



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

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Sunset over the Garhwal range, Himalayas.  
Quote from Swami Vivekananda (CW 3.353).

## CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom	483
This Month	484
<i>Editorial: On Centring Onself</i>	485
<i>Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago</i>	487
Teaching Philosophy across Cultures	
<i>Dr Jeffery D Long</i>	488
Modernization in India and Undercurrents of Assimilative Appropriation	
<i>Dr Priyavrat Shukla</i>	495
Village Swaraj and Sustainable Development	
<i>Rookmin Maharaj</i>	501
Multicultural Societies and the Creation of a Peaceful and Prosperous Global Village	
<i>Dr Bhuvan Unhelkar</i>	506
Mysticism and Social Transformation	
<i>Dr Beatrice Bruteau</i>	511
A Different Place, Yet the Same	
<i>Tracy Lee Kendall</i>	518
In the Vrindavan of My Heart	
<i>Swami Achyutananda</i>	520
Reviews	526
Reports	530

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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

Vol. 111

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No. 9

## ↔ Traditional Wisdom ↔

*MAITRĪ: FRIENDSHIP*

मित्रस्य मा चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षन्ताम् ।

मित्रस्याहं चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षे । मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे ॥

May all beings look upon me with the eye of a friend; may I look upon all beings with the eye of a friend; may we regard on one another with the eye of a friend. (Yajur Veda, 36.18)

न यस्य स्वः पर इति वित्तेष्वात्मनि वा भिदा ।

सर्वभूतसमः शान्तः स वै भागवतोत्तमः ॥

One who makes no distinction of 'self' and 'other' with regard to [one's] person and possessions, who regards all beings with an even eye and is tranquil of mind, is indeed the best of the godly. (Bhagavata, 11.2.52)

On whom the heart instinctively rests,  
In whom the spirit finds delight,  
With him, though one ne'er seen before,  
Safely in friendship may one unite. (Buddha)

Only two virtues are enough;  
Why should the good stand in need of more?  
Anger lived like a lightning flash  
And friendship enduring like a line on stone. (Vajjalagam, 42)

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews, 13.1)

Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own. (Sri Sarada Devi)

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## ∞ This Month ∞

Dialogue is the bedrock on which a genuinely pluralistic society is based and effective dialogue presupposes an authentic appraisal of one's own position. This month we explore some fundamental cross-cultural issues beginning with thoughts **On Centring Oneself**.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** acknowledges the need for India's modernization even as it warns of the dangers of indiscriminate Westernization—'Lest We Forget'!

There has been a radical change in the religious landscape of the US in recent years with a bewildering diversity of faith traditions making their presence felt. One of the avowed functions of the religious studies departments in American educational institutions is to sensitize students to this diversity. **Teaching Philosophy across Cultures** is a sensitive portrayal of what this involves by Dr Jeffery D Long, Associate Professor of Religion and Asian Studies, Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania.

The modernization of India has been a hugely complex process and the remarkable tension between Westernizing trends and traditional forms has led to the growth and flowering of fresh values marked by cultural assimilation and appropriation. This is the thrust of Dr Priyavrat Shukla's nuanced study, **Modernization in India and Undercurrents of Assimilative Appropriation**. The author is Reader, Department of Philosophy, Rani Durgawati University, Jabalpur.

**Village Swaraj and Sustainable Development** is a fictional narrative showing how Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru would compare the present state of Indian (and global) development with the values that Mahatama Gandhi had asserted through his concept of Purna

Swaraj and what cotemporary environmentalists have to say about it. Ms Rookmin Maharaj, the author, is a doctoral candidate, corporate governance, University of Calgary, Canada.

In **Multicultural Societies and the Creation of a Peaceful and Prosperous Global Village**, Dr Bhuvan Unhelkar, a reputed software specialist and social thinker from Sydney, explores cultural diversity as reflected in food habits, music and sports with an eye to fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Mystics have an aura of being too preoccupied with their inner lives to be able to address social needs. A careful study of the lives of the most famous mystics will belie this myth. But Dr Beatrice Bruteau, a member of the Vedanta Centre of Atlanta and an adjunct professor at the Divinity School, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, argues persuasively for an inextricable link between **Mysticism and Social Transformation** on philosophical and psycho-social grounds.

**A Different Place, Yet the Same** is a stirring first-person account of how Vedanta has been working in the life of Mr Tracy Lee Kendall, an inmate of the Coffield Unit, a large men's prison in Tennessee Colony, Texas. It underscores our common humanity and reminds us that we can all care and share, wherever we may be.

The third instalment of **In the Vrindavan of My Heart** by Swami Achyutanandaji, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, brings to life some of the enchanting lilas of Sri Krishna in the mythic environs of Vrindavan. The adapted translation from the author's original Bengali text, *Hridi Brindabane*, has been provided by Dr Chhaya Ghosh, Durgapur.

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# On Centring Oneself

EDITORIAL

It would come as a surprise to our readers that Dr Long, the author of the lead article in this number, begins his narrative with a statement of his own background. Surely, a journal committed to objectivity—reputed for hosting scholars and thinkers with detached judgements for more than a century—cannot be expected to make space for autobiographical material within scholarly papers. This is precisely the dogma that Prof. Long challenges—both in the context of academic studies as well as in the more humanly important field of cross-cultural understanding.

## Postmodern Objectivity

Separation of the subject and object is a fundamental tenet underlying the scientific method. So 'footnotes, references to "evidence", and the habit of writing in the third person' are some of the ubiquitous devices used by authors to showcase their scholarly (or scientific) credentials. It is these very devices that have been seriously called into question by postmodern thinkers, for whom texts can have no fixed meaning. For even supposedly objective historical documents change meaning with each authorial inference. No text can therefore be totally dissociated from its author.

But the inalienable link between texts and their authors does not, in the postmodern view, mean that one can read the author into the text. In *The Death of the Author*, an essay that has come to have canonical significance for postmodernists, Roland Barthes argues that: i) the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author (for every reader must use his own interpretive resources to understand a text); ii) the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture (for authors have to get their ideas from somewhere);

and iii) it is language which speaks, not the author (for language cannot be disassociated from thought). For our purpose here, we can read in these statements a case for a deeper claim to objectivity—an objectivity that includes the subject—for the subject is as much a construct (a product of culture) as is the text s/he leaves to the readers to interpret.

All this is theory. In our actual interactions within and across cultures we meet each other not as concrete objects—billiard balls endlessly bouncing off each other—but as volatile subjects, constantly entering into each other, endlessly trying to understand, participate in and share of each others' being. It is small wonder then that not only do we consider our selves special ('it is for one's self that everything else becomes dear') but also a narrative in the first person carries a peculiar weight of its own ('after all s/he is speaking from experience').

## The Elusive Self

The self is the basis of all our day-to-day dealings, yet it is the least understood of entities. According to Vedanta, our predicament is universally like that of the absent-minded person searching frantically for the necklace s/he is wearing—our real Self is the one thing that we do not know, even though we are largely 'self-centred' beings. To Buddhists, the self (*pudgala*) is an appearance, devoid of substance and in constant flux. Even the relatively stable *jivatman* posited by Vedantins, which survives the body and can transmigrate, is too complex and dynamic a structure for us to be fully conscious of: it is after all a conglomerate of perceptions and volitions, involuntary life-sustaining activities and the unfathomable reservoir of *samskaras*, of cogitation, intellection and the I-sense. Psychoanalysts also assert that much of

our psychic apparatus—including the ego, which is largely identified as the self—is in the unconscious realm, and hence is unknowable.

In practice, however, we have our vision directed outwards and it is in the social context that our selves are largely constructed and located. Our *social self* has a major role to play in our *self-concept*—the organized collection of beliefs and perceptions about oneself. The social self is in turn derived from: i) our interpersonal relationships—at home, work and leisure; and ii) our membership in larger, less personal groupings based on race, ethnicity, religion, culture, political or ideological affiliations and the like. The *social identity* that goes with our social self has several dimensions: i) allegiance to one's own group; ii) interdependency of beliefs (sharing of norms and goals within the group); iii) relation with other groups (the intergroup context); and iv) depersonalization (forfeiture of one's uniqueness, including independent thinking, in favour of group ideology).

Thus our response to social (and even interpersonal) issues is largely determined by our social identity. It has been shown that individuals with a high degree of secure social identity tend 'to evaluate out-groups more favourably, to be less biased in comparing the in-group with the out-group, and to be less likely to believe in the homogeneity of the in-group. In contrast, a high degree of insecure identity is associated with a very positive evaluation of the in-group, greater bias in comparing in-groups and out-groups, and the perception of greater in-group homogeneity.' It follows, therefore, that, as religious affiliation is an important component of group identity, our response to religions other than our own, is largely determined by our social identity vis-a-vis religion.

If we have a secure social identity, religious pluralism as a global fact cannot escape our notice. 'Intimate awareness of the faith of other people makes it increasingly difficult to claim superiority for one's own', writes the psychologist of religion David M Wulff. 'On the one hand is the dawning realization that the foun-

datations for one's own faith are in large measure an accident of having been born at a particular time and place. On the other is the discovery that the various religious traditions are equally capable of providing life with coherence and meaning.' But 'the attainment of a pluralistic perspective requires both courage and intellectual maturity', for 'coming to terms with the complexities of multiple perspectives and the relativistic context in which they exist' can be challenging even for the broadest of minds and sharpest of intellects. And an important prerequisite to understanding 'other' religious traditions is a realistic appraisal of one's own faith and commitment, devoid of apologetics and ethnocentrism—the defence of one's own position and the prejudicial judgement of others.

Postmodernists argue that if the self is a social construct, then in the wake of the amazing rise in social complexity, consumerism and mass culture, the search for a unified stable self—something that is substantial, essential or timeless—is hopeless, even if such a self were not an illusion. In its place we have a 'recognition, and sometimes a celebration, of disintegration, fragmented desires, superficiality, and identity as something you shop for'. Contrast this scenario with the sadhaka's quest for Self-realization as outlined by Swami Adbhutnanda, the famous unlettered disciple of Sri Ramakrishna: 'You think of mukti as liberation, but in the spiritual path mukti means not liberation but merger. Just as the water of the river merges in the sea, the Atman (self) within the sadhaka merges in the ocean that is the Atman (Self). The sadhaka attains mukti by losing himself in the ocean of the Atman. But is such "losing oneself" the end of sadhana? Such is the divine lila that one cannot escape even by losing oneself. One has then to do sadhana to rediscover oneself. ... Sadhana is without end.'

Our identity then is not an entity to be asserted but a reality to be recovered perpetually. This realization should help us be true to our selves and more authentic in our dealings with others. \*

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# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

September 1906

## ‘Lest We Forget’

India is being modernised. The forces which have made the Western nations what they are, had long entranced the imagination of the Indian people, and can now be fairly said to have entered their thought and begun their work. ... That to live in modern times and to hold her own under modern conditions, India will have to thoroughly modernise herself, seems to have been well understood by the majority of educated Indians. ...

... Of this new Western culture we have to learn many good things and root out many an evil from our society with its aid. It is of the utmost importance therefore to find out its bad features and guard against them, lest they should make entrance into our society along with its desirable elements that we are anxious to possess.

That it is nothing more nor less than a material civilization only—the product of wonderful conquests in the realm of matter—is clearly seen from the God it worships, namely SUCCESS. In her ‘History of the Standard Oil Company’ Miss Ida M. Tarbell gives the following as the ethical code of the princes of American finance:

‘Success is the paramount duty. It can be attained in the highest degree only by force. At times it requires violence, cruelty, falsehood, perjury, treachery. Do not hesitate at these practices, only be sure they are necessary for the good of the business, and be very careful to insist upon them always as wise and kind and that they work together for the greatest good of the greatest number.’ ...

... Its effect on those in whose hands is the moral and religious guidance of the people, and hence on the current popular religion of the West, can be inferred from the following excerpt from the *Positivist Review* for December last.

‘In a pamphlet entitled “The Churches and the South African War” ... Mr. Alfred Marks has collected a large number of expressions of opinion by the clergy of all denominations defending the war in South Africa. ...

‘If we suffered defeat, it was, according to the Bishop of Sierra Leone, because we had not prayed enough, since the release of Ladysmith followed our prayers; if we were victorious, it was, according to Dr. Norman McLeod, a sure sign that our cause was righteous—a comforting doctrine to all the successful villains in history. ... The war, which has resulted in the impoverishment of both South Africa and England, is spoken of as the opening of a new era of prosperity and equal justice.’ ...

... Its influence on ‘the Home’ in the West or what in India is synonymous with ‘the Mother,’ is brought out in a contrast between the ideals of ‘Marriage in the West and in the East’ by Mrs. Flora Annie Steele in the *Monthly Review* for April.

... ‘To the Indian wife (and to the Indian husband also) marriage is a duty, a duty to her race. “The real tie between husband and wife lies in their fatherhood, their motherhood.” A Western bride goes to marriage as she would to a theatre, “expecting to be happy, interested, amused.” The Eastern bride goes as a nun to a cloister, voluntarily self-dedicated to duty.’ ...

Let India learn all she can from the West, but let her beware of this degrading materialism with its message of vulgar, sensuous self-seeking, and let her not forget her own spiritual ideal of sacrificing in all things the lower self for the higher.

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# Teaching Philosophy across Cultures

DR JEFFERY D LONG

## **My Background: Ramakrishna Vedanta**

**M**y philosophy of teaching is inseparable from my philosophy of life and the values that orient my approach to everything I do. I chose a career as a teacher and scholar of religion because there is nothing I enjoy more than exploring and sharing ideas relating to that most important of human endeavours—the search for the meaning of existence and the attempt to realize that meaning in one's life.

In the course of my search, I have found my spiritual home in the Ramakrishna tradition. As a Vedantin, I teach the materials I do because it is my dharma. I see what I teach and the way I teach it as inseparable from who I am and my chosen spiritual path. According to the mission statement of the Vedanta Societies, Vedanta 'includes various truths found in all religions of the world'. It further declares that 'a Vedantin is one who accepts and respects all religions as true paths to the same goal'. If a single statement can be said to underlie my teaching and scholarship, this is it.

The central task of my teaching and scholarship is to embody and defend the principle of the truth and value of all religions. I see this principle as necessary to the survival and future evolution of humanity, which is why I have made a career of teaching students about the riches of the religious and philosophical traditions of Asia and, in my scholarship, of articulating and defending religious pluralism.

## **Balancing Commitments: My Own, My Institution's, and Those of My Students**

But while my philosophy and motivations are rooted in Vedanta, I am perfectly aware that this is not generally the case for my students, and that the setting in which I teach is not a Vedantic one. My teaching therefore involves a

constant negotiation between my inner convictions—how I understand what I do and my motives in doing it—and the respect for the convictions and motivations of my students and those of my institution that my own commitments entail.

How I strike the right balance, then, managing, on the one hand, to be true to my own commitments while at the same time being an effective teacher to students whose values and worldviews differ, sometimes vastly, from mine, is the overarching theme of my teaching career, and of this essay. How do I maintain the integrity of my worldview and those of my students while also challenging and instructing them?

In this essay, I will describe how I understand the institutional context in which I teach, as well as the underlying value system of that context: a value system that entails a role of advocacy for anyone involved in the teaching of non-Western cultural materials. I shall then discuss issues that arise from the interface of this advocacy role with the value systems of students. This shall lead into a discussion of what students typically expect from a course in Asian religions, which, in turn, shall lead into a discussion of objectivity and the role of the instructor's own commitments in the classroom. From this discussion a set of principles for the handling of Asian materials in the classroom will emerge, on the basis of which I shall proceed to concrete issues such as the question of whether or not—and if so, how—to incorporate instruction in meditation practices into the classroom, how to handle politically charged materials.

## **My Values and Teaching Philosophy**

How I, an Irish American raised Roman Catholic in rural Missouri, embraced Vedanta

is a long story that is beyond the scope of this essay. But my religious and philosophical commitments play a central role in informing my teaching philosophy.

These commitments entail, first and foremost, a commitment to pluralism: a belief that the diversity of worldviews is a good thing, to be celebrated. I therefore take it to be a sacred duty to inform others of the wide variety of belief systems that exist in the world and to thereby foster both tolerance and knowledge. Contrary to the view that religious commitment is incompatible with academic rigour, my religious worldview also commits me to seeking and expressing truth, and so to the most accurate possible representation of the religions and philosophies I teach.

My commitments to truth and pluralism also commit me to conveying, with the greatest clarity possible, the range of scholarly methods and approaches utilized in the contemporary academy to interpret the materials I teach. I therefore strive not to give my students a pre-digested version of the materials I present, but to engage them with scholarly debates on those materials. This exercise fosters critical thinking and a sense of the complexity of the issues involved in the field of religious studies.

### **The Institutional Context and Its Underlying Value System**

In determining how one should approach the introduction of Asian materials to audiences whose religious and philosophical beliefs differ significantly from those expressed in the materials in question, one must bear in mind one's goals in introducing these materials. These goals are shaped by the institutional context in which this introduction occurs. The teaching of Asian religions is neither a politically nor a philosophically neutral act. It is more than simply a matter of passing on information in an objective fashion in a value-free vacuum. The classroom is not a value-free zone. It is a site in which, even if only implicitly, worldviews are assessed and challenged and horizons are broad-

ened in ways that inevitably question the deeply held assumptions of the dominant culture.

