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Sunset over the Garhwal range, Himalayas.
Quote from Swami Vivekananda (CW 3,353).

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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

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❧ Traditional Wisdom ❧

TĪRTHA: PILGRIMAGE

वेनस्तत्पश्यन्निहितं गुहा सद्यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम् ।
तस्मिन्निदं सं च वि चैति सर्वं स ओतः प्रोतश्च विभूः प्रजासु ॥

The sage beholds that mysterious Being wherein all come to have their one home. Therein unites and therefrom issues the Whole; that all pervading Being is the warp and woof of all Creation. (Yajur Veda, 32.8)

तीर्थैस्तरन्ति प्रवतो महीरिति यज्ञकृतः सुकृतो येन यन्ति ।
अत्रादधुर्यजमानाय लोकं दिशो भूतानि यदकल्पयन्त ॥

By means of the *tīrthas* (sacrifices) the sacrificant overcomes great misfortune, and for such a worshipper is laid open the path of the virtuous by all quarters as well as all beings. (Atharva Veda, 18.4.7)

आत्मतीर्थं समुत्सृज्य बहिस्तीर्थानि यो व्रजेत् ।
करस्थं स महारत्नं त्यक्त्वा काचं विमार्गते ॥

One who, having forsaken the *tīrtha* of the Self, merely visits the external *tīrthas* is a person who having forsaken the invaluable jewel at hand goes in search of mere glass. (*Sri Jabala Darshana Upanishad*, 4.50)

One who has (God) here (in the heart), has Him there (in the *tīrthas*) also. He who has Him not here, has Him not there. (Sri Ramakrishna)

At each place of pilgrimage there is a special time when the spiritual current flows. If at those times an aspirant meditates, his mind easily becomes absorbed and he finds increased joy in his meditation. (Swami Brahmananda)

I believe Bethlehem, Golgotha, the Mount of Olives, and the Resurrection to be verily in the heart of him who has God. (St Gregory of Nyssa)

∞ This Month ∞

We continue our study of the ethos that pervades some of the important places of pilgrimage to explore the diverse shades that go into the making of **The Meaning of Tīrtha** and how this can enhance our understanding of religion and spirituality.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago presents excerpts from Swami Abhedananda's addresses in south India on his return from the West.

Pilgrimage is but one of the many meanings of the term *tīrtha*. It has got as much to do with personal purification as with peregrination. The spiritual transformation wrought at a *tīrtha* depends more on proper mental attitude and a spirit of service than the mere observance of ritual. It must also foster catholicity of mind and broadness of heart. All this, and much more, we learn from Swami Purnanandaji, Belur Math, through his illuminating article, **Tīrtha and Its Significance**.

The legend, tradition, ritual and religious culture associated with a *tīrtha* are easily apprehended by the initiated and the devout. But how does an outsider comprehend, participate in, and partake of the religious milieu of a *tīrtha*? Dr Dipak Sengupta provides us one such outsider record of insights and reactions while visiting the religious sites of ancient Greece, the Eastern Orthodox monasteries of Meteora and Catholic Rome in **The Monasteries of Meteora**. The author is retired Chief General Manager, Coal India Limited.

'The spiritual fire is blazing intensely there, and whoever goes there will be purified', said M about Dakshineswar. We get a glimpse of that fire and the ambience wherein

it burns as Swami Chetananandaji completes his narrative on **Dakshineswar: The Stage for Ramakrishna's Divine Play**. The author is Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis.

In the second instalment of **In the Vrindavan of My Heart** Swami Achyutanandaji, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, gives a fascinating account of the myths, legends and history associated with the Katyayani, Lala Babu, Shyamrai and Gopeshwara Mahadeva temples of Vrindavan. The adapted translation from the author's original Bengali text, *Hridi Brindabane*, has been provided by Dr Chhaya Ghosh, Durgapur.

Swami Chidrupanandaji, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, continues his visit to the remaining of the twelve *devipithas* located in West Bengal. He concludes his interesting account, **In Search of the Divine: An Account of the Twelve Shaktipithas of West Bengal**, at Belur Math, a *shaktipitha* of modern times.

Swami Vivekananda reached Vancouver on 25 July 1893 during his first voyage to the West. It had been assumed that he took the train to Winnipeg the next day, reaching Winnipeg on 28 July and Chicago on 30 July. The late Mr Rainer Kossmann, a founding member of the Vedanta Society of Winnipeg, has provided documentary evidence to challenge this view in **Swami Vivekananda's Journey through Canada: July 1893**.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave: A Moving Tīrtha is a stirring recall of the small personal events that marked out Vinobaji as great. The author, Dr Tapash Sankar Dutta, is former Principal, GC College, Silchar.

The Meaning of *Tīrtha*

EDITORIAL

One question that we have been repeatedly asking ourselves while putting together the twin issues on *tīrthas* is ‘Why this theme?’ Pilgrimage sites are now being actively promoted as tourist spots. Easier and cheaper travel facilities combined with increasing middle-class affluence has resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of tourists across the globe and the traditional pilgrimage spots have not been exempt from this influx. A vast amount of literature, scholarly as well as popular, is being churned out on virtually every pilgrimage destination. So, what fresh insights could we possibly be offering our readers?

What does *tīrtha* mean? Is it the same as pilgrimage, or does it have other connotations? What does a pilgrimage signify, for that matter? Can this term be used in a generic fashion, or does it have shades of meaning that vary with cultures, traditions, locales and times? Are the Hindu doing *parikrama* around Vishwanatha at Kashi and the Muslim doing *tawaf* around the Ka’ba at Makkah doing the same thing? What possibly is going on in their minds? What emotions do they experience? Is it possible to share these experiences when they meet? Is there a common language for this?

Then there is the distinction between the devout and the skeptic (or the agnostic, the atheist and the heretic). What does the uninitiated make of the salutations and prostrations, the fasts and vigils, the burning of incense and the waving of lamps, the unintelligible prayers and the apparently irrational charity? True, the scenic ambience, ornate architecture, tasteful decorations, soulful music and vibrant fervour at a *tīrtha* can all evoke a sympathetic or even an awed response from even skeptics and agnostics; but there are other elements that ‘outsiders’ may find incomprehensible or even positively

repulsive: mindlessly monotonous rituals, gruesome animal sacrifices, self-inflicted torture, and narrow exclusivist sermons. Irreverent outsiders can obviously vitiate the holy atmosphere which is so precious to the devout. Hence the restrictions on non-believers entering shrines or participating in closed rituals that obtain in virtually all religious traditions.

More intriguing are the differences within traditions that the outsider often takes to be monolithic. What does an austere celibate given to lifelong worship of Shiva at Uttarkashi make of Krishna’s ubiquitous sport in Vrindavan? What feelings arise in a Lutheran Protestant when he sees the rich tapestry of icons, images and murals at St Peter’s Basilica or attends Mass there? How does a Theravada Buddhist make sense of the huge pantheon of divine beings represented in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition? How does a Sufi from the dargah at Ajmer react to the restrictions on veneration and prostrations at Prophet Muhammad’s and other tombs in Madinah?

Religion itself is a conglomerate of diverse dogmas and folkways, social mores and cultural values, personal psychological orientation as well as the collective unconscious. So even ‘insiders’ approaching a *tīrtha* are likely to have very different feelings and reactions individually. How does an Indian tourist react to the massive ruins at Angkor Wat? Does he see them merely as historical remains of archaeological interest, or does he feel the presence of the Holy? How does this reaction vary with the religious affiliation of the visitor—Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim? And what are the thoughts of someone who does not care much for religion but has strong Indian nationalist sentiments? How would the Kampuchean react to his suggestion that what he sees in front is ‘Greater In-

dia'? What if this Kampuchean is Sita, the teenage vendor selling mementoes outside the temple complex?

Ancient cities like Varanasi, Jerusalem, Makkah and Rome have been important pilgrimage centres since ancient times. They have served as religious crossroads where humans confronted the Divine. But they have also been cultural 'melting pots' where people had to encounter men and women of other faiths, cultures, convictions and religious affiliations. While much of this interaction was responsible for the cosmopolitan character of these cities they also lead to conflict, strife and open warfare. The juxtaposed temples and mosques of Varanasi are more often reminders of this conflict when they could well have been symbols of harmony, just like the musical *gharana* of Kashi where Hindus and Muslims train in classical music with equal discipline and devotion. The 'Wailing' Wall of Jerusalem still draws tears from battle-hardened Jews for being the remnant of the ancient Temple of Solomon which was razed to the ground more than once and in whose place stands the Mosque of Umar atop Mount Moriah. While Jerusalem is a hotly contested territory—being of importance to Jewish, Christian as well as Islamic traditions—the peace of uniformity reigning at Rome or Makkah can be very deceptive. For the price of that uniformity is the total demolition of cultures termed 'pagan' coupled with an exclusivism that prevents the flowering of diversity.

The 'non-Hindus not allowed' or 'only the baptized may enter' notices in some Hindu temples and Christian churches, or the prohibition on non-Muslims from entering Makkah are only symptoms of a much deeper human malady that prevents us from relating to each other at a deeper level of our being. But if there are numerous divisive forces, the attempts at breaking barriers and bridging divides are no less significant. The famous Vaikom satyagraha in Kerala initiated by Gandhiji and led by Vinoba Bhave was an important step in allowing Harijans access to Hindu temples, and

when Vinoba visited the Vithoba shrine at Pandharpur accompanied by a German lady, a Muslim worker, a Parsi young man and some Harijans, it was probably the first time that a traditional Hindu temple was formally declared open to non-Hindus.

There have been numerous recent attempts at bridging sectarian divides *within* different religions. The Christian ecumenical movement has made concerted organized efforts to increase cooperation between the various Christian Churches and denominations. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Organizations of the Islamic Conference have similar aims though the efficient organization of the pilgrimage institutions of Kumbha Mela and Hajj probably provide greater impetus to sectarian unity amongst Hindus and Muslims.

The efforts at *inter-religious* dialogue and understanding have, in comparison, been feebler and less effective. How does a Hindu appreciate the Christian thesis that the incarnation of Jesus is unique and 'no one comes to the Father but through me'? How does (s)he honour the belief that 'Islam is the most perfect of all divinely revealed religions' and that Hazrat Muhammad is 'the seal of the Prophets'? How does a Muslim reconcile himself to the Hindu reality of numerous gods and their worship through images, a practice that amounts to *shirk* (idolatry) and *kufr* (unbelief) in orthodox Islam? How does a Christian grapple with the Buddhist silence on the existence of God?

None of these are new questions. But the fact that we hardly have any definite answers to these questions only exposes the fact that 'nowhere is our basic religious knowledge up to the level of our basic knowledge of mathematics or biology'. So an appreciation of *tīrthas* can be a small step in the process of religious education; and the *tīrthas* can serve as concrete reminders of the beliefs and aspirations of traditions other than our own. In trying to understand these *tīrthas* we understand ourselves and in meeting the 'other' at the *tīrthas* we are forced to take a fresh look at our own inner being. *

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

August 1906

Swami Abhedananda in Southern India

Swami Abhedananda since his landing at Colombo has been receiving grand ovations throughout the line of his travels in Southern India. Torchlight processions, Sankirtan parties, boys unharnessing the horses of his carriage and drawing it themselves, deafening cheers, presentation of addresses of welcome, showering of flowers and enthusiastic cries of 'Bande Mataram' and 'Hari Hara' &c., the thronging together of people of whole localities and other expressions of Oriental spiritual enthusiasm are the order of the day. ...

... In reply to the address of welcome at Tenkasi, he remarked that it was his earnest prayer that the people of India should acquire the spirit of co-operation and devotion to the cause of the country, which had characterised the Western nations and brought success to them in the great national competition. ... Spiritual regeneration, he said, leads to all political and social growth. To achieve this end, religious centres should be established all over the country. These centres should organise schools for imparting instruction in Vedanta and preaching missions for spreading Vedic truths and ideals. ...

... [At Trichinopoly] he ... remarked that Hinduism was being popularised in America by the members of the Ramakrishna Mission and that it was making headway there because it was a religion of first principles and did not rest its foundation on dogmas, but appealed to all men whatever their professed religion might be, by its broad tolerance and its national [*sic*] and scientific basis. The word Hinduism was misleading and did not convey in the slightest degree the grandeur and sublimity of the religion of the Aryans. ... Emphasising the need for unity and the power of organization among the Hindus, the Swami observed that in England the forty millions of the population acted as one mind, while in India the three hundred millions acted with as many minds. ... He asked them to assimilate these virtues of their European friends, and give up imitating their vices. ...

... [At Pudukotah] he advised the audience to practise when young, the breathing exercises enjoined in the Pranayama and Raja Yoga as a sovereign panacea for the cure of many ills that flesh is heir to. ... He dwelt at great length upon the catholicity of the Sanatan Dharma, and spoke against the custom of early marriage, as tying down young people to their homes and militating against their usefulness to society. He spoke of the good arising from the study of the Bhagavad Gita, and said that he knew many an American being helped in the pursuit of business by following the principles of Karma Yoga ...

... [At Tanjore] after demonstrating the fact of the appreciation of Vedanta in America by the existence of a number of societies started for the purpose of Vedantic study, he pointed out that almost all of the modern philosophical theories and truths were discussed many centuries ago in the Hindu Shastras. ... He emphatically brought home to the minds of the audience, the necessity for religious workers and sannyasins like himself, going to different continents ... to preach the Vedic religion, and that India ... could easily conquer the whole world spiritually, should the sons of the soil be alive only to the greatness of their religion. He was sorry that up to the present time he had not been able to get a single worker who was willing and prepared to sacrifice himself and go out on this religious mission. He said that, political greatness would come to a nation which was spiritually great, and that a Sannyasin, having nothing to fear, can go all over the world ... to establish a brotherly relation between nations and humanity in general.

*

Tīrtha and Its Significance

SWAMI PURNANANDA

From time immemorial humans have been believing in the existence of God. In the primitive or prehistoric ages a number of gods and goddesses used to be worshipped. They were mainly symbolic of natural or super-natural powers. For example, in ancient Greece Zeus was the king of gods who possessed all powers of protection and annihilation. The Romans had their king of gods, Jupiter. There were also subordinate gods like Apollo, the sun god of the Greeks, and the like. These gods had their temples and shrines where they were worshipped and these were considered holy. Furthermore, the places where these shrines were situated were also considered holy spots and people used to visit these places to pay their respects to the gods. Natural elements like air, water and fire have intrinsic powers and the gods were personifications of these powers. Obviously, these gods had the power to protect or destroy. Therefore they had to be propitiated; else they might become angry and destroy people. This gave rise to the idea of worship of gods and goddesses, worship circumscribed within certain rites. This god-worship, again, gave rise to religion with one or more gods. Such religions were named monotheistic or polytheistic accordingly. Every religion has its scriptures, holy places, temples, churches, mosques, or symbols associated with God. Different religions have different ways of worship and certain places have come to be specifically associated with

worship and adoration. Broadly speaking, places with such holy associations are known as *tīrthas* (places of pilgrimage) to the people of the respective faiths.

Places of pilgrimage are strewn all over the world. The concept of *tīrtha* has occupied the human mind since ancient times, and religion is very closely associated with the *tīrthas*. Since



MA. SE.

these places are considered holy, most people have faith and devotion towards them and visit them. In a general sense the word *tīrtha* means a place for religious practices. Again, though religion is an English synonym of the Sanskrit *dharmā*, the two words do not always mean the same thing. *Dharma* has a vast and diverse area for its meaning. Some use the word for piety or religious rites, some to mean natural properties of things, whereas others use

it for righteousness or divine virtues, and so on. The etymological meaning of *dharmā* is 'that which holds or sustains'. The Atharva Veda defines *dharmā* thus:

*Satyam brhadṛtamugram dīkṣā tapo
brahma yajñah pṛthivīm dhārayanti;
Sā no bhūtasya bhavyasya patnyurum
lokam pṛthivī nah kṛnotu.*

'The earth is being sustained by infinite truth, valiant righteousness, initiation, penance, prayer and sacrifice. May this earth, who is the mistress of our past and future, create a great universe for us.'¹ When all these qualities are associated with a holy place, then it is called a

tīrtha. There is a difference between *tīrthas* and other places of importance, be they historical, geographical, archaeological, or simply places of natural beauty. People visit the latter on excursions or pleasure trips. But pilgrimage is quite a different thing. Only journeys undertaken with some sacred or pious intention can be rightly called pilgrimage.

