege of seeing Sri Ramakrishna in sam-

adhi, according to the *New Dispensation* report cited in the opening paragraph of this article. Mary Pigot (b. 1837) who sometimes went by the name of Henrietta, was an Anglo-Indian lady, being the daughter of Julius Pigot and Desire Casabon. She was head of the Lucknow Girls' School (1859-64), in charge of the Bethune School in Calcutta (1865-68) and chief of the Calcutta Girls' School (1868-70). While in her early thirties, in 1870 she distinguished herself by becoming the Lady Superintendent of the Female Mission of the Scottish Ladies' Association in Calcutta. This organization was run by the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, whose headquarters was located in Edinburgh. She held the position at least until 1883. The Female Mission consisted of a zenana teaching establishment, an upper school, a lower school divided into two sections, and an orphanage. In March 1883, Miss Pigot lived at 19 High Street in the town of Serampore, about five miles north of Dakshineswar on the Hooghly River.¹⁰

In 1878 William Hastie (1842-1903) became the principal of the General Assembly's Institution (established in 1830) later known as the Scottish Church College. He remained in the College operated by the Missionary Board of the Church of Scotland until the end of 1883. Narendranath Dutta, the future Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), very much liked William Hastie, who he said 'lived on nothing and regarded his room as his boys' home as much as his own. ... towards the end of his stay in India he used to say, "Yes, my boy, you were right, you were right!—It is true that all is God!" I am proud of him.'¹¹ He was an intelligent man who lived an austere lifestyle and had a loving rapport with his students.¹² Hastie uttered the prophetic statement that 'Narendranath is really a genius. I have travelled far and wide, but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in the German Universities, amongst philosophical students. He is bound to make his mark in life.'¹³

It was from Hastie that Narendra first

heard about Sri Ramakrishna. On one occasion, the professor of literature was absent from the school, and he was replaced by Hastie, the principal. During the course of the lecture, Hastie discussed William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) book-length poem *Excursion* (1814). He mentioned that Wordsworth fell into a trance when he experienced the sublime beauty of nature. Hastie added, 'I have seen Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar attain that state among contemporaries. You will understand it if you go and see once that state of his.' Soon after this event, Narendra saw Sri Ramakrishna for the first time at Surendranath Mitra's house in 1881.¹⁴

Ironically, Rev. William Hastie and Miss Mary Pigot maintained a feud that began in 1879 and culminated on 21 March 1883, when she raised an action for libel in the High Court of Calcutta against Hastie. It was a sensational trial that has been preserved in a 343-page book. The contention was between Hastie, the principal of the Male College Mission, and Pigot, the head of the Female Missionary Mission in Calcutta, both of whom were connected with the Church of Scotland. Miss Pigot claimed that when Rev. Hastie came to India he attempted to gain control over the Female Mission by placing her in a subordinate role. She also claimed that Hastie and others had charged her with mismanagement of the school, cruelty to children and immoral conduct, which damaged her reputation and deprived her of her livelihood. In May 1882, Pigot had travelled to Edinburgh to improve her relations with the Scottish Church authorities. The *Pigot v Hastie* case began on 31 August 1883. While the original judge decided in Hastie's favour, the Court of Appeal reversed the decision. Consequently, in February 1885 Rev. Hastie, the former principal of the largest and most successful educational institution in India, spent a month in the Presidency Jail. Fortunately, he was allowed to leave the jail after he paid a fine of 300 pounds, which he had saved up for years by undergoing a frugal lifestyle. Many people thought Rev.

Hastie received unjust treatment and there were protests, but he wisely decided to return penniless to Scotland. In May 1885, the Commissioners of the General Assembly exonerated Miss Pigot.¹⁵ Presently, the Foreign Mission division of the Church of Scotland has no record of Miss Pigot's whereabouts after 1885.¹⁶

In 1885, Hastie returned to Scotland, where he distinguished himself by translating and editing seventeen books from German into the English language. His translations include four difficult works written by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and one by Rumi the Sufi. He also translated a two-volume jurisprudence manuscript from Italian and authored at least six theology books. Portions of two of Hastie's translations of Immanuel Kant's writings were selected to be part of the University of Chicago's 'Great Books of the Western World' series (Volume 42). Theology and jurisprudence were the two primary areas of specialization for the versatile Hastie, who taught courses in law at Edinburgh University. He also composed or translated books dealing with scientific cosmology, ethics, Christian missions, mysticism, politics and poetry. For his efforts, in 1895 he was appointed to the chair of divinity at the University of Glasgow. It is most unfortunate that this Glasgow scholar died suddenly during the peak of his career, in 1903, at sixty-one. After his death Hastie became a local legend. At the University of Glasgow the Hastie Lecturer series commenced in 1906, the Hastie Club composed of over fifty reverends was formed, and a 300-page biography on his life was written in 1926.¹⁷

Ramchandra Dutta, the Chemical Examiner of the Calcutta Medical College, arranged for Dr J M Coates to visit the ailing Sri Ramakrishna on 15 March 1886. At Cossipore, Dr Coates met Swami Ramakrishnananda, and described Sri Ramakrishna as a 'gentleman'. He examined the patient and correctly diagnosed his illness. By using signs, Sri Ramakrishna explained to him that God is One, and He is immanent in all beings. Dr Coates was astonished

to see Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi, though he knew that Jesus Christ had similar experiences.¹⁸

John Martin Coates MD (1832-95) was born in Belfast in Northern Ireland on 6 July 1832 and attended Queen's University. He joined the British army in the Bengal Presidency as an Assistant Surgeon (1855), Surgeon (1867), Surgeon Major (1873), Brigade Surgeon (1881), and retired with an extra pension (1890). Dr Coates served during the Sepoy Mutiny (1857) and was the Superintendent of Jails in Hazareebaugh (1866). As a scholar, he demonstrated his interest in Indian culture by authoring *Vocabulary of Seven Languages or Dialects of Chota Nagpore* (1875). Dr Coates was serving as the ninth principal of the Calcutta Medical College (1880-90), when he examined Sri Ramakrishna. The College was created by the British in 1835 with an adjoining hospital (1838) to train Indian doctors. During the time Dr Coates was the Principal of the College, the Eden Hospital (1881-82) and Ezra Hospital (1887) were added to the facilities. He died in Calcutta on 18 July 1895.¹⁹ *

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Dhan Gopal Mukerji and *The Face of Silence*

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Romain Rolland invited Dhan Gopal Mukerji to his home and waited eagerly for the opportunity to meet him personally. Fulfilling Rolland's earnest desire, Mukerji came to see him from Geneva on 4 October 1926; Rolland left a lengthy and vivid description of this visit in his diary. Their contact gave Rolland a positive indication of Mukerji's state of mind, which solely aspired after spiritual illumination, as he wrote in his diary. After this visit, Rolland's interest in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda increased beyond measure.

Rolland also recorded his first visit with Miss MacLeod on 13 May 1927, including his remarkable statement that 'many months—nearly a year—after the coming of Mukerji, my sister and I developed an attraction towards Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Mukerji acquainted us with the Ramakrishna Mission in India.'⁹ He further wrote that he received 'a whole library of books' on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda 'through the medium of Miss MacLeod'.¹⁰

Along with the books, Miss MacLeod sent her encouragement. In December 1926 she referred to a personal experience during her visit with M, the author of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. M's entire being remained effulgent with Sri Ramakrishna's touch long after the Master's departure. He told Miss MacLeod that the authentic Ramakrishna—'too dazzling' for most—could be experienced through 'Vivekananda the Moon of his reflection' (405). She wrote: 'There is great joy [in India] that you mean to write of Rama Krishna ... they say, "One body could not contain it—Ramakrishna represents the last 3000

years, Vivekananda the next 3000"' (ibid.).