The institutional value most obviously reflected in the incorporation of the study of Asian religions in the curriculum is cultural diversity. The number of college students who will study religion after college and pursue a career of teaching and scholarship is vanishingly small. The number that will specialize in Asian religions is even smaller yet. But the number of college students who will take at least one course in Asian or world religions in the name of broadening their cultural horizons is very high indeed.

Elizabethtown College is fairly typical of American colleges today inasmuch as its administration and faculty have formally endorsed diversity, both cultural and ethnic, as an important value. In the case of Elizabethtown College, this is reflected in moves to recruit more students and faculty from cultural and ethnic backgrounds other than the white American Christian identity that has traditionally been the norm here.

This commitment to diversity is also reflected in the incorporation of the non-Western cultural heritage requirement into the College's core curriculum, a set of courses which all students at the College must take.

Elizabethtown College has therefore made a conscious decision at an institutional level to act, as so many colleges and universities have, on the assumption that introducing its students to cultural diversity is an important educational value. The average student at Elizabethtown College (who is, demographically speaking, white, Christian, and female) therefore finds herself in an environment in which a small but growing number of her teachers and her fellow students are different from herself either culturally or ethnically (or both), and in which at least one of the courses that she will take during the course of her college career will be specifically intended to raise her awareness and appreciation of such difference. Raising such awareness and evoking such appreciation is a central goal

of the teaching of Asian religions at Elizabethtown College.

As the only member of the College's Religious Studies Department whose area of expertise lies outside the Christian tradition, and as one of only three faculty at the entire institution whose area of scholarly expertise is in Asian culture, supporting the College's commitment to cultural diversity is a large (albeit not explicitly stated) part of my job description.

It is a fairly widely known fact on campus that my wife and I are Hindu. So it is not at all uncommon for students assigned to various courses to interview us as persons from a religious or cultural background different from their own. We jointly advise the Asian student group on campus (which we helped to establish) and also act as advocates for these students. In November 2004, we jointly performed a Lakshmi Puja on campus in commemoration of Diwali—a historic first at Elizabethtown College. In addition to being both a religious and cultural event for the small community of Hindu and Sikh students on campus, the Lakshmi Puja was also an optional experiential learning exercise for my students, many of whom chose to attend it, bringing their friends along.

I have found, therefore, that given both what I teach and who I am, my central role at this institution has been to raise awareness and appreciation for cultural diversity—more specifically, religious diversity—both by what I do in the classroom and by being a living representative and advocate of the traditions I teach. Again, none of this has ever been explicitly stated in my job description. But it is an understanding of my position that I find reinforced repeatedly in my interactions with students, other faculty members, and the College's administration.

This expectation of a scholar of Asian traditions is quite different from what is the case at other, more avowedly secular institutions, such as state universities—especially the part about representing and being an advocate for the tra-

ditions I teach. It is certainly not the job for which I trained at the University of Chicago. The reactions that I have received when describing my role to colleagues teaching at such institutions have ranged from puzzlement to horror. I have also had the experience of discussing these issues with frustrated colleagues from other institutions, institutions more like this one, who face this same expectation and who, because they do not practise an Asian tradition, and are perhaps not religious at all, find it to be an annoyance, if not downright inappropriate.

This role of professor as cultural advocate does not only apply to Asian traditions. At Elizabethtown College, it applies to religion in general. This is explicitly the case in the Department of Religious Studies. During my interview process in late 1999 and early 2000, I got the distinct impression, which has since been confirmed in conversations with colleagues, that it was very important to this department that its faculty be 'friendly' to religion and to religious commitment, broadly construed.

This does not mean there is any expectation that the faculty practise a particular religion, or even that they be religious at all. But due to the College's religious heritage, combined with the fact that students at the College identify themselves overwhelmingly as practising Christians, there is a strong desire on the part of the department to at least appear broadly supportive of, or at least not hostile to, religious faith.

And this is not merely a matter of appearances. The College's religious heritage is that of the Church of the Brethren. Of our five faculty members with the closest ties to Religious Studies, three belong to the Church of the Brethren, and two of these three are ordained ministers. Of the two non-Brethren faculty members in our department, one is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, and the other is me.

Being committed, like the larger institution, to diversity, my department does not take

proselytizing to be within the scope of its objectives. (If it did, I could not ethically be a part of it.) But the department does see itself as an advocate of what could broadly be called the legitimacy of religion as an option in the contemporary world. This does not mean it shies away from critical scholarship or inquiry in the classroom. But its goal is not to debunk religion, and when critical inquiry is pursued this generally occurs within a context in which the validity of religion as such is not questioned so much as that of particular religious stances—specifically, those that endorse violence. Here one can detect the pacifist heritage of the College at work. All of this generally remains implicit in the classroom; but it is reflected in the first paragraph of the department's mission statement:

The Department prepares its majors and minors to continue theological study and ministry training at the graduate level; to pursue graduate study in religion; and to make meaningful contributions in the vocations to which they feel called. In keeping with the heritage of the Church of the Brethren and the mission of the College, departmental courses explore ways in which religious beliefs, practices, and traditions promote peace within the human community; commend the use of non-violent methods of transforming conflict; establish justice locally and globally; proclaim the essential worth of all human beings; and encourage respect for diversity (Elizabethtown College Catalog 2004-2006, 181).

The language of this statement quite clearly reflects the department's sense of alignment with religion. Its first priority, assuming the order of this listing is not a random one, is to prepare its students 'to continue theological study and ministry training at the graduate level'—which is, indeed, what many of our graduates do. The pursuit of graduate study in religion—that is, the 'purely' academic study of religion, contrasted with theological and ministerial studies—is listed second.

But even for those students who pursue career goals with no obvious relations to religion, religious language is used—reference be-

ing made to 'the vocations to which they feel called'. A centrally stated objective of departmental courses is to explore 'ways in which religious beliefs, practices, and traditions promote peace', non-violence, and social justice. This department clearly perceives religion primarily as a force for good and sees drawing attention to the positive dimensions of religion as a central task.

Being committed to the academic study of religion and to a religious tradition, I do not personally take issue with the stance my department has taken. Indeed, I share its strong commitment to peace and ahimsa. But because the traditions I teach, as well as the one I practise, are 'other' to those taught and practised by my colleagues and held by the vast majority of my students, I find myself in a position of double advocacy; for not only do I advocate the validity of religion as an option, I also advocate the validity of paths beyond the pale of explicitly Christian faith.

Again, in order to be absolutely clear, advocacy does not mean proselytizing, and I shall say considerably more about this in a moment. It means making a case for the legitimacy of diversity, for a positive attitude—minimally of tolerance, but more ideally of appreciation—for the religious choices of others, including their choice to be religious at all, even if these choices differ from one's own. The intention, therefore, of a course on Asian religions or philosophies, or of any course in religious studies at Elizabethtown College, is not to convert students to the worldviews under consideration in the class. It is, rather, to promote a positive appreciation for those worldviews and their contributions to humanity, to see them as part of the rich tapestry of the human experience.

### **Taking a Middle Path: Avoiding both Proselytization and 'Mere Information'**

Teaching Asian religions at Elizabethtown College—and I would argue that this is the case at any institution that endorses cultural diversity—is not a politically neutral act because of the fact that it involves this dimension of advo-

cacy, of cultivating positive appreciation for the traditions under consideration.

As we have already seen, there is an expectation that the traditions in question will be presented in a largely positive light. There is also an expectation that the students will come away from the course with a heightened appreciation for these traditions. The unspoken reverse of this—and of attempts to promote diversity in general—is that any bigotry or negative preconceptions that students might have about traditions other than their own will be mitigated. This, of course, is the subtext of all institutional efforts to promote diversity—whether in hiring practices or in the curriculum: the effort to combat bigotry by promoting a wider, multicultural ethos, on the assumption that bigotry is fuelled by fear, which, in turn, is fuelled by ignorance. Successfully eradicating bigotry therefore involves eradicating the ignorance, and thereby the fear, that gives rise to it.

But because teaching Asian philosophical and religious traditions is not a neutral act, either politically or philosophically, because it is an activity that presupposes having taken a side on certain highly charged social issues, it runs the risk of colliding with the worldviews of the students to whom it is addressed.

Why is this a problem? Pedagogically, it is at least a potential problem because it can interfere with the most basic goal of all of teaching: the successful communication of information to one's students. If students feel the information they are receiving, or the implicit agenda underlying its communication, is at cross-purposes with their own value system—if they feel, to put it bluntly, threatened by what they are being taught—then they are less likely to be open to the material and to receive the positive benefits of studying it. These positive benefits include—beyond the political end already discussed of promoting tolerance through cultural awareness—the development of critical reading, thinking and communication skills, and the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake.

To put the matter most bluntly and dra-

matically, if students feel that their own worldview is being subverted, rather than supplemented, by the material that they are learning, especially if this worldview is of a religious character, then they are likely to resist the material, possibly as a matter of religious duty.

Now to be sure, one could at this point ask whether a student whose resistance to learning about the beliefs and practices of others is *that* strong would take a course on Asian religions in the first place. This, of course, is a valid question; and in the course of my time at the College, I have found that the nature of my course material tends to lead to a large measure of self-selection among my students. Less obviously charged courses are available to students to fulfil their non-Western cultural heritage requirement, including an introduction to cultural anthropology and a course on international relations. (These courses challenge students in other politically charged ways; but they do not touch upon the heart of a student's worldview, especially that of a religiously committed student, in the ways that an Asian religions course can.) I am aware of students, both religious and secular, who have expressed the worry that their worldview might be undermined if they take one of my courses. These students therefore choose not to take my courses, and the issue of resistance does not arise. But the vast majority of my students, so far as I can tell, are quite curious and eager to learn what Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, and Sikhs believe and do.

Student self-selection, however, does not completely obviate the issue of possible student resistance to material that makes them uncomfortable; for it remains the case that the vast majority of my students are not practitioners of an Asian tradition, and that they find the material that I present to them foreign—and sometimes repugnant—to their way of thinking and living.

The two kinds of students I have noticed who are most likely to resist the material that I teach them are those who either are deeply reli-

gious practitioners of some form of Christianity or who have consciously rejected religious faith of any kind.

The students, on the other hand, whom I have found most likely to enjoy and benefit from the materials that I teach are those who have some religious background, and who may be religious practitioners, but who are in the process of questioning their religious beliefs and worldviews.

These are the students who are on a quest for answers, those who find information about novel ways of living and viewing the world to be, far from threatening, rather exhilarating—fuel for the fires of their own imaginations as they continue to evolve their own worldviews and identities utilizing the range of options that the contemporary world makes available to them. These are students who are more likely to describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ than ‘religious’ and are open to trying out new experiences and new ideas.

This is not to say that I have not had any devoutly Christian or avowedly secular students who have enjoyed and benefited from my classes. In fact, I have had excellent students who have been quite vocal about their disagreements both with the materials that I teach and with my own views, and who have returned again and again, taking as many as four or five classes with me over the course of their careers at the College. In general, though, I would say that the vast majority of the students who have taken more than one course with me have been in the third, ‘spiritual seeker’ category. It is this last category of students that I tend to find constituting my primary audience at Elizabethtown College.

Even these students, however, more often than not come from very conservative Christian backgrounds, and they find their understanding of what religion is challenged when confronted with Asian traditions. These students end up rethinking and redefining for themselves what constitutes religion, and re-evaluating their way of seeing traditions other than

their own (which of course is the whole point). Ideally, they see their own traditions with fresh eyes as well.

But to return to the issue of resistance, I have found that successful teaching of Asian traditions involves the maintenance of a balance between challenging students to see beyond the boundaries of their worldviews and reassuring them that their worldviews are not under attack. The extremes I seek to avoid in my teaching are, on the one hand, proselytizing, and on the other, what I call the ‘mere presentation of information’. If the first extreme results in resistance, the second results in boredom.

I actively seek to avoid proselytizing for a variety of reasons. First of all, my own belief system forbids it. As a disciple of Ramakrishna, I believe in the integrity of all the world’s religious traditions as paths to the goal of Self-realization. It is my belief that whatever belief system a student holds—religious or not—is appropriate to that student in his or her current stage of spiritual realization, and it is not my role to convince them otherwise. Some of the student comments that have made me feel the greatest pride as a teacher have been comments to the effect that: ‘This course made me stronger in my faith by making me rethink it in light of other systems of belief.’

On the other hand, if students decide on their own to change their belief systems after taking one of my courses, that is their choice. Whenever a student expresses to me a desire to convert to either Hinduism or Buddhism, I always say the same thing: ‘Read more. Study more. You don’t know enough yet to make such a life-changing decision.’

Secondly, as should already be evident, proselytizing—particularly in the name of non-Christian traditions—goes well beyond the institutional mandate that I have to teach Asian religious traditions. I am being paid by Elizabethtown College to raise awareness and appreciation, not to convert. At the same time, however, my advocacy role, my job of raising awareness and appreciation, combined with my own

enthusiasm for what I do and the fact that I practise one of the traditions I teach, could be misconstrued.

One way to avoid this problem is to take the other extreme—which I, again, call ‘mere presentation of information’. The philosophy behind such an approach is that it is entirely up to the student to make connections and see the relevance of the materials in question to their own lives, and that the sole job of the instructor is to present the material as clearly and as objectively as possible. And because I want to avoid proselytizing, I must admit I sometimes find myself defaulting to this position. The vast majority of my classroom activity is actually a straightforward explication and narration of philosophical systems and historical events, and my ‘advocacy’ consists for the most part of giving as accurate and enthusiastic a presentation as I possibly can of the material.

This approach makes the challenge to the students’ belief systems largely implicit, resting with the very fact that worldviews quite different from their own exist and are held by large numbers of human beings throughout the world who base their lives upon them. With many students I find this is sufficient to accomplish my pedagogical goals.

But the accuracy of a presentation, if it is to be truly effective, cannot simply rest with the ability of the instructor to explain things clearly, with the students playing the role of passive recipients of information. To be sure, I know I have some students who would be far more comfortable with such a passive role, and some for whom this *is* their role—students who never rise to the challenge I am offering them.

What is this challenge? I tell my students at the beginning of each semester that my goal is for each of them to be able to imagine vividly what it would be like to be a practitioner of every religion covered in the course—to inhabit, even if only as a thought experiment, all of the worldviews that we explore.

My goal in doing this is to cultivate not simply intellectual knowledge of other tradi-

tions, but empathy. This, of course, is in keeping with the larger goal of cultivating appreciation of diversity. To truly *know* other cultures is not simply to know *about* them, but to be able to imagine, even if only as a creative exercise, what it means to inhabit them—to *understand* them, in the most profound sense of the term.

It is impossible, of course, to replicate in all of its rich complexity the experience of another person, even someone from the same cultural background as oneself. But the attempt to do so is instructive, and is conducive to a greater appreciation of diversity and a willingness to accept difference, which, again, is the primary goal of a course on Asian religions in the education of most college students.

But the cultivation of empathy must be done subtly if it is not to be misconstrued as proselytization. The question is: How does one go about this? How does one cultivate empathy without either proselytizing or turning class into a dry recitation of facts that treats students as passive receptacles of knowledge?

The answer at which I have arrived in the course of my teaching career thus far involves weighing the expectations of the students when they take one of my courses, being honest about my own religious and philosophical commitments, and engaging in a constant communication with the students about their comfort levels and the degree to which they are being challenged by the material I am presenting. Strategies that work for one group do not work as well for another, and one must be constantly mindful of this.

Of all of these factors, I find honest and frequent communication with the students to be the most important, in terms of creating an effective classroom environment, which I define as one in which students are challenged without being threatened, comfortable without being complacent: essentially, a classroom that is on the ‘middle path’ between the terror of the exotic and unknown and the dry banality of ‘mere information’.

*(To be concluded)*

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# Modernization in India and Undercurrents of Assimilative Appropriation

DR PRIYAVRAT SHUKLA

## Modernity and Culture

Every culture expresses unique features of its own that constitute its dominant configuration and differentiate it from other civilizations and cultures. Indian civilization is distinguished from other civilizations of the world in respect of its continuity (*sanātana*), heterogeneity and its assimilative ethos along with its divinity-oriented integral character. Different phases of the socio-cultural transformations and tendencies of assimilation in Indian society and thought, during the so-called period of modernity, were generated either from endogenous sources or through contacts with external factors. Becoming increasingly conscious and to act in the light of that consciousness or awareness, makes a person or a society modern.<sup>1</sup> The concept of modernity has many implications. Besides analysing those implications in this article, we will also discuss whether or not that overwhelming storm of modernism has affected the essence or spirit of Indian culture as such, and to what extent. Moreover, it is to be seen how the modes of assimilation, appropriation and integration were functional within the contemporary Indian culture in the tensed situatedness of traditional Indian culture vis-a-vis modernism.

The word *modern* generally signifies something pertaining to the present time; something contemporary (at least not antiquated or obsolete), characteristic of contemporary styles of art, literature and music, that rejects traditionally accepted or sanctioned forms and emphasizes exercise of individual experimentation or sensibility. A *modern person* is one whose views and tastes are considered such. The word has come into modern English by way of the Latin

adverb *modo*, which means only, merely, lately (of the time), or just now. The word *modernus* is generated by the addition of *-ernus*, the adjectival suffix of time, to *modo*, the original ablative singular of *modus* (mode). Elaboration on etymology is relevant because of the element of time involved, for it is time that propels movement and, therefore, evolution. In the context of arts and literature modernism refers to characters, tendencies, or values with adherence or sympathy to trends occurring especially in the course of the twentieth century and taking form in any of the various innovative movements and styles of this period while maintaining an estrangement or divergence from the past. Modernism activates a rationalistic critique of the traditionally followed feudal superstructure of political, religious and moral systems and their conceptual framework. Besides the historical and chronological connotations of the term *modern*, there is, above all, the sense it has come to bear of 'something valuable and worthwhile, not just the latest and the imported, that it is a process rather than a static condition of human living itself' (230).