Defining Tīrtha

The Sanskrit word *tīrtha* is derived from the root verb *ty*, meaning ‘to cross’, ‘to surpass’. So according to the derived meaning, a *tīrtha* is a place from where one can surpass or overcome one’s evil actions (*tarati pāpādikam yasmāt*) or a place from which one can ascend (*tarati yasmāt sthānāt*) to a higher stage of life. A holy place raises us by leading to a higher mental plane; it has the power to manifest godliness in the human heart by making it pure.

The ultimate Truth is the foundation of spiritual science. All scientific truths—even religions and philosophies—are but lower steps of the seemingly infinite flight of stairs that leads to the summit of spirituality. Pilgrimage also happens to be one such step.

In English, one who goes on a pilgrimage is called a pilgrim. The word *pilgrim* is derived from Old French *peligrin* or from Late Latin *pelegrinus*, meaning ‘foreigner’. A pilgrim is ‘one who journeys in foreign lands’. So a place of pilgrimage is, by implication, a foreign land. But this differs greatly from the meaning conveyed by the word *tīrtha*. *Tīrtha* is a place for devotees, and devotees are not foreign to one another. For practicality’s sake, however, we must make do with the term *place of pilgrimage* for *tīrtha*.

Manifestation of God Is More in a Tīrtha

Descriptions of holy places are found in the scriptures of all faiths right from the Vedas, the most ancient one. It is God that has taken the form of *tīrthas*; that is why they are so holy. The Yajur Veda adores them with salutations: ‘*Namastīrthyāya ca*; Salutation also to the Di-

vine dwelling in *tīrthas*.² Though God is omnipresent He manifests Himself in certain places or objects for the sake of common people. Those places or objects are adored with the highest reverence and that is why the shruti offers the above salutation. Another such beautiful passage is found in the Atharva Veda:

*Divam brūmo nakṣatrāṇi
bhūmim yakṣāṇi parvatān;
Samudrā nadyo veśāntāste
no muñcantvaṁhasah.*

‘We revere the sky, the stars, the earth, all supernatural beings, and mountains; the oceans, the rivers, the ponds; let them (the gods dwelling therein) deliver us from our troubles.’³

A man of true knowledge experiences God everywhere. To him God has become this universe. But to a common man with his sense of distinction this idea is not that easy to accept or assimilate. For such people God manifests, as it were, in special objects or places or persons. This has been expressed by the Lord Himself in the Bhagavadgita:

*Yadyadvibhūtimatsattvaṁ
śrīmadūrjitameva vā;
Tattadevāvagaccha tvam
mama tejo ’mśasambhavam.*

‘Know it for certain that whatever there is extraordinary, endowed with splendour or valour, that originates from but a spark of my divine brilliance.’⁴ As Sri Ramakrishna says, ‘The Sun’s light falls equally on all surfaces, but only bright surfaces like water, mirrors and polished metals, can reflect it fully.’⁵ Similarly, *tīrthas* have the power to manifest the presence of God. For ages together great souls, spiritual luminaries, saints and sages have been visiting these places and undergoing spiritual practices there. Powerful spiritual vibrations surging out from their pure minds have produced strong spiritual fields that have made the places holy. In fact, these pure souls are the actual redeemers of the *tīrthas*. It is their holy presence and spiritual fervour that transform these places into *tīrthas*. ‘*Tīrthīkurvanti tīrthāni*, they make the

tīrthas holy', says Narada.⁶ Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi used to say: 'Where else is God except very close to His devotees? If worldly people even visit the place used by holy men, the very atmosphere of the place can remove the dross of their mind.'⁷ Such places are found in abundance not only in India but all over the world. The entire land of India is, as it were, a place of pilgrimage. Swami Vivekananda called it holy land, *puṇya bhūmi*.

As observed earlier, people of all religious faiths have their places of pilgrimage. Muslims consider pilgrimage to Mecca one of their chief religious principles (*hajj*). Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians too have their holy places. Buddhists and Jains may not stress image worship and rituals, but even they have their sacred spots: to the Buddhists the places bearing the holy memories of Lord Buddha, where stupas or columns have been erected as monuments, are sacred, while the birthplaces of the twenty-four tirthankaras are sacred to the Jains.

How *Tīrthas* Came into Being

How have these *tīrthas* come into existence? Where are they situated? What are the characteristics that make them holy or sacred? *Tīrthas* are located everywhere—generally on river banks, mountaintops or in remote, inaccessible places. Many rivers like Ganga and Yamuna are regarded as holy. Innumerable pilgrim spots stand on their shores—right from the place of their origin down to where they meet the sea. Confluences of two or more rivers are called *prayāgas*. *Tīrthas* like Prayagraj at Allahabad, Sone Prayag, Vishnu Prayag and Rudra Prayag are examples of these. Puri, Dwarka and Kanyakumari are some of the famous *tīrthas* that are situated on the seashore. But *tīrthas* stand even in the midst of impassable deserts; Hinglaj is one such. The Himalaya, the greatest of mountains, is believed to be the abode of gods and goddesses. So the entire Himalayan range is one vast place of pilgrimage with its innumerable *tīrthas* like Kailas, Mansarovar, Amarnath, Kedarnath,

and Badrinath.

We find a number of *tīrthas* mentioned in the Vedas, Puranas and other scriptures. Places that have witnessed the birth and divine sports of incarnations of God and places chosen by saints and sages for their spiritual practice and ministration have become famous *tīrthas*. Naimisharanya is one such eternally holy spot that has been described in many Puranas. Then there are the fifty-one *śaktipīṭhas* dedicated to the Divine Mother, the embodiment of cosmic Energy. The story how the various parts of Sati's body came to be associated with these *pīṭhas* has been narrated elsewhere in this issue. Besides places like these, spots where famous ancient temples are located are also called *tīrthas*. Thus Varanasi, Kanchipuram, Tirupati, Prabhas, Bhubaneswar, and Ujjain can all be equally designated as *tīrthas*.

It is evident that *tīrthas* are primarily associated with religion. Each of them enshrines the spiritual culture and religious heritage of a particular faith or tradition. This is the reason why people at large feel passionately about them. In the *Skanda Purana*, Agastya says to his wife Lopamudra: '*Tīrtha śabda varārohe dharma-kṛtyeṣu vartate*; O fair one! The word *tīrtha* is related to religious observances.'⁸ Agastya further describes other implications of *tīrtha* to Lopamudra: 'O fair one! Mother is a *tīrtha*, father is a *tīrtha*, congregations of holy persons are *tīrthas*, religious thinking as well as spiritual principles (*yama*) and disciplines (*niyama*) are *tīrthas*, sacred discourses by the celestial sages (*devaṛṣis*), places which great ascetics and gods frequent, and holy lands, O my beloved, are all considered *tīrthas*' (6.108.12-4).

Purpose of Pilgrimage

People go on pilgrimage for various purposes. Some go merely to visit or to enjoy the places' natural beauty; some go for attaining piety, others to perform religious rites. Spiritual aspirants resort to holy places in order to observe penance and purify their minds. Christians go to church to perform their daily devo-

tions; Muslims go to Mecca on hajj as a religious duty and offer their prayers collectively; Hindus go to Gaya to perform the obsequies of their departed ancestors. But whatever the case may be, one should go on pilgrimage with some *bhāva* (mental attitude). A *tīrtha* is an embodiment of the Divine—God assumes the form of a *tīrtha* and divinity is manifest therein. God, in this case, is not a person but an aggregate of divine principles. From an even higher standpoint, God is without any attribute whatsoever. It is the devotees who bring God down from the Principle to the Person (of their choice), and out of sheer love and compassion for them God descends to the personal level and accepts the various names and forms they attribute to Him in order to satisfy them. Devotees worship with utmost love the same God in different forms and with different names according to their mental make-up as their *iṣṭa devatā* (Chosen Deity). That is why it is said:

*Cinmayasyādvitīyasya
niṣkalasyāśarīriṇaḥ;
Upāsakānām kāryārtham
brahmaṇo rūpakalpanā.*

‘The assumption of forms by Brahman, the pure Consciousness, the One without a second, partless and bodiless, is for the sake of fulfilling the purposes of the worshippers.’⁹ The Lord is also called *bhāvagrāhī*, one who takes into account the inmost attitude of the devotee. That inmost attitude, imbued with the utmost unalloyed love, is the final word in the sphere of genuine religion, though outwardly a devotee may worship God with offerings or through charity or by singing of praises and glories. Pilgrimage too is but a kind of worship of God in the form of a holy *tīrtha*. Every *tīrtha* has its presiding deity who must be paid reverential homage, be it in the form of worship, chanting of holy names or meditation. That apart, in a *tīrtha* one is enjoined to give in charity to holy persons as well as to the poor and the afflicted. This is the manner in which the Divine in the form of a *tīrtha* is worshipped. God in turn is pleased to gratify the pilgrim with the desired results.

Obtaining the Fruits of Visiting a *Tīrtha*

Sri Ramakrishna once told a devotee: ‘From time to time he [a worldly person] should live in the company of holy men, and from time to time go into solitude to meditate on God. Furthermore, he should practise discrimination and pray to God, “Give me faith and devotion.” Once a person has faith he has achieved everything.’¹⁰ Pilgrimage can provide a devotee with all these. At a *tīrtha* one can associate with monks and devotees, benefit from the solitude and spiritual vibrations of the place which help concentrate one’s mind on God easily, and sincerely practise prayer and discrimination. What is discrimination? It is the ability to judge what is good and what is bad, what is acceptable and what is non-acceptable, what is real and what is unreal. After discriminating thus one must with strong determination accept the real and give up the unreal. Sri Ramakrishna says, ‘God is real and all else is illusory’ (392). This is the essence of discrimination. True, but unless the mind is prepared to accept it, it is all futile. ‘The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’¹¹ So one should maintain one’s *bhāva*. A famous Sanskrit verse says:

*Bhāvena labhate jñānam
bhāvena devadarśanam;
Bhāvena labhate sarvaṃ
tasmādbhāvāvalambanam.*

‘Through *bhāva* knowledge is attained, through *bhāva* comes God-vision. Everything is achieved through *bhāva*; therefore *bhāva* is to be adopted.’ Bereft of *bhāva* merely visiting holy places would at best be an excursion or a pleasure trip. However many dips one may take in the holy rivers, nothing will happen. Says Mirabai: ‘If God can be attained by daily bathing, may I be an aquatic animal.’ In the ‘Kashi Khanda’ it is said:

*Cittamantargataṃ duṣṭam
tīrthasnanānna śuddhyati;
Śataśo’pi jalairdhautam
surābhāṇḍamivāsuciḥ.*

‘Impurities of the mind cannot be removed by

bathing in holy rivers, just as a vessel used to hold liquor remains impure even if washed hundreds of times.¹² In order to acquire the competence and mental purity required for benefiting from a pilgrimage the scripture prescribes the practice of certain principles (*yama*) and disciplines (*niyama*). Again, these qualities themselves have been considered *tīrthas*.¹³

Mental Preparation for *Tīrtha*

Yamas are the lofty ethical principles of life. They are termed ‘universal’, because they comprise spiritual imperatives which are valid irrespective of time, place, social purpose or cultural demands. They consist of the five great vows of non-killing (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), continence (*brahmacarya*), and non-receiving of gifts (*aparigraha*).

In order to be established in these ethical principles, five observances or disciplines have been prescribed. They are: internal and external purification (*śauca*), contentment (*santoṣa*), mortification or penance (*tapas*), study (*svādhyāya*), and worship of God (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*). These are called *niyamas*.

A mind established in the *yamas* is itself a *tīrtha*. This ethical conduct has to be maintained throughout one’s life. Otherwise, merely visiting a *tīrtha* once in a while with a mind full of selfish desires—though making charity, performing worship and penance, practising cleanliness, and hearing religious discourses—does no good.¹⁴ In other words, pilgrimage is efficacious provided it is done in the right spirit. A *tīrtha* has the power to purify the mind and awaken spiritual fervour. As the Bhagavata says:

*Suśrūṣoḥ śraddhadhānasya vāsudevakathārucih;
Syānmahatsevayā viprāḥ punyatīrthanīṣevanāt.*

‘O venerable brahmins! By performing holy pilgrimage and serving great souls one can attain devotional faith (*śraddhā*) and the willingness to listen to discourses on Vāsudeva.’¹⁵

Three Types of *Tīrtha*

God is all-pervasive. Just as He manifests

Himself in human beings He dwells in animate and inanimate creatures too. Accordingly, *tīrthas* are classified into three types: *sthāvāra* (immovable), *jaṅgama* (movable), and *mānasa* (mental). *Sthāvāra tīrthas* include sacred locales like Varanasi, Vrindaban and Kamarpukur; sacred rivers like the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati; and temples like Jagannath, Somanth and Dakshineswar. By *tīrtha* we usually understand these immovable *tīrthas*. The ‘Kashi Khanda’ describes what made them *tīrthas*: ‘The wonderful natural characteristics of the locality, the unique grandeur of the local waters or the fact that some sage resorted to them (for austerity).’¹⁶

The great souls who make *tīrthas* all the more holy are *jaṅgama tīrthas*, or moving *tīrthas*. They are called brahmanas by virtue of their qualities and actions. Another verse attributed to the ‘Kashi Khanda’ says:

*Brāhmaṇā jaṅgamastīrtham
nirmalam sarvakāmikam;
Yeṣāṃ vākyaodakenaiva
suddhyanti malinā janāḥ.*

‘Brahmanas devoid of all blemishes and who fulfil all the desires (of others) are the moving *tīrthas*. Their words, like holy water, purify people stained by impurities.’ The virtues and duties that go to make one a brahmana have been enumerated in the Bhagavadgita: ‘Serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, forbearance, uprightness, knowledge, realization and faith are the duties of a brahmana born of his nature.’¹⁷ Persons possessing these qualities are indeed moving *tīrthas*. Whatever they speak is authoritative and the places they visit become sacred. In the Bhagavata, Yudhishtira tells Vidura:

*Bhavadvidhā bhāgavatā-
tīrthībhūtāḥ svayam vibho;
Tīrthikurvanti tīrthāni
svāntapsthena gadābhṛtā.*

‘O venerable one! A *bhāgavata* (one possessing divine virtues and motiveless devotion to God) like you is himself an embodiment of a holy

tīrtha; Gadadhara, the Lord Himself, being manifest in such persons, they make the *tīrthas* even more holy.¹⁸

How great these souls are! They possess the power of purifying anything that comes in contact with them. The Lord Himself confesses to Uddhava: ‘I always follow him who desires nothing, who is a *muni* (deeply engrossed in God), serene, free from enmity and who looks upon all with an equal eye, in order that all (the worlds within Me) may be purified by the dust of his holy feet’ (11.14.16). Such are the great devotees of God! They possess infinite purity, and the capacity to purify everything.

The third category of *tīrtha* is a man’s own mind that has been purified of all desires and merged in God. God is holy; there is nothing holier than God. And a mind always living in Divine presence becomes identified with the Divine. Says Sri Ramakrishna: ‘That which is Pure Mind is also Pure Buddhi; that, again, is Pure Ātman.’¹⁹

*Viśayeṣvatisaṁrāgo mānaso mala ucyate;
Teṣveva hi virāgo sya nairmalyam samudāhrtam.*

‘Attachment to worldly objects is what is termed mental impurity and detachment from sense objects is mental purity.’²⁰

A person having such a mind has no need to go anywhere to purify himself; his own pure mind is a place of pilgrimage. Not only that, whoever comes into contact with him becomes pure regardless of whether words are exchanged or not. This is beautifully described in the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra*: ‘How strange! Under the banyan tree is seated a young guru, surrounded by old disciples; the guru’s mute eloquence dispels all doubts of the disciples!’ What is the secret behind this? The guru’s mental field is so vast and powerful that it attracts and merges into itself the disciples’ small mental fields. Where then is the room for any doubt? Such a mind, devoid of the least stain of desire, the cause of impurity, is a much more effective purifying agent than a place of pilgrimage. A pure mind is a storehouse of immense power, including that of purifying other impure minds.

So the truest and best pilgrimage is to purify the mind (*manasaḥ viśuddhi*)—that is the greatest *tīrtha*—because it gives rise to a number of divine qualities that are themselves considered great *tīrthas*: truthfulness (*satya*), forgiveness (*kṣamā*), sense control (*indriya-nigraha*), compassion (*sarvabhūta-dayā*), uprightness (*ārjava*), charity (*dāna*), self-control (*damā*), contentment (*santoṣa*), continence (*brahmacarya*), pleasant speech (*priyavādītā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), fortitude (*dhṛti*) and austerity (*tapas*). All these are *tīrthas* in themselves (6.32); they are called ‘divine treasures’. A heart that possesses these rich treasures is ‘God’s parlour’; God manifests therein. And wherever such a person goes, that place becomes a *tīrtha*.