Miss MacLeod visited Rolland in Switzerland twice more in 1927, on 14 and 16 May. Afterwards, he wrote of her in his diary: 'She loves to give and take of the spiritual knowledge that she acquired on the path. She is like those insects that take nectar from a flower and transport the regenerating pollen from one flower to another' (405-6). Her visits served to further inspire and encourage him to write about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He was greatly helped in this work by Swami Ashokananda. Rolland wrote to him on 26 June 1927:

It is now one year since some pages of Dhan Gopal Mukherjee ... have effectually revealed to me the great soul of Sri Ramakrishna; and this beam of light has impelled me to know more of his life and thought. ... during the days passed together [with Miss MacLeod] we talked at length of Swami Vivekananda. I look upon Swami Vivekananda as a fire of spiritual energy—and on Sri Ramakrishna as a flower of love. Both radiate God and Life Eternal. The greater genius is Vivekananda, but Sri Ramakrishna is above genius.¹¹

On 4 October 1927, exactly one year after they met, Rolland wrote to Mukerji:

When I happen to read in some text about India some revelation which makes a deep impression on my mind, I do not discover it as a new thought, I recognize it as one of my own hidden thoughts. It was engraved within me, since eternity. ... The Eternal has scattered Himself, in handfuls, over the entire field of humanity. The earth is not yet ready everywhere to make the seed germinate. Somewhere, it rises and bears fruit. Somewhere else, it lies dormant. But the seed is everywhere. And turn by turn, what was dormant awakens, and what was awake goes

back to sleep. The Spirit is always moving, from people to people, from man to man. And no people, no man, imprisons it. But it is the fire of the eternal life in each one, the same Fire. And we live, to feed it.¹²

Rolland's Inspired Biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

The ancient spiritual truths of India—through an embodied form that broadcasts them to the world—continue to be mastered and given to humanity in every age with a suitable dimension and depth. All of India was elated with joy at the publication of Rolland's biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. They were originally published in French and then translated: *The Life of Ramakrishna* (French: 1st edition, 1928, 2nd edition, January 1929; English: August 1929); *Prophets of the New India* (combining the two biographies; English: 1930); and *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (English: 1931). E F Malcolm-Smith translated them all at Cambridge. The English translation of the *Life of Ramakrishna* was first serialized in *Asia* magazine, a New York monthly journal. It was introduced in the October 1929 issue, with the following editorial commentary: 'In it, the distinguished French man of letters offers a message to the peoples of the West. It is one of human realization—not new nor limited by race and national boundaries—not unshared by us all, but so clear and full in this Hindu saint that it can be passed on for the universal enrichment of man's spirit.'¹³

The biographies reached many eminent readers. Rolland was a renowned writer outside his native France. He now successfully revealed to France and the West the existence of ancient Indian wisdom in modern times in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. His prodigious and inspired writings on this subject created a strong spiritual bond between India and France. Earlier in his life, Rolland had believed that the intellectual European elite could solve the problems of the West and had envisioned a *Weltbibliothek* or meeting place for European and

Asian writers. He had even prepared a blueprint for a 'Friendship House'. However, he abandoned these ideas and other noble plans. In the *Life of Vivekananda*, he framed his appeal to the West: 'Among the spiritual ruins strewn all over Europe, our "Mother India" will teach you to excavate the unshakable foundations of your Capitole. She possesses the calculations and the plans of the "Master Craftsman". Let us rebuild our house with our own materials.'¹⁴

Rolland desired to bring spiritual enlightenment to the West. He also possessed a deep appreciation of those Incarnations of Truth who were also capable of social action to introduce, implement and maintain unity among the people. In *I Will Not Rest*, Rolland disclosed: 'When I set out on an intellectual pilgrimage to India, I brought back with me not the static dream of the infinite in which Indian thought is exhausted, but men who knew how to derive energy from Dream, men who could plunge into the seething arenas of action: Gandhi, the shepherd of the peoples, and the hero, Vivekananda.'¹⁵

The final chapters of the *Life of Ramakrishna*, 'The Swan Song' and 'The River Re-enters the Sea', inspired an Indian scholar to write that they could have been composed 'only by one whose learning was illumined by what we call in Indian epistemology *ārṣa-jñāna* or *siddhadarsana*'.¹⁶

Seven years after the two biographies were published, Rolland's close friend Jean Herbert travelled to India and sent him word that 'the whole Ramakrishna Order recognizes that the widespread extension of the thought and the glory of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is due to [Rolland's] books'.¹⁷ Around 1935 Jean Herbert met Miss MacLeod and was inspired by her encouragement to translate Swami Vivekananda's 'Four Yogas' and 'Inspired Talks' into French. This was followed, remarkably, by the commemoration of Sri Ramakrishna's one-hundredth birth anniversary at the Sorbonne, at which the French orientalist Paul Masson Oursel lectured on Swami Vivekanan-

da and the impending publication of Herbert's translations was announced. The foundation of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna in Paris was a direct result of this event (the Centre has since moved to Gretz). Miss MacLeod's vigilant desire, over many years, to have these works published by Macmillan & Company was now realized through the intervention of her friend, American author Edgar Lee Masters (1869-1950). When Masters wrote to Macmillan that the 'spiritual solution of the world depends upon the assimilation of these works', the publisher asked him to return Swami Vivekananda's books for further consideration (409). They were published in very popular pocket editions in English (American Pocket Edition, 1941) and German.

Struggling to define Indian mysticism, the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) drew inspiration from Rolland's biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Another inspired reader was Dr Felix Marti-Ibanez, who confessed in *The Mirror of Souls* that he took only one volume from his vast treasured collection when he had to flee his country during the Spanish Civil War. It was Rolland's *Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, because, he wrote, 'That uniquely magnificent, mystical book inspired me through the years to dedicate my life to the service of others' (407-8).

In his preface to the *Life of Ramakrishna*, Rolland expressed his gratitude to 'Mr Dhan Gopal Mukerji, who first revealed Ramakrishna's existence to me, and to my faithful friend, Dr Kalidas Nag, who has more than once advised and instructed me. May I have made the best use of so many excellent guides for the service of the India which is dear to us and of the human spirit!¹⁸ In the bibliography he wrote that 'Mukerji has consulted all the principal documents. He has also interviewed several of the eminent personalities of the Ramakrishna Mission, who knew the Master, in particular Swami Turiyananda, and he has used the Memoirs of Swami Premananda, one of Ramakrish-

na's dearest disciples' (302).

Mukerji read Rolland's biography of Sri Ramakrishna, which his *Face of Silence* had inspired. On 10 November 1931 he wrote a letter to Rolland from New York, expressing his praise and appreciation:

At last I have read your Ramakrishna and Vivekananda both in French and English. In the English translation I have studied the notes with care. ... This is not a book but the epic poem of the holiness of our time. You have traced the holiness of all mankind under every sentence.