True modernity is an active involvement of the individual and society in the affairs of the time and its characteristic features and a positive acknowledgement by them of the same. This does not imply a blind and uncritical support and imitation of something alien or extraneous. Such an attitude consists in one's being aware of the contrast of the present time and its rationally-founded convictions from the preceding or traditional or sometimes even dogmatic values. It is the consciousness of a different sensibility and of a fresh perception of the environment. It does not need to oppose unrea-

sonably the perennial values and paradigms of aesthetics, morality and the rationally-founded sciences. Modernity may be understood as an acute sense of originality of a particular culture in a specific place, time and environment. This contemporary originality may be meaningful in its relationship to the originality of past cultures, traditions and symbolism which is to be appropriately assimilated and regenerated in its present form. Modernity understood this way cannot be equated with amnesia, because something cannot be measured as different, original, or innovative with respect to that which is forgotten. In terms of a cultural response, the process of modernization 'involves attributes which are basically universalistic and evolutionary; they are pan-humanistic, trans-ethnic and non-ideological. It symbolizes a rational attitude towards issues, and their evaluation from a universalistic and not particularistic viewpoint.'<sup>2</sup>

### The Beginning of Indian Modernization

Modernization in India began mainly with Western contact and influence, especially after the establishment and expansion of the British rule in India. Significantly, the Western or the British tradition at that particular time had itself undergone fundamental transformations through the Industrial Revolution and several other rational reformations. It was only after the East India Company's rule that many modern cultural institutions and social structures were introduced into India. In their early manifestations, the insatiable urge for independence or the awakening of anti-colonial consciousness were not instruments of mere politics; they were the dynamic constituent elements in the formation of a new ideology and the process of cultural modernization presupposing a national identity of integral nature. The first expression of this vibrant consciousness appeared in the form of social and religious reform movements. There were at least two offshoots of the impact of modernism that emerged amongst Indian people of that era: one led to an attempt at reconstructing Indian soci-

ety on the basis of Western ideas inspired by the Enlightenment and liberalism, and another that wanted the reconstruction to take place on the basis of reformulation and reinterpretation of ancient Indian scriptures and traditions. The modern period in Indian history begins, as J L Mehta remarks, with Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) and our 'unwilled' involvement in the events of French and English political history in the first half of the nineteenth century. The beginnings of this social revolt can be easily identified in Roy's thought with its vivid criticism of the degraded state of Indian society and the prevalent evil cults and practices. Roy also acknowledged the virtues of Western modes and patterns of learning along with the concepts of liberal social and legal institutions. He aimed at cleansing Hindu culture and society of its weaknesses and dogmatism. To realize these objectives he founded the Brahma Samaj in 1828 in Calcutta. The main thrust of the Samaj was the transformation of Hinduism in the mould of modernity. The assumption was that Hindu society could only be healed of its social evils if it adopted the rational rejection of ancient religious practices of polytheism and idolatry. Roy campaigned for the abolition of the practice of sati until Governor General Lord William Bentinck enacted it in 1829. His revolt against the existing Hindu society and his appeal to Hindus to purify their religion and reform their social institutions was the most positive modernizing impact at that time. Undoubtedly, Roy helped contemporary people and society in many ways, and thus secured a place in history for himself. But his reform work and the formation of the Samaj could not affect the great tradition of Hindu culture in itself. Without bringing a lasting and comprehensive change to the intrinsic perennial nature (*sanātana svarūpa*) of Hinduism it could only have a partial and temporal impact. Nevertheless, the extrinsic blemishes on the religious and social face of the great Indian culture could get a wash-out in the process.

The terms *modernization* and *westerni-*

zation are not to be equated, as one can be modern without being Western. The adoption of Western cultural mores had little to do with India's modernization. Moreover, even scholars like W C Smith do not acknowledge the presence of a state of perfect modernity in the West. To be modern means, according to Smith, *moving in the direction of an increase in our awareness, so that possibilities open up, alternatives of choice emerge, where formerly we lived within a relatively closed horizon*. The knowledge of what is possible—an ever widening knowledge of ever new possibilities—and the technique of implementing the same constitute modernity.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in its original sense, the word *modernity* does not treat any traditional, religious or regional factors of conditionality as insurmountable obstructions to open and rational thinking.

### The Indian Response to Modernity

Let us explore if there were any welcoming notes from the Indian side as regards this modernizing tendency or if it was all accepted unwillingly. Mahatma Gandhi, an uncompromising believer in and advocate of the fundamental universal human values, who did not favour the isolation and exclusion of any single culture, acknowledged the possibility of a synthetic or assimilative approach towards alien cultural influences. He once said: 'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.'<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi also acknowledges that the urge for an appropriate assimilation has always been an inherent characteristic of our culture: 'The Indian culture of our times is in the making. Many of us are striving to produce a blend of all the cultures that seem today to be in clash with one another. *No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive*. What does interest me is the fact that our remote ancestors blended with one another with the utmost freedom and we of the

present generation are a result of that blend.'<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes one finds that particular instances of multiculturalism and 'interculturalism' are the outcome of modernization. Gandhi also appears to speculate about the birth of a new synthetic and assimilative form of swadeshi culture when he says: 'It stands for synthesis of different cultures that have come to stay in India, that have influenced Indian life, and that, in their turn, have themselves been influenced by the spirit of the soil. This synthesis will naturally be of the *Swadeshi* type, where each culture is assured of its legitimate place.'<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi was extremely modern in his thinking and actions. He pointed out that cardinal virtues and universal values are already present in our tradition; we are expected simply to apply them in current perspectives. For instance, of secularism, which is an important factor in the process of modernization, he himself exemplified his unique version. Without being *a-religious*, he was *non-communal* and an advocate of religious tolerance. Actually, he preached and exemplified the way one could be modern without leaving the essence of one's great cultural heritage aside. Gandhi was also against a gross imitation of Western culture and advised justified assimilation: 'European civilization is no doubt suited for the Europeans, but it will mean ruin for India if we endeavour to copy it. This is not to say that we may not adopt and *assimilate* whatever may be good and capable of assimilation by us, as it does not also mean that even the Europeans will not have to part with whatever evil might have crept into it.'<sup>7</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, an enlightened thinker and *sadhaka* of spiritual and oriental values, has written much about Indian culture. He views the impact of modernity in terms of *survival*, *domination* and *confrontation*. Nevertheless, he explores and advocates an assimilative insight: 'Confronted with the huge rush of modern life and thought, invaded by another dominant civilization almost her opposite or inspired at least with a very different spirit to her own, India can only survive by confronting this raw, new, ag-

gressive, powerful world with *fresh diviner creations of her own spirit*, cast in the mould of her own spiritual ideals.<sup>8</sup>

Even to minds imbued with spirituality, the complete rejection of alien cultural values is not considered justified. The process of assimilation, which Sri Aurobindo appears to suggest, is neither mechanical nor sheer imitation. He refers to the phenomenon of justified assimilation as *ātmasātkaraṇa*. It is an *assimilative appropriation, a making the thing settle into oneself and turn into the characteristic form of our self-being*. The issue of external influence and new creation from within is of considerable importance to him. Assimilation may thus presuppose a creative value-perception from within. An appropriate readiness of the mind to acknowledge the elements of rationality and to adopt an open attitude is a prerequisite for modernity. Indeed, Indians at that period were in urgent need of a creative involvement of their intuitively sublimated spirits in the process of modernization in the socio-political sphere of interpersonal and international perspectives. What Sri Aurobindo meant by assimilation is that one should not take modernization grossly in its European forms, but must reach whatsoever corresponds to it, illumines its sense, and justifies its purport in one's own spiritual conception of life.

### The Spiritual Dimension and Ambivalence

Analysing the need and social role of modern Indian philosophy, several philosophers have hinted at the incompetence of the typical Indian mentality in confronting the overshadowing effects of Western civilization. Whether a person suffers from an inferiority complex or harbours feelings of superiority with reference to the attractive features of modernism, either way he is at a loss. Professor D M Datta explicitly remarks:

A nation that is alive possesses, like a living organism, the power of assimilating from outside what is beneficial to it and also of rejecting what is harmful. Long foreign domination *crushed* our *self-confidence*. Cultural confidence is a mark of a

living nation. When we lost it, we blindly imitated the West—particularly Great Britain. We lost faith in our unique inheritances, including even the best achievements of Indian philosophy. An *unassimilated load* of foreign ideas and customs came to ride on a deep undercurrent of indigenous ones. There arose the morbid psychological phenomenon of a split personality. A reaction, equally blind, has now set in among a section of our people. They would have nothing from the West. It is a *dangerous symptom of self-sufficiency* that would not only impoverish our culture, but also hamper international understanding without which no nation can prosper at the present age.<sup>9</sup>

The cultural ingredients are so deeply rooted in our existence that any unsuitable or unwanted suppression may cause the psychologically worse state of identity-crisis resulting in split personality or even suicide. Most philosophers of this era with a religious orientation appear to be of the firm belief that Indian culture is essentially spiritualistic. W C Smith remarks: "The effective history of India even today is its religious history."<sup>10</sup> Human beings have a mind and something beyond or even higher than that. Actually, that *something beyond* is the eternal source of the creative and visionary aspects of culture (*sanātana saṁskṛti*). The intuitive (*prātibha*) creative visions come from there alone. Technically it is also called the ideational (*paśyanti*) stage of consciousness or language. Immediately before the intuitive form is expressed, in linguistic or pictorial symbolization, consciousness exists in the state of an idea only. It is not essential that such inspiring visions presuppose sadhana or sublimation of the mind through esoteric practices. There have been several visionary persons in the history of Indian culture and civilization who were instrumental in bringing forth revolutionary changes in social, religious and cultural dimensions of human life without being involved in so-called esoteric practices. These forms and visions of higher inspirational origin also constitute the foundation of Indian culture. One of the most important reasons why the Indian civ-

lization—which is the oldest among existing civilizations—is still alive and vibrant is perhaps because these essential elements have continued to exist in the minds of Indian people—the finest as well as the ordinary—as something basic and valuable. Other non-essential or temporal aspects of this very culture have been modified or even removed to keep in tune with changing times and environment.

### Levels of Truth

While looking back into the Indian tradition one can explore two modes or dimensions of the presuppositions or truths underlying the formation of Indian culture and thought: one based upon the essential and *sanātana* nature of the human being and its foundational spiritual aspirations; the other of basic presuppositions encompassing the beliefs and practices pertaining to local circumstances and environment, the social, legal and political institutions of the period, its historicity and so on. The former also represents the meaning of human existence and its destiny or, in other words, it explores the ontological and teleological implications of human existence. Accordingly, there are two sets of scriptures in Hinduism (as also in several other communities of non-Indian origin residing and flourishing in India since a long time)—primary and secondary. The first class of presuppositions is chiefly embodied in the primary scriptures (Shruti), and the second in the secondary scriptures (Smriti).<sup>11</sup> Throughout the evolution of the Indian worldview, and for all periods, it is found that the primary scriptures are the final authority and set the ultimate goal, and if the secondary scriptures differ in any respect from the primary, then that part of the secondary scripture is not to be treated as indispensably significant; it may even be taken up for deletion or modification. The secondary scriptures may at times convey different imports. Whereas one secondary scripture might hold that a particular custom or practice is recommended for a particular age in a particular situation, another may hold a contrary opinion.

As a glorious and divine doctrine, the body of eternal and foundational truths in the form of *sanātana dharma*, being based upon the innermost core of the human being, is believed to be unchanging. But the secondary scriptures are destined to change in course of time. Radhakrishnan also distinguishes between ‘*Śruti* or the *Veda*, which is independent of any purely human mode of thought and *smṛti* or the tradition, which is based on reasoning and interpretation’.<sup>12</sup> The former expresses the inner essence or core of pure religious experience, whereas the Smritis stand for the traditional development of religious conventions, social codes and elements of culture. K Satchidananda Murty, one of the great open-minded living scholars and philosophers, expresses some remarkable non-dogmatic thoughts regarding this issue. He holds that a scripture may not contain all truths; in fact, it may not be free from errors and signs of imperfection. Even divine revelations, according to him, are to be considered *progressive and continuous*.<sup>13</sup> The existing customs and practices as the outer form of a specific cultural period have undergone change several times in the past. Likewise the contents and directives of a tradition also change. The scriptures along with their readings or interpretations are recognized as constituent factors in formation of tradition. But it is also true that tradition plays a greater role in determining the mode of interpretation. Those readings will continue changing for ever, and other interpretive traditions along with their unique beliefs will come forward. Emergence of modernity is one such example. As time rolls on, more and more of the secondary beliefs or scriptures will go. Visionaries and leaders will come, and they will modify, sometimes superficially and sometimes radically, these directive principles, and guide society into newer channels, duties, paths and ideals that accord with the demands and conditions of the age.

### Approaches to Identity

Discussions pertaining to culture presup-

pose identity issues.<sup>14</sup> Let me correlate this with the extrinsic and intrinsic elements of Indian culture as a whole. We have here *mystical* as well as *mundane* approaches for determining the identity of the individual. Some of the foundational (*sanātana*) ideas on identity encapsulated in the *mahāvākyas* (*tattvamasi* and *aham brahmāsmi*, among others) are yet to be explicated and interpreted in terms of the phases of development of traditions. The issue of essential mystical identity surfaces at the dawn of creation about which there is an interesting description in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

Verily, in the beginning this (self) was Brahman. It knew itself only as 'I am Brahman.' Therefore it became all. And whoever among the gods became awakened to this—he indeed became that. And the same was the case with the rishis, the same with men. Realizing this indeed, the rishi Vamadeva knew himself: 'I was Manu, and I was the sun too.' It is so even now. Whoever knows, 'I am Brahman', he becomes all, even the gods cannot prevent his becoming this, for he himself has become their Self.<sup>15</sup>

It is precisely the primordial oneness that makes differentiation intrinsically possible. It shows that the individual self is also valuable in itself, because all generic and ontic differences are originating and getting resolved within the mystical universal Self. This is the basic mystical source of the multiple identities that appear thereafter. In the mundane approach to the issue of personal or social identity, it is realized that we live in the world of 'others'. It is in relation to others—to the society and environment in which one lives—that one's own mundane identity is formed or determined.

(To be concluded)

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1. J L Mehta, *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1990), 231.
2. Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition* (Faridabad: Thomson Press, 1973), 61.
3. Discussed in *Philosophy and Religion*, 231.
4. *Young India*, 1 June 1921, 170.
5. *Harijan*, 9 May 1936, 100-1.
6. *Ibid.*, 17 November 1920, 6.
7. *Young India*, 30 April 1931, 38.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959), 439.
9. D M Datta, 'Modern Indian Philosophy: Its Needs and its Social Role' in *Facets of Recent Indian Philosophy*, gen. ed. R Balasubramaniam (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1996), 2.217-18. Italics mine.
10. Quoted in *Philosophy and Religion*, 233.
11. Another version of this classification of the shastras is provided by Sir John Woodroffe: 'The Hindu Shāstras are classified into Shruti, Smṛiti, Purāna and Tantra. The three last all assume the first as their base, and are, in fact, merely special presentments of it for the respective ages.' See *Principles of Tantra* (Madras: Ganesh, 1952), 41.
12. S Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 151.
13. K Satchidananda Murty, *Ethics, Education, Indian Unity and Culture* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1991), 89.
14. The incident deciding the conflicted identity of Satyakama Jabala is worth remembering. See *Chbandogya Upanishad*, 4.4.1-5.
15. *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.10.

**Vivekananda on Westernization:** Vivekananda's mission itself was his answer to the question which bothered the Bengali intelligentsia of his time: what should one learn from the West and what should one reject? He proposed a fair exchange of ideas, a synthesis based on national dignity. One had to learn from the West, but not accept without discrimination their criticisms of Indian society or even their patronizing appreciation of things Indian. ... He acknowledged that the Hindu society lacked the strength to resist the flood of ideas from the West. He was not sure that this was undesirable.

—Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*

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# Village Swaraj and Sustainable Development

Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas as Seen through the Eyes of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Today

ROOKMIN MAHARAJ

26 October 2002, 4.47p.m.

Dear Bapu,

I am updating my letter dated 9 October 1945, as there has been so much technological advancement in the last fifty-seven years and also because I have seen my idealism with regard to *big* industries and technological advances come to naught. My *dam initiative*<sup>1</sup> is a case in point. Some of our initiatives have yielded positive results, but typically, we have failed to ask that *fundamental question* which you used as a benchmark to determine the viability of progress: 'Does moral progress increase in the same proportion as material progress?'<sup>2</sup>

I believe, if we use this gauge when initiating any technological advancement we may avoid reaping the negative or adverse effects of development in the long term. So it is imperative that I revise my outlook on your *Constructive Programme*, as I am seeing the havoc that modern technology and civilization is causing to the earth. Today we speak of *sustainable development* and in doing research on this endeavour I found that the fundamental edict of this initiative is much in conformity with your concept of village swaraj. Forgive me for taking your idea, 'I am convinced ... people will have to live in villages' (150), literally. I ought not to have been so narrow-minded and should have looked at the matter from a more postmodern perspective with its notion of peoples' 'quality of life', as you so insightfully did. *Quality of Life*, Bapu, is the buzzword today. Let me tell you about it. Please forgive me if I bore you with facts you already know.