When all the senses (*indriyas*) are brought under control and the mind is constantly fixed on God, all mental modifications subside, and one feels Divine presence everywhere, within and without. It then makes no difference where one lives, for one’s residence then becomes a *tapovana*—‘*nivṛttarāgasya grham tapovanam*; to a man of subdued passions his own home is a hermitage’. Sant Kabir says: ‘In the mind are Ganga and Yamuna. I take a holy dip in my mind. What further good will a *tīrtha* do to me?’ Again he says: ‘Don’t go, O brother! Don’t wander off to far-off places. Ganga and Yamuna are here in this body. So have your bath here itself.’

Therefore, all that is required is a pure mind, bereft of selfishness and passion. The same truth is spoken about in the *Skanda Purana*:

*Nigrhītendriyagrāmo yatraiva ca vasennarah;
Tatra tasya kurukṣetram naimiṣam puṣkarāṇi ca.*

‘Wherever a man may live having controlled the senses, for him that place turns into the *tīrthas* of Kurukshetra, Naimisha and Pushkara’ (6.40).

Good Actions: The Fourth Type of *Tīrtha*

There is yet another *tīrtha*, and that is good actions—work done for the well-being and happiness of the many; *bahujana hitāya*,

bahujana sukhāya. This was one of Buddha's instructions. He said to his disciples: '*Caratha bhikkhave cārikam bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya*; Let the bhikshus roam the four quarters for the well-being of the many, for the happiness of the many.' In the present age, Swami Vivekananda has interpreted it as the real karma yoga in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's great dictum of *śiva-jñāne jīva-sevā*, service to human beings looking upon them as God. We find the principles of karma yoga discussed in many scriptures, but it has been interpreted variously. Swami Vivekananda has highlighted its practical value as a means to God-realization. According to him *jīva-sevā* is not just a good deed but 'the best work you ever did'. To work for the sake of others is the only true work, all other work is non-work and contrary to real work. This *jīva-sevā*, not *sarvabhūta-dayā*, compassion towards all, elevates the mind to a plane in which it sees the supreme Self in all beings. Let alone selfless work, even a sincere prayer for the well-being of others makes the mind pure and the person blessed. And the place where this *jīva-sevā* is performed also becomes a *tīrtha*. The Mahabharata story of the brahmin family and the mongoose is proof of this, and is worth recollecting:

There lived a poor brahmin with his wife, daughter and son. Though the family was poor they were very pious. They lived on alms and could hardly make both ends meet. Once it so happened that they did not get any alms and so had to starve for a couple of days. Death was knocking at the door. Then, with much trouble, the brahmin managed to procure a meal of wheat. It was first offered to God and then divided into four equal parts. They were about to eat the meal, when a hungry guest arrived. He too was starving. A guest is to be regarded as Narayana Himself, so the brahmin offered his share to the guest, who ate it and said, 'Bring more food. This small quantity has only increased my hunger!' Now the wife offered her share to him. The guest consumed it in no time and demanded more. The son thought: 'It is my

filial duty as a son to complete the sacrifice undertaken by my father. Let me offer my share also to the venerable guest.' The guest devoured that too and said, 'My hunger is not yet satiated; I want some more food.' Then the daughter thought: 'As a daughter, is it not my duty to fulfil my parents' sacrifice?' And she placed her share before the guest. The guest's fiery hunger was now satisfied and he blessed them all and went away. Thus the four people gave up their lives for the sake of the guest. A mongoose was there witnessing everything. It came out and rolled on the sacred leftovers—and instantly half of its body became golden! 'Where on earth can I find another great *tīrtha* like this?' It began searching for such a place in order to turn the other half of its body golden. During its long search it came to the place where Yudhishtira had just completed his *rājasūya* yajna, the greatest sacrifice performed by a paramount ruler of the entire earth, and rolled on the spot—but with no effect!

Another incident would not be out of context here. Once a very poor devotee had a strong desire to go to Varanasi to have the darshan of Lord Vishwanatha. But he was too poor to do so. Swami Adbhutananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was then living in Varanasi. He came to know of the devotee's earnest longing and wrote to him to somehow collect the one-way railway fare to Varanasi and that other things could be taken care of. Thus being assured, the devotee reached Varanasi with great difficulty and had the darshan of Lord Vishwanatha and Mother Annapurna, and enjoyed the holy company of Latu Maharaj. But one day, at the Vishwanatha temple, he felt great mental anguish. After bathing in the Ganga and finishing his worship of Shiva with bel leaves, when he came out of the temple he saw that all the devotees were giving alms to mendicants and beggars according to their ability. He alone lacked the capacity to give in charity. He cried fie upon himself: 'I am a poor, wretched beggar myself, deprived of this rare opportunity. On the contrary, having come to this holy

place I am enjoying food and shelter provided by sadhus, and I do not have a penny to pay for it! He returned to his room with a heavy heart, closed the door and



started shedding tears of grief. Lata Maharaj came to know everything and suggested: 'What does it matter? You do one thing: tomorrow after bathing in the Ganga offer a handful of it to God and pray, "May all the miseries of the world be dispelled."' The devotee thought, 'This is just a consolation for a helpless destitute like me. What merit can be derived from it?' However, the next day the devotee did exactly as he was advised simply to honour the words of a great soul like Lata Maharaj. Immediately his mind became calm and serene, his heart was filled with an unspeakable bliss, and he felt blessed with divine grace. This is the result of true pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage to Unity

Human civilization is vast and infinitely diverse, and the different *tīrthas* are places of holy communion for the whole of humankind. There we experience the idea of unity in diversity, a sense of oneness; there we feel ourselves as part and parcel of the Cosmic Being, Virāt, for the *tīrthas* are eternal altars for divine communion. Pilgrimage helps us break free from the narrow, limited bounds of selfishness, caste, creed, and nationality and become one with the entire humankind. God is all and is in all. The one Eternal Being has become many, assuming innumerable forms and innumerable names. Realization of this truth is the culmination of spirituality—*avagatiḥ paryavasānam*, everything terminates in knowledge. It is this knowledge of oneness, where the entire universe becomes one single home, that a genuine devotee, whose heart has become pure and saturated with the nectar of universal love, realizes at a *tīrtha*. This is the highest significance of pil-

grimage. Else, as Sri Ramakrishna said, 'A sannyāsi's kamandalu, made of bitter gourd, travels with him to the four great places of pilgrimage but still does not lose

its bitterness.'²¹ Floating in the vast ocean of human souls we must transcend the artificial barriers that distinguish between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and so forth. We are all devotees of one and the same God. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, 'devotees have no caste'; they are the blessed children of Eternal Bliss, *amṛtasya putrāḥ!* Realization of this truth is the real purpose of pilgrimage. *Om tat sat.* *

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The Monasteries of Meteora

DR DIPAK SENGUPTA

'Hovering in the Air'

The tourist bus was racing through the countryside at around a hundred and fifty kilometres per hour. We had just left the ruins of Delphi and were proceeding towards Kalambaka, a small town in central Greece overlooking the monasteries of Meteora. Our guide Betty, with a very difficult Greek name, was narrating a brief history of the monasteries. *Kalambaka* is a Turkish word meaning 'beautiful fortress'. Such 'foreign terms' are reminders of the Ottoman Empire which once extended over this part of the world.

As we entered the town, the monasteries on the rock pinnacles came into view, shining in the setting sun. The word *meteora* literally means 'hovering in the air'. The pinnacles reach out for the sky, rising steeply some five to six hundred metres from the ground. Geologists differ in theories of their formation but these are undoubted marvels of nature. Greater marvels from the human point of view are the buildings on top of these giant rocks. It seemed as if some miracle had been conjured up to place them atop

those precarious heights and this makes Meteora one of the most spectacular tourist sites in Greece. No wonder that UNESCO has recently declared this to be a World Heritage site. As we settled down in our room in Hotel

Kalambaka the floodlit monasteries became visible against the dark sky from the balcony which is so common in Greek hotels.

A Turbulent History

In the early days of the eleventh century Christian monks settled in the caves

within these giant rocks. As times turned more and more turbulent and intolerant during the Turkish occupation, the monks kept climbing

higher and higher, until they were living on top of these inaccessible cliffs. In constructing the monastery buildings they addressed both aesthetic and utilitarian concerns. To carry material and people up the steep slopes they used collapsible ladders and also installed winches to lift baskets. We saw one winch set up at the Varlaam monastery. The rope with a basket on one end was hanging from a pulley. They told us that the machine was nearly five hundred years old.



A Meteora monastery perched on a cliff



A winch at work in Varlaam monastery



An approach bridge to a Meteora monastery

They are still being used to keep them in working order. Today roads, pathways, steps and wooden bridges across the cliffs have been built for easy access. But till the 1920s these were the only means of conveyance to the monasteries. Evidently the fear of invaders was persisting even a century after Turkish dominance over Greece had ended. The bridges were made of wood. They could be burnt off any day to isolate the monasteries.

The history of these monasteries is entwined with the history of Greece. During the Turkish occupation these monasteries kept alive the Hellenic culture and traditions which formed the base of the Greek Orthodox line of Christianity. These were not only religious centres but academic, artistic and political havens as well. It is believed that but for these monasteries Hellenic culture would have disappeared and modern Greece would have been a shadow of the Ottoman Empire with little bonding with its ancient roots. The monasteries also served as centres for the revolutionary movement of the early nineteenth century against Islamic rule. The Church always played a crucial role in European politics.

Historically, politics played an important role in the development of the Orthodox Church, since the estrangement of the Eastern and Western Christian Churches that began in the early days of the first millennium. Following the break in the Holy Roman Empire, the Christian Church also split into two, Western and Eastern. In the Western or Roman Catho-

lic Church the religious language was Latin and the Church was headed by the Pope, who crowned Charlemagne of Central Europe as the Holy Emperor on 25 December 800. In the East the religious language was Greek, the original language of the New Testament. The Eastern Church was headed by the Patriarch of Constantinople under the Byzantine Emperor. After repeated clashes, in practice as well as theology, the two Churches finally separated in 1054 CE.

The Divergence of Cultures

With the advent of modern scientific thought, the Western Church became more rational whereas the Eastern Church remained more conservative and accepted some pagan beliefs and practices. Saints were venerated at first. But it was natural for people with a polytheistic background—as was the case in Greece and the Middle East—to worship them as lesser deities. So this practice came into vogue. Virgin Mary was highly venerated, called the Mother of God, and put at the forefront of saint worship.



A typical Greek Orthodox church in Athens

With time the Orthodox Church people also started venerating relics. Material objects such as body parts (bones, teeth, etc.) and personal possessions of deceased saints and holy persons became objects of devotion. People believed that in them was the power to work miracles, to heal, and to protect them from evil spirits. Along with the worship of relics came the practice of pilgrimage to places connected with

the lives and relics of holy persons. People believed that such pilgrimages had magical effects upon the pilgrims. The few skulls that were kept in the Meteora monasteries made this place holy. This practice, however, is not exclusive to the Greek Church. We get to see holy relics in Catholic churches too. For instance, the Cologne Cathedral in Germany has the supposed bones of the three Magi and the



The Chains of St Peter at San Pietro in Vincoli

Church of San Pietro in Vincoli (St Peter in Chains), Rome, has the chains of St Peter displayed in a glass case.

The Symbolism of the Orthodox Church

As we made our way up the winding road to the monasteries, Betty kept providing us information about them. There are about six active monasteries in Meteora today. Some of them are open to the public. The monks still live in secluded areas. So there is hardly any chance to see or talk to them. Our first stop was at Agios Stefanos. It was the only convent there. Its year of construction is not known. The present *katholikon*, or central church, dedicated to St Haralambos was built in 1798. The saint's skull was gifted to the church by a local prince and is kept on the altar behind the *ikonostasis* or

gold veil. Because of this revered skull the monastery is one of the most sought after pilgrimages in Greece.

The St Stefanos Church is built in the shape of a Greek cross, all four limbs being equal in length, like any other Greek Orthodox church. A cupola or hemispherical dome caps the central chamber. It was quite an architectural feat in medieval times to construct a circular dome on a square base. Then there are smaller domes on the side limbs. So the top looks like a mass of soap bubbles. One has to enter the church through a side door that opens into an antechamber called narthex. We entered the main hall or nave through another door in the front wall.

As we entered, somebody shouted from the front, 'Only the baptized should enter.' I looked at Betty embarrassed. 'It is mainly for the Muslims', she said, trying to reassure me. Right or wrong, I was already in. As I entered the nave what struck me most was the arched ceiling with a huge face of Christ, shining golden in hue. The face was staring at me with penetrating eyes as if reading everything that was in my mind. This was not the soft loving face of Christ that I was accustomed to, but a harsh figure drawn with measured lines following the rules of religious iconometry. The image was flanked by pictures—of heaven on the right and hell on the left. The believers were depicted climbing to heaven on the clouds. On the other side, non-believers were portrayed falling into the eternal fire—a fire without light—and their faces showed the pains of torture. Little blue devils with tails were poking the falling souls with tridents. A very fearful sight it indeed was. During the Middle Ages popular religion was a religion of superstitious beliefs. People believed that the world was full of evil spirits and demons that sought and wounded human bodies and souls. Angels and saints were protectors against their malice through the magic charm of holy relics. The Church served as a shelter for the ignorant and illiterate people who looked for solace.

There stood at the end of the hall a wooden partition with three doors. The altar and the apse were behind the partition and could not be seen. The partition is called *ikonostasis* and is painted with figures of saints. All the saints were similarly dressed in white robes. It was symbolic of the equality in heaven, where all distinction is abolished. On the crown of the dome there was a smaller bust of Christ with hands raised. The two hands along with the head symbolized the Trinity. It was difficult to identify the saints except through some bodily features and symbols. St Peter was always depicted with a beard and holding a key. St John carried a sword. St Mark held a book. The purpose of the *ikonostases* was to keep the holy relics and bread and wine on the altar hidden from the eyes of non-believers—Turks in this case. Only on special occasions were the public—definitely only believers—allowed inside. On the back wall there were other icons. But all the walls and the ceiling were painted golden, shining in the dim lights fixed on the side walls.

Early Christian ecclesiastical scholars were against building temples, stating that God could be worshipped in any place and His best temple was the human heart. This was aimed at abolishing all pagan influence on the new religion. However, when church buildings were planned for congregational purposes, they were designed after a symbolic heart. The exterior was stark with no paintings or statues, only brick-faced walls. Inside was all golden, like the noble human heart. There were no windows in the walls or in the ceiling. No outside light was allowed to enter for fear that the inner space might be contaminated with sin. The interior was artificially lighted with candles in early days and now with electric lights. There were heaps of candles at the entrance and a bowl to put coins into when a devotee took a candle. Candle light symbolizes heaven.

The architectural style changed with the growth of Catholic churches. Thus in St Peter's Basilica in Rome natural light filters through



Sunlight streaming into St Peter's

windows in the dome, coming directly from heaven. With the passage of time windows in the walls came into vogue. These church windows are usually long and narrow with pictures of Christ or the saints on stained glass. Light entering from the sinful surroundings is blessed by the holy men.

The Contrast with Ancient Greece

Our last stop before coming to these monasteries was the ruins of Delphi, to which we had been just the previous day. It was hard to absorb the change of culture spanning two millennia—from ancient Greek to medieval Christian. Much happened during this period. The churches we were standing in were so very different from the ancient temple of Apollo, the ruins of which we had seen the day before on the slopes of Delphi.

Delphi was a religious sanctuary famous for its oracle and sacred to all of Greece in an-



A Delphi temple where the gods' treasures were stored

cient times. It thrived from the seventh century BCE well into the Christian era. Natural calamities were the main cause of its destruction, though fanatic Christians of the early Christian era also played a part. With its oracle and magic rituals it was in Delphi that pagan religion was at its best. The last phase of Delphi was that of a converted church. Betty showed us a broken cross and original stone engravings of Christian symbols.

The temple of Apollo, the god of prophecy, was a colossal structure. It was long, narrow and rectangular in shape with a thatched timber roof held by two rows of Doric columns with a corridor in between. The inner space called *cella* was a closed dark chamber lighted only by oil lamps. This was the *sanctum sanctorum* of the presiding deity, Apollo. Looking at the height of the columns we could imagine what an impressive statue it was. Like a typical Greek temple the facade consisted of steps, columns and a triangular frieze at the top. Images of gods, goddesses and war scenes were once sculpted on the frieze in relief. We could still see some broken cornices decorated with flowers and lion-mouthed gargoyles. The temple was all decorated on the exterior whereas the *sanctum sanctorum* was a closed room detached and insulated from the outside world and lighted only with oil lamps. Only the priests were allowed inside.