The Ramakrishna that emerges from your pages is not a Hindu saint only, [he is] also the agony of our modern soul for Godhood. The pain of man-God for God-man nowhere do I find so poignantly stated in the literature of the world since Tolstoy penned his *Confessions*! Now I feel I have earned my passport to Paradise because I introduced you to Ramakrishna. I had no idea that I was bringing Prometheus to the hidden source of the Flame Eternal. ... Your Ramakrishna is as simple and as fierce as the one they, his apostles, knew. I wish Vivekananda was alive to gaze upon the portrait that you have drawn of the Master. He alone could give you the praise that you deserve. As for Vivekananda, yours is the only one that India recognises. Where you say 'Ecce Homo', we recognise of whom you speak. He was implicit in all of us; but you have made him explicit. If your Ramakrishna is the eternal India, your Vivekananda is the precipitation of that Eternal in our history. Ramakrishna IS; Vivekananda Moves. What a magical composition of holiness you have wrought in two keys!¹⁹

An Indirect Benefit of Rolland's Pacifism: His Books Are Published in Russia

The letter I received from Dhan Gopal Mukerji II included an important addition to our homage to his father's role in disseminating Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in the West. Rolland's pacifism led indirectly to this significant benefit. Mr Mukerji wrote that the following story 'came from Tantine via Swami Nikhilananda':

Sometime after 1928, Romain Rolland remar-

ried. She was French and an ardent pacifist in the Communist movement in Europe. Stalin had a propaganda program going on the theme that Communism was pacifist and seeking the brotherhood of mankind. His followers organized visits to Russia by prominent personages who would carry this message back to their home countries. A delegation of prominent writers, professors and philosophers was recruited from Europe. Romain Rolland, known as an ardent pacifist and Nobel Prize Laureate, was encouraged by his wife to join it.

Romain arranged with various European publications and newspapers to send regular reports on what he would see during his visit. So he and his wife made what equated to [a] guided tour sponsored by the Communist Hierarchy. He was easily seduced by what he saw and what he heard and sent very favorable reports back to Western Europe. So favorable, in fact, that Stalin himself offered him an interview and [the opportunity] to discuss 'our shared belief in Peace.' In his recognition, Stalin asked Romain Rolland, 'What can I do for you?' And RR said: 'Let my books be published and distributed in Russia.' Stalin agreed—and his books on (1) Sri Ramakrishna and (2) on Swami Vivekananda entered circulation in the USSR.

Tantine wrote from Helsinki in July 1936 on hearing of my Father's death and gave tribute to my Father for his role in introducing their 'messages' indirectly into the USSR.

Romain Rolland's biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and his article, 'Asia's Reply to Tolstoy', which formed a chapter in K Lomunov's *Tolstoy and the Contemporary World*, ignited Russia's interest in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Rolland's biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were also primary vehicles of the living wisdom of the Upanishads.

In 1936, during the period of the heaviest censorship in Russia, Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna* was inconspicuously published in Russia.²⁰ Rolland's volumes that escaped the terrible literary purges were published anew in their entirety after the Second World War and became available through the public libraries. It is remarkable that the edition most favoured and

requested by Russian readers was 'that small old edition which appeared first' (749). Brezhnev permitted Rybakov, Russia's eminent Indologist, historian and a senior research fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, to rewrite selections from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (originally published in New York in 1942). Russian editors, however, restricted Rybakov, forcing him to delete all references to 'God' (ibid.).

In later years Gorbachev permitted the immediate publication of newly revised and reprinted editions of Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna* as a part of perestroika, his liberal reforms. Rolland's biography of Sri Ramakrishna was first published in monthly serial form, causing widespread duplication and a tripling of sales for the journal *Nayuka u Religia* (Science and Religion), in which pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were also published for the first time. Simultaneous publications of the book appeared in Leningrad and Kiev. A Vivekananda Society also was established to promote spiritual culture. Sri Ramakrishna's sayings were modernized and these, as well as Swami Vivekananda's most important works, were translated and published. Over the years, Rolland's works have attracted and inspired Ramakrishna-Vivekananda scholars as well as scholars interested in Hindu philosophy. Rybakov has written:

The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his closest disciple Swami Vivekananda have always constituted an issue of lively interest for the Russian readers from the beginning of this [twentieth] century. Several years before the October Revolution, or more precisely, even before the commencement of the First World War, the first volumes of the translated version of the precepts of Sri Ramakrishna and the works of Swami Vivekananda were published and became known among the elite circles of Russian intelligentsia (746)

... the prophetic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are of universal import and of great moral worth for the whole of humanity. Transcending the barriers of political frontiers and time, these ideas are bound to be

embraced by all the people of the earth seeking to reach the realm of truth—irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, sex, social standing, or religion and other doctrinal beliefs (750).

A preacher of an eternal philosophy, Swamiji is the most suitable person to help our country today. What is required by a tormented land is moral rejuvenation. Swamiji himself has said that even if all the wealth of the world were invested in one village of India, the conditions there would never improve. What is required is the awakening of sleeping souls. The philosophy of Vivekananda is a perfect blend of religion and science, and it contains ample flexibility. It is definitely not bound by an imposed rigidity, as most ideologies are (755).

We are not including substantive information about the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda phenomenon in Russia; it is not the subject of this essay. However, all these events are links in an unbroken chain of quiet, profound spiritual labour. As of this writing, newly discovered archival materials about Dhan Gopal Mukerji are en route to his son from his cousin in France. *

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The Meeting of Faith and Intellect

Ramakrishna was the representative of the totality of Hinduism. The Puranic aspects of Hinduism had been roundly criticized by Christians and rationalists. When Rammohan Roy and Dayananda stood up to speak for Hinduism, even they could not muster courage to speak in favour of Puranic Hinduism, for no argument acceptable to the rationalists could be adduced in its favour. ... Hinduism manifested its living form in the person of Ramakrishna and said to its critics, 'See with your eyes that which you cannot understand with your reason.' So Ramakrishna was the representative of those forms of Hinduism towards which Christian preachers were antagonistic, and which rational Hindus could not understand. But Narendranath was the very image of reason. He personified European thought, and all the factors that led even English-educated Hindus to criticize Hinduism were present in him. When Vivekananda sought refuge in Ramakrishna, it was, in reality, modern India seeking refuge with ancient India, or Europe coming face to face with India. Ramakrishna's meeting with Vivekananda was the meeting of faith and intellect, of esoterism and rationalism. Of these two images, one was wrapped in Puranic truths, took even the external forms of religion to be valid and wanted to keep them intact, and was keen on proving all the spiritual practices of ancient India to be true; the other was eager to cut through the dialectics and external bonds of religion. Ramakrishna did not take anything from Narendranath; but yes, he made a Vivekananda out of Narendranath by pouring into him his spiritual power and transcendent vision. Maybe the East and the West have met in the meeting of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and in all probability true global welfare will come to pass the day when the Western world comes to imbibe the spiritual wealth of the East—and on that day will be realized the goals of all peace-seekers.

—translated from Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', *Vivek-Jyoti*, January 1963

Wages of Wrath

N HARIHARAN

‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ This is a famous maxim laid down by Lord Acton in the rule book of politics. Lord Acton should know, because he had a thorough grasp of the chemistry and operational dynamics of power. It logically follows that, as a rule, the repositories of absolute power are squalid cesspools of moral and spiritual depravity and shocking specimens of corruption. The bane of concentration of power is sought to be whittled down in the modern era by the machinery of democracy, which is essentially an institutional device for decentralization and dispersal of power. But in days of antiquity when absolute monarchy was the rule, power, absolute and arbitrary, inhered in an individual. The king’s power was enormous and unquestioned. No wonder the majority of kings personified brutal power, arbitrary whims and despotic impulses. The heady wine of power intoxicated them. They were arrogant, aggressive, sinful and sadistic. The king was more feared than loved. He was a veritable millstone around the neck of his subjects.