## India in Context

India extends from the Himalayas in the

north to Kanyakumari in the south. It is about two thirds the size of Europe, excluding Russia. When the Aryans first came to India in about 1500 BCE (as several historians hold), they found a highly developed urban civilization in our country which was much superior to their own. The cities were well planned with wide roads, sanitary drainage, baths, granaries, and houses built of burnt brick.

This introduction is essential in understanding your concept of village swaraj, for I had to understand (as you did in your wisdom) the size, the history and the rich culture that is India, to fully appreciate your devotion to swaraj. Bapu, in 1922 you stated that 'India does not need to be industrialized in the modern sense of the term. It has 7,50,000 villages scattered over a vast area. ... The people are rooted to the soil, and the vast majority are living a hand-to-mouth life. ... Pauperism is growing. The Indian peasant requires a supplementary industry' (165). You saw the merit of the village system even then.

## The Rural Character of India

You said,

We are inheritors of a rural civilization. The vastness of our country, the vastness of the population and climate of the country have in my opinion destined it for a rural civilization. ... To uproot it and substitute it with an urban civilization seems to me to be an impossibility ... I can therefore suggest remedies on the assumption that we must perpetuate the present rural civilization and endeavour to rid it of its defects (157).

It is no secret that ancient India was more advanced than its European counterparts. Marx and Engels wrote about the 'Asiatic mode of pro-

duction', referring to the relatively self-governing villages which retained their tribal character while incorporating agricultural and industrial elements in their economy. The state's duty consisted in securing public works and irrigation. It was a society which fundamentally functioned in a 'learned way', the seats of power being filled by scholars, not military commanders. Central authority relied a great deal upon the independent functioning of village communities with minimum external interference.<sup>3</sup>

### The Destruction of a People's Will

As we know:

The Industrial Revolution in England caused devastation in India. It was the exploitation of India and other colonies that provided the capital for financing the Industrial Revolution. The Indian village system was traditionally built on domestic union of agriculture and industries. The hand-loom and spinning wheel, the emblem of the old village industry, were obliterated. The Indian village faded and became a speck of what it was in prosperous days (49).

I assume now that it is with these defects in mind that you opted for the village system versus the city system.

### Constructive Revitalization of the People

'There are two schools of thought current in the world. One wants to divide the world into cities and the other into villages. The one (former) depends on mechanizing and industrialization, the other (latter) on handicrafts. I [Gandhi] have given preference to the latter' (50).

I [Nehru] realize now why you chose villages instead of cities, as cities represented all that stood for colonialism, for a breakdown of village life and all of its fundamental elements—cultural life and family life, for example. Today a whole new industry of 'professionals' focuses on finding solutions to rejuvenate this aspect of life. These elements, as you stated, are vital in sustaining our communal way of life. You had painted a true picture of our villages:

The poor villages are being exploited by the foreign government and also by their own country-

men and the city dwellers. The villages produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it. The cities in India are an excrescence and serve at the moment the evil purpose of draining the lifeblood of the villages. The blood of the village is the cement with which the edifice of the city is built. I want the blood that is inflating the arteries of the cities to run once again in the blood vessels of the villages' (50).

Again, Bapu, you said:

If the villages perish, India will perish too. We have to make a choice between India of the villages, which are as ancient as herself, and India of the cities, which are a creation of foreign domination. The experience of mankind testifies to the fact that collective life is more genial, varied, and fruitful when it is concentrated in small units and simpler organization. It is only the small units that have the most intensive life. Collective life diffusing itself in vast areas would want cohesiveness and productiveness (50-1).

With years of observation and a more 'truthful' appreciation of my heritage I now understand your basic principles of village swaraj—swadeshi, full employment, bread labour, self-sufficiency, decentralization, cooperation and equality, to name a few—and the magnanimity and insight they include. This was a comprehensive plan incorporating all sectors of life. I see clearly now that, in your analysis and synthetic view, an ideal village—which incorporates the village panchayat (a body of good men elected by the people to carry out executive and judicial functions)—meant perfect harmony based on individual freedom. Your bottom-up approach was a stroke of genius as in this system each individual is an active participant in creating his or her own government. This relationship of individuals to society is expressed in terms of the individual being 'symbolically the centre of an ever enlarging circle'(13).

Bapu, as you so wisely stated in the *Harijan* on 28 July 1946, 'In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never ascending, circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by

the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle, whose centre will be the individual, always ready to perish for the village and the latter ready to perish for a circle of villages' (13).

But I have digressed from our main theme: sustainable development.

### Contemporary Thought Substantiating Village Swaraj

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines sustainability as 'ensuring a better *quality of life* for everyone, now and for generations to come'. Two of the main concepts these experts focus on—eco-efficiency and improving lives—are worth our consideration:

1. *Eco-efficiency* is defined as being 'reached by the delivery of competitively priced goods and services that satisfy human needs and bring quality of life while progressively reducing ecological impacts and resource intensity throughout the life cycle to a level at least in line with the earth's estimated carrying capacity' (WBCSD, 1993).

In my estimation this sounds very similar to your concept of using India's natural human resources to sustain the economy without having to deal with the excessive or massive amount of pollution that textile mills inflict on the environment. We need to remember that the silks of India were a wonder of the world for centuries before colonialism and that the British, supposedly the custodians of India, contrived to export raw cotton from India to England (paying Indians next to nothing for it) with the deliberate intent of promoting British machine-made textiles and obliterating an industry that was thriving in India for centuries. In the nineteenth century, heavy tariffs were imposed on Indian textile exports and heavy duties levied on machinery imported from Britain so that a rising textile industry was suffocated and massive unemployment ensued.

2. *Improving Lives*, is a concept that takes into account many factors including food, shelter, clothing, education, health, freedom, eco-

conomic stability, safety and security, healthy relationships—both within the family and across the wider community—a sense of purpose and adequate free time.

I can compare this with your *Constructive Programme* or *Purna Swaraj* outlined in the 1930s, years before sustainable development came into vogue. Bapu, your Purna Swaraj included such concepts as communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, development of village industries, village sanitation, new basic education, adult education, education in health and hygiene, promotion of provincial (comparable to the situation in Canada today) as well as national languages, economic equality, focus on the welfare of women, students, kisans, labourers and adivasis (the aboriginals, comparable to those in Canada today), the place of civil disobedience, and lastly khadi—which to me is one of the most important and pertinent aspects of your Purna Swaraj.

### Khadi and Globalization

Here I want to show what every Congressman, and for that matter every Indian, can do to advance the cause of Khadi. ... It means a wholesale swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessities of life. ... That means the reversal of the existing process. ... Instead of half a dozen cities of India and Great Britain living on the exploitation and ruin of 7,00,000 villages of India, the latter will be largely self-contained and will voluntarily serve the cities of India and even the outside world in so far as it benefits both parties. This needs revolutionary change in the mentality and tastes of many. ... *It vitally touches the life of every single Indian*, makes him feel aglow with the possession of power that has lain hidden within himself, and makes him proud of his identity with every drop of the ocean of Indian humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Bapu, is this what you meant by 'the real article' in your letter of 5 October 1945? If it is so, then I now understand what you meant: 'Khadi to me is the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and, therefore, ultimately ... "the livery of India's freedom". Moreover, Khadi mentality

means decentralization of production and distribution of the necessities of life' (173-4).

Today we are dealing with a phenomenon called 'globalization'. Globalization has resulted in increased competition and the drive to make 'more' at a lower cost has enhanced the reliance on machinery. This has aggravated the very situation which you had prophetically objected to:

What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might (166).

With your insight you pointed out that major economic issues are determined by whether people control the process of production or the means of production control people. Villagers 'cannot retain freedom if they do not control the production of the prime necessities of life.'<sup>5</sup> Today multinational and transnational corporations run the world and we are being 'marketed to' at every turn. In Canada they are realizing that wealth is being concentrated more and more in the hands of a few, while the middle class is gradually disappearing.

### Population Explosion v Consumption Patterns

Additionally, Bapu, let us look at your philosophy on human consumption patterns and the efficacy of your insightful thought with regard to sustainable development. Today, and even back in our own time, most of India's woes are/were blamed on population explosion. You refuted this by stating that 'people inflate the importance of consumption'. 'The distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an infinite multiplicity of human wants.' You wrote in *Young India* of 4 April 1931 that an

'increase in resources does nothing to increase welfare, since wants increase correspondingly. The extent to which existing demands are satisfied may never increase because wants rise commensurably with resources.'

I think you were so intuitive with regard to this issue of *needs versus wants*. Not realizing the difference between our needs and wants is to me the essence of what may be causing a great deal of chaos in our global society today. We have digressed so far from our basic beliefs and values that we as a global society are unable to think for ourselves and so allow 'big business' to dictate to us our 'wants', which are being thoroughly confused with 'needs'. As you said in the *Harijan* (28 January 1939), 'It is beneath human dignity to lose one's individuality and become a mere cog in the machine. I want every individual to become a full-blooded, fully developed member of society.' Further, you stated that we now believe that we can buy whatever is required for self-discipline, for example, good health. Recently on the news it was stated that Canada has an epidemic of obesity found not only in adults but also in children. Today we are seeking ways to alter our 'conspicuous consumption' patterns which have spawned a multibillion-dollar diet industry. During your speech of 25 December 1916 you had rightly said that 'Western nations today are groaning under the heel of the monster-god of materialism'.

I have included some electronic references substantiating the efficacy of your philosophy.<sup>6</sup> I will not bore you with any more details as I conclude my report to you on world affairs today.

### Conclusion

Bapu, it would be foolish to assume that we have all the answers to our current global problems in the form of Purna Swaraj and sustainable initiatives. However, you once advised another discouraged soul saying, 'Please do not carry unnecessarily on your head the burden of emancipating India [or the world]. In your emancipation is the emancipation of India [and the world]. All else is make-believe.'<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, your prophetic words echo our woes today: 'It is not the British [or globalization] that are responsible for the misfortunes of India [or the world] but we who have succumbed to modern civilization [marketing ploys of big multinationals].' And the solution: 'It is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant Dark Age. It is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness' (xvi).

Extrapolating the words of the Bhagavad-gita to this context, being able to 'discriminate' between what is truth and what is untruth with respect to honouring our sacred earth is of prime essence. It was because of our inability to 'discriminate' that India was lost to the British in the first place. Are we to lose our earth in the same way?

This means, of course, that as consumers each one of us can effect positive changes. We can compost our vegetable waste in our gardens. We can plant vegetables. We can try to encourage manufacturers to reduce packaging (they will change if we as consumers do not buy over-packaged products). We have to stop following the Joneses or Singhs and carpool and reduce our carbon emissions. We can refuse to change our cars only for the sake of getting the latest model. We can look into the viability of using wind power or solar power. It is amazing how much electricity can be generated from one windmill.

These are just some small steps, but I truly believe like you, Bapu, that when others see the positive tangible results in small initiatives, bigger things can happen. As you said,

India [the world] was once looked upon as a golden land, because Indians [people] then were people of sterling worth. The land is still the same but the people have changed and that is why it has become arid. To transform it into a golden land again we must transmute ourselves into gold by leading a life of virtue. The philosopher's stone which can bring this about consists of two syllables: *satya* (truth). If therefore every Indian [person] makes it a point to follow truth always, India [the world] will achieve swaraj as a

matter of course' (xlii).

Make no mistake if the West does not outwardly look polluted, as for example Calgary. We just need to drive a few miles to Caroline, Alberta, where sour gas wells are emitting volumes of toxic waste in the air. In Fort McMurray, the oil sand complexes emit thousands of pounds of raw toxic waste both in the air and in the rivers and streams (refer to endnote 6). Today it is essential for each one of us to know that governments can sustain geographical borders, but there are no borders that can contain toxins spreading from one part of the earth to the other by air or water. We have to adhere to *satya*; we have to know that we are all abusing our earth and find ways to reduce our footprints that we will all leave on this very sacred earth.<sup>8</sup>

Yours,  
Jawahar Lal

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# Multicultural Societies and the Creation of a Peaceful and Prosperous Global Village

DR BHUVAN UNHELKAR

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.

—*Mahatma Gandhi*

## Understanding Plurality

**D**r A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India, was once asked by a schoolgirl in all seriousness, 'Every day we read in the newspaper or hear our parents talk about *atankvadis* (terrorists). Who are they? Do they belong to our country?' 'This question really shocked me', says Kalam, 'I myself was searching for an answer.'<sup>1</sup> The answer is not easy, but the question is too important to be ignored. While vested interests promote and exploit parochial viewpoints, such elements are themselves a product of jingoistic, extremely narrow and, at times, disadvantaged upbringing. One possible way to counteract this 'war and pestilence' situation is to expose budding individuals to wide and varied cultures and value systems beyond their immediate upbringing. However, any attempt at initiating such a journey of multicultural introspection needs a framework. This discussion is the starting point for such a framework. Because of the author's personal experiences and experimentations, this discussion is initiated in the Indo-Australian context. The hope and wish of the author is that he would be able to further extend these thoughts and frameworks to the widest possible cross-sections of societies and countries and, thereby, aspire for a peaceful and, as a result, prosperous global village. Understanding multiple cultures and value systems and giving up our narrow parochial views has been promulgated by all those who have had a glimpse of the

peace that lies beyond different races, religions and cultures. For example, as early as 1893, Swami Vivekananda, addressing a gathering of different religious groups—and their variants—at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, narrated the now well-known allegory of the frog in a well: 'I think I should tell you a story which would illustrate the cause of this variance. A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born there and brought up there, and yet was a little, small frog. ... Well, one day another frog that lived in the sea came and fell into the well.'<sup>2</sup>

The difference in viewpoints between the frog in the well and the frog from the ocean can be easily surmised from the views expressed in our lounge rooms, dining rooms, editorials and parliaments. Individuals who have experienced multiple cultures, who have traversed the high seas, so to speak, are easily discernible from those who are born as, and live the life of, the frog in the well—mentally, and at times even literally.

However, if understanding multiple value systems is a possible path to the creation of a peaceful and prosperous global village, then surely it has to start with the generation that is frequenting the schools of today. Children see the world 'as it is', sans superimposed parental edicts, but lose that ability as they grow up. Peace and prosperity in a global context is possible only when individuals are, from their childhood, able to understand and appreciate varied cultures and value systems for 'what they are' rather than how they are interpreted. Because most individuals are brought up within the bounds of their families and cultures, they are unable to see beyond these traditional bound-

aries drawn around their upbringing for reasons that have more to do with protecting society rather than benefiting individuals. Culture is transmitted through a strict parental value system that does not permit individuals to chalk out their own values that may have potential universal applicability but, perhaps, may challenge the existing commonly held thoughts and beliefs. Ingrained value systems prevent the individual from opening up and investigating another value system that may be opposite to his own. This 'closedness' between incongruent cultures and societies prevents interactions amongst people and organizations, thwarts economic and social growth, festers mutual mistrust and dislike, and makes the world a poorer place to live in, in all aspects of the phrase.

What is important to note is that this culture we cherish is a learnt phenomena. Furthermore, parents, themselves being products of their culture, are unable and mostly unwilling to even try and let their wards experiment with something that may be unknown or strange. Unfortunately, such upbringing results in the child growing up with a strong belief that his or her own value system is the only value system in the world. Tragic indeed are the situations where a social system further eulogizes individuals who kill themselves for very narrow 'values' and take numerous other individuals and even totally unrelated bystanders along with them. Once a value system has crystallized—and experts consider that to be happening between the ages of six and eight—then it is very difficult to make the individual appreciative and understanding of a different value system. Thus, it is imperative that children are encouraged to continue to see things as they are, and to explore and experience varied beliefs and value systems beyond what are held by their own families and societies. If adults re-develop their ability to see reality, many problems of the world could be alleviated. Harris underscores this: 'The problems of the world—and they are chronicled daily in headlines of violence and despair—essentially are the problems of individuals. If in-

dividuals can change, the course of the world can change. This is a hope worth sustaining.'<sup>3</sup> How to change, then, and how to see the reality, is the question.

## Culture

What do we imply by 'culture'? At an informal level it appears to be the ethos exuded by a group of people. Practically, it is the way members of an entire society live their lives—the way they eat, dress, live, and even die. Culture is thus aimed at preservation of the social order. On a more formal level, according to an anthropological definition, culture is an integrated system of learnt behaviour patterns that is characteristic of the members of a society. Culture refers to the total way of life—the underlying patterns of thinking, feeling and acting—of particular groups of people. It is learnt, not inherited, and transmitted from generation to generation primarily through conditioned learning.<sup>4</sup> Another definition, by Edward Hall, is: 'Culture is a system for creating, sending, storing and processing information.'<sup>5</sup>

In general, cultures can be classified as *high-context* or *low-context* cultures. These may also be considered Eastern or Western cultures respectively. The high-context Eastern cultures are based on the value system of 'who you are' rather than the low-context cultural values of 'what you do'. For example, over centuries, Western educational institutions have focused on the individual per se, whereas Eastern institutions (including Nalanda and Takshashila of yore) gave due weight to the lineage of the candidate, his or her 'social context'. Indian culture forms part of the high-context spectrum, whereas Australian culture is predominantly low-context. In addition to being a high-context culture, India is also a highly complex choreography of multitudes of cultures which change their value systems and ethos as one traverses the country. In such situations, it is important to understand that studying high-context cultures from a low-context viewpoint can lead to paradoxes and contradictions. 'Hardly

anything makes sense if one goes by logic, and yet at another level, all seems to fall into place.<sup>6</sup> That level requires an approach that is totally devoid of pre-conceived notions of 'right and wrong', that is totally non-judgemental.