In front of the temple there used to be an open-air altar—a place to burn incense. This



A pagan temple in Pompeii

was all in ruins. A short distance from the temple there was a raised platform for offering sacrifice. It covered a large area and had columns all around. Betty showed us a sloping ramp to pull up the animals—mainly bulls and goats. But no sacrificial post was seen. I asked about it but Betty could not understand my query because she had never seen an animal sacrifice.

The complex was criss-crossed by a sacred path ascending in zigzags to the temple. The path was lined with offerings made by pilgrims from the city showing their gratitude and acknowledging the blessings of the god. These were mainly statues of gods, goddesses and



A Greek amphitheatre

heroes. On one side there was an amphitheatre with semicircular stone benches for the audience to sit and a stage at the centre. I could almost feel the ancient Greeks coming and going, praying, singing, dancing and shouting. In my mind's eye I could see some of them standing on the sacrificial platform. Blood was flowing down the drain. Fumes were swirling up from the altar vat. Some of the older men were venturing up the steps going inside the temple, which strictly was the priest's domain. All in all, there was an atmosphere of joy and gaiety, of song and dance, of magic and prayer. So different it was from the serene, silent and serious atmosphere of the monastery churches.

Roman Catholic Architecture

Before I proceed to the next stop I intend taking a pause to say a few words about the

change in Church architecture in the Catholic world. Standing in front of St Peter's Basilica in Rome I was amazed to see the difference in concept between Orthodox or Eastern and Catholic or Western Christianity. Whereas early Christianity shunned any pagan influence, European Renaissance at the end of the Middle Ages brought back the Hellenic style in full glory. The word *basilica* is of Greek origin meaning 'royal hall', indicating the pomp and grandeur that we were about to witness. The courtyard with an Egyptian obelisk at the centre and columns on both sides led the way to the church like the sacred path. The basilica itself was very impressive. The large dome on top is one of the finest in the world. The word *dome* came from the Italian *duomo*, meaning 'house of God'. We could see statues all over, right up to the roof. In the middle was Christ flanked by Saint Peter and the other apostles. There were other saints and popes. This was as impressive



A temple on the Acropolis beside the Parthenon

as the Parthenon, the temple of Athena on the Acropolis.

This basilica was constructed in the shape of a Latin cross, whose stem is longer than the arms. Entry was through beautifully carved huge wooden doors. The main central hall, the nave (meaning ship), was very spacious and had a high ceiling. The question of decorating these basilicas was a serious one. In the early days devout Christians objected to large life-size statues of God, Jesus or the apostles because they were too much like those graven images and



The statue-studded walls inside St Peter's

heathen idols that were condemned in the Bible. But St Peter's was decorated with beautiful larger-than-life marble statues at every corner. In the evening sunlight filtered through the slit windows on the dome to light up the saints. What a divine sight it was! We felt blessed.

Megalo Meteora and Varlaam

Our next stop was Megalo Meteora or the 'church of metamorphosis'. This was the first church of the Transfiguration. It was the best known among all the Meteora monasteries and also one of oldest, built in 1382 CE. It was located on the highest peak and founded by one of the most well-known monks of the Orthodox Church, Athanasios the Meteorite. The Serbian emperor Symeon Uros gave all his wealth to the monastery and himself became a monk. So this is the richest of the monasteries and has a good collection of Byzantine art.

The *katholikon* here is a twelve-sided hall with a dome twenty-four metres high. It has shining icons of Christ, Mother Mary and the saints. There are some gruesome torture scenes also. The main fresco was showing the Transfiguration of Christ. The Transfiguration as recorded in the New Testament was the revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus took his disciples Peter, James and John to a high mountain. And there he was transfigured before them: his face shone like the sun and his garments shone white as light. At the same time the prophets Moses and Elijah

appeared before the disciples. A voice from the clouds declared: 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.' All these stories we heard from Betty while coming down the hill.

The last stop was Varlaam monastery. This was a smaller monastery founded in 1517. We proceeded towards the central chapel through corridors. Betty pointed out that there was no church bell in any of the monasteries. Muslims did not approve of any sound connected to religious functions, so church bells were banned. Instead the monks improvised nicely curved iron pieces hanging in the corridors along with gong rods. These looked like beautiful pieces of sculpture.

We entered the church hall through the narthex. All monastery churches open to the west whereas all pagan temples opened on the eastern side. Betty explained the reason for the latter (the east is associated with sunrise) but did not know why monastery churches had western openings. The prayer hall was smaller but had a serene atmosphere. The main icon was that of Jesus Christ on the cross. This was the picture we adored so much. This definitely brought back childhood memories of studying the passion of Christ which was for the liberation of humans from pain. Other than the pictures of the saints and apostles there was also a large icon of Mother Mary and the Child. In the early days Jesus as a child was always depicted with an adult face, especially in contrast



An icon in a monastery corridor

with the soft, youthful face of the Mother. This symbolized the idea of the Immaculate Conception. As in other monasteries, there were no pews or benches in the hall for devotees to sit on while praying. There were a few benches along the wall and an organ at the end. Singing was more common than sermons in Orthodox churches.

With a lighted candle in hand I prayed in front of the icon of the crucified Christ. 'God became man in order that man might become God.' There were no lights except for

the candles. No external light was supposed to be there because, to the devotees, the icons were self-illuminant and sources of illumination for humankind. In the eighth and ninth centuries iconoclasts and image breakers banned all depiction of Christ or the saints through painting. But later popes allowed icons in the churches because what books were to the learned, pictures were to the illiterate. God and the saints were not worshipped as idols as the pagans were supposed to have done; they were worshipped through and across their images. The icons were not painted like natural figures. They had an aura of mystery and divinity surrounding them. They were also believed to have magical powers.

I knelt down on the floor to offer pranam and ask for blessing. Nobody was surprised because that was their practice too. We left the place with memories that I would cherish for the rest of my life. *



A Greek Orthodox icon

Dakshineswar: The Stage for Ramakrishna's Divine Play

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

The Northern Veranda

M describes the importance of the northern veranda: 'Here the devotees used to celebrate the Master's birthday. They would sing devotional songs in chorus and eat prasad with him. Keshab Chandra Sen and his followers often met with the Master here to talk about God. Afterwards the Master would feed them puffed rice, coconut, luchi [fried bread], and sweets. On this same spot Sri Ramakrishna, seeing Narendra [Swami Vivekananda], went into samadhi.'¹⁸

During his third visit, M heard Swami Vivekananda sing this song as he stood on the northern veranda:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit
through and through. ...
Ever more beautiful in fresh-blossoming love
That shames the splendour of
a million moons,
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,
Raising erect the hair for very joy.

M describes Ramakrishna's reaction: 'The Master shuddered when this last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted

in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, "that shames the splendour of a million moons"? Was this the vision of God, the Essence of Spirit? How much austerity and discipline, how much faith and devotion, must be necessary for such a vision!'¹⁹



Standing at the north-eastern corner of this veranda, the Master would say goodbye to the Calcutta devotees. 'One day', M said, 'I saw the Master sweeping the path next to the northern veranda with a broom. He told me,

'Mother walks here; that is why I am cleaning this path.'²⁰

The North-eastern Veranda

One day Ramakrishna was pacing back and forth on the north-eastern veranda of his room in Dakshineswar. He was in a spiritual mood, completely oblivious to his surroundings. Mathur was then seated alone in a room of the kuthi (bungalow) near the nahabat, and was watching him through a window. All of a sudden Mathur ran out of the house, threw himself down at Ramakrishna's feet, and began to cry profusely. 'What are you doing?' said Sri Ramakrishna in alarm. 'You are an aristocrat and Rani Rasmani's son-in-law. What will people say if they see you acting like this? Calm

yourself. Please, get up!

Mathur gradually got control of himself and said: ‘Father [as he called Ramakrishna], I was watching you just now as you walked back and forth—I saw it distinctly: As you walked towards me you were no longer yourself. You were the Divine Mother Kali from the temple! Then, as you turned around and walked in the opposite direction, you became Lord Shiva! At first I thought it was some kind of optical illusion. I rubbed my eyes and looked again, but I saw the same thing. As often as I looked, I saw it!’²¹

The Nahabat (Music Tower)

There are two nahabats in the temple garden, one on the south side and the other on the north side. M describes the music that came from one of these towers: ‘Early in the morning, before the eastern horizon becomes red, the *mangala-arati* [morning service] to the Divine Mother begins with the sweet sound of temple bells. In the nahabat, morning melodies are then played on the flageolet to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. These are welcome sounds of love and joy to all, for the Mother of the Universe has awakened to bless Her beloved children.’²²

Ramakrishna’s mother used to live in the upper room of the northern nahabat and Holy Mother lived in the lower room. To protect her privacy, the veranda was screened with plaited bamboo mats, which cut off the sun and fresh air. Holy Mother lived there like a caged bird. She would cook for the Master on the northern veranda of the nahabat. (*Pointing to the steps reaching the upper floor of the nahabat*) M says: ‘The Holy Mother

would sit here and repeat her mantra. As a result of her limited movement, she developed rheumatism that caused suffering all through her life. Her little room was filled with groceries and other things; and sometimes women devotees also stayed there. Oh, what superhuman patience, perseverance, and self-control! Her self-sacrifice and service are incomparable.’²³

The Flower Gardens

M describes the beautiful temple gardens:

On the bank of the Ganga and just to the west of the Panchavati are a bel tree and a sweet-scented, milk-white *gulchi* flower tree. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of *mallika* [a type of jasmine], *madhavi*, and *gulchi*. He brought a *madhavi* plant [a flowering creeper which Radha liked] from Vrindaban and planted it in the Panchavati. East of the goose pond and the kuthi is another pond around which are many flowering plants such as the *champak*, the five-faced hibiscus, the pendant hibiscus [resembling earrings], roses, and the *kanchan* [gold]. On a fence there is an *aparajita* [a blue flower used in the worship of the Divine Mother], and nearby are jasmine and *shetalika*.

West of the twelve Shiva temples, there are many flowering trees such as the white oleander, red oleander, rose, jasmine, and double-petalled jasmine. Also growing there are *dhutura* flowers,

which are used for the worship of Shiva. Tulsi [basil] plants grow in brick vases between these flowering trees.

South of the nahabat are more double-petalled jasmine as well as other varieties of jasmine, gardenias, and roses. Two more flowering trees grow near the chandni ghat: the lotus oleander and the *kokilaksha*, or cuckoo-eyed flower. The colour of the latter resembles that of the eyes of a cuckoo. West of the Master’s room there are quite a few plants: *Krishnachura*, double-petalled jasmine, jasmine, gardenia, *mallika*, roses, hibiscus,



The northern Nahabat

white oleander, red oleander, five-faced hibiscus, china-rose, and so on.

Formerly Sri Ramakrishna picked flowers for worship. One day when he was plucking bel leaves from a bel tree near the Panchavati, a layer of bark came off the tree. At that moment he experienced that God, who dwells in every being and everything, must have felt pain at this. He never again picked bel leaves for worship. Another day while picking flowers he had a vision: He saw that the flowers of each tree formed a bouquet and all those bouquets hung around the neck of the cosmic form of Shiva. Thus he experienced that the worship of God is going on day and night. After that experience he could no longer pick flowers.²⁴



Hans Pur (Goose Pond) ringed by flowering trees

M's description of the flower gardens makes us feel that we are roaming in the gardens of heaven.

The Bakul-tala

M writes: 'West of the nahabat are a bakul tree and a bathing ghat. The women of the neighbourhood bathe at this ghat. In 1877 Sri Ramakrishna's aged mother passed away there. Following the Hindu custom, the Master's dying mother was taken to this ghat and the lower half of her body was immersed in the holy water of the Ganges. She breathed her last in the presence of her weeping son' (481).

M told Swami Nityatmananda: 'Holding the feet of his mother, the Master said: "Mother, who are you that held me in your



The Bakul-tala ghat

womb?" The Master knew that he was an avatar, so he exclaimed in joy: "You are not an ordinary woman."²⁵

The Panchavati

M describes the Panchavati as it appeared in Ramakrishna's time:

A little north of the bakul tree is the Panchavati. This is a grove of five trees—banyan, pipal, ashoka, amalaki, and bel—which were planted under Sri Ramakrishna's supervision. After returning from his pilgrimage [in 1868] he spread the holy dust of Vrindaban around this place. The Master practised various kinds of sadhana [disciplines] in the Panchavati grove, sometimes going there alone at night. Later he often accompanied the devotees as they walked around the holy spot. East of the Panchavati is a thatched hut [now, a brick room], in which Sri Ramakrishna practised meditation and austerities [Advaita sadhana under Tota Puri].



The Panchavati

... [Within] the Panchavati is an old banyan tree which has grown around a pipal tree, both looking as if they were one tree. The banyan is an ancient tree, and as a result there are many holes in it which are the homes of birds and other animals. Around this tree is a circular brick platform with steps on two sides—north and south. The platform is used by people who visit the temple garden and especially by those who wish to sit in solitude and meditate on God with the holy Ganga flowing before them. Sri Ramakrishna used to sit on the northwest corner of the platform and practise various kinds of spiritual disciplines. He would cry to the Divine Mother with a longing heart, as the cow longs for her calf.²⁶

M told Swami Nityatmananda: ‘European indigo planters used to live here. This banyan tree and the platform existed during their time. This platform was the first place where the Master practised intense sadhana. Between the Panchavati and the old banyan tree was the madhavi creeper that the Master brought from Vrindaban. He planted it himself.’²⁷

Swami Subodhananda told M the following incident:

The Master told me: ‘I was then possessed by divine madness. One day I was weeding in the Panchavati. I was unaware that a beautiful young woman was standing behind me. Piqued, she said to me: “Hello, sadhu! I have been standing behind you for such a long time and you have not looked at me or talked to me! I have visited many ashramas and everywhere people are eager to talk to me and want me to live there. But you didn’t even care to look at me. You are a real sadhu” (6.292).

M describes this particular scene many times:

Sri Ramakrishna was going to the pine grove. ...

After a few minutes, M and Latu, standing in the Panchavati, saw the Master coming back toward them. Behind him the sky was black with the rain-cloud. Its reflection in the Ganges made the water darker. The disciples felt that the Master was God Incarnate, a Divine Child five years old, radiant with the smile of innocence and purity. Around him were the sacred trees of the Panchavati under which he had practised spiritual disciplines and had beheld visions of God.

At his feet flowed the sacred river Ganges, the destroyer of man’s sins. The presence of this God-man charged the trees, shrubs, flowers, plants, and temples with spiritual fervour and divine joy.²⁸

Sadhan Kutir (Meditation Hut)

The Sadhan Kutir is situated east of the Panchavati. It is here that Tota Puri initiated the Master into sannyasa, and here that he attained nirvikalpa samadhi. M says: ‘It was a



The Sadhan Kutir

thatched hut with an earthen floor when the Master practised Vedanta sadhana there. Later it was rebuilt as a brick building and there was nothing inside. Now someone has installed a Shiva image there. So many things will crop up in the future; people will say that image was there during the Master’s time. Thus it happens everywhere.²⁹

The Pine Grove and the Bel-tala

M describes:

Going a little north of the Panchavati one reaches a fence of iron wire. North of this fence is the pine grove—a collection of four pine trees. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees would use this place to answer the call of nature.



The Bel-tala

East of the pine grove is the bel-tala. Sitting under this bel tree, Sri Ramakrishna practised many difficult disciplines [especially tantric sadhanas under the guidance of the Bhairavi Brahmani]. To the north of the pine grove and bel tree is the high boundary wall of the temple garden, and on the other side of the wall is a government magazine.³⁰

Gazi-tala and the Main Gate

M writes:

There is a path running east to west between the northern portico of the courtyard and the kuthi. While walking east, one can see a beautiful pond with a concrete ghat on the right side. There is



Gazi-tala

another ghat for this pond on the eastern side of the Kali temple, which is used to clean the sacred utensils and dishes. A pipal tree is next to the northern ghat. This place is called Gazi-tala. Long ago an old Muslim saint lived here, passing his days in the contemplation of God. His departed spirit is worshipped even today by Hindus and Muslims who live near the temple. [At Gazi-tala Ramakrishna practised Islamic sadhana under the guidance of a Sufi named Govinda Roy.]

The main gate of the temple garden is a little east of the Gazi-tala. People who come from Alambazar or Calcutta enter the temple compound through this gate, and the people of Dakshineswar come through the northeastern gate, which is a little north of the main gate. A guard protects the main gate. When the Master would return late from Calcutta by carriage, sometimes even at midnight, the guard at the main gate would unlock the gate for him. Then the Master would invite the guard to his room and feed him fried bread and sweets which had been sent as prasad (ibid.).