But there were notable exceptions also. Ashoka, the beloved of the gods, Akbar the Great and Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher-king, were all outstanding monarchs unbitten by the bug of power. They were, in spite of the unlimited regal power they enjoyed, benevolent, magnanimous and caring, mainly because of the spiritual core that defined their personalities. Our epics and Puranas are replete with instances of righteous kings who were unobtrusive and humble in spite of the stupendous power they wielded. To the impressive galaxy of such noble monarchs belongs King Ambarisha, of whom the Bhagavata speaks in glowing terms. The story of Ambarisha as related by the Bhagavata¹ is a saga of self-effacing devotion

humbling the egregious spiritual insolence of an eminent sage who falls victim to anger in an unguarded moment.

A Noble Lineage

Rajarshi Ambarisha is a scion of the Ikshvaku dynasty. He is descended of a noble and illustrious lineage. The sterling virtues that he has are both congenital and cultivated. He is a mighty king exercising sovereignty over a vast empire. Shuka calls him a ‘blessed soul’ (*mahā-bhāga*) who has in mind not his status as the ruler of the earth but his exalted position as a devotee of Vishnu. His opulence is inexhaustible and his glory unfading. He is heir to a double patrimony—one in the form of material wealth and the other in the form of spiritual treasures.

Ambarisha’s father Nabhaga was a paragon of virtue and a model of rectitude and truthfulness. An incident in Nabhaga’s early life illustrates his dedication to truth. Nabhaga was mulcted of his share of inheritance by his brothers when he was away engaged in his studies. On his return from the gurukula, he was exhorted by his helpless father to go to a sacrifice performed by certain sages and help them by clarifying doubts that often occurred to them in the course of their ritual. His father also told him that the sages, pleased with his timely services, would bestow on him all the remnants of the sacrificial materials on completion of the rite. Accordingly, Nabhaga went to the sacrifice conducted by the sages and waited upon them. At the end of the sacrifice, the sages bequeathed the residue of the materials to Nabhaga. When Nabhaga was about to take possession of them, there appeared on the scene a dark-complexioned person pressing his exclusive claims on the full quantum of the materials. They finally

agreed to refer the dispute to Nabhaga's father, who with an exemplary sense of judicial impartiality pronounced the verdict in favour of the dark-complexioned person. He said that it had been settled long ago that the remnants of sacrificial materials rightfully belonged to Rudra. Nabhaga dutifully abided by his father's decision and renounced his claim. Impressed with the sense of probity, righteousness and truthfulness of Nabhaga and his father, the dark-complexioned Rudra gave the materials to Nabhaga and vanished.

A True Jnani and a Perfect Bhakta

No wonder then that Ambarisha, the son of the truthful Nabhaga, is a repository of all the finest virtues. Shuka's delineation of the profile of Ambarisha is sharp, suggestive and significant. Shuka loses himself in a cascade of eloquence as he describes Ambarisha's unique character in inimitable language. Says he: 'Ambarisha, though the master of the vast earth comprising seven continents and endowed with inexhaustible wealth and incomparable prowess, knew it all to be short-lived and dream-like (*sarvam tat svapnasamstutam*)—even though for ordinary men it was most difficult to attain (*ati durlabham pumsam*)—and that it led only to spiritual blindness (*vidvān vibhavanīrvāṇam tamo visati yat pumān*). Being supremely devoted (*prāpto bhāvam param*) to Bhagavan Vasudeva and his pious devotees, he regarded the whole universe as nothing more than a mere clod of earth (*loṣṭavat smṛtam*)' (9.4.15-7).

Here is an unmistakable clue to the subtle and inexorable workings of true devotion. Genuine devotion sees through the hollowness of temporal pomp and ignites the spark of extreme dispassion. Being a devotee par excellence, Ambarisha, though surrounded by a sea of opulence, stands immovable as a mighty rock of dispassion. Now, this incredible same-sightedness that looks equally upon a piece of gold and a lump of clay is possible only for a sithitaprajna who is ever poised in the non-dualistic state. So

Ambarisha fully answers to the description of a jnani contained in the Bhagavadgita: 'Enlightened men are those who see the same (Atman) in a learned and humble brahmana, a cow, an elephant, or even a dog or an outcaste.'² Shuka clearly indicates through his pregnant words that Ambarisha is a jnani.

A perfect jnani has inevitably to be a perfect bhakta. He is the worshipper of either the Impersonal Absolute or the Personal God. Ambarisha is a staunch devotee of Vishnu. All his faculties, physical and mental, are oriented, in their entirety, to the adoration of Achyuta. Shuka says: 'His mind ever clings to the lotus feet of Krishna, his speech in recounting the divine glories of Vaikuntha, his hands in cleaning the temple of Hari, his ears in hearing the stories about Achyuta, his eyes in seeing the beautiful idols and temples of Mukunda, his physical frame in embracing His devotees, his nose in smelling the fragrance of tulasi leaves offered at the feet of the Lord, his feet in treading the holy tracts consecrated to Hari and his head in bowing at the lotus feet of Hrishikesh.'³ By describing Ambarisha's total dedication to the Lord, Shuka demonstrates that true bhakti is nothing but a state of being in perpetual union with the Lord.

A Sage King

It might be supposed that Ambarisha is ipso facto an inept monarch who, ever immersed in self-forgetting devotion and transcendental wisdom, is ill-equipped for the exacting tasks of governance and statecraft. Shuka's significant remark dispels the misconception and shows that Ambarisha is in fact an ideal king who wields the sceptre as it should be: 'He rules his kingdom dedicating all his secular and spiritual activities to Adhokshaja, with his mind ever anchored in the Lord (*bhagavaty-adhokṣaje sarvātmabhāvam vidadhan*) and guided by the counsel of men of sagely wisdom (*tanniṣṭhaviprābhīṣitah*)' (9.4.21).

Dedication of one's actions to God, with the conviction that one is a mere instrument of

the divine Will is the crux of karma yoga. Thus, Shuka implies that Ambarisha, being a jnani and a bhakta, cannot but be a full-fledged karma yogin. The Gita categorically affirms that yoga is skill in action.⁴ Performance of one's allotted duties in the spirit of karma yoga and being ever united with the Divine cannot but be skilful action. In the eloquent words of Shuka, 'The king, by his assiduous practice of the triple disciplines of bhakti yoga, the yoga of penance and the yoga of disinterested performance of his duties pleased Hari (*bhaktiyogena tapoyuktena svadharmena harim prīṇan*) and gradually cut the cords of attachment (*saṅgān sarvāñchanairjahau*) and developed a notion of unreality (*akarodasanmatim*) with respect to his house, wife, sons, relatives, elephants, chariots, horses, soldiers, jewels and ornaments, weapons and all his inexhaustible treasury.'⁵

These remarks of Shuka clearly show that Ambarisha is a royal sage in whom the triune disciplines of jnana yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga have attained a happy fusion. Ambarisha is a standing testimony to the fact that the holy staff of the recluse, the rosary of the devotee and the sceptre of the monarch are not mutually exclusive and can conjointly take the spiritual aspirant to the summum bonum of final release.

Divine Protection

The Lord is so mightily pleased with Ambarisha's rare devotion (*ekānta bhakti bhāvena prīto*) that He does him an unprecedented favour. He stations His potent and terrifying discus, Sudarshana, at Ambarisha's palace for his protection (*bhṛtyābhirakṣaṇam*)! (9.4.28). It is doubtful whether the Lord has ever shown a similar marked favour to any other devotee. What makes Him extend such a strange and spectacular favour to Ambarisha? Could it be that the Lord's appointment of the Sudarshana-chakra for Ambarisha's eternal safety is due to His knowledge that, as a king, Ambarisha is vulnerable to the perils of external aggression and internal uprising, which are likely to

hamper his serious devotional pursuits? Or could it be that He has a premonition of the grave tribulation and risk of personal danger Ambarisha is to soon face in the course of his sincere fulfilment of religious vows? Or could it be that He wants to demonstrate to the world the reward that awaits unflinching devotion of a high order? Surely, the ways of the Lord are inscrutable. But the fact remains that the divine discus, terrible and invincible, keeps unwinking vigil at Ambarisha's palace to ward off dangers that are likely to threaten him.