Further to understanding both the perceived positives and negatives of the aforementioned cultural systems, there is another interesting phenomenon that emerges when one allows oneself to willingly oscillate along the entire swing of the cultural pendulum. One starts becoming aware of something more than the dichotomies of right-wrong, low-high, black-white and rich-poor. It leads to a dawning of the fact that 'I' am different to and independent of the actual value systems. And what is true of 'I' is true of every individual within the world. In India, it has been accepted that the realization of 'the non-moving' or 'the still' within you is the ultimate goal of life and is the key to global understanding, global peace and global prosperity. This real 'I' is the equivalent of the 'spirit' as understood in the West, and is different from the psychological 'I', more popularly understood as the ego. While this author does not propose to delve into theology, still as an interested layman it is possible to appreciate the obvious correlation between the Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist goals achieved through meditation and the biblical statement 'Be still and know that I am God.' If realization of the real 'I' can be aided by experiencing multiple cultures, then every effort should be made to let people experience precisely those diverse value systems.

When one grows up in a culture, or experiences another culture, what exactly is it that is experienced? The underlying patterns of thinking, feeling and acting are permeated by five cultural variables, as suggested by Devereaux and Johansen: Language, Context, Time, Power and Information Flow. I have modified this list, based on my understanding and experiences, and I expect it to be further improved upon and augmented as we develop deeper understanding of these cultural factors. The modified list is: i) Food, ii) Music, iii) Sports, iv)

Family, v) Language and vi) Faith. For want of space, I am discussing the first three factors in detail with the hope of discussing the rest in subsequent papers.

### Food

'Humanity feeds at mother's breast.' Hence gastronomy is an excellent mechanism to study and understand cultures and value systems. And not only is the content of what is served at the dining table crucial in understanding the given culture, but also the protocols and rituals surrounding dietetic inputs. This is because not only is the food that is cooked and served important, but also the manner in which it is produced, stored, and served after cooking—for all of these add together to reflect the value systems of a group of people. An example of such understanding comes from an oft-asked question on Indian cooking by my Western friends: 'Despite India being a tropical country, with high temperatures and humidity, why is there so much of spice and heat in Indian cooking?' The fact that spices make you sweat and thereby cool your physiology is only a small part of the answer. Ages have gone by, and the detailed process of cultivating spices, adding them to the meal, consuming the meal and following it up with right amounts of liquids and the like reflect a long-drawn-out era with its associated thinking that has gone into the making of this value system. A hamburger, on the other hand, reflects the value system of a culture that is based around 'work'. Cultures where people have very little time on their hands will immediately accept a hamburger as okay. The elaborate procedure of making the Indian samosa and the relative brevity of making the ubiquitous American or Australian hamburger reflect, in a subtle way, the detailed value systems of these groups of people. 'Vegetarian', 'vegan', 'whale meat', 'steak' and 'snakes' are words that reflect far more than food, and produce saliva or nausea depending on your upbringing. Perhaps further study of these and similar 'popular' culinary processes and products of 'the other cul-

ture' can lead to far greater understanding of the value systems of 'others' than would be possible by mere reading of historical facts or philosophical discussions.

### Music

Music, whether it be for a tap dance at the local bar, a rock concert, or the rendition of an evening classical raga during one of those long twilights that are the hallmark of an Indian evening, is far more than a mechanism to fill time. Consider, for example, the greater sense of discipline prevalent in most Western societies, apparent in the queues at the movie theatres, bus lines, public toilets and so on. (For better or for worse, the epitome of this discipline, as far as the general reading of this author goes, has been the German army of the past century.) This can be contrasted with the comparatively amorphous nature of groups of people in the Eastern cultures, most notably the Indian culture, and the way it finds expression in public places. These specific cultural traits of the West and the East can be seen in the underlying philosophies of their respective musical systems.

To be more specific, consider the fundamental Western musical concept of a symphony as against the fundamentals of Indian music revolving round the ragas. From a musically lay person's viewpoint (like mine), a symphony, and the orchestra that would play the symphony, has the following characteristics: i) It is a team effort wherein numerous musicians are performing simultaneously; ii) The permutations and combinations of various artists in the symphony can be expanded to fill the stage, and beyond; iii) It is 'written' and is fully prescribed, so it can be, and is in fact, 'read' and played; iv) Individual artists cannot go on their own during the orchestration, but have to faithfully follow their script; v) It has specific starting and end points; vi) It requires the team to be extremely precise with the timings of the rendition; vii) It has the concept of a 'chord' wherein multiple notes are played at the same time.

The aforementioned points indicate, in

more ways than one, the way Western culture is prescriptive and emphasizes team work and discipline. However, the discussion becomes more interesting when the above points are considered in light of the corresponding Indian musical style and investigated for its mappings on the Indian culture. The Indian musical system has the following characteristics: i) It is primarily an individual effort; ii) It allows individuals to play and express their respective voices and instruments in their own way; iii) There are no more than three basic ingredients even in the most formal Indian musical concerts: the primary voice or instrument, the rhythm, and the drone; iv) The need and desire to expand to include numerous artists is not felt; v) The typical Indian concert is 'unwritten' in the sense that, within the given notes, the artist is free to create sequences 'on the fly'. Thus, the same artist performing the same raga at a different time will express the raga differently; vi) While it has a specific starting point, a classical-music concert can theoretically be unending, till such time that the artist decides to terminate it; vii) It has no concept of chord but only that of individual notes put together.

The above points reflect not merely music, but many facets of the Indian value system. For example, a Gandhi in politics, a Ramanujan in mathematics, and a Tendulkar in sports, tend to be primarily individual efforts. These luminaries leave their immediate peers so far behind that despite their support, the peers remain in the background, and like the individual notes of an Eastern melody, individuals in the East attain the most, and teams (equivalent of chords) strain at the seams.

### Sports

Nothing provides deeper and more substantial contrast between Indian and Australian culture than the game of cricket. This contrast is even wider when one compares this game, synonymous with religion in India, and the game of baseball in America. While cricket represents a leisurely, long-drawn-out, strategic as-

pect of the culture where it prospers, baseball represents the frenzied activities and need for quick results in places where it is popular. I have had a unique personal experience of explaining the game of cricket to the then managing director of American Sports Medicine Institute (ASMI; www.asmi.org). I was on a short software-related assignment in Birmingham, Alabama, and we were involved in creating a substantial Internet-based solution for various sports injuries being treated at ASMI. Over a long and friendly dinner, I opened up the conversation by exploring the possibility of including cricket ("What? You don't mean croquet?") as a content in the list of sports hosted on the Internet by the organization. Although my audience remained amiable, they were nonetheless aghast at the prospect of a game whose shorter version lasts for a day, whose longer version goes on for five full days, and at the end of those five days, half the games result in a draw. Those familiar with cricket were smiling, and those in love with baseball categorically stated they had nothing to do with this game of cricket. The cultural differences could not have been more blatantly clear. Cricket has been adopted and then imbibed by the Indians like no other game, and I suspect it has lot more to do with the lifestyle than mere promotion of the game. As they say, time is plentiful in India. Therefore, a game that takes five full days to play and then results in a draw is accepted quite well. Indeed, this should not come as a surprise to anyone who knows how the Indian cultural system bases itself upon reincarnation. A very 'practical' American culture is not going to easily accept the game of cricket. Australian culture provides a third unique perspective of being able to accept both types of games: the fast game of rugby that ends within ninety minutes, and the rather long-drawn tussle of a five-day cricket test match.

### Conclusion

Will the understanding of multiple cul-

tures help alleviate the problems plaguing the world? Even if the answer may not be a resounding yes or no, it is most certainly a hope worth sustaining, and a hope worth investigating further. Understanding of two or more cultures may not prevent every problem of the world, but it certainly has the capacity to create an understanding amongst people about the values and beliefs of 'those others' so that there is no credence given whatsoever to the destructive activities of a few individuals, however much it is shrouded in the garb of martyrdom. This paper has aimed to provide the philosophy behind the need to expose oneself to multiple value systems, thereby removing the 'parallax' that exists if one is born and brought up within a single culture. The utopian dream this author aspires for is where every youngster is provided the opportunity to learn and understand, right from the beginning of his or her life, the nuances of high-context and low-context cultures and the different ways in which these are expressed through sports, music and food. Only such individuals will be able to live their lives from the core of their being, from the permanent and all-pervading spirit within them, the one that is our true 'I'. It is then inevitable that such a global fraternity will, by its very nature, be peaceful and prosperous. \*

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# Mysticism and Social Transformation

DR BEATRICE BRUTEAU

We usually think of mysticism and efforts at social transformation as being opposite poles of human activity. But I propose to say that social transformation is impossible without mysticism, and that any mysticism that does not proceed to social transformation is a false mysticism. This is the general thesis. I will particularize it in terms of what I call 'the JESUS Programme' and outline the way that I think Jesus himself may have seen a 'Plan of Redemption' in the conclusions he drew from the revelation he received on the occasion of his baptism.

My storytelling, or reconstruction, will suggest that Jesus taught this *plan* to his companions, and that he modelled it and drew others into it by organizing shared Suppers in the communities he visited. We are familiar with the event we call 'The Last Supper', indicating that there had been many such preceding events. This presentation is intended to concretize what I am saying about the bond between mysticism and social transformation. The mysticism shows in the Baptism and the social transformation in the Suppers.

## Mysticism

It might be as well to prefix to this discussion a clear statement of what I mean and what I do not mean by the word *mysticism*. I do not mean parapsychological phenomena, such as extrasensory perception, out-of-body experiences, or communication with the deceased. I do not mean parapsychical phenomena, such as miraculous healings, auras, levitation, or apparitions. I do not mean occult sciences, such as astrology, palmistry, or energies attached to objects or the earth. I do not mean even such things as altered states of consciousness or visions of angels and saints.

The mystical in itself and properly so-called refers to the realization of union with the Absolute, whether conceived as a personal God or as the ground of Being. Directly experienced *unity* is the crucial point. The *Mandukya Upanishad*, one of the Hindu treatises on mysticism, before 500 BCE, says that this supreme awareness is 'beyond the sense, ... the understanding, ... all expression .... It is the pure *unitary* consciousness ... one without a second.' Jan Van Ruysbroeck, fourteenth-century Flemish Christian, says that one's 'spirit is undifferentiated and without distinction, and therefore it feels nothing but the *unity*'. Teresa of Avila, sixteenth-century Spanish Christian, says, 'it is like rain falling from the heavens into a river or a spring: there is nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate this water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens. Or it is ... as if in a room there were two large windows through which the light streamed in: it enters in different places but it all becomes *one*.'

Plotinus, third-century Neoplatonic philosopher, gives this account of his experience: 'There are not two; beholder is *one* with the beheld. It is not a vision compassed but a *unity* apprehended. ... This is why the vision baffles telling. We cannot detach the supreme to state it. If we have seen something thus detached, we have failed of the supreme, which is to be known only as *one* with ourselves.'

One of the earliest Zen treatises, sixth century, reads: 'Should you desire immediate correspondence with reality, all that can be said is "No duality!" When there is no duality, all things are *one*; there is nothing that is not included. The enlightened of all times and places have all entered into this truth.' Moses Cordovero, sixteenth-century Jewish Kabbalist,

teaches: ‘The essence of divinity is found in every single thing—nothing but God exists. ... Do not say, “This is a stone and not God.” ... Rather, all existence is God, and the stone is a thing pervaded by divinity. ... The Creator is ... at one and the same time, knowledge, knower, and the known. ... There is nothing that is not *united* to God.’

Mysticism means acquiring this *perspective* and consequently a new *conscience*. Before you can transform society, you have to have a vision of reality in which perceptions, feelings, and motivations find a new context and a new focus.

### Human Ill and Its Causes

To explain why I think that we need to be mystics in order to effect social transformation, I have to say something about what I feel needs transforming. We all know that there are many things amiss in our social-economic-political-physical world. I propose to trace them through four levels: social, psychological, metaphysical, and logical.

The *social* level of human ills surround us: war, terrorism, tyrannical political oppression, economic exploitation and deprivation, social class disadvantage, crimes of all sorts and the punishments for them, and other kinds of power relationships, down to interpersonal abuse in business, family, and one-to-one interactions. All these, I say, are instances of the *domination paradigm*.

Domination means that one party—which may be an individual, an organization, a nation, a religion, a race, or a social class—determines for the dominated party whether they may exist (think of wars and attempts at genocide), how they may exist (think of slavery, or not being allowed to practise your religion or have access to medical care), what they may be or do (choice of career, right to vote or drive a car, where one may live, how to dress), what their value is (what the majority culture says their value and role in life is, whether they may hold public or religious office, whether their opinions count),

and what degree of respect they may be accorded (think of deference behaviours, use of formal or familiar names, slang terms). This is the social level.

Why do people behave this way towards other people? On the *psychological* level, I think that dominators feel that one party or the other must be in control. If I or we do not control the other, the other will control us. We struggle to establish power and control, to accumulate goods, and to compare ourselves with others to their disadvantage.

These various efforts at dominating others are probably rooted in a set of genes mandating rank-ordering, something that characterizes many animal societies, not only primates but herding animals such as horses and elephants, and even chicken, from whom it is named ‘the pecking order’. Among human beings, we see it formalized in business, the military, the church, and government, and informally we see it operating in almost every human encounter.

Biologically, the pecking order determines your opportunities for food and mates—the means of continuing life. That is why genes for pecking contests are preserved: those who peck best, mate most, and thus leave more copies of the genes for pecking well. As you move up the pecking order, you may gain more life, more Being. Thus we may say that energetic application to the effort to move up the ladder arises from a sense that one is vulnerable, that *one does not have sufficient secure Being*.

But the pecking order is not merely a material consideration; it is also a matter of social interaction itself, of honour and prestige, as well as of privilege and reward. This shows even in animal behaviour: The top wolf walks regally, with ears and tail proudly up, stares at underlings freely, and helps himself to the best of everything, whereas the underlings slink about, tails down, and dare not raise their eyes.

You can see human beings doing things very like this. It is also true that those on top actually have more energy and better health, more immunity. Low ranking humans tend to be de-

pressed and to have low energy and poorer health. If you have high rank already, you can get more of what it takes to gain still higher rank, whereas if you have low rank you tend to slip even further down.

The human being in such a rank-ordering system feels an insufficient hold on both material and social Being—not enough food and not enough honour, wealth, and respect. In our societies, those who have sufficient food may still want more honour. And honour has its value by contrast with those less honoured. We want to be bigger, richer, stronger, smarter, more attractive, and to belong to the most respected social class, the winning political party and the true religion. For if we are not in the superior position, our opposite number will be, and we will be inferior. So our gaining these goods is essentially dependent on the disappointment and depression of others. The contrast is supposed to allay the feeling of insecurity in Being. But both inferiors and superiors continue to experience anxiety and greed, two forms of Being-insufficiency. Thus, although it looks as though arrogance or ambition is the driving motive, I conclude that *fear* is really the bottom line. This is the *psychological* level of human ill.

What makes it possible? We come to the *metaphysical* level. Fear is sustained by the knowledge that the pecking order can and does change, and then the 'others' may dominate you. The psychology of fear rests necessarily on a metaphysics of *alienation*: the perception of a world consisting of others, aliens, those I am not and who cannot be completely trusted, and whose interests are distinct from mine. We do not love our neighbour as our self because we do not perceive our neighbour as our self. The neighbour is 'somebody else', separate from us and dangerous.

Metaphysically, we see a world composed of separated, competitive, potentially hostile beings. It is true that we also recognize friends, helpers and kin, but just now we are answering the question, What makes social fear possible? The fear presupposes the alienation. This is the

*metaphysical* level of human alienation.

And this metaphysics rests on a *logical* level in which the principle of identity is *mutual negation*. Beings are identified by their differences from one another, by being outside and excluding one another. It is precisely my not being you that enables me to be who I am. I am I insofar as I am not-you, and you are you insofar as you are not-I. We hope to establish ourselves in Being by what we are not.

These assumptions and apparently natural, spontaneous, and unavoidable perceptions are the ultimate foundation for our social fear and insecurity, which drives us to try to dominate our surroundings in order to protect ourselves. We put energy and effort into trying to gain more power, wealth, social status, life and pleasures because we feel that we do not have enough. *Not enough Being*. We are limited, vulnerable, and contingent. We are facing our *finitude* and identifying with it, believing that it is the total and final word about us.

### Liberation from Finitude

As long as you experience yourself as deficient, as a vacuum, you 'suck in', draw Being from all other sources. But when you experience yourself as full, not deficient, then you 'radiate', you give to all others. So here is my thesis: This belief, that we are trapped in nothing but finitude, is the source of human ill, and *mysticism is liberation from this belief*.

Mysticism means liberation from finitude. The defining characteristic of mysticism is union with the Infinite. It overcomes the basic insecurity of insufficient Being, or an unreliable hold on Being. Mysticism brings the mystic into direct experience of transfinite existence. The consequence is that the mystic no longer feels insecure in Being. The mystic has realized a level or kind of Being that is safe from any possible weakness, lack, attack, injury, or destruction.