The Kuthi (Mansion)

M describes the mansion in which Ramakrishna lived for many years:

Coming out of the temple courtyard through the northern portico, one comes across a two-storeyed mansion called the kuthi. Whenever Rani Rasmani or her son-in-law Mathur and other relatives came to visit Dakshineswar, they stayed in this kuthi. During their lifetime Sri Ramakrishna lived [for 16 years] in a room on the west side of the ground floor of this mansion. From this room one can go to the bakul-tala ghat and have a very good view of the Ganges (482).

Swami Saradananda describes a touching incident that took place on the roof of the kuthi. It is amazing how Sri Ramakrishna prayed for the disciples who acted in his divine drama:

After he (the Master) had attained all the spiritual experiences described earlier, divine inspiration prompted a new desire to arise intensely in the Master's mind. He became extremely anxious to meet the devotees he had seen previously in spiritual visions and to transmit his spiritual

power into their hearts. The Master said: 'In those days there was no limit to my yearning. During the daytime I could just manage to keep it under control. Severely tormented by the worthless, mundane talk of worldly people, I would wistfully anticipate the day when my be-



The Kuthi

loved companions would arrive. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them about God and to lighten my heart by relating to them my own spiritual experiences. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them completely engrossed me. I kept planning what I should say to this one and what I should give to that one, and so forth. When evening came, I couldn't control my feelings any longer. I was tortured by the thought that another day had passed and they still hadn't arrived! When the vesper service started, and the temples resounded with the ringing of bells and the blowing of conch shells, I would climb up to the roof of the kuthi [bungalow] and cry out at the top of my voice, with the anguish of my heart: "Come to me, my children! Where are you? I can't bear to live without you!" A mother never longed so for the sight of her child, or a friend for a friend, or a lover for his sweetheart, as I did for them. Oh, it was beyond all describing! And soon after this, they did at last begin to come.³¹

M makes a wonderful comment about Dakshineswar: 'The spiritual fire is blazing intensely there, and whoever goes there will be purified. The body does not burn, but mental impurities are consumed in no time. Then a man can attain immortality. God himself, in a physical form, lived there for thirty years! One can tangibly feel the spirituality at Dakshineswar.'³²

There is a beautiful verse in the *Sri Sri Chaitanya Charit-amrita*: 'Adyapiha sei lila kare gora rai, kono kono bhagyavane dekhibare pai. Chaitanya is still performing his divine play; only the fortunate ones can see it.' Let us pray to Sri Ramakrishna to grant us the good fortunate to be

able to visualize his divine play. *

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RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMA, RAJKOT



In the Vrindavan of My Heart

SWAMI ACHYUTANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Devi Katyayani

The winter this year has been particularly severe in Vrindavan. It is difficult to go to the river bank after sundown. So the other day I decided to visit the Katyayani temple which is within the Radhabag area. As one passes the Vrindavan Municipal Office and turns to the right, one gets to see this temple. Leaving the main road I took the lane to the entrance. It is said that this is one of the fifty-one *pitha-sthanas* of Sati. There is another small temple on the Panchakroshi path circumambulating the town. It is regarded as the original Katyayani Pitha by some people. Anyway, keeping clear of this controversy I entered the one which is now regarded as the *pitha-sthana* by the people of Vraja. The gateway marked with lion images leads into the open courtyard attached to the temple *natmandir* (dance hall) to one side. To the east of the *natmandir* stands a small sanctum. Inside there is an image of Durga as Mahishamardini (destroyer of the demon Mahishasura) made of *ashta-dhatu* (an alloy of eight precious metals).

As soon as I entered the temple precincts, the mahant (head priest)—an ascetic with matted locks—came forward and met me. He used to go to the local Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama for treatment, so he knew the Mission sadhus. After I had introduced myself, he took me

into the sanctum sanctorum for darshan. The image was placed on a rectangular platform raised about one and a half feet from the floor. Of the Devi's ten hands, one did not hold any weapon—it had a lotus instead. Normally Goddess Durga is not associated with the lotus. But here she is present in her *vaishnavi* form. The priest also pointed out a portion of the platform right under the image, which was covered with glass. This is the actual *pitha-sthana*, he informed. It is said that when Sati gave up her life, unable to bear her husband being insulted at Daksha's yajna, Shiva was mad with grief and anger. He went round the world carrying his wife's body on his shoulder—racing round in his dance of destruction. It was at this time that Vishnu dismembered Sati's body to calm Shiva's frightening mood. The places where the body parts fell became *pitha-sthanas* ('seats' of the Devi). It is believed that Sati's

locks fell in this place. The petrified locks are kept away from public gaze. Only the priest washes and dries them every day and applies a vermilion mark before he covers them up again. Offerings of flowers are placed on this glass case. I prostrated before the goddess and came out of the temple.

Mahantji next made me sit on a bench in the garden by the temple. He said that in the twenty-second chapter of the tenth *skandha* of the Bhagavata



Katyayani Pith

there is an interesting story regarding this place. It seems the cowherds of Vraja used to worship Bhuteshwara Mahadeva of Mathura and Goddess Katyayani of Vrindavan. The cowherds were originally devotees of Shakti. In Mathura or Nandagram, Shiva was worshipped as Nandishwara, Bhuteshwara and the like, while the women of Vrindavan worshipped Katyayani. Every year, in late autumn, for one full month these women would bathe in the Yamuna at dawn, worship the goddess in a sand image with fruit and flower offerings, and live on a simple boiled fare. They would pray to the goddess to give them Krishna, the son of Nanda, as their husband. As the legend goes, at the end of the month-long prayer and worship, Krishna did appear to them at Chir Ghat and enacted the *vastraharana lila*.

Having put them to this ultimate test of being robbed of their clothes, Krishna promised them that he would fulfil their hearts' desire the next full-moon night in the month of Ashwin, a boon that was fulfilled through the *rasa lila*.

The Play of Ganesha

This Goddess Katyayani is the presiding goddess of Vrindavan. In autumn and spring special nine-day (*navratri*) worship and fairs are held here. Special functions and worship are also performed on Diwali day and other festive occasions. The sanctum also has images of Shiva, Surya, Narayana and Ganesha in niches along the side walls of the shrine. A Bengali sadhaka named Keshavananda Brahmachari is credited with the establishment of this temple. He was born in a brahmin family of Howrah. It was due to his untiring efforts and prolonged sadhana that this temple took its present form. The image of the goddess along with her mount, the lion, and Mahishasura were cast in *ashtadhatu* by a deft craftsman in Kolkata. Stone sculptors of Jaipur crafted the

images of Chandrashekhara Shiva, Vishnu and Surya. The remaining deity, Ganesha, came to this temple in a rather strange manner.

While all this work was going on, Keshavananda saw the goddess in a dream one night. She said, 'When you bring my image from Kolkata, see that you also get Ganesha from Kedar Babu.' Kedar Babu was an employee in a British firm in Kolkata. He was also a disciple of Keshavananda. Now, Kedar Babu also had acquired this Ganesha image in a strange way. The story goes thus: There was a certain Englishman, W R Yule, who worked in an English firm, Jardine and Skeiner, of Kolkata. Sometime in 1911 or 1912, Mrs Yule, on her way to England, bought a marble image of Ganesha

from Jaipur, which she kept as a decorative piece in her drawing room. One day, while she was hosting a get-together for her friends in her house, they asked her what that little curio was. She told them that it was a Hindu god. When her friends heard this, they picked up the image from the shelf, placed it on the dining table and had a good laugh over it. The same night Mrs Yule's daughter came

down with high temperature and in her delirium she talked of 'an image with a trunk' chasing her. The doctor dismissed this as a sign of delirium. She was treated accordingly but with little effect. One night Mrs Yule herself dreamt of a fierce-looking man riding a bull, and with a long stick-like weapon in hand, telling her, 'Return that image immediately to the place from where you brought it, lest serious harm befall you.' Mrs Yule contacted her husband in India and shipped the image back. The image was kept in Mr Yule's office for three days. Since word had already gone round about this miraculous Ganesha, people in large numbers began pouring into the office to have darshan. Finding things become difficult, Mr Yule handed the image over to Kedar Babu, a



brahmin employee of the firm, to do the needful. Kedar Babu took the idol home and started worshipping it with great devotion. Soon both Keshavananda and Kedar Babu received a divine directive to take Ganesha to Vrindavan. Thus in the year 1913 the present pantheon of Katyayani was formally established.

Lala Babu's Temple

Today is Monday. Since there was still some time before sundown, I thought of visiting Gopeshwara Mahadeva. As one steps out of the Katyayani temple, one gets to see the temple of Ranganathji. The Bengalis call it the 'temple of the golden palm'. Walking northwards one comes face to face with Lala Babu's temple. Lala Babu was the landlord of Kandi in Murshidabad and Paikpara in Kolkata. Once while he was residing on the banks of the Ganga near Belur, he heard a washerman's daughter say, 'O Mother, the day is about to pass. Set fire to *basana*.' Now, by *basana* she meant the dry banana leaves that had to be fired for ash. But *basana* also means desire. Lala Babu's dormant spirit of renunciation was fired up with this second sense. He thought of his own life, which appeared to him to be nearing its end; and therefore it was time to set fire to his desires and his attachment to the world. And that was precisely what he did. Forsaking his regal lifestyle and comforts, he came to Vrajadham and immersed himself completely in a life of devotion to Krishna. He got this grand temple built in pink marble. It also has board and lodging facilities for sadhus and devotees. Lala Babu's samadhi lies to the south of the main entrance. I made my obeisance to the deity as well as the devotees and



Lala Babu's temple

came out.

The Lila of Shyamrai

There are several other temples and spots of special interest around this place, like the Brahma Kund (where Brahma had tried to test Krishna by stealing his cattle and cowherd friends) and the rather obscure shrine of Shyamrai in Bhutgali. The temple caretaker told us that once there had been a burglary in the Shyamrai temple. The dacoits had tied up the pujari and other inmates living within the precincts and locked them up in a room before escaping with all the ornaments of the deity and other valuables. In the process, the toes of the image were broken. Everyone was shocked as this was seen as a bad omen. Word was sent to Raja Babu of the Dinajpur royalty, who was the temple owner and lived in Bengal. He was of the opinion that the damaged image be duly immersed in the Yamuna and replaced with a new one. What happened thereafter was nothing short of a miracle. An order was placed with a reputed craftsman in Jaipur for making a replica of the existing image. The old image was sent to Jaipur to serve as the model for the replica. But though well packed in a box, this im-

age got thrown out of the carriage during the bumpy journey and had to be brought back to Vrindavan. Meanwhile the new image at Jaipur was inadvertently damaged while it was being given finishing touches. So this new image had also to be rejected. Finally it was decided that the image would be made at Vrindavan itself. Expert artisans were engaged and work was started.

Soon the auspicious day for installation of the new image was at hand. Raja Babu and his many

relatives had come from different places to attend the ceremony. But once again the new image got damaged in the final process of cleaning. At the same time one of Raja Babu's daughters slipped and fell from the stairs and was seriously injured. The turn of events cast a deep pall of gloom over the entire family. Everyone was scared, apprehending some grave calamity. The same night one of Raja Babu's daughters had a strange dream. Shyamrai appeared to her and said, 'Where is the need for a new image? Don't you people understand that I will not leave this place? Get my toe repaired and worship me as you did before.' Artisans were summoned the very next day and the idol was repaired. This being done, Shyamrai was once again ceremonially installed on his throne and worship continued as before. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

The elderly caretaker narrated to me this remarkable story about Shyamrai. This image was by no means ordinary. Krishna himself resided in these humble dwellings every moment of the day. As I was listening to all this, I was reminded of a similar incident that took place at the Dakshineswar temple of Rani Rashmani. The image of Radhakanta had been inadvertently damaged by the pujari. But there the solution came through Sri Ramakrishna, who was a living personification of the deity. He said, 'If anyone of the sons-in-law of the Rani had broken his leg owing to a fall, would he have been forsaken and another person placed in his stead, or would proper arrangement have been made for his treatment? Let that procedure be followed here also.'

The Rani took this advice as God's own directive. Sri Ramakrishna, who was adept at making clay images, himself repaired the image by meticulously rejoining the broken foot.

The Blessed Palm Tree

I was then taken to a palm tree right in front of the temple. As I looked on, I remembered Uddhava's thoughts at the sight of the gopis' ecstatic devotion to Krishna: it is great good fortune even to be born as the creepers and trees of this holy place. It is believed that this thought of Uddhava has found fulfilment and many devotees and saints have really taken birth of their own accord as the groves and trees of this holy Vrajadham. Therefore the Vaishnavas hold not only the soil but also the plants and creepers of Vrindavan as holy. This palm tree was no exception. The temple priest told me why.

Once while the annual cleaning of the temple precincts was going on, the resident priest thought of felling this palm tree which used to bear flowers, but never any fruit. Besides, being right in the centre of the courtyard opposite the Shyamrai temple, it used to obstruct the devotees' view of the deity, especially on special days when people came in large numbers for darshan. The priest wrote a letter to the Babus in Kolkata asking their permission to fell the tree. Hardly had two or three days elapsed when he received a telegram from the Babus asking him not to cause any harm to the tree and stating that a letter would soon follow. The priest was puzzled, because he was sure that his



The Govinda image at Dakshineswar and detail of the broken foot repaired by Sri Ramakrishna

VEDANTA SOCIETY OF ST. LOUIS



letter could not possibly have reached Kolkata within such a short time. So what was the matter? He waited for further instructions and received the much awaited letter after about fifteen days. The letter said that much before the priest's letter was received the Babu had had a strange dream. A holy spirit residing on the palm tree appeared to him and said that he was residing there for quite some time now and was happy to have the darshan of Shyamrai from his dwelling place every moment of the day. When he caused no inconvenience to anyone, why this move to deprive him of his dwelling and the regular darshan of Shyamrai? So the Babu instructed the priest to get an earthen platform built round the tree and to see that the place was kept clean. He also asked him to see that all the flowers and garlands offered to Shyamrai were later offered at the foot of the tree.

My interlocutor stopped to catch his breath. I

found the place exactly as the Babus had wanted it to be—neat and clean with marks of worship, just like in a temple! And no bird sits on this tree or dirties the place, added the caretaker! Once again I offered my obeisance to Shyamrai and the holy spirit that dwelt there and came out of the precincts overwhelmed and amazed.

Gopeshwara Mahadeva

The temple of Gopeshwara Mahadeva is one of the most ancient holy sites of Vrindavan. I have heard about Gopeshwara Mahadeva as the deity who had witnessed the divine *rasa* of Krishna and the gopis. Today I intend visiting him.

The pinnacle of the temple can be seen from quite a distance. But the temple itself is a small, unassuming structure with a concrete pathway around it. To the north-west is a small shrine dedicated to Goddess Annapurna. I made my pranams to the goddess before entering the Shiva temple. It is said that this self-emergent (*svayambhu*) shivalinga is the oldest deity of Vrindavan. The holy linga rises about a foot above the pedestal symbolizing Gauri or Durga and is of reddish hue. It is said that almost all the temples of Vrindavan were attacked or damaged during the Muslim rule. But this one remained untouched. It probably escaped the marauders' gaze because of its unassuming simplicity. A few ancient images on its dilapidated



Entrance to the Gopeshwara Shiva temple



Vamshi Vat

walls stand witness to its antiquity.

A little to the north of this temple is the place known as Vamshi Vat. There is a legend associated with the emergence of Gopeshwara Mahadeva in Vrindavan. Vamshi Vat is said to be the place where Sri Krishna performed his *maharasa* with the gopis. The one who is omnipresent and is therefore called *bhuma* had appeared in human form to the gopis of Vrindavan at this very place on the full-moon night of the month of Ashwin. Krishna had sported with each of them, knowing full well that they were only his own reflections, that they were but parts and he the whole. Paramahansa Shukadeva observes that this sport was nothing but the fusion of the individual self with the cosmic Self. It is said that the gods and goddesses of heaven had arrived to see the sight of this cosmic union, this divine lila. When Yogishwara Mahadeva saw this, he was beside himself with joy and for the sake of experiencing that divine ecstasy he disguised himself as a gopi and danced with Krishna. When *rasa* was over, Krish-

na asked Mahadeva to remain in Vrindavan for ever after as a witness to this divine spectacle. Shiva promised that he would. Gopeshwara Mahadeva is none other than Shiva, who danced with Krishna as a gopi. Hence many people still call him Gopishwara. There is an ancient banyan tree almost in the centre of the walled Vamshi Vat area (*vat* means a banyan tree and *vamshi* a flute). It is said that it was under this tree that Krishna had stood playing the flute that had drawn the gopis to him forgetful of hearth and home. An old painting depicting the *rasa* in Rajasthan style stands under the tree. Worship is performed

here every day in commemoration of that heavenly event. In a niche in the boundary wall stands an image of Shiva in the guise of a gopi! As I stand there thinking about this lila strains of devotional songs waft through the air:

Where, O where art thou,
the life of Vrindavan—
O the lord of my life.
My lonely heart yearns for thee,
O Mohana, play thy flute ...