On the Horns of a Dilemma

As part of his devotional exercises in adoration of Achyuta, Ambarisha scrupulously observes the *dvādaśī-vrata*, a religious vow that involves prolonged fasting and single-minded meditation on the Lord, along with his wife, who is equal to him in all virtues. At the end of the vow, he worships Keshava at Madhuvana with great devotion by performing all the prescribed acts of adoration. He feeds the brahmanas sumptuously and gives them liberal presents like well-adorned cows that yield copious milk. The rules of the vow demand that he complete it by ending his fast within a particular time. Now that point has almost approached and Ambarisha, with the permission of the assembled brahmanas, is about to take his meal—when the eminent sage Durvasa appears on the scene.

Ambarisha is extremely delighted at the arrival of the venerable sage. He extends to him all the traditional honours due to an esteemed guest (*atithi*) and humbly prays him to dine at his place. The sage readily accepts the invitation and goes to the nearby Yamuna for his bath and devotions, promising to return soon.

Time passes inexorably, and the deadline for ending the fast is almost at hand. Ambarisha is anxiously awaiting Durvasa's return, but there is no sign of it. The king finds himself stuck on the horns of a dilemma. What is he to do now? If he delays ending his fast till the sage returns, he would be guilty of a serious lapse in

the fulfilment of the vow; that would be sacrilegious. And if he ends the fast by eating before the arrival of the sage, he would be guilty of disrespecting an honoured guest; that would amount to insulting the puissant sage. In all humility, Ambarisha appeals to the elders conversant with the scriptural rules to show him the way out of the imbroglio. He says: 'If I eat, the sin of slighting the sage would befall me. If I do not eat, my vow will prove abortive. Pray show me the line of action I should adopt so that good may befall me and sin may not touch me (*garkrtva sadbhu me bhupadadharino va na manasi prier*)' (9.4.39).

Ambarisha's appeal to the bar of scriptural wisdom for the resolution of the crisis throws a flood of light upon his lofty character. Here is an all-powerful monarch whose writ runs unquestioned throughout the length and breadth of a vast kingdom. If he wants, Ambarisha can arrogate to himself the wisdom and final authority to decide on this ticklish issue and unilaterally take a decision one way or the other. But his act of eliciting the expert opinion of the assembled elders is a measure of his deep humility, high regard for his elders in age and wisdom, and firm loyalty to scriptural mandate. The elders voice their view by saying, 'You may break the fast, O King, by taking a sip of water (*anbhava kevalena*). Wise men say that taking a sip of water is, at once, tantamount to eating and not eating food (*praburabbhakshananam vipra bhaksanam naikena va tat*)' (9.4.40).

Accordingly, Ambarisha ends his fast by having a sip of water, all the while meditating on Achyuta, and eagerly awaits Durvasa's return.

Durvasa's Rage ...

Then the sage comes back from the river. Even as he approaches Ambarisha, he comes to know, through his power of clairvoyance, of what he considers a grave offence on the king's part: Ambarisha's act of ending the fast even before he is fed. The choleric Durvasa's eyes redden, his face contorts into a forbidding frown

and he flies into a paroxysm of rage. With knitted brows, he casts a blazing look at Ambarisha, who receives the sage with folded hands. Durvasa thunders: 'Look at the flagrant violation of dharma by this man who is intoxicated with the pride of wealth and who considers himself the supreme overlord, but who is, in fact, destitute of even a tinge of devotion to Vishnu. He invites me, a guest, to accept his hospitality, but humiliates me by breaking his fast even before feeding me! Now he will know what the supreme penance of a sage like me can do to quell his overweening insolence. I shall forthwith show him the consequences of his unrighteous act.'

So saying, Durvasa wrathfully plucks a lock of hair from his head and, lo, out of it emerges a goblin, fierce as the Fire of Dissolution! The grisly fiend rushes, sword in hand, towards Ambarisha to slay him. But the king, a picture of serenity and sangfroid, stands motionless, willing and ready to submit himself to death if he were indeed an offender deserving such a terrible punishment. With his whole being anchored in Vishnu-consciousness, he attempts neither to fight nor to flee. He just stands there as a perfect model of poise and self-surrender.



... and Its Terrible Consequence

Now happens the miracle. The divine discus Sudarshana, appointed by Lord Hari to safeguard Ambarisha, swings into action and in a trice burns down the fiend as a blazing fire would an angry cobra. Then it turns towards Durvasa himself and starts chasing him! In utter fright the sage takes to his heels and runs in different directions to different realms inhabited by various heavenly beings. But the discus would not leave him. He seeks refuge in Brahmaloaka, but the Creator pleads his inability to help, saying, 'All of us including the entire universe owe our existence to Sri Hari in whom, at the time of Cosmic Dissolution, everything merges and dissolves by His mere will. All of us, including Lord Bhava, Daksha and Bhṛigu, carry out with bowed heads His behests for the welfare of the world. How am I to pit myself against the Lord's inexorable will?' Durvasa, distraught with grief, then seeks sanctuary in Kailasa and appeals to Shiva for rescue from Sudarshana. Shiva too expresses his helplessness in the matter and says, 'We are all under the thumb of His maya and powerless to comprehend His inscrutable ways. We spring into manifestation and dissolve into latency repeatedly by His mere will. We cannot oppose the irresistible power of the divine discus, the dreadful weapon of Sri Hari. You would do well to seek refuge at His own feet, for He alone can ensure your welfare.' Harried by Sudarshana's relentless pursuit, Durvasa hurries to Vaikuntha, where Sri Hari resides with His divine consort. Trembling with fear, he throws himself at Lord Narayana's feet and laments piteously: 'O Achyuta! O Ananta! Ignorant of Thy supreme prowess, I have committed a grave offence against Thy dear devotee. Please pardon my sin and save me!'

The Power of Devotion ...

Lord Vishnu takes the opportunity to articulate a mystic truth that forms an important aspect of the doctrine of devotion.

He says: 'O Sage! I am under the control of

My devotees and destitute of any freedom, as it were (*aham bhaktaparādhīno byasvatantra iva dvija*). My heart is taken captive by the sadhus who are ever devoted to Me (*bhaktaiḥ sādhubhirgrastahṛdayo*) and I am the only beloved for them (*bhaktajanapriyaḥ*). I covet not anything more than the unmotivated love of My devotees (*nāham ātmānam āśāse madbhaktaiḥ sādhubhirvinā*). Giving up all—their wives, sons, home, friends, wealth, and even their very life—they have resorted to Me as the sole haven (*ye dārāgāraputrāptān prāṇān vittamimam param hitvā mām śaraṇam yātāḥ*). How can I desert them (*katham tārṇstyaktum utsahe*)? Their hearts ever tied to Me, they attract Me as surely as chaste women attract their noble husbands (*mayi nīrbaddhabhṛdayāḥ vaśīkurvanti mām satstriyaḥ satpatirṇ yathā*). Their sole delight is in rendering loving service to Me (*matsevayā pratītam*). They disdain even the four supernal blessings of *sālokyā* (residence in My realm), *sāmīpyā* (living in proximity to Me), *sārūpyā* (attainment of My form) and *sāyujyā* (complete absorption in Me) (*sālokyādicatuḥṣṭayam necchantī*), being sated through dedicated service to Me (*sevayā pūrṇāḥ*). Will they, then, be enamoured of the petty delights subject to the sway of Time (*kuto nyat kālavidrutam*)? Sadhus are My very heart and I am the heart of sadhus (*sādhavo bhṛdayam mahyam sādhubhūnām bhṛdayam tvaham*); they know not anything else than Me, nor do I know in the least anything other than them (*madanyat te na jānanti nāham tebhyo manāgapi*)' (9.4.63-8).