This does not mean that the mystic believes one's human nature, one's finitude, to be immune to ill. It means that the mystic has dis-

covered a further reach of Being that is immune to ill. This may be experienced as trustworthy security dependent on the grace of God, or as revelation of a central self whose own nature is intrinsically secure. The two versions can be combined by saying that the central selfhood is an emanation from, or a creation of, or a free gift from the personal Deity. The important point is that the mystic is satisfied by experience of a relation to the Infinite that results in unquestionable security. In some spiritualities this is called 'faith'.

When this happens, all the value arrangements in the person's world shift in their foundations. Neediness has been radically undercut. There is a Zen Buddhist story that illustrates this very well, a ninth-century monk's account of his enlightenment and how he felt afterwards:

Wherever I went I met words and did not understand them. A lump of doubt inside the mind was like a willow-basket. For three years, residing in the woods by the stream, I was altogether unhappy. When unexpectedly I happened to meet the Zen master sitting on the rug, I advanced towards him earnestly asking him to resolve my doubt. The master rose from the rug on which he sat deeply absorbed in meditation. He then, baring his arm, gave me a blow with his fist on my chest. This all of a sudden exploded my lump of doubt completely to pieces. Raising my head I for the first time perceived that the sun was circular. Since then I have been the happiest man in the world, with no fears, no worries. Day in, day out, I pass my time in a most lively way. Only, I notice my inside filled with a sense of fullness and satisfaction. I do not go out any longer, hither and thither, with my begging bowl for food.

### Jesus' Baptismal Revelation and Its Social Implications

In my reconstruction of the Jesus Story, this kind of realization is the breakthrough event of Jesus' baptism. Jesus went to be baptized by John, and just as he was coming up out of the water, he had a vision. The heavens were opened for him—that is to say, something was

revealed to him—and he experienced the Spirit of God coming upon him, and he heard a voice from heaven say, 'You are my son, the beloved, in whom I take delight.' The Spirit which had come upon him then drove Jesus into the desert, where he remained a long while, fasting and meditating on these words.

This story is like that of the Buddhist monk perceiving for the first time that the sun is round. We have all heard over and over that we are God's children, but have we really been *struck* by it? Has it come as a revelation that is like a fist-blow shattering our lump of doubt completely to pieces? In my storytelling, this is how Jesus took it. He took it hard. He took it very personally. And in that moment, he took it universally—on behalf of all humankind.

One thing that is characteristic of all true mystics is that they do not conclude that there is something special, privileged, or unique about themselves. What they have discovered in a profound, experiential way that they cannot doubt, they attribute to all. The force of the experience assures them that this closeness to God, this union, has to be true of everyone. In the Unity, the experiencing mystic cannot be separated from other persons. It is *all* one.

Now, in my storytelling, Jesus, in the desert, draws four important conclusions from this revelation. These conclusions form the outline of his Plan of Redemption. The Jesus strategy, as I understand it, is to convince people that we are essentially *full* rather than deficient, and that we are therefore capable of being generous and radiant. And our mutual irradiation can make a better world.

*The first conclusion* is, We are all children of God. The divine filiation is the foundation of our being, the ultimate truth about our identity, and the clue to our work and our destiny. In one image, we are sparks of the Endless Light, and our vocation is to heal the world and participate in the continuation of the Creation. Already we begin to see how mystical experience leads naturally to social transformation.

*The second conclusion* follows from the first.

If we are all God's children, then we are all equal. Don't confuse this with being 'the same'. Diversity is protected and delighted in. But we are personally and socially equal in dignity and value. Every child of God must be accorded the respect shown to the divine Parent. If you dishonour the offspring, you dishonour the Parent.

*The third conclusion* spells this out: We must show equal respect to all. We are not to defer to some and despise or condescend to others. We are not to acknowledge kinship with some and reject others. We are not to put people into honour-classes and ranks of respectability. No person or group of people is to specify what 'diverse' role others are to play. We are to avoid or correct social stratification that contradicts the equality of the divine filiation and leads inevitably to injustice.

*The fourth conclusion* begins the process of making all this concrete and practical: We must share our lives with others. We must love our neighbours as ourselves. We must honour and love even our enemies, for they too are God's children. We are commanded to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might (being, resources). And love our neighbour likewise, for the neighbour is God's child, like ourselves. Therefore the neighbour is to be loved with all our mind and will (heart), all our vitality (soul), and all our material resources. There is the social transformation, full blown.

Of course, on the one hand, we can say that all this is perfectly traditional. The Tradition had been saying this, more or less, for a long time, and putting a good deal of it into practice. If the Hebrew prophets had been asked whether they preferred to be identified as religious reformers or as social reformers, they would probably have indignantly rejected that distinction. For them, religion is doing what God commanded, and what God has commanded is social justice and righteousness, care for the poor and the powerless. On the other hand, we can say that anybody who takes all the implications of this seriously and proposes to reorganize human society along these lines, is

doing something distinctly radical.

### **Kinship with God and the Revelation at Sinai**

It should be clear now how mysticism is tied to social transformation, why we cannot achieve or sustain a social transformation into equality and justice and peace without the mystical assurance that we are secure in Being and that all other persons are our own kith on this level. And neither can we attain insight into this mystical truth and rest content with merely contemplating it within ourselves. Its very nature both liberates us to put it into social practice and requires us to do so, in order to be objectively consistent and subjectively sincere.

Kinship with God is not an aspiration but a reality of destiny. If you are the *child of God*, then you have sufficient Being, you are not in need, or in danger, or insecure in your fundamental reality. You don't need to protect yourself against others. You don't need to compare yourself with others to excel them in whatever ranking game your culture favours. Therefore you are free to express your divine nature in generous care for others.

I take this to be the meaning of the Exodus story and the Revelation at Sinai. The God who presides over these events is a Liberator. Being a Liberator is tied up with being Being itself—'I AM THE ONE WHO IS'—and with being Ultimate Freedom—'I WILL BE WHATEVER I WILL BE.' This God liberates us from 'the narrow place' (Egypt): our constricted beliefs, perceptions, feelings, practices. Such liberation is what we need most; we are not to value anything above it. We are not to be enticed into imaging true liberation in some compromised way and investing our appreciative and creative energies in those idols. When we are clear about this, we realize that we don't have to engage in injury-to-neighbour practices any more in order to protect ourselves and gain a desired advantage. We are not so much forbidden as liberated from that way of life. And we are given a new charter governing a new way of life.

## The Alternative Paradigm

On this basis, we can now proceed to those alternative structures that are the reversal of the Domination Paradigm, to what I call the Communion-in-Friendship Paradigm. Instead of identifying ourselves with being not-you, by mutual negation, we can identify ourselves as persons by mutual affirmation: by recognizing the child of God that the other person is. Here we need to look deeply into just what it means to be a child of God.

The First Epistle of John tells us that we are 'called children of God, and that is what we are'. And 'God is Love.' The Greek word used here and generally throughout the New Testament for 'love' is *agape*. It means unconditional self-giving love. It helps us to see this if we compare *agape* with *eros*. *Eros* seeks the good of the lover: I say I 'love' something or someone if that thing or person is good for me. But *agape* seeks the good of the beloved, no strings attached, no expectations, without condition. The Epistle is saying that such love is the intrinsic and necessary character of God. The metaphysical way of saying this is that being is essentially, intrinsically, and necessarily communicative: *To be is to communicate being*. To be is to love, and to love is to communicate being. Being is radiant.

It is this nature that appears, therefore, as the central reality of the child of God. The mystic is the one who has found—and operates from—that place in oneself which has this character of communicating being, giving love unconditionally, seeking the welfare of the recipient without expectation of return. Everyone who loves so, says the Epistle, is 'born of God'. When we love one another, says the Epistle, God is living in us, and the God-Love comes to completion in us. This is what it means to be 'from God', 'born of God', a 'child of God'.

Notice what this does with respect to the lover's reality and identity. The more the lover gives oneself away to others, the more the lover is established in being, precisely as this most essential character and deepest nature, that of the unconditional, *agape*-lover. We can see the

truth of the saying that if you try to hoard your life and accumulate goods for yourself, you will actually be losing—leaking—soul and self-being. Your sense of insecurity will increase, your belief in your insufficiency will grow, because no matter what you gain, you will feel it is not enough, not safe.

On the other hand, if you have found the level of soul in yourself that is the child of God, which is the lover by nature, which is naturally radiant and gives away Being, your sense of being in God and thereby being utterly secure will increase. The more you give unconditionally, the more you will gain this sense of security, because the more you will be—and will know that you are being—real.

While we are talking about the meaning of being a child of God, I want to offer an interpretation of the teaching that appears a number of times in the Gospels, linking 'child' with 'kingdom'. Unless you receive the kingdom of God as a child, you will not enter it. The setting—blessing infants and toddlers—suggests that what is being urged is emulating immature (and innocent?) human beings. But suppose the original saying was something to the effect that unless you realize yourself as a child of God, you cannot be in the kingdom? Not because someone will refuse you entrance but because knowing that you are a child of God is being in the kingdom.

Kingdom is the desirable social order, the community of persons in their reality as *agape*-lovers. Being born of God is being free enough, secure enough, that you can give yourself happily to others, seeking their well-being and benefit. This reading would link mysticism with social transformation. To be a mystic is to realize oneself—and others—as children of God. This in turn brings the kingdom into manifestation, makes social transformation happen.

To return now to the analysis of the alternative structure to that of the Domination Paradigm, we can say that instead of a logic of identity by mutual negation, we have a logic of identity by mutual affirmation. Instead of saying 'I

am I by virtue of being not-you', we say 'I am I by virtue of giving myself to you.' With this sense of identity in Being, we can proceed to a metaphysics of indwelling: Being is communitarian and consists of the inter-beings: I am in you, and you are in me.

Notice how very different this is from a metaphysical perception in which the beings stand apart from one another and are potentially hostile to one another. Under the Domination Paradigm, beings are perceived as outside and excluding one another. In the Communion Paradigm, beings as persons are perceived as being inside and including one another. Agape-love makes the lover both pour out Being towards the Beloved and also unite with the Beloved. We have differentiation and union by the same principle.

This metaphysics of mutual indwelling now makes possible what was not possible under the Domination Paradigm. We could not love our neighbours as ourselves before, because we did not perceive our neighbours as ourselves. Now we do: whatever happens to anyone is perceived by us as happening to ourselves. A psychology of agape-love blossoms from this metaphysical perception of the basic dynamic of Being itself, the radiant communication of Being. And this love-psychology, loving the neighbour as our self, is what finally permits a politics, or social organization and dynamic, of Communion in Friendship.

That is the analytical structure of the bond between mysticism and social transformation: social organization and dynamic depend on psychology, psychology on metaphysics, metaphysics on logic. Domination comes from fear, fear from alienation, alienation from mutual negation. The alternative is: mutual affirmation makes possible mutual indwelling and oneness, which makes possible a psychology of love, which expresses as a social dynamic of friendship and communion.

### Conversion

The mystical experience is what makes the

shift from the logic of mutual negation to the logic of mutual affirmation. It is the conversion. It puts a whole new orientation into the consciousness and life of the person. We may see by this argument why the social conditions of communion and friendship cannot be obtained by simply instituting change at the political level itself. The transformation has to come from a much deeper level. It is not sufficient even to make a change at the psychological level, because our feelings are generated by our taken-for-granted perceptions, and the way we form concepts. We have to go all the way to metaphysics and logic to make the turnaround. That turnaround is the mystical experience: the insight and realization that fundamentally we are One in this mutually indwelling way that supports the differentiation of persons and their union by the single principle of agape.

In the Jesus faith tradition, the mystical experience is the realization (insight/firm conviction/experience) of oneself in Being, of all other persons in the same Being; the experience of ourselves as children of God, meaning that our fundamental and essential reality is that we are securely loved by God as most dear and precious children and that therefore we also are lovers with agape-love, even as our Progenitor is.

We are 'participants in the divine nature', as the Epistle of Peter says, meaning that we are able to love as God does, as the Epistle of John says. We are not insecure and needy in our true, central and eternal being.

From this insight, experience, and conviction then comes the whole social transformation. It not only becomes possible, it becomes inevitable. The radiant pressure of the divine love insists on expression, spontaneously communicates itself, because that is what it is. It is self-giving, Being-communicating. So god expresses as world, as Universe, as whatever is, and we, as members of this world in our human nature, and as children of God in our person-nature, continue this expression, this manifestation, this communication, which is the divine radiance, the divine glory. *(To be concluded)*

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# A Different Place, Yet the Same

TRACY LEE KENDALL

**G**reetings in peace, love, and Truth. This is written in the spirit of sharing, to share with you how I met Vedanta in a way and place which I am sure is very different from the usual circumstances.

My name is Tracy Lee Kendall and I am thirty-two years old. I was born in Torrance, California, but have grown up in Texas and California. I have lived in urban as well as rural areas and have been exposed to people and cultures from all over the world. As my mother introduced me to spiritual exploration at a very young age, I have also learned of and experienced various modes of spiritual practice from different sects of Christianity to Native American beliefs to the occult and New Age, various spiritual paths around the world—ancient and modern. I have searched and studied for twenty-five years of my thirty-two-year life in this body. At times I have been extremely dedicated, at other times, it was little more than a romanticized superstition or a dry repetition of an empty disciplinary regime merely for a sense of purpose.

In a way, throughout my life I have been blessed to have been unattached to a lot of things which would hurt others and myself, but I have been attached to many things which degraded me as well. I have dwelt in very peaceful and pure environments, but I have also walked in many evil places like drug cultures and circles of thieves as well. I have gazed upon the bison peacefully grazing on the vast expanse of the Great Plains and I have gazed upon the reflection of a street lamp in a puddle at night behind the most narrow and dark city bar. I have seen a person do just about anything a person could do, well or sick. Through all of this, I have always been as if I was on the outside looking in, which I used to consider a curse. Over time, I

realized what a blessing it actually was, because as in a chess game, one can see life better from the outside of it and know more of the truth, because things are clearer when one is not in the frantic middle of them (until a deeper realization comes to you allowing a better understanding more constantly). It seems I was granted a little bit of non-attachment from the very start which grew as more drops of Truth fell into my life.

In about 2000, I ended up discovering a very old copy of Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood's translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It was in a bookshelf hidden away at an Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meeting here. I was in bad shape at the time mentally and physically due to various stresses in my life. Writing a letter of enquiry to the address of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, I received a reply, materials and advice from the honourable and reverend Pravrajika Varadaprana of the Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara, California, and from that moment on, I began to submerge deeper and deeper into the Vedantic teachings which had been introduced to me. I learned more, realized more, and had more affirmed as time went on regarding Truth undeniably shown through the lens of Vedanta. As time goes on, I continue to find more and see more, which usually means I find out how little I know, how far I have to go, and how much harder I have to work. Sadly, due to illness, Pravrajika Varadaprana is no longer able to help guide me, but the dedicated, devoted, and knowledgeable Pravrajika Shudhatmaprana of the Vedanta Society of Southern California has most graciously been helping me in any way she can and has brought vital spiritual development into my life which I cannot thank her enough for.

I am writing this a world away in a place and land alien in view and context from what Sri Ramakrishna and most of you probably are accustomed to. I am at the Coffield Unit, a maximum-security men's prison in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The Coffield Unit has the highest population capacity of any unit in Texas. The Coffield Unit is in the heart of East Texas, which is recognized as being the most prejudiced and racist area left in the United States. The Unit is located at the end of a rural farm road and the only things farther on are a shooting range where guards practise shooting human-sized targets, a sewer plant, and various inmate graveyards buried in the forestry. The ways, cultures, and respects here are mostly incomprehensible to those who have never experienced it, and most of the time, even to those who do experience it.

I have a very long sentence and probably won't live to its end and I am a hard-core realist (however abstractly I dwell), so, especially due to my circumstances, if something is of no substance, I have no time for it since it has no purpose or relevance. I cannot and will not soothe myself with false hopes or practices. What I am learning and experiencing through the Ramakrishna Order of the Sixth Daršana is as if it has a life of its own which continues to thrive in my life whether I actively practise the things or passively dwell in them. True reality moves All whether we choose to look at it or not and we cannot fail to perceive it whether we understand what we are perceiving or not. If you choose to at least look at the Absolute, we cannot fail to find more and more Realization. If Brahman is All, how can we fail to find Truth in Anything? Especially if Anything is Everything? Regardless of what we believe we do or do not

have access to, if our goal is the Supreme, there is Hope. Ironically, even if our goal is not the Supreme, there is still undeniable Hope, but the sooner we come to terms with our Unity as Brahman, the better for our Realization of Progress in Truth as a Whole.

In Vedanta I have found Lasting Truth and a solid foundation of growth and discernment and progress on my spiritual path. The improvements in my life have not come from me forcing them upon myself, they are natural and lasting evolutions. There is so much and a lot of it I cannot even find the words to express, but I am positive that many of you can relate to realizations and enrichment through Sanatana Dharma and no matter how many worlds away from you I am, because of the effects of this spiritual path, I doubt I would have any problem relating to any of you if I was there. Brahman is Unity, so it stands to reason that those devoted to any form of Brahman should find at least some degree of unification between each other.