The whole atmosphere seems spiritually charged!
(To be continued)



The divine couple Radhe-Shyam

In Search of the Divine

An Account of the Twelve Shaktipithas of West Bengal

SWAMI CHIDRUPANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

About the Attahasapitha the *Pithanirnaya* says, 'Attahāse coṣṭhapāto devī sā phullarā smṛtā; Viśveśo bhairavastatra sarvābhīṣṭapradāyākah. In Attahasa fell [Sati's] lower lip. [Here] Devi is called Phullara and the Bhairava is Vishvesha, the fulfiller of all desires.' At Attahasa Devi Phullara is worshipped as Jayadurga. Legend has it that a monk from Varanasi, named Krishnadayal Giri, dreamt that the goddess was lying in the woods in a neglected state. He saw the goddess in her Jayadurga form. He rescued the stone image and started her worship. Since then the goddess has been worshipped here on a regular basis.

Curiously, the image, smeared with vermilion, resembles more a tortoise than a human form. To the west is the temple of Vishvesha. There are also two other Shiva temples and a large pond in front of the Devi temple.

The *shivābhoga*, or food offering to jackals, is worth watching. The term *shivā* refers to the Devi as well as jackals. *Annabhoga*, or rice offering, is first offered to the Devi. Part of it is then placed in a special place as *shivābhoga*, which is eaten by the jackals of the forest. After the jackals have had their meal, the rest of the Devi's *annabhoga* is distributed among the devotees. Many pilgrims visit this pitha. Many of them

make vows or offer gifts and sacrifices in front of the temple.

The most important event held in this place is Devi Phullara's annual worship festival. This festival begins on the full-moon night of the month of Magha (mid-December to mid-January) and continues for the next ten days. A large fair is organized at which many people gather together. Near this temple is the birthplace of the famous writer Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay.

Devi Nandini of Sainthia

Sainthia is roughly thirty kilometres away from Labhpur. There is a direct train from Kolkata to Sainthia. The ancient Satipitha of Nandipur is situated on the eastern side of the Sainthia railway station. According to the



Nandini of Sainthia

Pithanirnaya a piece of Sati's necklace fell here. The Devi and Bhairava of this place are Nandini and Nandikeshwara. The temple premises are guarded by a high wall. Inside, a peepul and a banyan tree stand intertwined spreading their branches over a large area. Under these trees stands a small temple that houses a *brahmashila*, a triangular piece of rock, which is worshipped as the Devi. Until recently there was no image of Bhairava Nandikeshwara in the compound; it was be-

lieved that he resided in the trunks of these trees, and this was how he was being worshipped all along. Now a beautiful temple dedicated to the Bhairava has come up. Besides this, some other temples also have been constructed around this place. A big temple of Sri Jagannathadevi is one such. This Shaktipitha receives numerous pilgrims every day.

Lalateshwari of Nalhati

Fifty kilometres north of Sainthia is Nalhati. About one kilometre west of the Nalhati railway station is a hillock, on which stands the beautiful temple of Lalateshwari. The Devi here is in the form of Kalika and the Bhairava is Yogisha. Says the *Pithanirmaya*: '*Nalahātyām nalapāto yogīśo bhairavastathā.*' Since the goddess resides on a hilltop, she is also called Parvati; and since, according to one local tradition, Sati's forehead fell here, the deity is also known as Lalateshwari (*lalata* means forehead). There are several stories as to why the place is named Nalhati: some say it is because the lower part of Sati's elbow (*nala* in Bengali) fell here, while others opine that it is so because Nala was the name of a king who once ruled in these parts. As if to complicate matters, the *Shivacharita* suggests that it is Sati's spinal cord that fell here!

The ancient temple and the image are both very beautiful. It is learnt that Rani Bhawani was so pleased on seeing this temple that she donated thirty acres of land. Later, her son, the well-known devotee Raja Ramakrishna, established his *panchamundi* worship seat in this place.

The stone image, also covered with vermilion, looks like a human forehead, thus justifying its name Lalateshwari. The golden

eyes and nose seem to be later additions. The temple of Bhairava Yogisha is situated on the north-eastern side of the main temple. The main festivals observed here are Durga Puja, Kali Puja and, in the month of Chaitra, Vasanti Puja. Every day thousands of people visit the temple seeking the Devi's blessings.

On the way from Sainthia to Nalhati one can also visit the famous Tarapith. The Divine Mother is worshipped as Ugratara here. Some people believe that Sati's eyes fell here and so the place is regarded as one of the holiest pilgrim spots. It is said that Sage Vasishtha attained samadhi here. More recently, the great devotee Bamakshepa attained his extraordinary spiritual experiences at this place.

Boarding the train from Kolkata, one can reach Rampurhat and go to Tarapith and Nalhati. The Murshidabad-Delhi national highway connects Morgram with Panagarh at Bardhaman, and Nalhati is very close to Morgram. The journey can also be made by train.

Devi Mahishamardini of Bakreshwar

Bakreshwar is very close to Birbhum. In fact Nalhati, Tarapith, Sainthia, Siuri and Bakreshwar are all located on the same route.

Bakreshwar is sixteen kilometres from Siuri. It is to the north-east of Morgram and to its south is the river Papahara. It is believed that Bakreshwar gets its name from Sage Ashtavakra, who is said to have meditated here for ten thousand years before he achieved the state of oneness with Shiva. Thus the chief temple of the place is dedicated to Vaktranatha Shiva. This old stone temple has two shivalingas: the bigger one is named after Ashtavakra and the smaller one is called Vaktranatha Anadilinga. Several other smaller Shiva temples



Mahishamardini of Bakreshwar

surround the main temple.

Right beside the Vaktranatha temple stands the temple of Devi Mahishamardini, another Satipitha. It has been said in the *Pithanirnaya*: ‘*Vaktreshvare manahpāto vaktranāthastu bhairavaḥ; Nadī pāpaharā tatra devī mahiṣamardini*. On Vaktreshwara dropped [Sati’s] “mind” (the region between the eyebrows). Vaktranatha is the Bhairava [at this place], where [flows] River Papahara, and the Devi is Mahishamardini.’ There is no trace of Mahishamardini’s original image, but the existing ten-handed brass statue of the Devi is beautifully made. There is also a footprint of hers on a basalt slab. Kshatrapala, as the temple of Vatuka Bhairava is known, is located to the south of the Mahishamardini temple. Besides these, there are also two other beautiful temples in Bakreshwar: the Harishwari temple and the Mahaprabhu Nityananda Smriti temple.

From the ancient days Bakreshwar has been a place well known for cult worship. Mythological books describe it as ‘*guhyaṃ tīrtham param mahat*, supremely great esoteric tīrthā’. Its famous burning ghat is situated on the bank of the Papahara.

The seven hot springs of Brahmakund, Suryakund, Dugdhakund, Bhairavakund, Agnikund, Jibitakund and Chandrakund are the other attractions of Bakreshwar. Each one of them has a legendary origin. The springs are considered very holy. The water of these springs is very hot and it is customary for the pilgrims to bathe in them, especially during festivals and on other auspicious days. Special worship ceremonies are held on occasions like Shiva Chaturthi and Durga Puja.

Devi Kiriteshwari of Lalbagh

It is written in the *Pithanirnaya*: ‘*Bhuvanesī siddhirūpā kirīṣṭhā ca kīrtitā; Devatā vimalā namnī samvarto bhairavastathā*. Bhuvaneshi, the embodiment of perfection, who is also known as Kiritastha, [is here] Devi Vimala, and the Bhairava is Samvarta.’ This temple is situated on the bank of the Ganga at

Batnagar. One can go there by rail via Lalbagh Court Road station, or by road via Khagrachhat after crossing the Ganga.

Mention is made of this pitha by the *Tantrachudamani* and the *Mahanila Tantra*. A tiny piece of Sati’s crown fell here. The goddess is worshipped in a stone placed on a high rock altar. Raja Ramakrishna, the son of Rani Bhawani, used to visit this temple. There are also several other big and small Shiva temples in this area. In Batnagar village, there is a secret shrine of Kiriteshwari and a Shiva-Kali temple. Local people believe that the Devi’s crown is preserved here in an earthen pot that is always kept wrapped in a silk cloth. From the early days, a fair is being held here every Tuesday.

Devi Bhramari of Salbari

Says the *Pithanirnaya*: ‘*Trisrotāyām vāmapado bhrāmārī bhairaveśvaro*. At Trisrota [fell Sati’s] left foot; [here the Devi is] Bhramari and the Bhairava Ishwara (or Ambara).’ Situated in Jalvish (or Jalpesh) village of Salbari, south of Mainagudi, this is a renowned pitha. Trisrota was the historical name of this place. Just like Kashi Vishvanatha Jalpeshwara Shiva is also quite famous. It is mentioned in the *Skanda Purana* that Raja Jalpa had a vision of Anadilinga Mahadeva on attaining moksha. Parashurama is also said to have meditated here.

The temple is very big and beautiful and is visible from a great distance. A dry moat runs round the temple premises and the whole area is full of trees. The sanctum housing the deity is ten feet below floor level and a flight of stairs connects it to the temple proper. The Jalpeshwara Anadilinga is pyramidal in shape.

Devi Bhimarupa of Tamluk

Our last stop is Tamluk, the place where Sati’s left ankle fell. Devi Bhimarupa or Kapalini and Bhairava Sarvananda are the presiding deities here. Vibhasa is the other name of this holy place and the goddess is worshipped as Bargabhima. There is a good description of this pitha in the *Vishuddhasiddhanta Panjika*. Situ-

ated in Medinipur district, Tamluk is easily accessible by bus from Kolkata.

In days past, when the river Rupnarayan flowed very close to the temple—it has now retreated—merchants and traders used to take the blessings of the Devi before setting sail. It is said that Dhanapati Saudagar built this temple after returning from his business tour of Singhala (Sri Lanka), but according to another version it was Maharaja Tamradhwaja who founded it. The dock of Tamralipta (Tamluk) is very ancient; many Chinese travellers have described it in their journals.

Legend has it that Kalapahar tried to destroy this temple too. The scared priest fled the temple, leaving the doors wide open. When Kalapahar entered the temple to destroy the image, he was shocked to see his own mother standing in front of him! She asked Kalapahar to go back and he obliged. There are stories of many other supernatural events too. The Devi here is said to be very alive and active. Both the temple and the image are very ancient. Bhairava Sarvananda's temple is just beside the Devi temple.

The Mahamahapitha of Modern Times

On the afternoon of 21 July 1920, soon after the funeral pyre of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was lighted on the bank of the Ganga at Belur Math, the sky on the opposite side became overcast with clouds. But not a drop fell on the cremation site. However, when the flames had consumed Holy Mother's mortal frame and Swami Sarada-



Devi Bargabhima of Tamluk

nanda had poured the first pitcher of Ganga water over the embers, a heavy shower descended and extinguished the fire completely. Swami Shivananda observed that it was as if the gods were showering the holy water of peace to douse the flames of Mahamaya's cremation. From that day, this spot also has become another Shaktipitha, but with a difference: the fifty-one pithas are so called because parts of Sati's body fell on those places, but in Belur Math the entire

physical frame of the Divine Mother was cremated. That makes the spot a Mahamahapitha.

The Divine Mother is present in all these sites, compassionately blessing us with faith, devotion and knowledge. We set out on the pilgrimage to receive her blessings, for without that it is impossible to see the light of Wisdom. Mother is the embodiment of Knowledge and Devotion. Jay Ma! Jay Ma! *



Sri Sarada Devi temple at Belur Math

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kashi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name on my lips?
What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours, for sure? —Madan

Vivekananda's Journey through Canada: July 1893

RAINER KOSSMANN

During the summer of 1893, Chicago hosted a large World's Fair which drew many visitors throughout the summer. Attendance on some days exceeded 100,000 visitors. The Parliament of Religions addressed by Swami Vivekananda in September 1893 was associated with that World's Fair.

Canada served as a major route for oriental visitors to the World's Fair, with passengers disembarking from ships in Canada's western port of Vancouver, British Columbia. They then travelled 1,600 miles eastward by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) Express for three days through the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The daily run left Vancouver at 10.45 a.m. and took the first day and night to cross British Columbia. It reached Banff Hot Springs in Alberta at 3.45 p.m. on the second day with Calgary, Alberta, reached a few hours later at 7.15 p.m. The train then spent the second night and most of the third day crossing Saskatchewan, reaching Manitoba at 4 p.m. on the third day. It arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, at 10.30 p.m. on the third day after a sixty-hour journey. This was then followed by a thirty-three-hour southward journey from Winnipeg to Chicago.

Swami Vivekananda is shown on the passenger manifesto of the *Empress of India*, which left Yokohama, Japan, on 14 July 1893 and arrived at the port of Vancouver on the evening of Tuesday, 25 July. In attempting to reconstruct the course of Swamiji's journey from Vancouver to Chicago, Marie Louise Burke writes: 'There was nothing to detain Swamiji there [at Vancouver] for more than one night, and he most probably boarded the train the following morning. ... At Winnipeg, which he reached on Friday night [28 July], he transferred to another train that carried him down to the United

States' (*Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols. [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992], 1.16.)

A news item on page 8 of the 31 July edition of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, however, contradicts this itinerary. It announces:

Swami Vevekananda [*sic*], a Hindoo priest, arrived from the west last night on his way to Chicago, where he will attend the world's congress of religions as a delegate from India.

According to another news item in the same edition:

The Atlantic Express was an hour late in arriving last night. A very fast run was made from the portage to the city, the time occupied in running the fifty-six miles being 1 hr. 18 min. without stops.

Swami Vivekananda thus arrived in Winnipeg at 11.30 p.m. on Sunday, 30 July 1893, an hour later than the scheduled arrival time of 10.30 p.m. If he stayed on the CPR Express all the way from Vancouver, he would have left Vancouver at 10.45 a.m. on Friday, 28 July. His letter of 20 August from Metcalfe indicates that, given his limited monetary resources, he probably travelled second class on his trip through Canada to Winnipeg.

Some of the other passengers from the *Empress of India* also arrived at local Winnipeg hotels over the 29 July weekend, with the first of these arriving on the Friday night CPR Express, which arrived five and a half hours late on the morning of Saturday, 29 July, as indicated by the following news item in Saturday's *Free Press*:

Three extra sleepers were attached to the CPR Express from the west, which arrived in the city at 4 o'clock this morning. The passengers were mostly Chinese and Japanese tourists and merchants.

The passenger manifesto of the *Empress of India* shows a Tuason party, whose arrival is reported

in the *Free Press's* 31 July number:

Mr. Touason, a wealthy planter of Manila, arrived by Friday's Atlantic Express, accompanied by his wife and two daughters, and five beautiful Japanese ladies. Mr. Touason and his family are on their way to France on a visit, and will go to the World's Fair at Chicago.

Another entry reads:

The following registered at the Manitoba Saturday morning: ... Mr. and Mrs. Tuason, Miss Ellen Feeney Tuason, Miss C. Lyarda, Miss R. Lyarda, Manila, India.

Tuason is also shown as registered by the Manitoba hotel's register of Saturday, 29 July. This was also published in that day's *Free Press*.

Freight from the *Empress of India* also passed through Winnipeg on 29 and 30 July according to the following *Free Press* news items:

Two cars of silk and twenty-seven Chinamen passed through the city Saturday night for New York.

Four trains of Asiatic freight, part of the *Empress of India's* cargo, passed through the city yesterday [Sunday] on the way to New York and Boston.

About a dozen other *Empress of India* passengers also show up registered at local hotels in the 31 July edition of the *Free Press*. From this it is clear that the passenger and freight load from the ship went by train through Winnipeg over the weekend of 29-30 July 1893. The weather was sunny and warm, with temperatures in the high seventies and low eighties, and dropping to the high forties and low fifties overnight. The hotels were quite busy, with the Manitoba, Winnipeg's most popular hotel, showing a guest list of 180 that weekend.

Other travelling companions of Swami

Vivekananda that he may have interacted with on his Canadian journey have been mentioned in news items from that weekend's *Free Press*:

Five Bombay merchants en route to Chicago where they will spend two months at the World's Fair, arrived from the west last night and are at the Manor.

P. Mercer, of Calcutta, who has been in the government service of India for ten years, is at the Manitoba on his way to England. He remains in the city a week.

About three weeks earlier, on Tuesday, 11 July, a large party of the Nawab of Rampur had also checked into the Manitoba hotel on their way to Chicago.

From Winnipeg, visitors to the World's Fair were shunted onto trains heading south to Chicago via Minneapolis, covering the additional nine hundred miles in thirty-three hours. These southbound trains typically left around noon, reaching Minneapolis early the next morning and Chicago at 9.30 p.m. Swami Vivekananda is not reported to have stayed at any Winnipeg hotel on Sunday night; therefore it is likely that he remained on the train and left Winnipeg at noon on Monday, 31 July, arriving in Chicago on Tuesday evening, 1 August. It is also highly likely that he would have travelled and remained with a tourist contingent of the *Empress of India*, heading directly for the

World's Fair via Winnipeg. His letter of 20 August 1893 from Metcalfe indicates that he was acutely concerned about conserving funds and this adds further evidence to the likelihood of his having stayed on the train on Sunday night. These must, of course, remain assumptions till we come across fresh indisputable facts. *

THE secretary-treasurer of the Winnipeg General Hospital acknowledges with thanks the receipt of \$20 collection at Roman Catholic churches per Rev. Father Cloutier.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, a Hindoo priest, arrived from the west last night on his way to Chicago, where he will attend the world's congress of religions as a delegate from India.

GRAND MASTER W. T. MARSHALL, of the Manitoba Grand Orange lodge, left on Saturday for the Soo to attend the meeting of the Grand Lodge of British North America there.

*A clipping from
the Winnipeg Free Press
Monday, 31 July 1893*

Acharya Vinoba Bhave: A Moving *Tirtha*

DR TAPASH SANKAR DUTTA

Acharya Vinoba Bhave was a versatile genius who served the downtrodden people of India throughout his life. In him we notice a balanced combination of jnana and karma. He travelled through villages all over India on foot for twelve long years, commencing from 1951. Villages are the lifeblood of India where nearly seventy crore people live, move and have their beings. A large proportion of these villagers are landless agriculturists almost all of whom are poverty-ridden. Moved by their pathetic condition, Vinoba appealed to the landlords to donate a portion of their land to him regarding him as their son. To one landlord he said, 'You have seven sons; consider me as your eighth and give me my legitimate share.' Touched by his appeal, landlords donated huge areas of land, which he distributed to landless people for the solution of their economic problems. He collected twenty-six lakh acres in Bihar alone.

Noble Inheritance

Vinoba Narahari Bhave was born on 11 September 1895 in Gagode village in Kolaba district of Maharashtra. His guru Mahatma Gandhi called him Vinoba and in course of time he became known by this name. Vinoba was the eldest of four brothers and a sister. The youngest brother died a premature death. His father Narahari Shambhuroa, a textile engineer by profession, used to live in Baroda, so Vinoba together with his brothers, sister and mother Rukmini Devi lived with grandfather Shambhuroa in their village home. Shambhuroa was a large-hearted person. Every year he would

distribute the first crop of mangoes from his garden to his neighbours and friends. In the words of Vinoba, 'We learned voluntary social obligation from our grandfather.' Shambhuroa was free from superstition. He did not hesitate to engage even Muslim singers to sing devotional songs in his ancestral Shiva temple. 'If there be any element of purity in me, it has been inherited from my grandfather', Vinoba once confided to his friends and relatives.



His mother's influence on Vinoba was immense. She regularly used to sing devotional songs to her children in order to nurture their religious sentiments. From his very childhood Vinoba dreamt of a life of brahmacharya. When he expressed this desire to his mother, she replied: 'If God had given me the body of a man, I would have tried to live in an even more austere manner. A virtuous householder earns a good name for the family, but the life of a brahmacharin at its highest brings salvation to forty-two generations!' In fact, when Vinoba's mother was thirty-six years old, at her earnest request, she and her husband took the vows of celibacy for the rest of their lives. This was disclosed to Vinoba by his father after Rukmini Devi's demise at the age of forty-two. It must be mentioned in this connection that all her three sons remained lifelong brahmacharins!

Vinoba's mother used to give alms to beggars whenever they approached her. One day, seeing her give alms to a well-built beggar, he protested that she was being kind to a man who did not deserve it. In reply his mother said, 'Vinya, who are we to judge who is worthy and

who is unworthy? All who come to us for help are Gods in human forms. So we must provide whatever help is within our means.' She was also very considerate towards the so-called untouchables and it was from her that Vinoba learnt that 'he who gives is a god, but he who withholds is a devil'. Vinoba's mother's utterance reminds us of Swami Vivekananda's teaching that service performed in the right spirit of karma yoga becomes 'worship of Shiva in the jiva', which is one of the most effective means of self-purification and God-realization. Swamiji expresses the ideal of service powerfully in the following lines:

These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.

Vinoba's mother used to serve her neighbours in times of need. On one occasion when a neighbour was indisposed, she went to cook for them after having finished her own cooking at home. Disapproving of this, Vinoba said, 'Mother, you are selfish. Why didn't you cook for them first and then do our cooking?' His mother replied, 'If I cooked their food first, it would get cold by the time they ate it.' The answer went straight into Vinoba's heart.

Rukmini Devi wanted her children to water the tulsi plant and feed a cow every day before taking food. When Vinoba wanted to know the reason she said, 'It is not proper to take food before offering it to others.' Though Vinoba did not like talking about himself, he occasionally used to speak of his mother's influence on him.

Independent Spirit

When Vinoba was ten years old, his mother brought her children to their father at Baroda, where Vinoba completed his primary education. He was admitted to class eight in 1910. At that time the freedom movement was just taking shape. Vinoba was very much influenced by the *Kesari*, the Marathi weekly edited by the reputed nationalist Lokamanya Tilak.

After matriculation in 1913 he joined the intermediate class at Baroda College. But within a few weeks of his college life he realized in his heart of hearts that there was no use wasting time and energy pursuing a college education that was only meant to train 'your most obedient servants'. College education would not help him serve his country in the long run. So he burnt all his certificates. When his mother tried to dissuade him saying that he might need them later, he emphatically said that he would not. At that time he was only twenty years old.

Vinoba was an outspoken person. While at college he used to avail of the Central Library, Baroda, then considered one of the best libraries in India. One summer day, feeling very hot in the library room he removed his shirt. The library attendant objected to this and when Vinoba refused to listen to him the matter was reported to the librarian, who happened to be an Englishman. The librarian called him to his room and asked him if he knew what good manners were. Vinoba firmly replied that he did, saying, 'In our country, we do not think it good for one to remain seated and keep another standing.' The librarian was taken aback and offered him a chair. Vinoba then added, 'In our country we remove shirts during hot weather because it is healthy and convenient.' The librarian could not refute this logic.

Having left college without appearing for his intermediate examinations, Vinoba decided to live in Benares and pursue scriptural studies. There he used to sit on the bank of the Ganga every day for hours together and practise concentration of mind. Occasionally he used to give vent to his feelings by composing poems. An incident occurred at this time which left a deep impact on his mind: One day he bought a lock from a shop. He knew the price to be three annas. But the shopkeeper demanded ten annas. This he paid, telling the shopkeeper that though he knew the lock actually cost three annas he was paying him ten trusting his words. Vinoba used to pass this shop every day. One day the shopkeeper called and told him that the

price of the lock was indeed three annas and requested him to take back the excess seven annas and excuse him. Hearing his words Vinoba expressed gratitude to God for teaching him two fundamental lessons: always speak out the truth; and believe even a liar's words so that in course of time he may have a chance to amend himself.

Master and Disciple

While living at Benares he was very much impressed by reading Gandhiji's speeches in the newspapers. In him Vinoba found a leader with the intense political urge to free India from British rule. So he wrote to Gandhiji. After exchanging a few letters with him, Gandhiji invited the young Vinoba to meet him at Kochrab Ashram in Ahmedabad. Vinoba reached Kochrab Ashram on 7 June 1916 and found that he had met the man he could follow. His moral and spiritual life was further strengthened through Gandhiji's influence. Gandhiji was also impressed by Vinoba's personality. Informing Vinoba's father about his whereabouts, he wrote, 'Your son Vinoba is with me. At a tender age, he has acquired a degree of spirituality and asceticism that took me years of patient labour to attain.'

Mother Gita

Coming into close contact with Gandhiji, Vinoba began to realize the significance of the Bhagavadgita. In his words, 'I know of nothing which is of greater value than reading the Gita. I have found a living person who follows the philosophy of the Gita in his own life. He is my Master.' Once his mother had asked him to translate the Gita into simple Marathi verse. This he did when he was incarcerated in Dhulia jail in 1930-1 for carrying out satyagraha against the manufacture of toddy. This translation, which has retained the rhythm of the original to a remarkable degree, Vinoba called *Gitai* or 'Mother Gita'. He once said, 'My mother left placing me in the lap of Mother Gita.' Further: 'The bond between the Gita and me transcends

reason. My heart and mind have both received more nourishment from the Gita than my body from my mother's milk.' On request, he also explained the teachings of the Gita in a simple way to his fellow prisoners from 21 February to 19 June 1932. The jail authorities even relaxed the rules and allowed him to explain the same to women prisoners on their demand.

In order to understand the significance of the Holy Quran, he learnt the Arabic language. At one time he used to associate with pious Muslims to imbibe the teachings of the Quran. Hearing the Quran from his lips Maulana Abul Kalam Azad called him a hafiz (a person who knows the Quran by heart). He published a book titled *Essence of the Quran* in August 1962. At the time of his visit to East Pakistan for a period of sixteen days devout Muslims spontaneously purchased eight hundred copies of this book.

In Jails and Ashrams

Vinoba had been arrested on 17 June 1923 in Nagpur for delivering an impassioned speech against the British. In reply to a query from friends regarding his jail life, he said, 'You must have seen a circus, where man dominates animals, but in a jail animals dominate men.' Within a short period of time he was transferred to Akola Jail. Describing his experiences in Akola Jail he said, 'I secured the MA, BSc degrees in jail—"Master in the Art of Breaking Stone-chips!"' From 1923 to 1940 he underwent imprisonment several times for taking part in India's freedom movement. On one occasion, when the jail authorities wished to provide him some facilities and asked him about his needs, he promptly replied: 'I cannot dream of more pain than being deprived of seeing the sun rise and set every day during my prison life.' Gandhiji designated him as the first satyagrahi during the civil disobedience movement of 1940 in protest against India's forced participation in World War II. Directed by Gandhiji, he joined the movement and courted imprisonment for a period of five years.

Introducing Vinoba to his English friend

C F Andrews in 1918, Gandhiji said, 'Vinoba is the best jewel of the Ashram. He has not come to the Ashram to be blessed by it, but to bless it.' He was given the title of Acharya by Gandhiji in 1921. In the same year he was sent to Wardha to open an ashram. Once Vinoba took a year's leave from the ashram to recuperate his health and to pursue his personal studies. Seeing him rejoin the ashram exactly after one year Gandhiji was very pleased and praised his devotion to truth. 'Rather it is an indication of my devotion to mathematics', replied Vinoba. 'Mathematics is inseparably connected with me, so I did not commit any mistake in my calculations.' Gandhiji smiled and said, 'Mathematics cannot come into conflict with Truth.'

Another incident provides insight into Vinoba's self-effacing nature. Once Gandhiji wrote a letter to him mentioning that 'I have never come across in my life a nobler soul than you'. Disapproving of the contents of the letter, he tore it up and threw it into the waste-paper basket. Kamalnayan, a ward of Vinoba's noticed this, picked up the torn letter, and after having rearranged it and read its contents, he said to Vinoba, 'Letters written by Bapu are a property of the Ashram and ought to be preserved at any cost.' Vinoba said, 'Is it not a mistake on Bapu's part to call me great? He has come into contact with many great souls; he ought to have mentioned their names also.' 'Bapu does not do anything hastily. Before writing this letter, he must have given the matter due consideration', replied Kamalnayan promptly. 'If that be so, preserving the letter will arouse my feeling of egotism, which will prevent me from advancing in spiritual life. So I

am perfectly justified in tearing up this letter', answered Vinoba, putting the matter to rest.

Creating a Legacy

After Gandhiji's death Vinoba tried to put his teachings and programmes into practice to the fullest extent. There is no denying the fact that he did not merely follow those teachings, but also made important additions. In a message sent to the annual conference of the Akhil Bharatiya Sarva Seva Sangh held in 1958, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said of him, 'In the troubled and dynamic scene that is India today, the frail figure of Vinobaji stands like a rock of strength, modest and gentle, yet with something of the vision of the future in his eyes. It is not for us, smaller folk, to judge him whether we agreed with him or disagreed in some matters, for he is above these minor judgements. He represents, as none else does, the spirit and tradition of Gandhiji and of India.'

Vinoba was well-versed in sixteen languages which included English, French, German and Japanese. He wrote many books which reflected his original thinking. His notable works include *Talks on the Gita*, *Ishavasya Upanishad*, *Swarajya Shastra*, *Thoughts on Education*, *Bhoodan Yajna*, *Gitai*, *Stree Shakti*, and *Jivan Shikshan*. He wanted to solve all mundane problems with the light of spirituality and never deviated from principles even when the atmosphere was hostile. His life was a life of sacrifice for the cause of society and country. At the end of a voluntary fast, he gave up his body on 15 November 1982, leaving behind a legacy that serves as an unfailing beacon to all seekers of truth and social justice. *

Bhavana: 'Suppose two men go for a bath in the Ganga. One of them says, "What is this Ganga that people talk so much about? Take two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen; combine the two gases—it becomes Ganga. What else is there in the Ganga?" The other says, "The Ganga flows from the lovely lotus-feet of Lord Vishnu. She has dwelt in the matted hair of Shiva. Thousands of seers, both ascetic and kingly, have done penance near her. Countless holy acts have been performed by her side. Such is the sacred Ganga, my mother.'" Filled with this *bhavana* (feeling), he bathes in the river. ... Both derive the benefit of physical cleansing. But the devotee (bhakta) gets the benefit of mental purification as well.'

—Vinoba Bhava



Reviews



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

Max Muller and His Contemporaries.
Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture,
Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. E-mail: rmic@vsnl.com. 2001. viii + 235 pp. Rs 100.

Quite a few studies on Max Muller exist: notably the one by Nirad Chaudhuri and a fairly well-written sketch by Gauranga Gopal Sengupta in his comprehensive study *Indology and its Eminent Western Savants*. But the volume under review has a special ambience. As noted by Professor Kapila Vatsyayan, it is one thing to speak or write about the 'scholar extraordinary' in or for seminars organized by such bodies as India International Centre and another to do that at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture—and, of course, in Kolkata, West Bengal. She says in her stimulating paper 'Whither Orientalism?' that her own personal rapport with the milieu of Bengal Renaissance makes Max Muller and his contribution somewhat unique. 'Max Muller like some of his predecessors, not all, was also a child of [the] psychic response of Europe of that time and the period immediately preceding' (79). A scholar of 'uncanny insights and missionary zeal', Muller 'is not part of [the] colonizer's sense of wielding power but one who tacitly accepts European or Christian superiority at one level' (ibid.). Nevertheless, he was also the one who placed Sri Ramakrishna on the Western centre stage for the first time!

Commemorating the death centenary of the pioneering orientalist (described by Swami Vivekananda as the reincarnation of Sayana, the great rishi), 'the purpose', says Swami Prabhanandaji 'was to take stock of Indology today and look ahead to the future in areas where Max Muller made outstanding contributions: Sanskrit Studies, Comparative Religion, Philosophy, and Social Criticism' (3).

The scope of the volume thus goes beyond merely focusing on Muller's doubtless unique contribution to oriental studies. As Professor D P Chattopadhyaya, analysing Muller's Indian connections, says, his view of the nature and development of language points to one important difference:

while Muller, in his interpretation of the Vedic texts, went 'well beyond the somewhat restricted etymological approach of Yaska', one misses in his 'pro-Naturalist reading of the Vedic corpus' the 'highly nuanced spiritual interpretation' of Dayananda, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo (18).

But then, as Swami Ranganathanandaji points out, Muller had unshakeable conviction about the grandeur, sweep and antiquity of the Hindu ethos. No wonder Georg Lechner in his paper points out that Max Muller 'was not simply an exponent of Hindu thought and civilization, he was also a defender of modern Hindu character' (32), which he explored in the classic, *India: What Can It Teach Us?* But he was no blind admirer and never hesitated in speaking plainly about Indian character when it was needed (see the incident about Indian students' alleged knowledge of Sanskrit, 32). Professor Visvanath Chatterjee brings out clearly and cogently Max Muller's views on and scholarly engagement with Sanskrit language and literature and assesses the various ways in which this engagement helped Muller to lay the foundation for the systematic study of the evolution of language (especially the connection of sound and sense), its phonetic implications, and philology, not to mention the rediscovery of the Vedic texts. And as Professor Albrecht Wezler says in his piece on 'Max Muller and Indian Philosophy', 'Max Muller's importance for our knowledge of and our attempts at understanding Indian philosophy lies not so much in his writings on individual schools ... but rather and first of all in his editing the Rig-Veda' (98). 'Had he not drawn, and most eloquently, competently and impressively at that, the Indologists' attention to the Rig-Veda, the Veda at large, and the moulding effect it had on the whole of the later development of Indian culture, Indologists would not have been able' to take the significant steps that they took in succeeding studies (ibid.).

Professor J N Mohanty, in his characteristically incisive way, makes the same point tracing Max Muller's interest in Vedic texts to his awareness of Schelling's 'philosophy of mythology'. Mohanty

also brings out several implicit aspects in Muller's nearly absent engagement with Hegel—specially as embodied in his *Phenomenology of Mind*. The irony, as Professor Mohanty puts it, is: 'Where but in Hegel could he have found a maturer grasp of this identity of thought and language which Max Muller was developing all on his own?' (108).

Professor Kapil Kapoor places the great savant in the context of 'text-renewal mechanisms', what he calls the 'Vyāsa Paramparā'. It is in the tradition of the textual renewal of a primary text (the *Ashhadhyayi* of Panini and the Mahabharata are cited as 'root' texts) through commentaries, recensions, redactions, adaptations and translations, that one has 'to see the contribution and the role of Max Muller and the other European scholars', says Professor Kapoor (125-6).

Johannes H Voigt in his comments on Max Muller's social criticism points to the social ethos extant at that time. Indeed, what Muller wrote in 1865 is much more valid today: 'The utter disability of people to judge the manners of other nations or former ages with anything like fairness or common-sense' is an 'extraordinary feature in the history of manners' (168).

In his thoroughly researched and cogently argued presentation on Indology and cultural studies as communication, Aditya Malik suggests that 'there may be a discourse of difference and identity that is radically distinct from the hegemonic usage' we are familiar with. 'We need to create a new context for communication.' According to this, 'Indology or cultural studies makes sense only in the context of communication with the "other" rather than in the context of the production of knowledge about the "other"' (186).

In his valedictory address, Professor R K Das-Gupta focuses on Max Muller's 'response to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda'. He notes that he 'turned to the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna out of his love for Vedanta'; after, perhaps, some disillusionment with (basically academic and therefore anemic) philosophy. Indeed, Professor DasGupta declares a highly debatable point as a matter of fact: 'Today philosophy itself is dead in the West' with 'its death warrant ... first pronounced by G. E. Moore' (200). Hence, by and large, Max Muller's fascination(?) for Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

Ratna Basu's 'Max Muller's Indology Revisited' is based on her personal experience 'in this area in German universities' which shows that 'Max Mul-

ler's research investigations have been superseded', that his "theory of renaissance" in the history of Sanskrit literature has been rejected', and that 'scholars of the science of religion do not agree any more with the universal theory of the development of any religion from its primitive level to its superior ones' (204-5). In short, 'utter indifference' marks the attitude of German scholars towards Max Muller's views—except for his rendering of the Vedic texts. Ratna Basu also focuses on the 'ambivalent and controversial remarks and utterances' made by Max Muller on Indian culture, civilization and religion (an aspect which is rarely focused on, if at all, by the Indian scholars who, by and large, highly admire and appreciate Max Muller.) The suggestion that Max Muller's colossal work should be considered, using Indic idiom, at least as *purvapaksha* if not as *siddhanta* is, indeed, a fresh perspective.

It is entirely appropriate that the proceedings (and the volume) end with Professor Tapan Raychaudhuri's address. He raises the rather nagging question: 'Why is it that contemporary Europe, particularly his own country, has almost forgotten' Max Muller? He ascribes it to 'the misinterpretations of his theories'. Similarly, postmodernism (of which the learned scholar is urbane critical in what seems to me a pointless, if not dismissive, way) also 'has produced some rather misleading theories and suppositions'. Here Professor Raychaudhuri is somewhat ambivalent: he declares in the beginning of his address that he is 'not an Orientalist' and yet advances the generalization that 'all Orientalism was based on a simple dichotomy of the East and the West' (215). If the Professor could identify this as a 'misleading' assumption, he could have elaborated a corrective to these misleading assumptions. I am sure coming from a scholar and cultural historian of his stature, this would be very valuable.

Throughout the volume one notices either consciously or unconsciously an allegiance to the postulates of 'orientalism' à la Edward Said and his followers. Isn't it time that this complex of intellectual enquiry is subjected to a much-needed critique, especially in terms and implications of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda (for want of a better term) Vedanta? With the distinct emergence of American Vedanta and Vedantists, the immense resilience of this tradition seems to yield more comprehensive approaches to the appropriation of 'other' cultures. It neither unduly privileges the foundational texts or traditions nor gives in to the temptation of

marginalizing them. A delicate balance is central to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta tradition, a balance which is comprehensive and cuts across disciplines. Pointing to this is the significance of the volume.

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Ayurvedic Cooking for Self-healing. *Usha Lad and Dr Vasant Lad.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: *mlbd@vsnl.com*. 2005. 254 pp. Rs 195.

Ayurveda is the ancient Indian medical system—in vogue for more than five thousand years—with a holistic approach towards the healing of the body, mind and spirit through proper diet and balanced lifestyle. The book under review, presenting Ayurvedic recipes, is not only a complete know-how of food preparations based on the central working principles of Ayurveda, it also projects Ayurveda as an ‘intuitive science of life’.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter explains *tridosha* (triple humours) as the basis of one’s individual constitution and describes the attributes of the *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* typologies as manifested in the body. The second chapter points out improper eating habits and guides in planning an exercise regime keeping in view the workings of the *doshas* and the body’s biological clock. The role of a balanced lifestyle, sustaining relationships and meditation are stressed here. The process of digestion, the effect of various tastes on the *doshas*, and the concept of *agni* as a factor responsible for digestion are narrated in the third chapter. Ayurveda specifically emphasizes avoidance of incompatible food combinations, which are listed in the fourth chapter along with some useful tips to aid digestion. Chapters Five and Six describe the modalities of setting up an Ayurvedic kitchen, including lists of ingredients and menus for breakfast, lunch, snack and dinner for summer and winter seasons suitable for persons with specific *doshas*. Chapter Seven encompasses more than a hundred recipes for the preparation of different kinds of soups, khichris, rice dishes, vegetables, raitas, pickles, chutneys, breads, sweets, and beverages. The effect of cooked dishes on the three *doshas*, their medicinal values, and some remarkable characteristics of the chief ingredients used are given

for each recipe. The utility of fruits, vegetables and kitchen herbs as medicines for healing is discussed in detail in Chapter Eight. Very useful information in tabulated form on how to determine one’s constitution, comprehensive food guidelines for basic constitutional types, qualitative attributes of foods (fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, animal food, seeds, oil-seeds and spices) and their action on the *doshas* is appended. Inclusion of a glossary, a bibliography and an index enhances the value of the book. The readers will also become familiar with nearly three hundred home remedies for everything from common cold and skin problems to stabilization of blood sugar in diabetes—all using household herbs, fruits and vegetables.

Indeed, this can prove to be an immensely helpful book for health-conscious people. The authors are to be congratulated for their balanced, logical presentation, interspersed with beautiful line drawings. The get-up and printing are excellent.

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A Visible Wound. *Julie Friedeberger.* New Age Books, A44 Naraina Phase I, New Delhi 110 028. E-mail: *nab@vsnl.com*. 2004. xii + 192 pp. Rs 250.

All mutilating surgical operations, particularly those done for cancer, are a massive trauma for patients and their families. The term *cancer* evokes a terror that no other disease does. The psychological insult is therefore as important and severe as the physical trauma associated with this disease and its therapy. Amongst cancers, breast cancer stands out for the additional injury that it inflicts on the female psyche and personality. This book is a first-person account of the trauma of one such individual and how she handled it.

Breast cancer is one area where the psychological profile of the patient and the help of a psychologist is important, not only in helping the patient but also, at times, in helping the clinician choose the appropriate therapy. This can be a very delicate issue as the patient is often very vulnerable, physically as well as psychologically. The more educated and intellectual a patient, the greater the vulnerability. She sometimes has a whole lot of treatment modalities to choose from. It is often difficult for the patient to decide because she cannot foresee and judge the future.

That is why the role of the clinician and the psychologist becomes so important. They have to give her a glimpse of the life ahead that is so difficult for her to see.

In this book the author, who is also the sufferer, describes these problems vividly right from the initial suspicion of the disease. She is familiar with yoga systems and her mind is tuned to think along those lines. She takes recourse to yoga and ultimately, through acceptance and assimilation, comes out victorious against her fear of disease and deformity. She is no longer afraid of 'a visible wound'. It makes fascinating reading, even if rather long-winded. Many women reach that acceptance through faith and family support.

In India, yoga practices are mainly considered instruments for spiritual progress in the path towards God-perception or realization of the higher Self. The goal may or may not be reached, but it sets the direction. In the West, yoga systems are pursued more for material benefits, which may be physical or mental. In this book, the author is aware of the higher possibilities of yoga but it is not clear whether she subscribes to them or whether she became aware of them through her suffering. In India one is apt to laugh at this craze for physical yogic practices as means for *bhoga*, or fulfilment of desires—the popularity of teachers like Baba Ramdev notwithstanding. Reading this book, one comes to think that the right path probably lies somewhere in the middle. For some reasons we have downplayed the material world in our spiritual life for a long time and have suffered. In order to be true and of significance to human life, any system should benefit both the material and spiritual aspects of life. This book has successfully highlighted this point.

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Goswami Tulsidas' Dohawali. *Comp. and trans. Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia.* 36A Rajghat Colony, Parikrama Marg, Ayodhya 224 123. 2004. xi + 127pp. Rs 50.

Goswami Tulsidas, the sixteenth-century saint, popularized the name of Rama among people. The Lord made Tulsidas an instrument for the spread of bhakti. Tulsidas's realizations filled him with divine love and compassion for humanity, which he was eager to share with all. Out of this

overflowing divine love sprang the immortal *Ram-charitmanas*, a poetic life of Sri Rama in colloquial Hindi. It is the most influential book in the whole of northern India.

The present booklet, *Dohawali*, is a collection of 573 *dohas* (couplets) translated into simple English. The first few verses extol Rama's name above everything. God and His name are inseparable. The saint prays for absolute faith in the divine name and that Rama be his only strength and refuge. Love and devotion for Sri Rama have been described in various ways and through different examples.

Although Sri Chhawchharia covers a wide range of topics, the central idea ringing throughout his work is devotion; that alone can take care of all the other things of life, be it morality, ethics, philosophy or code of conduct. For Tulsidas, devotion to Rama was of paramount importance. He wanted that divine love to throb in every human heart—everything else was unimportant—so he dedicated his life solely to the spread of bhakti among people. This is evident throughout the small book.

Notwithstanding a few grammatical and spelling errors, Sri Chhawchharia's lucid translation will be welcomed by those who cannot make use of Tulsidas's *dohas* in the original.

Swami Tejomayananda

Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar

Books Received

What You Would Like to Know about Karma. *J P Vaswani.* Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10 Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune 411 001. E-mail: *g_ph@rediffmail.com.* 176 pp. Rs 85.

An insightful account of the subtleties of personal givens (our happinesses and sorrows), and how they can be positively influenced by our attitudes, affect and behaviour. Written in Dada Vaswani's inimitable style, generously interspersed with anecdotes and practical hints arranged under fifty-seven heads, it serves high wisdom for everybody to share.

Swami Vivekananda as a Philosopher. *J L Shaw.* Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. 2004. 30 pp. Rs 12.

A brief monograph on why scholars need to study Swami Vivekananda as a philosopher.

Reports

News from Branch Centres

A bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda was unveiled at the higher secondary school run by **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai**, on 14 April 2006. On 1 June, Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built Vivekananda Block comprising additional classrooms for the centre's higher secondary school.

On 27 April, Swami Smaranandaji also inaugurated a rural-sanitation project of **Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar**, at Hong Basti in Ziro. On the 28th he laid the foundation stone for a 10-bed CCU and 10-bed eye ward at the hospital. Besides, Mr Gegong Apang, Chief Minister, Arunachal Pradesh, declared open a new two-storey building with two mini wards and staff quarters on 11 June, and on the 19th Mr C C Singhpho, Arunachal Pradesh Minister for Health and Family Welfare, launched the hospital's Mobile Outreach Eye Care Facility in Parampare district

An additional building for the Sri Sarada Vidyalaya nursery and primary school at **Ramakrishna Math, Madurai**, was opened on 18 May.

Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, conducted a 3-week summer camp for children in the 8-15 year age group from 30 April to 20 May. About 850 children took part in the camp which included yogasanas, meditation, bhajans, Vedic chanting and moral classes.

Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, organized a month-long summer camp for children between 7 and 12 years old in May. Nearly 50 children participated in the camp.

Rural Development in Katihar

During the financial year 2005-6, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Katihar**, undertook several activities aimed at helping needy people in and around the town.

Under a self-support scheme it distributed 26 rickshaws and 12 vans, and helped 9 persons upgrade their small businesses. Also, 23 women were provided with sewing machines, 5 physi-



Happy girls with their new bicycles in front of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Katihar

cally challenged persons with tricycles, and 39 girls with bicycles, school bags and books.

The 6 pump sets that the centre installed in as many villages were a boon to the farmers and so were the 97 tube wells that it sunk at many other places. In an effort to increase sanitary awareness in these villages, the centre also set up 35 pukka latrines.

Nearly 650 students were benefited by the 9 free coaching centres that the Ashrama operates in Katihar and surrounding villages. The centres are all well equipped with educational aides and the students were supplied with books



One of the Ashrama's coaching centres in progress

and stationery.

The Ashrama organized 9 eye camps (702 patients) and 61 general medical camps in 7 villages (7,750 patients).

Village Uplift Activities in Chapra

On 4 May 2005 a terrible fire in Gautamsthan village, 15 km from Chapra, left over 80 houses completely destroyed or badly damaged. On 5 May **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chapra**, surveyed the situation and distributed 100 saris and 20 dhotis among the victims. In the following weeks a community hall-cum-shelter was erected and a non-formal school started in it for the village children. Later on, with help from headquarters, the centre rebuilt/repared 92 houses. Regular visits to the village by a medical van and weekly distribution of milk to children were also begun.

Shortly after starting the relief and social-uplift work at Gautamsthan, a similar programme was taken up in 3 other nearby villages—Korhbarwa, Lalbazar and Dumri Chirand—where too non-formal schools are being run for a few hundred underprivileged children



Milk distribution at a non-formal school

who have no school to attend. Milk and mobile medical service are also provided weekly.

This year Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was celebrated in these villages with the villagers enthusiastically and voluntarily making all arrangements.

At the Chapra Ashrama itself a daily non-



Villagers participating in Sri Ramakrishna's birthday festival at Korhbarwa

formal school has been functioning since 2004 with about 60 poor children aged between 5 and 12. Besides supplying their school dress, the Ashrama provides them breakfast and milk.

Relief and Rehabilitation

The following centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission together distributed 4,714 blankets among poor people as part of their welfare activities: Belgaum, 100; Belgharia, 65; Ichapur, 500; Kamarpukur, 700; Koalpara, 200; Pune, 250; Puri (Mission), 64; Purulia, 1,491; Sikra-Kulingram, 100; Swamiji's House, 50; and Vrindaban, 1,194.

The devastating flood that hit Cachar district on 15 June damaged many houses and carried away the belongings of many people. On the very next day **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Silchar**, distributed 1,000 kg rice, 200 kg dal, 10 kg milk powder, 335 biscuit packets, 300 plates, 450 bowls, 100 spoons, 100 cooking pots, 100 dhotis, 167 saris and 300 packets of candles to 170 affected families in the Hatichera area.

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, distributed 450 loaves of bread, 1,200 biscuit packets and 65 cans of milk to 600 Sri Lankan refugees at a relief camp in Rameswaram.

Ramakrishna Math, Antpur, provided 845 bamboo poles and 42,425 tiles to 160 families of Hooghly district whose houses were destroyed by a storm. *