These words of the Lord give us an inkling of the esoteric relationship that exists between Him and His devotees. In a word, He is their alpha and omega.

... and the Dangers of Conceit

Lord Vishnu then makes a very profound observation that spiritual aspirants can ill afford to ignore: 'O Sage! Austerity and knowledge are both conducive to spiritual welfare for persons endowed with humility (*tapo vidyā ca viprāṇām niḥśreyasakare ubhe*). But in the case of a person

lacking in modesty, those very things lead to contrary results (*te eva durvinītasya kalpete karturanyathā*)' (9.4.70).

The poison of pride vitiates all the noble virtues in a person and renders them worthless. Even scholars and sages are not exempt from the stigma of self-conceit. That is why in the very opening line of his *Vishnu-shatpadi* Shankaracharya, an embodiment of humility, prays for the removal of pride: 'O Vishnu! Remove pride (*avinayamapanaya viṣṇo*).'

The Devotee's Glory

Vishnu then exhorts Durvasa to seek Ambarisha's help in escaping from the menacing Sudarshana. The sage rushes to the king, clasps his feet and craves pardon for his unthinking misdemeanour. The king shudders in anguish and embarrassment at the sage's act. Then he utters a stirring hymn in praise of the divine discus, praying to it to be benign and propitious to the sage and grant him safety. Sudarshana promptly calms down and ceases from its murderous chase. Durvasa, with a bewildered mind and a contrite heart, now sings a paean in praise of the glory of the Lord's devo-



tees. He exclaims in great astonishment: 'Ah! I have seen today the glory of the servitors of Ananta. You strive, O King, for the good of even him who has wronged you. Indeed, what is impossible of accomplishment for such sadhus and what is there too hard for them to renounce? (*Aho anantadāsānām mahattvarī dr̥ṣṭamadya me; Kṛtāgaso'pi yadrājan maṅgalāni samīhase. Duṣkaraḥ ko nu sād̥hūnārī dustyajo vā mahātmanām*)' (9.5.14-5).

Ambarisha has been waiting for one full year without eating anything, expecting Durvasa's return. Now that the sage has come, the king honours him by feeding him sumptuously. Then, permitted by the contented Durvasa, he takes his meal consisting of the remnants of food that had been partaken of by the sage. Finally Durvasa showers his blessings on Ambarisha and takes leave of him.

The Source and Course of Anger

Durvasa is an eminent sage who has practised the severest austerities. Even in the mind of that sage prowls the growling beast of anger. What is the reason? To understand this paradox, we have to find out what the source of anger is.

The verses of the Bhagavadgita locate the source of anger precisely. The Gita portrays in a couple of arresting verses the unstoppable slide towards utter perdition of an individual who broods on sense objects: 'In one who dwells longingly on sense objects, attachment to them is produced. From attachment develops desire, and from desire comes anger. From anger arises delusion and delusion results in loss of memory. Loss of memory brings about the destruction of intelligence and by the destruction of intelligence he is ruined.'⁶ So the Gita clearly pinpoints the act of brooding on sense objects as the villain of the piece.

But Durvasa is a model of self-control not given to indulging in sensuous fantasies. A man of intense self-discipline, he is apparently a spiritual giant in whom there is not even the mildest flicker of desire. True, he is proof against the

lures of sense delights that abound in the objective universe. But there is in him, perhaps buried deep down in his subconscious mind, a subtle craving, far more insidious and irresistible, for constant public acknowledgement and acclaim of his spiritual eminence. His overweening sense of self-importance and his domineering manner make him highly sensitive to even the smallest acts of other people, however inconsequential they may be. He perceives insults where none is intended.

And here is Ambarisha, an innocuous king who is so good and peace-loving that he would not so much as hurt a fly. In order to meet an indispensable requirement of a religious vow he has already undertaken, and thus avoid a lapse in its fulfilment, he takes a sip of water as counselled by the wise men and symbolically ends his fast. But even this simple act of the king's Durvasa misconstrues as an insufferable affront to him, and his obsessive sense of vanity is pricked. It sends the sage up a spiral of infernal fury. In stark contrast, even when faced with the danger of physical annihilation, Ambarisha keeps his cool and does not let the impending disaster impair his high regard for the man who is its cause!

Notwithstanding all his austerity and penance, Durvasa is still a prisoner of his own narrow ego. His mind is still a playing field for the three gunas and subject to violent mood swings. True to the Gita statement that kama and krodha are born of rajas, his craving for public acclaim and his anger at imaginary slights are the products of his rajoguna. The triple gunas

can have their riotous play only in the environment set up by ego consciousness. In the universal consciousness that Ambarisha's mind typifies, the interplay of the gunas ceases. In that serene mind bereft of the clash of the gunas prevails the supreme 'peace that passeth understanding'.

There are a couple of crucial lessons that the story of Ambarisha teaches. First, the best ethical and spiritual qualities are of no avail without the support of the golden virtue of humility. And humility is an expression of expanded consciousness. Second, anger is an index of ego consciousness or constricted consciousness. It is certainly bad, under any circumstance, to deliver oneself into the hands of the scourge of anger. But to vent the venom of fury on a peace-loving soul for imaginary grievances is positively atrocious. As described earlier, the inevitable corollaries of anger are delusion, failure of memory, destruction of intelligence and total ruin.

In a word, the wages of wrath are ignominy and extinction. Like it or not, once the wages are earned they are not open to the luxury of non-acceptance! *

References

1. Bhagavata, 9.4-5.
2. Bhagavadgita, 5.18.
3. Bhagavata, 9.4.18-20.
4. Bhagavadgita, 2.50.
5. Bhagavata, 9.4.26-7.
6. Bhagavadgita, 2.62-3.

Direct Disciples on Anger

Anger is controlled through patience. Be patient, forbearing, and humble. ... Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'He who can forbear, lives. He who cannot, is lost.' —Swami Brahmananda

Hatred and anger are signs of ego. If a man hates anyone or gets angry with anyone, you may be sure he has not conquered his ego and cannot feel true love in his heart. —Swami Ramakrishnananda

Lust, anger, and avarice—these are but different forms of the same thing. ... Join the senses to the Lord. That is the best way to teach the senses a lesson. —Swami Turiyananda



Reviews



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

J. Krishnamurti: Great Liberator or Failed Messiah? Luis S R Vas. Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: *mibd@vsnl.com*. 2004. vi + 191 pp. Rs 195.

This book makes an assessment of writings appreciating as well as criticizing the controversial philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. (Among his admirers may be mentioned Fr Anthony de Mello, Fr Carlos Valles, and Mary Lutyens, while his detractors include Lama Anagarika Govinda.) There was a time when the Theosophical Society was all praise for him and selected him to be a messiah and world teacher. Did he come up to the expectations of the Theosophical Society? Luis Vas mainly attempts to answer this question. He also discusses, inter alia, the originality of Krishnamurti's thinking, the significance of his impact, and the relevance of his teachings. As Vas himself writes in the introduction: 'In this book I consider various assessments of Krishnamurti as well as charges against him, what might be the answers to them and, most important, how best to access his insight.'