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana mentioned this journal in a letter and I felt moved to write and share a little with the readers. I have never even seen a copy of this journal other than a very good article on meditation from it, so I have no idea if this is even appropriate for it, but regardless, I hope you get something positive out of this, whether it be encouragement or simply knowledge of a Vedantist in an area of the United States which you would probably never have heard of.

Please accept my sincere thanks for your time and my hopes that all good fall upon you. May you be blessed in All.

*Śrīśāntipremamīca [sic].*

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**The Call of Vedanta:** A wise proverb states: 'In each person there dwells a King. Speak to the King and the King will come forth.' The poetry of the Upanishads is speech directed to the King within all of us. It is kingly speech—lofty, sovereign, unassailable—speech whose unearthly cadences are as a 'breath of the eternal' come down to our world of strife and division to awaken us from out of a bad dream.

—Richard Schiffman in *Living Wisdom*

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# In the Vrindavan of My Heart

SWAMI ACHYUTANANDA

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

## Reliving the Keshi Legend

Winter in Vrindavan is now on the wane. This is one of the finest seasons here—pleasant and salubrious. I was out of the ashrama before sunrise, alone on the empty streets. I walked past Kala Babu's garden and reached the banks of the Yamuna. The waters of the Yamuna have receded considerably in recent times. I was walking northwards, past 'Dhir Samir' on the left. It is said that when Sri Krishna and Srimati Radharani used to walk here, even the wind blew gently, so as not to disturb them! Hence the name Dhir Samir, gentle breeze. I was ruminating over these lilas as I continued my solitary walk, when my attention was attracted to a soft hum:

I chant 'Krishna, Krishna'  
every dusk and dawn.  
Krishna! The name that quells all sorrow,  
Krishna! Who alone ferries us  
across the ocean of samsara ...

I saw a frail old sannyasi, bent over on a stick, walking along, singing Krishna's glories. I followed him to Keshi Ghat. He descended the steps, touched the holy water thrice and sprinkled some of it over his head. He then climbed back to the circular platform at the head of the ghat and took his seat there. I too sat down on a nearby platform, after having myself touched the holy waters of the Yamuna. The eastern skies were turning crimson and the faint glow that lit

up the ripples added to the beauty of Yamuna, the daughter of the Sun. The golden glow of the solar orb made its appearance on the eastern horizon and I offered obeisance. As I lifted my gaze a wonderful sight caught my eyes. I found the elderly babaji swinging his *uttariya* (chadar) as if wiping an invisible object with great tenderness. I could not suppress my curiosity any longer. So I went over and sat by his side. I don't know what he thought of me, but he got up and walked over to the small shrine on the ghat with a marble image of Goddess Yamuna. He stood there for some time, head bowed, and then returned to his seat. I pulled myself closer and greeted him saying 'Radhe, Radhe'. As he looked up I saw his tearful eyes for the first time. A gentle smile played across his childlike edentulous face, 'So you have seen all this silly play of mine! It is for this reason that I come here while it is still dark and no one is around. I don't want anybody else to watch over my play.' 'What is this "play" that you are talking about? Who is it that you are playing with?' I enquired. The octogenarian sadhu thought for a while, looked me up very closely, then spoke out as if

talking to himself: 'You know, Babaji, contemplation of divine lila is an important part of our sadhana. I love to go to the places of my Krishna's lilas and relive the experience. Mine is the living Krishna! He is eternally present in this eternal Vrindavan. It is for this reason that I am unable



Yamuna Devi at Keshi Ghat

to sit within the confines of temples for long. The trees, the groves, the breeze and even the dust of Vrindavan is vibrant with his living presence. Not he alone, but the austerities and aspirations of innumerable devotees comes alive in my mind's eye. The nectarean lila of Vrindavan is relived in the Vrindavan of my heart. This is my sadhana. Take this place for instance: it is here that the eleven-year-old Krishna killed the demon Keshi. Kamsa was convinced that this amazing child was the one destined to kill him. So he sent Keshi and Arishtra to kill this child. I was thinking of the killing of Keshi when you saw me. You know what I saw? A huge stallion tearing across at terrible speed—its mane flying in all directions, hooves threatening to break the earth open, and neigh reverberating in all directions. That's Keshi in disguise. I also saw the dark young lad—in his habitual yellow dhoti—with his *amarigta* tied tightly round his waist, a bright bandanna keeping his curly hair in place, a sandalwood tilak glowing on his forehead. A

soft, mischievous smile played across his beautiful pink lips as he saw Keshi coming forth to meet his deliverance at his hands. He clasped his hands close to his broad, dark chest, adorned with a white floral garland. There was not a whiff of excitement or tension anywhere on the lad's face.

'I see my Krishna even now as I tell you about him! He walks up and holds the horse by its hind legs and whirls it round, just as Garuda would whirl the snakes. And then he flings it across with great force. But Keshi has not had enough yet. He comes back bounding, trying to charge Krishna. And what does Krishna do? He thrusts his small tender arm right down Keshi's

throat. I flinch at the sight. But what wonder! Keshi is choked to death as Krishna keeps pushing his arm deeper. Keshi is delivered from his cursed demon-frame at Krishna's holy touch.

'I got so caught up with this divine spectacle that I could not restrain myself from wiping the sweat off Krishna's body. I didn't know if Krishna was in my mind or in front of me. Anyway, I must thank you for making me relive this lila one more time.'

This was amazing! With folded hands I entreated the sadhu that if he had no objection I would like to spend some more time with him over the next few days. To this he said, 'No, one is not supposed to tell about one's sadhana to all and sundry. Moreover, I am a crazy man; I have no fixed place, time or schedule.' But I would

not let go so easily. I persisted with my request. At last he said that he lived close to Kaliyadaman Ghat and that I might find him there the following evening. Saying this he took his leave. I kept sitting there for some more time, beholding the beauty of Keshi Ghat, said to be the most beautiful



Keshi Ghat

ghat in Vrindavan. The evening arati of Mother Yamuna is held at this very ghat.

### The Trail along the Yamuna

Next day, long before sundown, I came to the place he had told me about, but I could not find him anywhere. I had not enquired about his name or other particulars. He too had not asked who I was. He was too immersed in sadhana to bother about such details.

I started walking northwards along the Yamuna. To my left was Chir Ghat (*chir* means clothing). There is a huge *kadamba* tree here, and on one of its branches there is an earthen image of Sri Krishna. Down below, at the foot



The Yamuna at Chir Ghat

of the tree, are a few images of the gopis, reminding one of *chir haran lila*, the stealing of the gopis' apparel. The other branches are full of colourful pieces of cloth which the devotees have tied as tokens of their wishes of Krishna. At present the Yamuna has receded so far to the east that this place hardly looks like a ghat. A dusty track has replaced the original water-course. But legend has it that it was at this place that these *sadhikas* of Vraja were put to the test. Sri Ramakrishna has said that so long as one is constrained by shame, hatred, and fear, one cannot become one with God. The gopis were helped by Krishna to shed these constraints at this Chir Ghat.

Further down the road, again on the left, is the famous *Imli Tala*. It is said that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had taken shelter under this tamarind tree when he had come to Vrindavan in search of Krishna. This place was a dense forest at that time but now has many houses in and around. People say, a branch of this holy tree had grown over the wall of the adjacent house. The owner tried to trim it, but when blood-redsap started



Imli Tala temple

oozing out he quickly abandoned the idea. The branch can still be seen slanting towards the boundary wall.

A little down the roadside stands Shringar Vat, the decoration tree, associated with the devotions of Nityananda Mahaprabhu. The stump of an ancient *kamala* tree and a small shrine with a painting showing Sri Krishna decorating Srimati Radhamani with flowers are reminders of the legend which gave the place its name.

It is difficult to see the Yamuna from here. Vast vegetable fields are seen instead. As one walks past the Madan Mohan temple and Aditya Tila a huge *kadamba* tree is seen at a distance. It is said that the Yamuna used to course past this tree in earlier times. A flight of red sandstone stairs running down to the sand below reminds one that this was a ghat at one time. In fact, the place where I am now standing was the site of a rapid as the waters of the Yamuna coursed into a whirlpool. Even today, in the rainy season, a big pool of water is formed in this place.

On either side of the ghat are raised circular platforms. A big branch of the *kadamba* tree reaches down to where the waters of the Yamuna once were. It is said that it was from this branch that the audacious boy Krishna jumped into the whirlpool below to subdue Kaliya, the dangerous serpent who lived in these waters with his family, and had poisoned the lake.

I bent low at the foot of the tree and then sat down, taking in the sweet fragrance of the *kadamba* flowers. And then there was that familiar voice:

With eyes closed  
or wide open  
Whichever side I gaze,  
Seeing within



Kaliyadaman Ghat

or looking out,  
 (Let me) see Your enchanting face.

It was none other than the aged sadhu I was looking for. He played on a pair of cymbals as he circumambulated the tree, singing all the while in his sweet voice. 'There you are!' said the sadhu as he espied me. 'You have come to the right place. Do you see those old rooms out there? My Gopal lives in one of those. And I stay with Gopal.' I wanted him to recall Krishna's lilas. So I asked him, 'Gopal would have had his rest by now. He must be at this ghat now along with his friends.'

#### Kaliya's Deliverance

His face suddenly turned grave. 'Yes,' he said, 'this is the place. The puddle that you see here was the Kaliya lake. Kaliya the snake lived here with his family. He had taken shelter here to escape the wrath of Garuda. But, you see, one's nature does not change. After settling here Kaliya had made the lives of all the residents of Vrindavan—birds, beasts and humans—miserable, by spitting venom everywhere. Anyone who came close to the lake got seared by his

poisonous breath. We find a description of this in the tenth *skandha* of the Bhagavata. Krishna decided to deliver the Yamuna and the inhabitants of Vraja from Kaliya's poison. It was here that he jumped into the lake and grappled with the serpent. But Kaliya too was blessed by Krishna's touch. You must remember that none of these asuras were ordinary creatures. They had acquired this privilege of coming into contact with the incarnated supreme Self through their sadhana spanning several births. Most of them attained deliverance at the hands of the Lord himself, while some were reborn as devotees of great renown.

'Kaliya's deliverance beckoned him to Krishna. He coiled himself round Krishna's body and bit him! Oh, imagine the pain! You shiver even at the thought! Word spread like wildfire and all of Vrindavan was out here swooning with anxiety for Krishna's safety. But soon the tables were turned. Kaliya was forced out of the waters! And imagine the scene! There was Krishna jumping from one head to another of his hood in an ecstatic dance, even as all of us were scared to death at the thought of Krishna being harmed by Kaliya! But as he passed from one head to another, those very mouths that spat venom began vomiting blood now. And



Madan Mohan temple

when Kaliya appeared all but dead, his wife and children came up to Krishna to pray for the life of their husband and father, who was fortunate enough to have acquired the divine touch of Krishna—that very touch for which devotees would gladly give up the pleasures of heaven, supremacy over the three worlds, unmitigated yogic powers, or even personal salvation. My Krishna took pity and let Kaliya go, banishing him to the Ramanaka island so that the Yamuna would no lon-

ger be unsafe. Since then this place has been called Kaliyadaman Ghar.

'What happened after this was still more amazing. Having grappled with Kaliya for such a long time in the water, my Gopal caught a cold. He came up and sat on the mound that you see over there, close to the Madan Mohan temple. It is said that to give him extra warmth, the sun god along with his twelve attendants sent forth extra heat. Soon Krishna started sweating. A new pilgrimage site called Praskandan Tirth (the place of swear) was born in this place, and the mound where Krishna sat is called Aditya Tila ever since.'

The old sadhu stopped to catch his breath. He then asked me to come over to his *kuria* for some prasad. His gripping account had transported me into a mythical world; the offer for prasad brought me back to the world of reality. I complied with his request. And by the time I left his exquisite shrine with its charged spiritual atmosphere, night had settled.

### Vrindavan through the Ages

Next day I went again to the old babaji. He seemed to have taken a liking for me and told me many other stories about the place. He told me in detail how Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's two disciples, Sanatan and Rup Goswami, lived in Vrindavan and preached Vaishnavism as per the wishes of their guru. Babaji took me round all the places



Sanatan Goswami Samadhi Mandir

that were associated with Sanatan and Rup Goswami. While he was talking of these sadhakas, he seemed to tremble with holy fervour. A vibrant spirituality permeated the whole place.

He took me to Rup Goswami's famous Govindji temple. We walked in through a huge gateway carved out of red sandstone. The present temple of Govindji is to the left. This is supposed to have been built in 1819 by Nandakumar Basu, a rich landlord from Bengal. As we walked

further on, we came to a stone canopy which seemed to be a relatively new construction. Under the canopy one can see the imprints of a pair of feet engraved on white stone. There are also ancient engravings on the adjacent wall. Two small temples stand on either side. This place is on a raised mound and is called Gomatika.

The main door of the temple was a little further down. We selected a quiet place away from the crowd and sat down. Babaji seemed to have slipped into the past and began his soliloquy: 'After the war of Kurukshetra and the subsequent annihilation of the Yadu dynasty, Krishna decided to put an end to his mortal play (*nara lila*). Soon after, the Pandavas put



Govindji temple

Arjuna's grandson Panikshit on the throne of Hastinapura and Krishna's great-grandson Vajranabha on the throne of Mathura and left for the Himalayas. It was Vajranabha who first took it upon himself to identify the places associated with his

great-grandfather's divine play and set up appropriate *vigrahas* (images for worship) in those places. Of these, four are known as "Devs"—Hari Dev on the banks of Manasi-ganga at Govardhan, Bal Dev in Mahavan, Keshav Dev in Mathura and Govind Dev here. There are two "Naths"—Srinath of Govardhan, who is presently at Nathdwara in Rajasthan, and Gopinath at Vamshi Vat. Besides, there are two "Gopals" too—Sakshi Gopal, who is in Orissa, and Madan Gopal of Vrindavan. All these temples are well known even today. There is an interesting story associated with Govind, Gopinath and Madan Mohan. It is said that one day Vajranabha asked his mother Usha, "Mother, you have seen my great-grandfather Krishna. Can you tell me what he looked like?" In answer to this, Usha described how Krishna looked. Vajranabha called deft artisans and ordered them to make three images of Krishna in black touchstone according to Usha's description. Usha saw the three images. In one she found the feet to be like those of Krishna. This image was called Madan Gopal. Seeing the next, she said that its chest was a perfect likeness of Krishna's. This was Gopinath. Seeing the third she pulled her veil over her abashed face, for that face looked exactly like that of her grandfather-in-law, Krishna. This was Govind Dev. In all these three images Krishna is seen with his flute, while Hari Dev and Keshav Dev are *giridhari* (the holder of Mount Govardhan) images, where Krishna holds up his right hand and rests the left on his waist. Srinath and Sakshi Gopal show Krishna in the *tribhanga* (bent in three places) pose. The original images of Govindji, Gopinathji and Madan Mohanji are presently in Rajasthan.

'None of these deities had the companion image of Radharani in those ancient days. All of them were duly worshipped as per the orders of King Vajranabha. But as Dwapara Yuga came to an end and Kali began, all these places of worship ended up in ruins. Much later, during the rule of the Hindu kings, temples were again built on these sites and new images were in-

stalled. But in 1018, when Mahmud Ghazni, attacked and looted Mathura, all these temples were once again destroyed. Many local inhabitants embraced Islam under duress. Vrindavan became a virtual *vana*, a forest, with no trace of habitation or civilization left behind. It is said that most of the priests had managed to take the original images with them as they left the place, and they hid them in river beds or wells or in the jungles to save them from being defiled by the invaders. After this, hundreds of years passed by and in the sixteenth century Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu rediscovered this ruined place of pilgrimage. Radhakund and Shyamkund are said to have been discovered by him. Later on he sent his two disciples Sanatan and Rup Goswami to rediscover and restore this forsaken and forgotten place of pilgrimage.

'An interesting story is related about the re-emergence of Sri Govindji at Gomatila. One day when Rup Goswami was crying and praying to Krishna to reveal himself, a cowherd boy came and told him that there was a particular place on the bank of the Yamuna where every day a cow would come and empty its udders. He asked Rup Goswami to come and see it for himself. Rup went there the very next day and found that what the cowherd had told him was true. Thereupon he collected a few men and had the place dug up. Soon a *tribhanga* image of Krishna was unearthed. This was none other than the resplendent Sri Govindji. Rup was overwhelmed. He virtually bathed his dear Krishna with tears of joy. It was a sacred *ekadashi*—the eleventh lunar day—in 1535. Rup installed Sri Govindji in a small hut nearby.'

In this way I came to know from Babaji how, down the ages, Vrindavan was annihilated and then rediscovered and rehabilitated time and again. Probably no other place of pilgrimage has suffered such ravages of time and yet retained its magic: for everything in Vrindavan still reminds one of Krishna and his divine play! Even the soil of Vraja is vibrant with his divine presence.

(To be concluded)



## Reviews



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

**The Philosophy of the Vāllabha School of Vedānta.** *K Narain.* Indological Research Centre, B34/115 Sukulpura, Durgakund, Varanasi 221 010. 2004. xiv + 466. Rs 495.

Here is a book that is at once authentic and extraordinary, dealing with Vallabha's school of Vedānta. It is authentic, as it relies entirely on the original Sanskrit books (texts, commentaries, glosses and notes) and the traditional interpretation. It is extraordinary because it not only covers *in extenso* the philosophical position of Vallabha as well as the religious discipline he advocates, but brings out clearly the relation between them. The relation centres round the individual soul (jiva) which is mundane in existence but spiritual in nature (*anu* or atomic, eternal and all-pervasive).

The author's canvas is thus not only vast but also unitive. He attempts a synthesis, and this is the most dominant feature of this volume. In fact, the position of Vallabha himself is synthetic, although this is not widely recognized. For instance, his conception of the Godhead (Parabrahman, Krishna alone) is *nirguṇa* (devoid of differentiating attributes) and all the gods and the manifestations of powers (*vibhūti*) thereof are *saḡuṇa*. The object of devotion must be *nirguṇa*. This is a splendid restatement of Shankara's Advaita, ignoring, of course, the irrelevant and unnecessary introduction of *māya* into the *nirguṇa* Reality (hence the name Śuddhādvaita). Likewise, Vallabha's distinction between *maryādā* (conventional devotion, scripturally indicated, specific to castes and external in orientation) and *puṣṭi* (loving devotion to the *nirguṇa* Reality, pertaining to the innermost depths of one's being, and beyond castes and creeds) is in fact an expression of synthesis.

Piercing through this grand synthesis are the necessary dichotomies (like the *nirguṇa* and *saḡuṇa* aspects of the Godhead, the *maryādā* and *puṣṭi* aspects of devotion, the *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* and *kārya-lakṣaṇa* of the ultimate Reality, jnana and bhakti) and the author has done well in dilating upon the distinctions inherent in these dichotomies. Distinc-

tions and contradictions can coexist with ease only in Brahman, the *paramārtha* (cf. Vallabha's statement, *viruddha-dharmāśrayatvaṃ tu brahmaṇo bhū-ṣaṇam*, in his *Anubhāṣya*).

And important to note in this connection is the distinction that Vallabha makes between the phenomenal transactional world of names and forms that we experience when we are awake (*prapāṇca, jagat*) and the felt world of ideas, feelings and thoughts (*samsāra*). The former is 'public reality' while the latter is 'private'. Being private, it is unreal, and being unreal, it is caused by *avidyā*. It can therefore be sublated by *vidyā* (knowledge). Not so the phenomenal world, which is real, eternal and has its source in Brahman.

Scriptural knowledge (jnana) and scriptural prescriptions (*vibhita-karmā*) together with devotion are meant to weaken the hold of *samsāra* on the individual soul. Vallabha's unique contribution is the praxis of *maryādā-bhakti* (the familiar nine kinds of devotion) with emphasis on loving devotion to the manifestations or aspects (*amśa*) of *saḡuṇa* Puruṣhottama (*prema-lakṣaṇā-bhakti*), followed by *miśra-puṣṭi-bhakti* (*maryādā-puṣṭi*), love of Puruṣhottama (the supreme Reality, *nirguṇa*), partially arising out of God's grace, and ending with *puṣṭi-bhakti* (*puṣṭi-puṣṭi-bhakti*). The previous devotion is a means to an end, whereas the final one is an end in itself, an ideal. Both, however, are owing to the grace of God. Here devotion is transcendental (*nirguṇa*), devoid of a reason (*abaitukī*), unimpeded and free.

Now, who is eligible to enter this final stage? Vallabha answers, whoever has an interest (*ruci*) to attain it, for such an interest is impossible for one who lacks the grace of God. It is in this context that Vallabha's fivefold *puruṣārtha* scheme, derived from the Bhagavata, is to be considered. Besides the four well-known objectives, discussed and explained in the scriptures, Puruṣhottama (attainment of the *nirguṇa* Reality) is included as the fifth or final.

Another interesting observation of Vallabha is explained by the author. The word *bhakti* (from the root *bhaj*) means specifically service (*sevā*) qualified

with the emotion of love. It is essentially a mental phenomenon. He explains in the *Siddhānta-muktāvalī*: 'This love for Purushottama (*nirguṇa*) follows a complete understanding of divine greatness ... and is of the nature of supreme love. *Eṣa bhaktiḥ māhātmya-jñāna-pūrvaka parama-sneha rūpāḥ.*'

This is primary devotion (*mukhyā bhakti*), in fact the real one, for it is derived directly from the grace of God and not from any scriptural prescriptions (*vibhīṭā*). Further, it is not synonymous with worship (*upāsānā*, puja) or sacrifice (*yajna*), which are always associated with particular manifestations (*sagūṇa*) and not with Purushottama (*nirguṇa*). And they are motivated by specific desires (*sakāma*) and not characterized by love for its own sake. They are a means to an end and not the end in themselves.

Vallabha's genius for synthesis shows itself again when he points out that proper bhakti begins with loving God and accommodates the usual Vedantic methods of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. His insight manifests when he differentiates jnana from bhakti. Jnana is totally in favour of enhancing one of the *guṇas*, namely *sattva*, and therefore it is in the realm of *sagūṇa bhakti*. But bhakti proper (*puṣṭi*) transcends all *guṇas*, including *sattva*. It is *nirguṇa*. It leads to union with Purushottama and does not stop with Akshara Brahman as jnana does.

This means that *nirguṇa bhakti*, while it is both a means to an end and an end in itself, achieves the realization of Purushottama's own-nature (*svarūpa*), namely the triune of Reality-Consciousness-Bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*). Bliss is the own-nature of Brahman. Vallabha takes the five *koṣas* not as sheaths of individual constitution but as *vibhūṭis* or special manifestations of the Godhead's power.

The volume is without doubt an excellent account of Vallabha's contribution to Vedanta and is a valuable addition to the growing literature on Vedantic systems.

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**Letters From Mirtola.** Ed. Jyotsna Singh. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: *brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in*. 2004. xii + 194 pp. Rs 150.

In editing this volume of letters written by Sri Krishnaprem and Sri Madhava Ashish to her fa-

ther, Dr Karan Singh, Jyotsna Singh has done well to include the detailed memoirs on Sri Krishnaprem by Madhava Ashish and Gertrude Emerson Sen midway through the book. These two accurate portraits will help the reader understand how the Englishman Ronald Nixon, a professor of English at Lucknow University, entered the Bhagavata world. Sri Krishnaprem Vairagi (1898-1965) was a product of Cambridge University and had spent some time as a fighter pilot in the First World War. Buddha drew him to the mysterious East, and Monica Chakravarti (Sri Yashoda Ma), wife of his Vice-Chancellor, initiated him into Vaishnava sannyasa. They founded an ashrama in Mirtola near Almora and installed an image of Radha-Krishna for ritual worship. After the passing away of his guru, Sri Krishnaprem continued to stay there with his disciple Madhava Ashish, spending his time in regular puja of the deity, contemplation and writing.

As a young man, Dr Karan Singh became a disciple of Sri Krishnaprem and his association with the ashrama has continued to this day. Each of the letters printed here brings out the crystalline faith Sri Krishnaprem had in his deity and his guru and his personality is literally robed in peace and calm. He was full of *mahavishvasa* in his chosen path. Dr Karan Singh writes: 'Sri Krishnaprem's words came from the depth of great spiritual achievement, the vision of a true seer. When he spoke of Krishna, his beloved, the eternal lover of all beings, his eyes would glow with a strange radiance and his whole body seemed vibrant with inner joy.'

When Sri Krishnaprem was once asked by an Indian professor why he followed the purificatory and puja rituals so thoroughly at great personal inconvenience though he was born an Englishman, the yogi replied simply: 'For one thing, I believe that any self-imposed discipline, external or internal, is rather a good thing in this present age, when every kind of social and individual restraint is in process of being hurled out of the window. Also, quite simply, this happens to be the path laid down by those who have gone before me and reached the goal.'

So perfectly Vaishnavite an answer, like Andā's phrase, '*melayar seyvanagal*; [it is] the ancestral tradition' and the Mahabharata refrain, '*eṣa dharmah sanatanah*'; this is the eternal dharma! His faith in the power of love, capacity to interpret dreams, and respect for the mantra as an instrument to gain spiritual states of being are all here. With Madhava Ashish the subjects are more external: the state of the

nation, party politics, the communal problem. But all of *Letters from Mirtola* bears witness to the glory and good of India's universal Sanatana Dharma. No man is an island, no seeker an alien. All of us are in Vrindaban, holding hands in the eternal *rasa*.

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### Value Education: The Indian Tradition.

*Prof. D P Mukherjee*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2004. xiii + 217 pp. Rs 210.

That our society is facing a crisis of values is increasingly evident and widely acknowledged. The disintegration of the joint family, lack of systematic value education in schools and the cultural cross-currents created by rapid globalization have all contributed to this predicament. Parents, educationists and the state have now woken up to this clear and immediate crisis in our midst. One of the responses, reflected in the present volume, has been a renewed exploration of our ancient religious traditions in the hope of finding solutions to modern problems. As the author says, an 'attempt has been made to find out the socio-moral values that are congenial with the objectives (of social education in India at present) and in what ways they are present in the ancient Indian traditions and scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism'.

The book is based upon the author's doctoral thesis and shows wide-ranging scholarship across multiple religious traditions. The author has scanned a vast array of ancient scriptures and classified relevant material under forty-two socio-moral values. The fourth chapter, which lists audio-visual and readable media, is a uniquely useful resource in itself.

Unfortunately, modern thinking on value education, the present volume not excluded, does suffer from a fundamental and fatal weakness. One of the central tenets of such thinking seems to be that, like making a beautiful bouquet of the choicest flowers picked from plants in your garden, you can abstract values from the ancient religious systems—somehow have Hindu values without Hinduism, Buddhist values without Buddhism and Jaina values without Jainism, to put it bluntly. Bouquets may be beautiful, but they all have the same little drawback—they are dead! Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism all have holistic views of the spiritual nature and destiny of human life and their values are mani-

festations of this central spiritual vision. Without the life-giving spiritual cores of the great ancient traditions, all our efforts at extracting values from them will be reduced to drawing up lists and catalogues—of some academic interest certainly, but little else.

This apart, the present volume is a significant and welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on value education. It would be a worthwhile addition to all school and college libraries and is of direct relevance to education, and teacher-training institutions in particular.

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**Gramodaya for Right Living.** Vivekananda Kendra-*nardep*, Vivekanandapuram, Kanyakumari 629 702. E-mail: *ngc\_vkna\_rdep@sancharnet.in*. 2004. xvi + 112 pp. Rs 300.

This book is based on a permanent exhibition, Gramodaya Park, housed in the Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari. The exhibits tell a pictorial story of development in consonance with nature and culture leading to sustainable development. They explore the ancient wisdom of India as applied to the contemporary situation.

In his foreword, P Parameswaran compares the traditional thought of India with the dualistic Cartesian outlook—and its dichotomy of mind and matter—which has influenced Western science and philosophy. So Western classical science sees the units of existence in isolation. It has a materialistic outlook and views matter as 'an accidental collocation of atoms'. The industrial technology emerging out of this classical Western science is utility-based, capital-intensive and machine-oriented. Its main objective is to increase the production of material goods for providing maximum material comforts. But indiscriminate mechanization can be problematic. Machines contribute to environmental pollution and lead to human alienation and ill health. Basic issues of nutritious food, safe drinking water, appropriate shelter and primary health must needs often remain unaddressed.

The volume explores a more traditional Indian approach to these problems—holistic as well as simultaneously utilitarian and value-oriented; humanistic rather than capitalistic in its emphasis. It depends more on tools than machines, for tools ex-

tend human capacity without harming the environment. It is nature-friendly and cares for the well-being of all creatures, including animals and plants.

The objective of *gramodaya* (the term means village development) is to make humans happy, nature-friendly and self-dependent. The Gramodaya Park calls our attention to various technologies in the field of housing, water management, sustainable agricultural practices and health, based on Indian methods and centred on spiritual and holistic approaches. The volume shows how these can be used by individuals and groups to solve some of our core socio-economic problems in an eco-friendly manner. The lucid text and colourful get-up is equally reader-friendly.

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**Teachings of the Inner Light.** *Deepa Kodikal*. Viva Books, 4262/3 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. E-mail: [viva@vivagroupindia.net](mailto:viva@vivagroupindia.net). 2005. xxviii + 278 pp. Rs 250.

In a harmonious society, spirituality pervades. But it is paradoxical that India, with its abundance of spiritual wealth, is itself facing a growing incidence of disharmony and stress-related problems. Apart from scriptures such as the Gita or the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which are never rendered obsolete by time, a large volume of recent literature on holistic living addresses this problem. This text is one such.

Deepa Kodikal explains how one can progress spiritually while leading a normal life. No new doctrine is propagated and one is not required to change one's path. The contents of the book, the author points out, are based on her own spiritual experiences and 'knowledge from within'. Therefore, the lessons as well as the terms used should be understood in that context. The epilogue provides a graphic account of some of these experiences.

Suffering is the result of ignorance about life itself. The author points out that many people suffer due to a sense of failure in life, a negative mindset dominated by fear, jealousy, anger and pessimism, and inability to prepare oneself to face challenges. Furthermore, one should realize that there is a divine scheme in life's journeys and in the various options in life. Instead of calling for a change in other people and in the external situation, the primary duty of a

spiritual aspirant is to adapt his/her attitude towards life—by bringing a change within oneself—in all matters, major as well as minor. If this attitudinal change is practised, one realizes the divine pattern laid out for individual progress. It is for us to choose freedom or bondage. Duties performed to the best of one's ability without concern for fruits of action will automatically put one 'in a meditative state without any effort'. Absence of ego is 'natural samadhi and natural meditation'. Instead of fighting negative feelings, we ought to transform them through discrimination. Maya conceals the Lord from us by creating a sense of separation. If the ego is dissolved, 'universal consciousness' alone remains.

The subjects dealt with in the book are grouped under heads like 'Natural Meditation, Living Meditation', 'Why Life Is Often Imperfect', 'The Inner Divinity', 'Karma' and 'Sadhana'. The language is simple and clear and the style elegant. There are some repetitions, which is perhaps inevitable when the subjects are interlinked. The chapter on 'The Inner Divinity' involves concepts which are open to discussion. The author's vision of the 'disembodied individuality' is an example.

The chapter on sadhana is of special relevance to contemporary society and ideas such as the need to become a 'thinking individual' will appeal to readers. While stressing the value of a 'guru mantra', the author has tried to avoid religious overtones; *so'ham* is deemed a 'secular chant'. A mantra is to be chanted and heard 'in the silence of the mind'. There are lessons on methods of guiding the thought process, mental relaxation, avoidance of stress, and need for detachment and renunciation. Stressing the wisdom of helping others, the author remarks: 'Nature recognizes your selfless contribution with an appropriate response in your times of need.'

Without denying the role of a guru, the emphasis is on 'self change' for spiritual progress. The author has undergone extraordinary experiences and managed to successfully handle them. However, some of the spiritual experiences detailed in the book are serious enough to necessitate the guidance and blessings of a preceptor.

Deepa Kodikal has taken great care to record her personal experiences and share her 'success story' for the benefit of society. The book will help in promoting a positive outlook and fortitude in a complex world.

*P S Sundaram*  
Mumbai

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# Reports

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, declared open the renovated museum at **Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park**, on 15 June. On the 28th Revered Maharaj also inaugurated the newly built library at **Ramakrishna Math (Beni Pal Udyan), Sinthi**, Kolkata.

2,174 pilgrims received medical treatment at the medical camp conducted by **Ramakrishna Math, Puri**, on the sacred occasion of Ratha Yatra, from 27 June to 5 July, and more than 27,000 pilgrims were served sherbet by the ashrama.

About 25,000 pilgrims were served lemonade by **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri**, during the Ratha Yatra festival, and 35 pilgrims received treatment at the medical camp organized on this occasion.

The newly constructed monks' quarters building at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad**, was inaugurated on 2 July.

On 4 July, Srimat Swami Gahanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built kitchen block and an art gallery, and also unveiled a statue of Swami Vivekananda at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute and Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira** (Saradapitha) celebrated their foundation days jointly on 4 July. Sri Arjun Singh, Union Minister for Human Resource Development, and Sri Sudarshan Roy Choudhury, West Bengal Higher Education Minister, spoke at the public meeting organized on this occasion. Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the meeting. The Union Minister released the yearbook and two other publications of RKMVERI.

On 14 July, Sri Arjun Munda, Chief Minister of Jharkhand, inaugurated the tree plantation project under National Horticulture Mission organized by **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi**, Ranchi. Under this project, saplings of mango, papaya, and lychee are being planted in 70 villages of 6 blocks in Ranchi district.

## Achievements

Master Abhisek Suman, a student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, won the 2006 Indian National Biology Olympiad gold medal for his performance at the International Biology Olympiad orientation and selection camp held at the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, TIFR, Mumbai, in June.

Sri Prasanna V Rangadurai, a student of Vivekananda College (**Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai**) participated in the 18th meeting of Nobel laureates in Chemistry held in Germany. He was chosen for this in a competition held among young scientists worldwide.

## Relief and Rehabilitation

In the wake of the recent devastating flood in Gujarat, **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, distributed cooked food to 1,400 flood-affected people at Dabhau village in Anand district. In West Bengal, many villages in Howrah district were affected by a flood of the Damodar River in July. **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha** distributed 2,470 kg rice, 1,521 kg dal, 140 kg sugar, 165 kg salt, 257 kg edible oil, 25 kg milk powder, 100 kg bleaching powder, 100 l phenol and 5,000 halazone tablets to 1,021 flood-affected families of six villages in the area.

**Ramakrishna Math, Antpur**, distributed 500 blankets and **Ramakrishna Math, Ootacamund**, 400 blankets to poor and needy people of their localities. \*