Aldous Huxley, in his foreword to Krishnamurti's book *The First and Last Freedom* (1954), wrote: 'In this volume ... the reader will find a clear contemporary statement of the fundamental human problem, together with an invitation to solve it in the only way in which it can be solved—for and by himself.' This is very true. One is reminded of Krishnamurti's own words in the same book: 'What you are, the world is. So your problem is the world's problem. Surely, this is a simple and basic fact, is it not? In our relationship with the one or the many we seem somehow to overlook this point all the time' (25). As a matter of fact, as Vas rightly points out, Krishnamurti always emphasized the importance of release from entrapment in the 'network of thought' through a perceptual process of attention, observation, or 'choiceless awareness' which would release the true perception of reality without the mediation of any authority or guru.

In the first chapter, 'Legacy', Rohit Mehta is

quoted: 'What Krishnaji is trying to bring about is a shift in consciousness.' Then there is Radha Burnier, who quotes Krishnamurti's own words: 'Use me as a mirror to question yourself. Don't be influenced by anyone, not even me. I am nobody.' The chapter records a long conversation between Krishnamurti and Ruben Feldman-Gonzales.

The next chapter of the book is entitled 'Recollections and Assessments'. Here are David Frawley, S Balasundaram, Maurice Frydman, Wanda Dynowska (Uma Devi), Shiva Rao, David Bohm, Asit Chandmal, Achyut Patwardhan, Nadesan Satyendra, Gopal Krishna, and others. Their interactions with Krishnamurti are faithfully recorded. Most of them are positive and favourable.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter of the book is the third one, 'Krishnamurti and Theosophy: Full Circle?' The question mark is rather confusing (there is already one in the title of the book). The author makes it plain that relations between Krishnamurti and the Theosophical Society underwent a circular development: the initial adulation of Krishnamurti by the Theosophists, their rejection by him, and finally an apparent mutual accommodation by both. The wheel indeed came full circle.

The final chapter, 'Assessing Krishnamurti's Insights', explains Neurolinguistic Programming (the new art and science of getting what one wants), and Krishnamurti is here assessed against this new perspective. It is pointed out that life is to be enjoyed, to be made conscious by enjoying it. For joy is consciousness and that is our natural state. Finally, Vas concludes: 'He [Krishnamurti] may have underestimated the difficulties on the way, but he certainly made it easier for others to trek the same terrain. His success lies chiefly in that.' A sensible conclusion.

More a compilation than an original composition (in fact, some of the long quotations may be suitably abridged), the book under discussion is a useful one on Krishnamurti. The author has done his homework well and has tried to be unbiased, and this is commendable.

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Swami Vivekananda's Message to the Modern India. Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, 5 Singarachari Street, Triplicane, Chennai 600 005. E-mail: vkmadras@vsnl.com 2004. 64 pp. Rs 20.

This booklet is a compilation of three learned articles originally published in the prestigious volume of the Vivekananda Kendra entitled *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*. The contributors are eminent thinkers on Swami Vivekananda and Indian culture.

In his article 'Swami Vivekananda on Education', Sri T S Avinashilingam, freedom fighter and founder of the massive educational complex, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, discusses the salient points of Swamiji's philosophy of education, namely, development of the multi-dimensional personality of students, the necessity of cultivating a scientific temperament, the importance of a positive attitude towards life, practice of concentration and continence, emphasis on self-confidence as the bedrock of one's very existence and service to humanity as a form of worship of God. He concludes with the hope that this type of education as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda would be implemented all over the nation and would subsequently result in the revival of her pristine glory.

Swami Gambhiranandaji is widely known for his pioneering work of translating the ancient scriptures of India into English and interpreting them in the light of the life and message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. His article 'Worship of God in Man' enumerates the philosophical background of the multifarious welfare activities carried out by the Ramakrishna Mission throughout the country. He traces these concepts to Sri Ramakrishna's experiences and teachings and their elaborations by his foremost disciple Swami Vivekananda. The author points out that merely worshipping God in an image while neglecting his suffering children is tantamount to heartlessness and hypocrisy and exhorts the sadhakas to carry out service activities in a spirit of worship of the Divine.

In an interesting article, eminent historian Sri M C Joshi points out how India has always had an intrinsic and resilient ability to spiritually renew herself and bounce back in the world forum whenever there was a need. This has occurred time and again and has invariably been followed by a socio-cultural regeneration and revival. As examples, he cites the

several incarnations of God including Buddha, the works of Chanakya, Patanjali, Manu and Adi Shankaracharya, the great saints of the bhakti movement such as Ramananda, Namdev, Jnaneswar, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya, Tulsidas, Raidas, Samartha Ramdas and Raja Rammohan Roy, culminating in the 'brightest luminary of the nineteenth century'—Swami Vivekananda, the disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. His findings only reinforce Swami Vivekananda's assertion that religion is the backbone of India and that she can progress only in and through religion and spirituality.

Swami Abhiramananda

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Gita Today. Dr Krishna Bhatta. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2004. xxix + 325 pp. Rs 450.

There have been scores of studies on the Gita. Yet, Dr Krishna Bhatta's book is a welcome addition to the whole literature. The author, a doctor by profession, has been a US resident for quite some time. This treatise on the Gita is a look into the ancient scripture from a modern perspective. Originally, the material of this book was posted as 'Gita' columns on a website. Only later were they compiled into this book. It thus appears as a journalistic attempt to bring down the message of the Gita to the level of common people, couched in a modern language.

The 'Introduction' to the book analyses the dilemma of an 'intellectual' Arjuna on the propriety of a war between relatives of his own clan. There is a certain amount of 'uneasiness', as the author puts it, among educated people about Krishna encouraging Arjuna to plunge into a deadly war. But one should remember the specific situation when a particular doctrine of morality is propagated. As Swami Vivekananda pointed out in his lectures, for the majority of people, the doctrine of 'non-violence' can wreak havoc if carried out to its fullest. Non-violence can be practised in the true spirit by people who are endowed with an abundance of sattva, but not by those who are fettered by the chains of rajas, the tendency to work tirelessly. Indeed, Swamiji advised people to imbibe the ideals of Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, thus shelving, for the time being, the other aspect of Sri Krishna—the di-

vine lover of Vrindavana as portrayed in the Bhagavata.

The chapter entitled 'Miscellaneous' posits Draupadi as a role model for modern women. The uprightness of Draupadi and her ability to protest against all the humiliations meted out to her have been portrayed as desirable qualities, especially in this modern age. The author goes on to argue that Sita and Radha are characters that are far removed from and too idealistic for the lives of today's women.

The book is a modern way of looking at the Gita. The devotion of the author is unquestionable. Yet his interpretations sometimes appear to be clumsy, losing their focus on the deeper spiritual significance of the scripture. All said and done, the book has a very positive message and would certainly help one gain respect for the great traditions that our country has offered over the ages.

Swami Tyagarupananda

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Like the Gods: The Creation Story for the 21st Century. *Juliette S Karow.* Black Walnut Press, 2208 East Baltimore St, Baltimore, Maryland 21231, USA. E-mail: reviews@blackwalnutpress.com. 2003. xii + 82 pp. \$12.95.

A concept that could revolutionize our understanding of Christianity has inspired *Like the Gods*. Calling upon her readers to read the Bible not literally but as a symbol, Dr Juliette Karow chooses a familiar sentence for a detailed commentary: 'For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil' (Genesis, 3.5).

According to Dr Karow, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have not cared to study the profound meaning of the creation story in the Bible. On the contrary, the New Thought Religions (including Christian Science, Unity, and Science of Mind that are actually Bible-based) as well as the Vedic, Native American and Shramanic religions consider the creation of mankind as good. Dr Karow gives a brief note on these religions and zeroes in on the kundalini chakras of the Tantra to explain the symbology behind the myth of genesis. So we find the snake representing knowledge, the woman signifying our 'intuitive, super sensory nature', and Adam's aware-

ness of his nakedness to be a mystic experience of the realization that he too is like God, 'made in the true image of Divinity'.

In fact, Dr Karow goes so far as to say that the concept of original sin could be a latter-day insertion. The message of the Bible is about a God of Love and his teachings. Jesus was an incarnation who came to teach us about God's love for us. His disciples have spread this message. 'Mystical religion has always known that each one of us is potentially divine. More and more people are now realizing the power of God in their individual lives.' The ancient Vedas have spoken of human beings as children of immortality, *amṛtasya putrāḥ*. *Like the Gods* is a persuasive, amiable and significant publication for ushering in a divine harmony for humankind.

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Book Received

The Philosophy of the Bhagavadgītā. *S M Srinivasa Chari.* Munshiram Manoharlal, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. Website: mrmbooks.com. 2005. xxvi + 294. Rs 575.

An in-depth, two-part study of the philosophy of the Gita by a scholar who has had training under eminent traditional teachers.

The first part discusses the philosophical implications of crucial verses selected from every chapter of the scripture with particular reference to the doctrines advanced by Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva while interpreting them in their commentaries. This gives the reader an idea of how differently the basic Vedantic tenets are explained by the great commentators, and how much of their explanations are actually reflected in the original text. In the second part the philosophical, theological and ethical ideas of the Gita are consolidated and reconstructed under three broad headings: 'Tattvas', 'Sadhana' and 'Parama-purushartha'.

Armed with 'sufficient textual authority', the author concludes that some of Shankara's and Madhva's doctrines do not fully conform with the teachings of the Gita.

PB

Reports

News from Belur Math

The 96th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 18 December 2005. It was chaired by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. 128 monastic members, 57 lay members and 44 associates participated in it.

News from Branch Centres

On 9 December (Swami Premanandaji's birthday), Most Revered President Maharaj inaugurated the 4-semester diploma course on 'Meditation and Spiritual Life' introduced by our deemed university, RKMVERI, and gave a short benedictory address to the participants at Vivekananda Sabhagriha, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur. Classes began from the next day at Saradapitha's Shikshanamandira (BEd college) campus.

On the 23rd (Holy Mother's birthday) Revered President Maharaj laid the foundation stone for the proposed central administrative office building at Belur for RKMVERI. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice Presi-

dent, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, were also present.

Relief and Rehabilitation Work

The following branch centres distributed a total of 6,078 blankets to poor people affected by the severity of winter in December: Asansol, 50; Baranagar Math, 100; Baranagar Mission, 1,040; Bhubaneswar, 500; Chandigarh, 215; Cooch Behar, 300; Jalpaiguri, 200; Kamar-pukur, 400; Karimganj, 300; Manasadwip, 300; Puri Math, 928; Rajahmundry, 245; Saradapitha, 500; and Tamluk, 1,000.

The recent floods in Tamil Nadu caused much devastation in the state. Our centres provided the following relief to the affected people: **Chengalpattu:** 11,500 plates of cooked food in Chengalpattu and 6 nearby villages; **Chennai Math:** primary medical relief to 4,565 victims of Cuddalore district; and **Chennai Mission Ashrama:** 8,100 plates of cooked food and 201 saris, 50 garments, 100 plastic pots, 300 plates, 300 tumblers and 200 bowls in Chennai's Jaffarkhanpet area.

Synopsis of the Governing Body's Report for 2004-05

The 96th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 18 December 2005, at 3.30 p.m.

In the wake of the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission launched massive relief operations in Andaman Islands, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Sri Lanka. Several thousands of victims were served with cooked meals, food materials, medical aid, temporary shelters and essential commodities like clothing, utensils and sleeping mats. Centres in Chennai, Kalady and Batticaloa distributed fibreglass boats and catamarans as well as fishing nets and other fishing gear to the fisherfolk, the worst sufferers in the tsunami disaster. In all, up till November 2005, 487 boats were distributed, and out of 324 houses undertaken for construction, 150 were completed and handed over to the beneficiaries; construction of 3 community halls and 1 school-cum-shelter house is in progress. A few tsunami-affected children were also admitted to our hostel in Port Blair. A sum of Rs 5.22 crore has been spent on these relief operations as of 31 March 2005.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, on recommendation of the University Grants Commission, declared Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research

Institute (RKMVERI) a deemed-to-be university under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Mission. To start with, the following 'thrust areas' have been chosen: 1) Disability Management and Special Education, 2) Integrated Rural Development including Tribal Development, 3) Indian Cultural and Spiritual Heritage and Value Education, and 4) Disaster Management including Relief and Rehabilitation.

During the year under review, the Mission started a new centre at the site of the birthplace and ancestral house of Swami Vivekananda under the name 'Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre'.

In the medical field, the following deserve mention: the starting of an eye-care unit at the dispensary of Patna centre, a telemedicine service unit at the polyclinic of Lucknow centre and a blood bank at the hospital of Vrindaban centre.

In the educational field, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (an autonomous body of the UGC) accredited the Vidyamandira (Saradapitha centre, Belur) with an A+ (90%-95%) grade. The Vivekananda College of Chennai Vidyapith centre was granted autonomous status from the academic year 2004-05 for all courses affiliated to the University of Madras. Its Algal Biotechnology unit of the Department of Plant Biology and Plant Biotechnology has entered into an MoU with 4 Indian companies for effluent treatment and with a Japanese company to work on polymer biodegradation.

In the rural development field, Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), a unit of the Lokashiksha Parishad of Narendrapur centre (Kolkata) was chosen as the lead JSS to help and guide the JSSs of West Bengal and north-eastern states. The Agricultural Training Centre of the Lokashiksha Parishad was nominated by the West Bengal government as a State Agricultural Management and Extension Training Institute (SAMETI) to support the state government by taking up a series of activities relating to human resource development in agriculture and agro-allied fields, and help it in the reformation of State Extension Programmes. The Lokashiksha Parishad's Medinipur Demand-driven Sanitation Strategy has been recognized as a role model in the promotion of the central government's Rural Sanitation Programme. The Department of Drinking Water Supply, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, recognized the Lokashiksha Parishad as one of 4 chief resource institutes in 2004-05 for capacity development of key functionaries of its Total Sanitation Campaign programme.

Under the Ramakrishna Math, the following developments deserve special mention: the starting of new centres at Cuddapah in Andhra Pradesh, Ghatshila in Jharkhand and Bindweide (near Bonn) in Germany; and the inauguration of a nursery-school building at Mekhliganj centre in West Bengal, a school building at Kalady centre in Kerala, and a dispensary building at Ulsoor centre in Bangalore.

During the year, the Mission understood extensive relief and rehabilitation programmes in several parts of the country involving an expenditure of Rs 13.05 crore and benefiting 8.97 lakh people belonging to 2.20 lakh families in 2,180 villages. Welfare work by way of scholarships for poor students and pecuniary help to old, sick and destitute people amounted to Rs 3.36 crore. Medical service was rendered to more than 66.10 lakh people through 10 hospitals and 131 dispensaries, including mobile ones, and the expenditure incurred was Rs 39.59 crore. Nearly 1.86 lakh students including 64,000 girls were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to postgraduate levels. A sum of Rs 92.66 crore was spent on educational work. A number of rural- and tribal-development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs 10.63 crore.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks and sincere gratitude to our members and friends for their kind cooperation and continued help.

Swami Smaranananda

General Secretary

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission