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Prabuddha Bharata

OR

AWAKENED INDIA



By Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Yoga, by one or more or
all of these the Vision of the Paramatman is Obtained.

ADVAITA ASHRAMA

MAYAVATI, HIMALAYAS



Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt. Pithoragarh 262 524, U.P.

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Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

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No. 3

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

'Truth is one: sages call It by various names'

सा नो अद्य यस्या वयं नि ते यामन्नविक्षमहि ।
वृक्षे न वसति वयः ॥

1. May she (Night) be gracious to us today. With her arrival we now repair to our homes, as birds return to their nest upon the tree.

Rg-Veda 10.127.4

नि ग्रामासो अविक्षत नि पद्वंतो नि पक्षिणः ।
नि श्येनासश्चिदर्थिनः ॥

2. Men have gone to their villages and all beasts and birds, including the swift hawk, have gone to rest.

Rg-Veda 10.127.5

यावया वृक्यं वृकं यवय स्तेनमूर्म्ये ।
अथा नः सुतरा भव ॥

3. O Night (*ūrmyā*), ward off the she-wolf and the he-wolf and the thief. Help us to cross over [to the world of light.]

Rg-Veda 10.127.6

उप ते गा इवाकरं वृणीष्व दुहितृदिवः ।
रात्रि स्तोमं न जिग्युषे ॥

4. O Night, O daughter of the sky, I have offered thee this hymn, as a cow [gives milk]. Accept it as a song of praise to the victor.

Rg-Veda 10.127.8

* The *Rātrī-sūktam*, Hymn to Night, is concluded here. Man seeks light but cannot dwell in it for long. He dreads darkness but he cannot live without the night which gives him rest. Night gives rest to all beings. When he sleeps he goes away from the known world. So he prays to the Night-goddess for protection. This hymn is believed to ward off bad dreams. Night here may also be a symbol of Maya.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

What India is now undergoing is not just a socio-economic transformation but a rejuvenation of her ancient culture. This is the theme of this month's EDITORIAL.

Selfishness is the root-cause of all evil and suffering, and through Self-realization man can free himself from them. How this truth is embodied in the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is shown by Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in the article THE MESSAGE OF RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA: THE PANACEA FOR THE ILLS OF TODAY.

In PLACING OF MANTRA Swami Shraddhanandaji Maharaj, head of the Vedanta Centre of Sacramento, U.S.A., shows how the principle of *nyāsa*, widely used in rituals, can be converted into a highly versatile spiritual technique. Spiritual aspirants will find the article illuminating.

Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, was the summation of all the earlier ideals of women and the highest manifestation of Divine Śakti. This credal concept of the Ramakrishna Movement is forcefully brought out by Swami Hiranmayanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, in THE HOLY MOTHER IDEAL, originally delivered as an extempore talk.

Swami Nityabodhanandaji, head of the Centre Vedantique, Geneva, has been doing pioneering work in interpreting Vedanta in Europe through his speeches, articles and books, both in English and French. His present article TRUE CREATIVITY: CREATING ONESELF is a brief report on an inter-faith dialogue in Paris. In his own paper, originally presented in French, the author examines the phenomenon of creativity from the standpoint of Vedanta. After pointing out that artistic joy and freedom are an expression of the bliss and purity

of the Atman, the author shows that human creativity itself is an expression of Divine Creativity in the soul at the three dimensions of Sat, Cit and Ananda. The article is rounded off with a brilliant insight into the concept of Time.

In SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE GITA Swami Sridharanandaji, head of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow, offers a modern, pragmatic interpretation of the first chapter of the Gita without violating the canons of traditional exegesis. The article, based on his very popular Sunday discourses on the Gītā, provides a deep insight into the psychological situation that called forth the divine message.

PALLIMANGAL: AN EXPERIMENT IN RURAL RECONSTRUCTION by Swami Smarananandaji explains the motivating philosophy behind the Ramakrishna Mission's rural development projects and provides a brief resume of the work done in three villages in Bengal. The author is Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur.

BHAGAVAN BUDDHA MEETS LORD CHRIST IN A MOMENT OF TRUTH is a poem on the complementary nature of world religions. Its talented author Dr. Gaurie Nag, who got her Ph. D. in English literature from the University of London, was working as a painter in London when her genius was nipped in the bud by the hand of death. The poem was sent to us by her former teacher Dr. (Miss) Vinita Wanchoo.

With the second instalment of WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO MARY HALE? Swami Vidyatmananda of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Gretz, France, concludes his poignant, well-researched biographical account of Mary Hale who figured so prominently in the early years of Swami Vivekananda's life in America.

Swami Sarveshananda of the Vivekananda Monastery, Ganges, Michigan, has

drawn a scintillating profile of one of America's great savants in THOREAU: THE FIRST SANNYASIN OF AMERICA.

PILGRIMAGE TO PAVAPURI narrates the experiences of a monk at the place where

Lord Mahavira attained Nirvana and also introduces you to the religious traditions of Jainism. Its author, Swami Brahmesh-ananda, is a highly qualified doctor at the Ramakrishna Mission General Hospital, Varanasi

INDIA: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

(EDITORIAL)

A.D 2,000 is only a decade and a half away. Though future is always an unknown factor, at no other time in history had future appeared so unknowable and unpredictable as it does now. Every nation has to face this unknown future, but all of them do not do it in the same way. For most Western nations the future holds little promise beyond the prolongation of the material comforts they already enjoy, and many are haunted by the fear of nuclear annihilation. By contrast, India looks to the future with eager expectation and firm faith.

India's attitude towards the future differs from almost all the other nations in one very fundamental respect. It is an attitude of rejuvenation. The future for India is important not so much for the material prosperity that it hopes to achieve as for the prospect of effecting a complete rejuvenation. India represents one of the oldest surviving civilizations of the world. This culture underwent a certain degree of decline from the tenth century A.D. to the middle of the nineteenth century. The present struggle is to recapture the lost glory by revitalizing the cultural elan of the country. History has proved the indestructibility of Indian culture. No external force has so far succeeded in annihilating it. Indian culture, no doubt,

went through phases of decay but, after every such interval, its vitality reasserted itself. What we are now witnessing is the beginning of a new renaissance.

Poverty and squalor are present all over India, and some people who visit this country see nothing but these. But the historical reasons behind this situation are quite different from those behind poverty as it exists in other developing countries or as it existed in the developed countries during the Middle Ages. Destitution and backwardness, that have become a prominent feature of present-day Indian society, represent only a brief interlude in the history of India. Until the seventeenth century India was one of the wealthiest nations in the world, and the collective consciousness of the nation carries the indelible impress of the splendour of the past epochs. The efforts now being made to attain economic prosperity should be regarded as an attempt to recover or restore the prosperity it has lost, rather than as an attempt to acquire something new which it never had. It is this spirit of self-renewal that distinguishes the Indian approach to the future from the approaches of the other nations.

This was one of the important 'discoveries' that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru made in his famous book *The Discovery of*

India written at the Ahamedabad prison in 1944. Nearly half a century before that Swami Vivekananda had made an identical discovery, and Nehru was undoubtedly influenced by Swamiji's basic concept. In his lectures 'From Colombo to Almora', in the letters he wrote to his disciples and monastic brethren, and in the interviews he gave to newspaper reporters Swamiji pointed out that the chief task was to *rejuvenate* India. Almost echoing the words of Swamiji, Pandit Nehru wrote:

I was not interested in making some political arrangement which would enable our people to carry on more or less as before, only a little better. I felt they had vast stores of suppressed energy and ability and I wanted to release these and make them feel young and vital again...Behind the past quarter of a century's struggle for India's independence and all our conflicts with British authority, lay in my mind, and that of many others, the desire to revitalize India. We felt that...we would re-charge the battery of India's spirit and waken her from her long slumber.¹

That this process of self-renewal is not something new but is an inherent characteristic of the dynamics of Indian culture is shown by the famous declaration of the Gītā that God incarnates Himself again and again to establish Dharma at critical periods in history.

It may be asked whether this self-rejuvenation process is a unique feature of Indian culture. Does it not operate in other cultures? Before attempting to answer this question it is necessary to understand what the term 'culture' really means. Anthropologists have defined it in two broadly different ways. The first is a 'universalistic' definition equating culture with the total social heredity of mankind; it is represented by the classic definition offered by the British anthropologist E.B.

Tylor: 'Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.' The other classification offers a 'pluralistic' or relativistic conception of culture, confining culture to a single group or people. According to this view, as stated by the American anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, 'Culture is an historically derived system of...designs for living, which tends to be shared by...members of a group.'² If we adopt the second definition, we will find that four major cultures have served as the main springs of humanity's creative power. These are the Hellenic, the Hebraic, the Indian and the Chinese. All surviving cultures of the world (except those of Africa) have been derived from these four cultures. The culture of Middle-East countries is almost wholly Hebraic with an admixture of much earlier extinct cultures like those of the Sumerians and the Assyrians. Western culture is a product of the interaction between Hellenic and Hebraic cultures.

It is clear that nationhood and culture are not always synonymous. Every nation does not have its own independent culture. All the countries in Europe and America share the common Western culture.

2. In this context it may be useful to know what 'civilization' means. This term is used more in the study of history than in anthropology and sociology. 'Civilization' refers to the total achievements of a group of people over a period of time. Some historians like Arnold Toynbee associate this term only with city-culture, and all those peoples who did not develop cities are considered by them to have failed to develop civilization. This is an unwarranted assumption, as it would exclude Vedic Aryans (who led a pastoral life) from the pale of civilization. Any significant culture which endured for a considerable period in history should be regarded as a civilization.

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Calcutta: The Signet Press, 1946) p. 50

Similarly Hebraic culture is shared by most nations of the Middle East. India and China are unique in that they are the homes of two of the major cultures of the world.

According to Pandit Nehru, the peoples who show the maximum degree of the vitalizing power of history are four: Americans, Russians, Chinese and Indians. He believed that these peoples would provide the four major civilizations of the future.³ Among these four nations, America is too young to speak of rejuvenation. Russia does not boast a great past worth rejuvenating. China has a most ancient and glorious heritage, but this has been repudiated by that country's modern leaders who have fallen for a wholly alien ideology. That leaves India as the only country which has to effect an all-round renewal of its ancient culture on a massive scale. The main problem facing India today is the coupling of this rejuvenation process to the equally important process of social change and economic advancement.

It is not implied here that the process of renewal is going on only in India. Some kind of cultural revitalization is going on in many other countries, but it is either partial or assumes the form of religious revivalism. In the West the process of renewal is being sustained mainly by the Catholic Church. The appearance of religious fundamentalism in some of Middle East countries and their allies should be regarded more as regression than as rejuvenation. Other than Nepal and Sri Lanka, India is practically the only home of Indian culture and therefore the responsibility for rejuvenating this culture rests chiefly upon Indians. Indian culture is the common heritage not only of all

Hindus but also of all those who live in this country and of those who accept its system of values.

Theories of social change

The idea of rejuvenation of culture is not accepted by all social thinkers. There are four or five major theories regarding the nature of human culture and the course of history. The German-born American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) held that every culture was distinct and unique in time and space with its own set of values and should be studied separately. This theory of 'cultural uniqueness' is widely accepted by many sociologists.

Fritz Graebner (1877-1934) and William Schmidt (1868-1954) and some other German anthropologists developed the theory of 'cultural diffusion'. In their view all cultures have developed out of the intermingling of bits of cultural traits that originated at certain limited places and times which they called 'cultural spheres' (*Kulturkreise*). English anthropologists George Smith (1840-76) and W.J. Perry (1868-1949) believed Egypt to be the primordial centre from where the elements of culture diffused to other parts of the world. In some of his writings and speeches Swami Vivekananda seems to have believed in this theory of diffusion. But he held that India was the primordial fountainhead of spirituality and the fundamental truths of religion spread from here to the Middle East, Greece and Egypt.

Then there is the theory of 'retrograde evolution' which holds that the story of man is the story of his progressive degradation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) believed that man in the 'state of nature' had been 'free, healthy, honest and happy' but had been corrupted and enslaved by the growth of social institutions. The

3. *The Discovery of India*, p. 49. In later years he expressed this idea in some of his speeches.

Judeo-Christian tradition holds that the first man Adam fell from the original state of purity and peace, and since then sin and evil have been on the increase. Some religions of this tradition believe that this state of affairs will continue until the return of the Messiah or the dawn of the doomsday. Indian mythology also propounds the theory of four *yugas* the first (*satya yuga*) of which being the highest and the other three *yugas* representing successive stages of degradation.

According to the fourth theory of 'unilinear evolution', mankind had a common origin and has been evolving from the primitive to more and more advanced forms of living and thinking. History is the record of man's progress. The French philosopher August Comte (1798-1857), the British anthropologist E.B. Tylor (1832-1917), the British philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and others have distinguished several stages in the onward march of man.

However, Hegel (1770-1831) showed that human progress was not smooth and continuous. Conflicts and antagonisms were inherent in life, and progress was achieved by reconciling the polar forces. Everything man created would get objectified and alienated from his self and would oppose him. When a particular type of social life was created, it would become inadequate and an obstacle to further progress. It (the 'thesis') would then be opposed by another society (the 'anti-thesis') and out of this conflict would emerge a higher society (the 'synthesis'). Thus each phase of the historical process could be said to contain the seeds of its own destruction and to 'negate' itself. This 'dialectical' progression of history, Hegel believed, was a process of God's self-realization. Karl Marx (1818-83) accepted this theory of Hegel but replaced the notions of God and spirit with those of

nature and matter. An important point to be noted in this view is that destruction of an earlier form of social life is necessary to create a new form.

Lastly, we come to the theory of 'cyclical history' which conceives history on the pattern of human life, as passing through the stages of birth, youth, maturity, senescence, death. This theory was first developed by the German philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) who believed that Western civilization had already reached the stage of senescence. He held that, as in the case of individual life, rejuvenation of a culture was impossible. On the other hand, the British historian Arnold Toynbee has developed a more complex cyclic theory which conceives civilization (he recognizes 21 surviving ones) as undergoing rejuvenation through continual processes of challenge and response, and also through encounter with other civilizations. The Russian-born Harvard sociologist Pitirim Sorokin propounded another type of cyclic theory. According to him civilizations do not decay; 'instead, after their emergence they continue for an indefinite period, shifting from one dominant cultural system to another, from the ideational to the idealistic or the sensate and then in turn to a different ideational, sensate or idealistic type.'⁴ This theory speaks, not of rejuvenation, but of 'reconstruction' which means making a culture shift its centre from sensate or material values to spiritual values.

What cultural rejuvenation means

Culture is an extremely complex phenomenon, and all the above mentioned theories may be partially true inasmuch as they explain some aspects of it. It may

4. Pitirim Sorokin, *Reconstruction of Humanity* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1958) p. 96

be useful to take into consideration all of them in understanding the stupendous process of revitalizing India. The Hegelian-Marxian theory may be useful in understanding the economic forces operating in the country but its premise that destruction of older culture is necessary for the construction of a new culture should be rejected. Toynbee's theory of rejuvenation through the mutual encounter of cultures seems to be true. Contact with Western cultures provided the fillip for the socio-political awakening that swept through Asia and Africa at the beginning of this century. Similarly, the diffusion of Indian culture is taking place in the West and has already given rise to a spiritual awakening there. However, Spengler believed that, like an old man, an old culture too cannot be rejuvenated. Is this Spenglerian thesis true?

Here comes the practical significance of the experience of the sages of Vedic India. They discovered that the real self known as the Atman is immutable and immortal and, as the outer body gets old and dies, the Atman assumes a new body, just as a person discards old clothes and puts on new ones.⁵ This is true also of the society and the nation as a whole. The soul of the nation remains the same but its outer form goes on changing. This idea is embodied in the concepts of *śruti* and *smṛti*: the eternal revealed truths (*śruti*) remain unchanged, whereas their practical application through laws and customs (*smṛti*) goes on changing from age to age.

Why does the society change? Because the means of production change. Mankind has been continually evolving newer methods of producing more food, clothing and luxury goods, new modes of travel and communication and, of course, new techniques of killing fellow-humans. As a

result, human relationships, attitudes and social institutions have been constantly undergoing change all through history. This explanation we owe to Karl Marx, and it is difficult to deny its validity.

The eminent scholar D. D. Kosambi has, while applying this Marxian concept to Indian history, noted the unique feature of Indian culture as its continuity.⁶ What is the secret of this continuity? Kosambi is unable to explain it in terms of Marxist dialectics. Pandit Nehru asks himself this question in his attempt to 'discover' the real India:

Being an Indian I am myself influenced by this reality or myth about India, and I feel that anything that had the power to mould hundreds of generations, without a break, must have drawn its enduring vitality from some deep well of strength, and have had the capacity to renew that vitality from age to age. Was there some such well of strength? And if so, did it dry up, or did it have hidden springs to replenish it? What of today? Are there any springs still functioning from which we can refresh and strengthen ourselves?⁷

Half a century earlier, Swami Vivekananda had answered these questions. In his lecture delivered at Ramnad in south India, Swamiji pointed out:

Each nation has its own peculiarity and individuality with which it is born...and here in this blessed land, the foundation, the backbone, the life-centre is religion and religion alone...This is the very reason, the *raison d'etre*, that this nation has lived on, in spite of hundreds of years of persecution, in spite of nearly a thousand years of foreign rule and foreign oppression. This nation still lives; the *raison d'etre* is it still holds to God, to the treasure-house of religion and spirituality.⁸

6. D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971) p. 9

7. *Discovery of India*, p. 48

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol. 3, p. 148

5. Cf the famous verse in the *Gītā* 2.22

By 'religion' Swamiji meant not rituals or myths or institutions, but spirituality—the mystical experiences of sages and the laws of the spiritual world discovered by them. In every age great sages in India gave their all to the pursuit of the ultimate Truth. Through their efforts and the aspiration of millions of people great spiritual power has accumulated in this nation. This is the secret of the undying vitality of the race and the unbroken continuity of its culture.

Spirituality is the soul of the Indian nation. When the channels for the expression of this soul get blocked owing to the changes in the modes of production, social attitudes and institutions, the society decays. This happened several times in the history of India, the British occupation representing the lowest level of decline that the country ever reached. By rejuvenation of India is meant changing the social conditions, attitudes of the people, and the laws and mode of administration of the land in such a way that the soul of the nation may manifest itself through every department of national life and in the individual lives of the people.

This is what has been taking place in India after independence. In spite of poverty, crime and disorder, the signs of rejuvenation are visible all over the country. The country has already achieved self-sufficiency in food. Great advancement has been made in industry, commerce, communication, and transport. Gigantic programmes for education and research are in full swing. Laws have been enacted to do away with untouchability, dowry, communalism and other social evils. A blow to conservatism has been dealt with the Hindu Code Bill of 1955 which gives full rights of inheritance to widows and daughters. Justice and freedom of speech are ensured to every citizen. However, the most important changes are the acceptance of

democratic polity by the masses and their sense of collective responsibility regarding the unity of the nation. The recent elections have given ample proof of these. Even in the remotest villages people can be seen listening to news broadcasts over the radio or discussing the current political situation.

The fear of some people that all these changes may eventually wear away the country from its cultural heritage towards materialism is unfounded. For these changes affect only the external body of the nation while its soul continues to be inviolate and invincible. The spiritual power of the nation has already started throbbing in newly opened cultural arteries bringing new life in every department of national life.

India cannot put the clock back, but must move with the times. She must learn to change without breaking her cultural continuity. To succeed in this endeavour three conditions are to be fulfilled: she must learn the lessons of her history, she must adapt herself to the present, and she should prepare herself for the future. It is not possible to discuss these conditions in detail here, but it is necessary to identify the main issues.

Learning the lessons of the past

George Santayana's famous dictum, 'A nation that does not know its history is fated to repeat it', has nowhere been proved with such disastrous certainty as in India. One of the drawbacks of the Indian attitude towards life is the neglect of history, and the country has paid dearly for this neglect.

In an article published in a Japanese magazine, Arnold Toynbee listed four lessons that we might learn from history.⁹

9. Arnold Toynbee, 'What Modern Man Must Learn from History' in PHP (Tokyo) February, 1975 pp. 69 ff.

One is the transitoriness of power. No nation has ever held power for more than a brief period. If you read H.G. Wells's *A Short History of the World* or Pandit Nehru's *Glimpses of World History*, you can see the march of history like the movement of waves, nations rising and falling, rising and falling, now here, now there, in the different parts of the globe. Before the Second World War, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy dominated the world. Now they have all become impotent.

'Another lesson', says Toynbee, 'is that the use of force for attaining objectives is, in the long run, counter-productive.' This is in essence what Christ meant when he admonished Peter at Gethsemene, '...all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword'. No Christian nation has ever heeded his admonition. Even the two World Wars and the Vietnam war have not opened the eyes of the people, and futile wars continue to be waged even now.

The third lesson is that 'an ex-victim of ill-treatment is tempted to behave like his former persecutors, and that this is not only ethically wrong but is also eventually disastrous for the party that makes the ethical or political mistake.' Toynbee illustrates this point by citing the examples of France and Germany and present-day Israel.

Yet another lesson is that 'it is disastrous to give paramountcy to a narrower loyalty over a wider one.' The story of ancient Greece is an illustration of this point. Says Toynbee: 'The classical Greeks sacrificed their magnificent common Greek civilization to their loyalty to their respective local warring states. In consequence, the classical Greeks wrecked their civilization and eventually forfeited their political independence too. The chronic warfare between the local Greek states was ended

at last by the subjugation of all of them by the Romans.'

Let us now see how far these propositions of this eminent historian are applicable to the history of India. As regards the first lesson about the transitoriness of power, India remains an ideal for other nations to emulate. This nation never made the acquisition of power the goal of life. It never tried to rise at the expense of other nations and yet, as Swami Vivekananda has pointed out, India's destiny was to 'conquer her conqueror'. India's conquests have been cultural conquests. Said Swami Vivekananda, 'We also have been great conquerors. The story of our conquest has been described by that noble emperor of India, Asoka, as the conquest of religion and of spirituality.'¹⁰ India always held knowledge and spirituality to be superior to wealth and power. An entire caste (the Brahmin) was set apart solely for the cultivation and preservation of knowledge and spirituality without the benefit of wealth or power. That was why, in spite of its political downfall, India never lost its culture. As long as India holds on to this great tradition, it has nothing to fear. Swamiji repeatedly stressed this point in his lectures and writings: 'In religion lies the vitality of India, and so long as the Hindu race do not forget the great inheritance of their forefathers, there is no power on earth to destroy them.'¹¹

The second lesson of history, about the futility of the use of force, is enshrined in Indian Culture in the form of its belief in the power of *ahimsa*, non-violence. It is of course true that India has a great martial tradition, and its history has a long record of innumerable internal wars. But these wars affected only certain castes, and the common people lived in peace. It was by

¹⁰. *Complete Works*, (1973) Vol. 3, p. 276

¹¹. *Complete Works* (1978), Vol. 4, p. 324

awakening the dormant power of *ahimsa* that Mahatma Gandhi won freedom for India. It is most unfortunate that faith in the power of *ahimsa* has been steadily declining in India, and both the government and the people resort to reckless violence at the slightest provocation. Violence is an insult to the divinity in man and is against the spirit of Indian culture.

Toynbee's third lesson is about the retributive effects of tyranny and exploitation. In the matter of this, India's record at the international level has been clean all through her history. India never conquered or colonized another country. But, within the country, in the Indian society, some of the worst forms of exploitation and social tyranny have thrived for several centuries. The caste system has enabled India to preserve its spiritual culture and, as D.D Kosambi has pointed out, to wholly avoid the inhuman institution of slavery. But its disadvantages outweigh its advantages. It was based on the division of labour to start with and, had the original scheme been carried out to its logical conclusion, it would have perhaps resulted in the progressive elevation of the lower classes. But this never happened. What really happened was that the wealth and other goods produced by the people at the lowest strata of society passed upward the caste hierarchy leaving them only bare subsistence. Knowledge, wealth and political power accumulated in the hands of a few privileged people at the top who refused to share them with the masses. In his brilliant essay 'Modern India' and in his lectures and letters, Swami Vivekananda has analyzed the causes and consequences of this deplorable state which, according to him, was mainly responsible for the political and economic downfall of India.

It should, however, be said to the eternal credit of the poor downtrodden masses of India that, in spite of being the

victims of centuries of exploitation and suppression, they have in them no bitterness or hatred towards the upper classes. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if a person served another for twelve years, he would acquire his master's qualities. When the British left India after ruling the country for more than a century and a half, Indians did not feel hatred towards their former masters but had imbibed from them some of their undesirable qualities. These qualities still persist in the attitudes of government officials, educationists and the police.

The fourth lesson of history, which is the most important one in the Indian context, is about the danger in pursuing parochial interests at the cost of the welfare of the whole nation. This lesson Indians seem to have never learnt. It was the disunity of India that invited foreign adventurers and made possible the repeated subjugation of the country. This fact is too well known to need elaboration here. Yet even today India continues to be divided in the name of religion, language, race and local traditions, so much so that national integration has become a major problem now.

Apart from these four lessons singled out by Toynbee, there are several other lessons we have to learn from history. One of these pertains to the decay of civilizations. Several civilizations decayed and vanished. In the fourth volume of his monumental *Study of History* Toynbee enquires into the cause of this phenomenon and ascribes it to the loss of creativity. What causes the loss of creativity? Laziness, luxury, over-indulgence—this is the answer that Toynbee derives from his investigation. When a nation accumulates too much wealth and abandons itself to sense pleasure, it decays and is overrun by barbarians. This was what happened in India around the tenth century A.D.

Indications of the decadence that prevailed then may be seen in the plays of Kālidāsa, Bāṇa and other writers of the period. Had the material and spiritual wealth that had accumulated in the country then been utilized for the uplift of the downtrodden masses, India would not have fallen a prey to the Turkish hordes. The rot spread through the Mughal period and, by the time the British came, India had become dissipated, bloated, uncreative.

Poverty, if it is not extreme, is not a curse, rather it is a blessing inasmuch as it enhances the vigour of the people. The Vietnam War gave ample proof of this truth. The United States spent billions of dollars on logistics, deployment and tactics. Yet the well-fed American soldiers, who had to be air-dropped hot sausage and ice-cream even at the battlefronts and had to be entertained by an army of prostitutes, were no match for the ill-equipped, schoolboyish-looking Vietnamese soldiers who needed nothing more than simple rice for their sustenance. The American phobia of the U.S.S.R. is at least partly caused by the knowledge that the restricted Soviet economy has kept the Russians a more vigorous people. India and China, poor that they are, are bursting with tremendous vitality.

No nation should accumulate wealth beyond a certain limit but should divert the surplus wealth towards the welfare of the poor of that nation or of other nations. This is what history teaches us.

Yet another lesson that history teaches us is that no nation can survive in isolation. One of the main causes for the political downfall of India in the twelfth century A.D. was that she had ceased to communicate freely with the other countries. As a result, Indians were ignorant of the progress the Arabs had made in all fields, the military superiority of the Turkish hordes, and the intellectual awakening that

was sweeping through Europe. Caste and religious rules had become too rigid, an attitude of self-sufficiency and of contempt towards the foreigner had developed, and the whole society had got encapsulated. 'India's doom was sealed the very day they invented the word Mlechcha and stopped from communion with others', declared Swami Vivekananda.¹² In another lecture Swamiji said:

We cannot do without the world outside India; it was our foolishness that we thought we could, and we have paid the penalty by about a thousand years of slavery. That we did not get out to compare things with other nations, did not mark the workings that have been all around us, has been the one great cause of this degradation of the Indian mind. We have paid the penalty; let us do it no more.¹³

Fortunately, modern India is doing more than enough to compensate for its past mistake. The Roman statesman Cicero said, 'To be ignorant of the past is to remain a child'. The study of history is necessary to understand not only the mistakes of the past but also its achievements. Edgar Allan Poe's description of Greece and Rome—'the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome'—is equally applicable to India. Every Indian should make a deep study of his country's past at least to discover its true identity and to know what he has inherited from his forefathers. A nation which has no clear self-identity and pride in its heritage succumbs easily to the influence of alien cultures. This has happened in India. Under the British rule India lost both its identity and pride, and the nation is yet to recover them fully.

That is why the teaching of history in the right perspective is important in India. The history of India taught in schools

12. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 5, p. 52.

13. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 3, p. 272.

during the British regime was certainly defective. But the 'social science' which has now taken its place in curricula is not quite satisfactory. Being in the form of snapshots of both the past and the present, it does not give an integrated picture of the nation's past or enable the students to understand its true identity. It is also to be regretted that, whereas the British distorted the study of Indian history in one way, some of the present-day Indian scholars and government agencies have distorted it in a different way thereby causing much confusion in the minds of the youth.

Solving the present problems

However glorious the past might have been, what really matters is the present. India's survival as a cultural nation and as a nation-state depends upon how and how far she succeeds in solving her present problems. Innumerable as they are, these problems may conveniently be studied under four broad heads: national integration, economic progress, social reconstruction and international relations.

In no other country is national integration so serious and complex a problem as it is in India. It is a liability that this nation has inherited from its past. Religious, linguistic and racial diversities are threatening to break up the hard-won unity of the nation. It is impossible to eliminate the differences caused by these factors. The real problem is to find out the common ground on which a pluralistic society can stand united as one nation. Unity in diversity has always been the hallmark of Indian culture, and the only viable course is to follow this principle. But what does this unity-in-diversity mean? What is the unifying factor? The prevalent view seems to be that it is nothing but economic necessity, in accord-

ance with the maxim, 'Hang together lest you should hang (i.e. be hanged) separately'. This view is potentially dangerous inasmuch as it implies the possibility of attaining economic prosperity by forming splinter-groups.

There is only one factor which can serve as an indissoluble bond, and that is the ancient culture of the land. Culture can bring about the unity of the nation if three conditions are fulfilled. In the first place, the cultural identity of the nation is to be determined. The cultural profile of the nation is to be drawn by retaining those values which are acceptable to all the communities and by eliminating those values and symbols that are likely to cause discord.¹⁴ Secondly all communities should recognize the culture of the land as their common heritage, and should take pride in it. Muslims in Indonesia are proud of their country's past; children in Pakistan are taught that *their* forefathers who lived in Mohenjo Daro created the Indus Valley civilization. Why can't, then, all Indians learn to look upon the ancient culture of their land as their own? Thirdly, there should be continual dialogue between communities at all levels. Half the disharmony arises from insufficient understanding of one another's points of view and ways of life, and the other half from the exploitation of this ignorance by vested interests.

The second major problem facing India now is the attainment of all-round economic prosperity. The country is successfully tackling this problem, although it started late and with few advantages. It has attained self-sufficiency in food production and has become a major industrial power. It is catching up with the technological revolution that is sweeping through the developed countries and,

14. Swami Vivekananda did pioneering work in this field and his works deserve careful study.

if the increase of population is kept in check, India is bound to regain her economic power.

The real economic problem for India is not production but redistribution of wealth. This is partly caused by inadequate legislation and inadequate implementation of land reform and labour policies. It is also partly caused by the failure of planning. Planning in Western nations began only after they had attained considerable economic prosperity through industrialization which had reduced social distinctions. Planning in communist countries was attempted only after creating an egalitarian society first. But planning in India (and other developing countries) is meant to create both wealth and social equality. It has failed in achieving that latter goal. The main reason for this is the absence of a motivating philosophy of life, a powerful national ideology, capable of changing the attitudes of the people. In this regard China has a distinct edge over India and, while India should not follow the Chinese ideology, she has something to learn from the Chinese experience.

India should at least develop an authentic work ethic for all its people. The communist economy is based on the Marxian philosophy of work. The work ethic of capitalist economy is not so clearly defined but is distinct enough. Japan has its own highly successful work ethic. India too should develop its own philosophy of work based on its native culture. Such a work ethic should be capable of satisfying three needs of a worker: (1) it should motivate him to work (not escape from work as some Indian schools of thought do); (2) it should teach him how to convert even mechanical, monotonous work into a creative act; (3) it should bring him spiritual fulfilment. Above all, it should be based on such impersonal and universal principles that both the rich and the poor

can practise it and is acceptable to all communities. The Karma Yoga taught in the Gita satisfies all these conditions. All that is necessary is to adapt it to modern social conditions. Much pioneering work in this direction has already been done by Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

Political and economic changes have begun to alter the structure of Indian society. Its three pillars—caste system, village life, joint family—are crumbling. The evils of industrialization have already appeared in many places. Economic disparities are creating discontent. Education is awakening the minds of people to social injustice and new human possibilities. All this leads to the building up of tension in different sections of the society which occasionally breaks out in the form of violence, caste-feud and communal riots. However, through a massive programme of social education it is possible to bring about an all-round integration, if not homogeneity, of Indian society which it has failed to achieve all these centuries. One major difficulty in this field is the tendency of the people to follow persons, not principles. The Indian tradition of the Guru may have something to do with this tendency.

In the international field India is strengthening her defence and, on the other hand, is successfully maintaining her neutral stand. If the Non-aligned Movement has gained the credible status of a powerful alternative to Super-power rivalry, it is not a little owing to the leading role India has played in the movement. However, her attention has been mainly focused towards the west, partly out of fear—most of the invasions on her territory came from that direction—and partly out of economic necessity. Her neglect of South East Asian and Far Eastern countries—which are culturally closer to

her than all other nations—has not only deprived her of immense strategic support but also prevented her from playing a leading role in this part of the globe.

Facing the future

The rejuvenation that India is now undergoing should prepare her to face the challenges of the future. The future of India cannot be considered in isolation. There is going to be a common future for all humanity. What that future will be like is anybody's guess. Everything goes to show that the world is about to enter a new age. The changes that information explosion, space travel, computerization, electronic revolution, biotechnology (including genetic engineering, tissue culture and even the biocomputer!) might bring about in the lives and thoughts of people in the next century are truly mind boggling.

However, two things are clear. One is that the future belongs to the brainy, not the brawny. Those nations which produce the most brilliant scientists will dominate the world. If India is to successfully compete with the top nations of the world, she has to undergo nothing short of an intellectual renaissance. It is a pity that few people in India seem to be aware of the gravity of the present situation which allows half the population to remain illiterate. The present system of education is utterly inadequate even to enable the nation to cope with its present problems, let alone prepare it for the 'new age' of the future.

The second important feature of the future would be a tremendous increase in the demand for spiritual knowledge. If the increased tempo of life and technological and environmental changes are not to produce wholesale insanity, human consciousness will have to undergo a spiritual transformation. Call it mysticism,

yoga, consciousness-science or psychotechnology, spirituality is going to play a dominant role in the life of the future generation. The present migration of spiritual teachers and yogis from the East to the West may be only the beginning of a massive trend of the future. The world may need as many spiritually illumined people as there would be scientists. Swami Vivekananda made a remarkably prophetic statement to this effect towards the end of the last century.

There were times in olden days when prophets were many in every society. The time is to come when prophets will walk through every street in every city in the world. In olden times, particular, peculiar persons were, so to speak, selected by the operations of the laws of the society to become prophets. The time is coming when we shall understand that to become religious means to become a prophet, that none can become religious until he or she becomes a prophet... The schools and colleges should be training grounds for prophets.¹⁵

To the task of fulfilling the spiritual needs of the world India has to make a great contribution. Swami Vivekananda made repeated references to this as the mission of India to the world. Swamiji said:

But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious... In this land are, still, religion and spirituality the fountains which will have to overflow and flood the world to bring in new life and new vitality to the Western and other nations, which are now almost borne down, half-killed, and degraded by political ambitions and social scheming.¹⁶

It is important to note that Swami Vivekananda believed that this giving of spirituality to other nations was necessary

15. *Complete Works* (1978), Vol. 6, p. 10

16. *Complete Works*, 3; 108, 148

not only for the welfare of those nations, but also for India herself. The very process of giving activates the creative powers of a person. A person who is always at the receiving end, and has nothing to give to others, finds life meaningless; he becomes uncreative and a burden upon others. This is true of nations too. Said Swamiji:

Give and take is the law; and if India wants to raise herself once more, it is absolutely necessary that she brings out her treasures and throws them broadcast among the nations of the earth, and in return be ready to receive what others have to give her. Expansion is life, contraction is death.¹⁷

What this statement implies is this: rejuvenation of India is primarily a process of spiritual rejuvenation, and this is possible only by giving spirituality to other nations which are in need of it. When the

¹⁷. *Complete Works*, 4: 365

cultural channels are cleared and spirituality flows freely through them, the nation will regain its creative vigour and material prosperity.

To maintain the transmission of spiritual knowledge to other nations, India must replenish and build up a vast store of spiritual power. Several of the ancient *paramparās* (lines of teachers) and *sampradāyas* (traditions) have already become extinct. Whatever has survived has to be preserved and developed further. For this we need competent persons. Spirituality is not an intellectual or emotional exercise. It is the unveiling and focussing of the light of the inner Spirit. It can be attained only by those who are endowed with renunciation, purity, selflessness, devotion, courage and grit. It is by producing such persons that India can rejuvenate herself and fulfil her historical purpose.

THE MESSAGE OF RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA: THE PANACEA FOR ALL THE ILLS OF TODAY*

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

The subject of today's lecture is, how we can remedy the evils of the present-day world by following the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. It is very difficult to establish a proposition that the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda will set right all these evils. Ills are of various kinds: we feel some of them directly, while others affect us indirectly. These may be divided into two groups: those which affect us

individually and those which affect us in our collective life. The problems which affect us individually are inadequate food, clothing, shelter, literacy and finance. We also need a source of cultural development. Then we need the satisfaction of the emotional and spiritual aspects of our personality. Every human being tries to overcome these shortcomings through individual struggle in his own way with his limited resources. Collective ill is those which affect our life as members of the society. They include a wide range of problems involving the laws of the land, the people of the land, the people around

* Lecture delivered by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 2 September 1984 at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore.

us, the countries that are just beyond our borders and so on.

To be successful in life, a man must make a perfect adjustment within and without, by bringing about some changes within himself as well as outside. The question is how these changes are to be brought about. Man needs not only the primary requirements of food, clothing and shelter, but also security. He expects his neighbours to be sympathetic to him, to help him in times of need. Otherwise he will suffer. We shall see how the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda can help us in this regard. We shall view the problem very dispassionately.

Sri Ramakrishna taught in a language intelligible to all people. Even an absolutely illiterate man could understand his teachings. But the deeper meanings of his teachings generally elude us. Swami Vivekananda interpreted these plain teachings in a way meant to draw out all those deeper meanings. With Swamiji's interpretation, we get a different picture of Sri Ramakrishna altogether. Once Swamiji mentioned that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna were very pithy and pregnant with meaning and that many books of philosophy could be written on a single piece of his teaching. To illustrate this point, Swamiji took one teaching of Sri Ramakrishna and explained the idea to a brother-monk for seven days continually. The brother-monk then realized how profound and significant the Master's teachings were.

So a teaching may be simple in the surface but it requires a genius to understand its deeper implications. Hence the ideal that Sri Ramakrishna represents does not correspond fully with what we mean by it because we can think of that ideal only according to our capacity and level of understanding. But when we see how his teachings were interpreted by Swamiji, we wonder why we never thought there was

so much meaning in every one of them. Swami Vivekananda once remarked that whatever he had spoken came from Sri Ramakrishna and, if he had mentioned anything that proved harmful to any one, then the responsibility was his own, since he had failed to interpret the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna properly. So guardedly did even Swami Vivekananda, the great genius, speak of Sri Ramakrishna. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna may look simple on the surface and escape our understanding when we hear them casually, but they are very profound and full of meaning which we fail to grasp. Only great concentration and pondering over its significance will reveal its true meaning. We need Swami Vivekananda's help in interpreting Sri Ramakrishna. That is why we bracket Ramakrishna and Vivekananda together when we try to understand their teachings. It is often found that later generations dilute a saint's teachings and read different meanings into it so much so that their interpretations may sometimes even run contradictory to the saint's teachings. To guard against any such misunderstanding that may creep in the near future into Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, we should always treat the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as an integral one.

Now, coming back to the original topic, some ills are universal: they encompass every country and every individual. Previously we were concerned only with our own State and Country, but now we have to consider the whole world: so small has the world become owing to technological advancement. In the present context, let us see what the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda can do for the betterment of the world.

Each individual is a unit of life and the society is composed of such units. So the evils affect everyone else as much as it

does myself. What is the main trouble that we are suffering from? What is the root cause of all our problems? To speak very briefly, it is our selfishness. Each man thinks only of himself and is indifferent to the sufferings of others. If the individual is all right, the whole world will be all right. We need not worry about the other evils that are spread everywhere because their ultimate source is our own self. It is our egoism, our own limited vision that sees the world with all its good and evil. If our vision is absolutely pure, then there will be no discord, no difference, no evil or ugliness anywhere. That is what all the great saints of the world have taught. We see with evil eyes, so evil comes before us more and more. How is this to be changed? Jesus says in the Bible, 'You see only the speck of dirt in your brother's eyes, but ignore the beam in your own eyes. Remove the beam from your eyes first and then you will have clear vision and you will be able to help others.'¹ We do not try to free ourselves from the evil perspective projected by our deluded eyes. So we are incompetent to help others. The main thrust of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings is: improve yourself first. How is this to be done? Swamiji explains: 'Free yourselves from selfishness. Selfishness is the root of all evils, individual as well collective'. If we free ourselves from this defect, the world will be set right immediately. But we fail to understand this, and hasten to help others without improving ourselves.

What is our true Self that the scriptures speak of? Our true Self is not the body. We generally identify ourselves with the body and therefore become subject to all the ills that go with the body. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says: 'If one knows one's own self not as it appears but as it really is, then, out of what desire, for

what reason will one suffer with the suffering of the body?'² The body cannot be free from the inherent defects that go with it. It has inevitably to pass through the stages of birth, existence, growth, transformation, decay and death.³ We think we are the body and identify ourselves with all the changes that take place with it. And this identification with the body is the cause of our selfishness and the source of all evils. We have to understand this clearly.

You may say this is very philosophical and not practical. In India it would appear as if boys and girls were born with philosophical ideas. The story goes that in Navadvip, the famous seat of logic, even birds talk logic. India is a land of philosophy. But when it comes to the application of philosophy in practical life, we miserably fail. The teachings of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda will not have any value unless we have applied them in our practical life. We talk of the One all-encompassing Reality, but in our behaviour see difference between man and man. This is because of the selfishness that we have inherited. Selfishness means to look upon oneself as a unit to the neglect of the other units of life that are around us. The great saints always remind us of the oneness of the whole universe. If we practise their teachings, the whole world will automatically change for us. India's glorious heritage has been these teachings and they should not simply remain in books.

Swami Vivekananda says that we are

2. आत्मानं चेद्विजानीयादयमस्मीति पूरुषः ।

किमिच्छन् कस्य कामाय शरीरमनुसंज्वरेत् ॥

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.12

3. जायते, अस्ति, वर्धते, विपरिणमते, अपक्षीयते,
विनश्यति

1. cf Matthew 7:3

Yāska, *Nirukta*

all the descendants of ṛṣis. But we are not even a little liberal, even a little free from selfishness. We are not able to look at our neighbour with sympathy, but we talk of the One Spirit pervading everything, *eko devaḥ sarva bhūteṣu gūḍhaḥ*.⁴ We suppress other people and rise at their cost. We want to have more privilege than the others. We want better opportunity to enjoy name and fame. Now, this selfishness is at the root of all the evils we find in the world. It is better to understand these evils philosophically than to remain confused by their outer forms. If we try to rectify them at their source, it will be easier to challenge them and ultimately gain supremacy over them. So what is necessary now is the conquest of the mind and, through that, conquest of the whole world. Free yourselves from base selfishness and you will become a saint. The Indian ideal is that. But we Indians only talk of higher things but never practise them in life.

Sri Ramakrishna always lived in the highest spiritual plane, yet when he came down to ordinary human level, he used to pray to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, do not make me indifferent to the sufferings of the world. I do not want Samadhi. I want to be of service to the whole world.' Sri Ramakrishna knew nothing but God and boasted no education, but his mere knowledge of God was enough to make him sympathize with and love the whole world. He did not distinguish between man and man. Vivekananda made a great mark in the world, not because he was a lecturer of a high order, not because he was a brilliant speaker or a scholar well versed in the scriptures, but because of his love for humanity. This love for mankind was taught to him by Sri Ramakrishna. Once

when Sri Ramakrishna asked Swamiji about the aim of his life, Swamiji replied, 'I want to remain immersed in Samadhi, coming down from that plane occasionally only to take a morsel of food and then again merge in that state.' At this Sri Ramakrishna chided him saying, 'I thought you were a much bigger personality. I thought you would be like a great banyan tree which spreads its branches all around under which many weary souls would come and take rest. Instead of that, you are eager for your own happiness.' Even if it be spiritual happiness, Sri Ramakrishna did not want Swamiji to enjoy it all by himself. He wanted Swamiji to live for others. A great and skilled artist that he was, he moulded Swamiji after his own great ideal. And Swamiji acknowledged his debt to Sri Ramakrishna. He said, 'I am what my Guru has made me.'

Unselfishness is the ideal that Ramakrishna-Vivekananda hold before us as the only means to free the world from the evils of today. All the evils of humanity arise from selfishness. We want to rise above others and be a superior person. We want to have more power over others. We want to enjoy the world more than others. We want to retain our individuality as a single unit. The Upaniṣad declares: 'Man is but a fraction of a hundredth part of a hundredth part of the tip of a hair. But he has also the potential to become infinite.'⁵ The small bit is capable of becoming infinite. Our smallness is due to identification with the limited body. Once we understand our true essence, we become boundless, infinite. This is the core of the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. We shall see how this teaching can be applied in the practical every-day life.

4. एको देवः सर्वभूतेषु गूढः ।

Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad 6.11

5. बालाग्रशतभागस्य शतधा कल्पितस्य च ।

भागो जीवः स विज्ञेयः स चानन्त्याय कल्पते ॥

Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad 5.9

We have shrunk ourselves into a small shell. The shell has to be burst, or it has to be dissolved. The bubble has to be merged with the ocean. As the *Kāthopaniṣad* puts it: 'Just as a drop of water falling into an ocean of pure water becomes one with the ocean losing its individuality, so also the human soul, after getting rid of limitations caused by body consciousness etc., becomes one with the infinite self.'⁶

This teaching has to be practised in our life. We have tried other methods and have not succeeded. Let us now try this method of forgetting the notion of our individual limitation by identifying ourselves with the whole world. This, in a nutshell, is the panacea for all evils. Wherever you find evil, know it for certain that it is caused by one single factor—selfishness. And selfishness is caused by identification—identification with either one's own body or with a group, a particular caste, community or nation. All these limitations deny the One Reality. They negate the highest Truth. Our scriptures teach us to get rid of this smallness. Let us be identified with the whole universe.

People say they are backward, they are undeveloped, they are developed, they are small, they are powerful, they are weak etc. All these notions stem from the idea that they are the bodies. If they can get rid of this idea, the whole universe will be transfigured. All the evils will then cease to appear.

You may say it is not practical in the sense that we cannot attain to it immediately. But we have to proceed step by step toward the ideal. If we gradually change our outlook taking the highest ideal as our goal, it will be possible to get rid of all limitations and differences in a methodical

manner. Without this ideal, there is no hope for a better world.

If we spread this ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, people will slowly understand the beauty of it, its efficacy and potency, and will get gradually transformed in course of time. This is a slow but sure process of emancipating the world. Sri Ramakrishna ingrained this teaching in Swamiji who preached it to the whole world. Gradually we will have to purify our vision and see God residing in all souls. The whole world will be transfigured. Not that there will then be no differences, or that every thing will vanish, but these differences will not confuse us. They will not make us limited or forgetful of the needs of others. We will feel oneness with all, and spontaneously help others. As we try to remove evil from us, so we will help to remove evil from others too. We will be happy with ourselves as well as with others.

Says Śrī Kṛṣṇa: 'He is the supreme yogi who sees the joys and sorrows of others as he does with regard to himself.'⁷ He will forgo his own happiness to make others happy and share the unhappiness of others in difficult situations. We should cultivate wide sympathy, and follow the ideal of live and let live. Not only that; we should be prepared to die so that others may live. We must sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others. Sri Ramakrishna sacrificed his beloved disciple for the sake of the world, and we see how much benefit the world has gained in a short span of forty years through the untiring service of Swamiji. Swamiji did not believe in piecemeal reforms. He desired a root-and-branch transformation of the whole world, the spiritual conquest of the whole

6. यथोदकं शुद्धे शुद्धमासिक्तं तादृगेव भवति ।

एवं मुनेर्विजानत आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥

Katha Upaniṣad 2.1.15

7. आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति योऽर्जुन ।

Bhagavad-Gītā 6.32

world. Conquest does not mean anything in the material sense but it means the conquest of our own narrowness. You will find that this is the quintessence of the whole of Swamiji's teachings, all other teachings being merely elaboration of this one idea—to make every man realize his true Self, that he is the eternal Atman, the immortal soul free from all limitations.

Sri Ramakrishna has said that a hungry man cannot think of God. It is ridiculous to preach spiritual ideas to a hungry man; you must give him food first. Similarly an ignorant man needs education. Every one should be helped, according to his need, to manifest his own real Self by getting rid of all limitations. But all these forms of help should have the ultimate aim of God-realization in view. Swamiji said, 'When a man is hungry, know that God is waiting in that form to be served with food. When a man is ignorant, God is waiting there to be served with knowledge. When a man is devoid of education, God is waiting

to be worshipped with education. Whatever is lacking in any man, God is waiting in that form to be worshipped with that proper requirement.'

We are trying to remove the differences between nations through organizations like the U.N. But they don't serve the purpose fully because we do not approach the problems in a spirit of dedication and helpfulness which is necessary to solve them. Any piecemeal solution will only shift the problem to another plane. It is like the legendary Mahiṣāsura who took different forms when his forms were being destroyed one by one. In a similar way, evil also takes different forms. This evil will be eliminated only if all of us together get rid of our selfishness. Let us hope that through the grace of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda we will all be gradually enlightened and will be able to adopt this ideal in our lives. May we all realize our oneness with the whole universe. May that blessed day soon come to all of us!

THE PLACING OF MANTRA

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

Mantra-Nyāsa or placing of a Mantra is an important part of ritualistic worship in Hinduism. Special short formulas or 'seed' words (Bīja-Mantras) are repeated and 'placed' at different areas of the body by a movement of the fingers or palm. This is Nyāsa. The idea behind it is that the particular places by this touch become mystically enlivened. 'Worship of the Divine is to be performed by first becoming divine' is a well known maxim.¹ As a first

step in this divinization process, the worshipper tries to purify his body and infuse spiritual power into his limbs at the beginning of Pūjā through *kara-nyāsa* (Nyāsa on the fingers), *aṅga-nyāsa* (Nyāsa on the body) and *vyāpaka-nyāsa* (extensive Nyāsa). The general practices followed for this are comparatively easy. But in Tantrika worship complicated Nyāsas are prescribed. This placing of Bīja-Mantras varies in procedure according to the particular deity worshipped. One has to learn these mantras and methods from Pūjā books. In the practice of Nyāsa, much imagination and concentration are called for.

1. The original statement of this principle in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.1.2-7) is:

देवो भूत्वा देवानप्येति

It appears in modified forms in the Tantras.

Apart from ritualistic worship, some

people practice Nyāsa to bring about harmony in the body and mind. The effect of Nyāsa here is similar to that of Prāṇāyāma. There is a verse: 'A person who daily practises Nyāsa in accordance with the rules of Āgama (Tantras) imbibes divine nature and attains the perfection of Mantra-Japa.'²

Practices like Prāṇāyāma, Nyāsa, etc. belong to the domain of Vaidhī Bhakti, that is, devotion governed by religious regulations. When a deep love for God springs in the heart, these ritualistic practices cease to be important. Bhakti has then reached the level of Rāga-Bhakti (passionate attachment to the Divine). In one of his devotional hymns Saṅkarācārya says:

I do not know charity or Dhyāna Yoga. I am ignorant of Tantra, hymns or Mantras. Neither am I familiar with Pūjā and Nyāsa-Yoga. O Mother Bhavāni, Thou art my only refuge.³

However, the idea of Nyāsa or placing of the Mantra can be used in our contemplation in various ways. Followers of Bhakti and Jñāna Yoga can both practise this spiritual application of Nyāsa and thereby gain deeper and subtler levels of experience. An aspirant who has received an *iṣṭa-mantra* from a qualified Guru should strengthen the faith that the holy name of God is one with God. Spiritual Reality is condensed in the Mantra. The Mantra is śabda-Brahman, declares our scriptures. When the Mantra is practised with great

intensity of love and faith, it becomes awakened and opens up amazing vistas of Vedantic knowledge.

Mantra-Nyāsa in the heart and on Iṣṭa-mūrti

Sri Ramakrishna has pointed out the heart as an excellent place for meditation. In the yoga scriptures, we read about six centres in the body. The centre in the heart is called *anāhata cakra*. One has to visualize a beautiful full-bloomed lotus in the region of the heart. This is to be the seat of the Iṣṭa, one's Chosen Deity. While doing Japa the aspirant should first think that the Mantra is purifying the seat of the Iṣṭa and making it radiant. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* it is stated that the student should seek and ask about the inner Ākāśa (space): 'Now in this abode of Brahman (body) there is a place in the shape of a small lotus; within it is a small inner Ākāśa. What is inside that has to be sought, that indeed, one should desire to comprehend.'⁴

The next Nyāsa is on the Iṣṭa-mūrti (image of the Chosen Deity) in the lotus of the heart. Visualizing the form of the Iṣṭa shining in the light of consciousness and simultaneously directing the Mantra toward the Iṣṭa—these twin mental activities should gradually merge into one. The sound of the Mantra then becomes one with the form of the Iṣṭa. Both are the Eternal Consciousness—Paramātman. Hearing the Mantra and seeing the Iṣṭa are unified in consciousness. The state of mind in which these two different experiences become one is called *prajñā* or pure comprehension. Says the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*:

2. आगमोक्तेन विधिना नित्यं न्यासं करोति यः ।

देवताभावमाप्नोति मन्त्रसिद्धिः प्रजायते ॥

3. न जानामि दानं न च ध्यानयोगं

न जानामि तन्त्रं न च स्तोत्रमन्त्रम् ।

न जानामि पूजां न च न्यासयोगं

गतिस्त्वं गतिस्त्वं त्वमेका भवानि ॥

Bhavānyastakam

4. अथ यदिदमस्मिन् ब्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकं वेश्म
दहरोऽस्मिन् अन्तराकाशस्तस्मिन् यदन्तस्तदन्वेष्टव्यं
तद् वाव विजिज्ञासितव्यमिति ॥

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.1.1

‘This has to be attained by Prajñā.’⁵
‘Through one-pointed and subtle understanding, It (Paramātman) can be seen by deep-sighted Sages.’⁶

As the practice of Mantra progresses, the Iṣṭa transcends form and merges into the formless, the Sat-Cit-Ānanda; the Iṣṭa-Mantra too leaps from sound to the Soundless, the Śabda Brahman. The *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* in its exposition of *praṇava* (the supreme sound Om) speaks of its four *mātrās*, or parts. A, U and M—are *vyakta* or expressible. The fourth part is *avyakta* or inexpressible, it is specified as *amātrā*. What is true of Om applies also to the other Iṣṭa Mantras. The Iṣṭa Mantra placed on the Iṣṭa during contemplation leads first to the vivid living presence of the Deity and finally merges into the soundless Brahman.

The spiritual aspirant sometimes practises contemplation with eyes open. In that case the external altar containing the Iṣṭa Mūrti (image or picture) becomes the sādhanā’s heart. The Mantra repeated in the mind should be directed to the external image of the Deity which thereby becomes ‘enlivened’ with consciousness. In the course of sādhanā the aspirant will feel that there is no difference between Iṣṭa Mūrti and the sound of the mantra, that the sound of the Mantra itself is seated on the altar as Iṣṭa Mūrti.

Mantra-Nyāsa on prāṇa

According to Vedantic scriptures, Prāṇa or the life-force, divided into five components, is responsible for all the biological

functions in our body. Respiration, circulation, digestion, nerve currents, the various movements of our limbs, the activities in the brain, all of these functions are animated by Prāṇa-śakti (power). Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā*: ‘Abiding in the body of living beings as (the fire) Vaiśvānara, I, associated with Prāṇa and Apāna, digest the fourfold food.’⁷

Superior to Prāṇa is Caitanya (consciousness). The Supreme Self is indeed Pure Consciousness. All the power of Prāṇa really comes from Ātman. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* we read: ‘Those who have known the Vital Force of the vital force, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear, and the Mind of the mind, have realized the ancient, primordial Brahman.’⁸

In the stage of ignorance we do not know that the Prāṇic functions are under the rule of Consciousness. If Mantra Nyāsa is practised on the Prāṇas, their biological nature becomes slowly purified. The Jaiva (relating to Jīva) Prāṇa gets transformed into Divya (Divine) Prāṇa.

The mind has to be directed towards breathing, heartbeat, circulation, etc. while Japa is being done. Gradually, the meditator will feel that the movements of Prāṇa are really vibrations of the Mantra. What was before a biological pulsation is experienced now as a pulsation of Mantra-Caitanya. Japa has, as it were, spread all over the activities of the Prāṇas. The sādhanā is not doing Japa only by the throat or tongue or mind, but, wherever

5. प्रज्ञानेनैवमाप्नुयात् ।

Katha Upaniṣad 1.2.24

6. दृश्यते त्वग्रचया बुद्ध्या
सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः ।

Katha Upaniṣad 1.3.12

7. अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः ।
प्राणापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यन्नं चतुर्विधम् ॥

Bhagavad Gītā 15.14

8. प्राणस्य प्राणमुत चक्षुषश्चक्षुरुत
श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो ये मनो विदुः ।
ते निचिक्युर्ब्रह्म पुराणमग्रचम् ॥

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.18

there is any Prāṇic impulse, there Japa is being carried on spontaneously. The Prāṇa, thus 'purified' by Mantra Nyāsa, gradually leads to higher experiences of consciousness.

Mantra-Nyāsa on the body and the organs

'The Self-existent Creator made the senses turn outward. Accordingly human beings look toward what is without and see not the inner Self.'⁹

If Mantra-Nyāsa is practised on the functions of the senses their outgoing tendencies will be arrested considerably. When the eyes bring the notion of any visual form, let that notion be connected with Mantra-Śakti. Then the visual knowledge will be transformed into a piece of Divine Knowledge. If the Iṣṭa Mantra be directed to a sound impression received through the ears, it will cease to distract the mind. The vision of the eyes and the hearing of the ears will glow with the light of consciousness. In a similar way other sense experiences can be spiritually transformed. This pervasion and deepening of Mantra-Japa brings an unearthly peace in the heart.

Body-consciousness is a terrible obstruction in our spiritual life. This can be lightened by Mantra-Nyāsa. Instead of constantly bringing the 'I' idea with the gross body, let the Mantra be 'placed' all over the body. The biological body will then be felt as a spiritual entity. Saṅg Rāmprasād, the Śākta saint: 'The Name of Mother Kali as a Kalpa-Taru (heavenly

wish-fulfilling tree) I have planted in my heart. I have sold away this body in the market place of the world and bought in exchange, the name of Mother Durga.'¹⁰ Here 'sell away the body' means to be free from body-consciousness. The holy name of the Divine Mother has now taken its place.

Mantra-Nyāsa on Mental Waves

We cannot meditate deeply on the Iṣṭa because of the incessant wanderings of the mind. In books on Yoga various methods have been prescribed for concentration. Mantra Nyāsa also is an excellent way. If the *citta vṛttis* (mental waves) can participate in our Mantra-Japa, if we can establish with them a spiritual friendship, then they will no longer behave as enemies. 'The uncontrolled mind behaves as a foe to oneself' says the Gita.¹¹ If the holy Mantra is directed to a *citta-vṛtti*, it becomes illumined with the Light of Consciousness and becomes a spiritual companion.

Swami Vivekananda has in his 'Hymn to Shiva' presented two forms of Lord Śiva. Impressions gathered through many past lives are blowing furiously like a violent tempest. Like turbulent waves they are crushing even the strongest. There is no respite from the duality of 'I' and 'Thou' (subject and object). This state of the *citta* is Śiva's *atī-vikalita-rūpa* (incessantly changing form). On the other hand, when the *vṛttis* are purified, when the light of consciousness shines through them, when the mind is no more deluded by the ideas of cause and effect and the storm of distractions stops—when there is no sense of within or without, that state of the mind is Śiva's *nirodha-mūrti* (perfect equanimity

9. पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भू-
स्तस्मात् पराङ्पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्ष-
दावृत्तचक्षुरमृतस्वमिच्छन् ।

Katha Upaniṣad 2.1.1

¹⁰. A famous Bengali song which begins with *Kālīnāmo kalpataru*

¹¹. *Bhagavad Gītā 6.6*

pose). Swamiji is saluting both of these forms of Śiva in the hymn.¹²

Mantra-Nyāsa on the world at large

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* describes the relative world as *brahmacakra* (the wheel of Brahman): 'In this wheel of Brahman Haṁsa (the Jīva) is revolving endlessly.'¹³ This Brahmachakra is in truth Brahman itself, but because of Avidyā (the basic ignorance of reality) the Jīva does not know that. He sees the one as multifarious—the universe as a series of changes—and becomes overwhelmed by

12. वहति विपुलवातः पूर्वसंस्काररूपः
 प्रमथति बलवृन्दं घूर्णितेवोर्मिमाला ।
 प्रचलति खलु युग्मं युष्मदस्मत् प्रतीतं
 अतिविकलितरूपं नौमि चित्तं शिवस्थम् ॥
 जनकजनितभावो वृत्तयः संस्कृताश्च
 अगणनबहुरूपो यत्र एको यथार्थः ।
 शमितविकृतिवाते यत्र नान्तर्बहिश्च
 तमहह हरमीडे चित्तवृत्तेनिरोधम् ॥
 Swami Vivekananda, *Śiva-stotram* 3,4.

13. अस्मिन् हंसो भ्राम्यते ब्रह्मचक्रे ।
Śvetasvatara Upaniṣad 1.6

the dualities of pleasure and pain, hope and frustration, life and death. If he could understand the Brahmachakra as Brahman and feel the presence of the immutable Divine in the manifold world, his confusion and rotation in the wheel would end and he would attain Supreme Peace.

Just as by Mantra-Nyāsa we can spiritualize our body, Prāṇa, senses and mental functions by raising them from their material level to that of the Spirit, in a similar way, it is possible to bring the harmony of the Spirit in the diverse segments of the world of our experience.

Let the Mantra be 'placed' on the vast sky, on the ocean, rivers, forests, mountains, trees and plants and meadows. Let the Mantra be fixed on human beings, animals, birds, on any segment of the universe that comes to our experience. The Mantra—Śabda-Brahman—will transform that material segment into spiritual radiance.

Thus, knowing the holy name of God as God Himself, we can apply the power of the Mantra inside and outside of us and bring everything to a sublime unity of Sat-Cit-Ānanda. So long as the Iṣṭa-Mantra is with us, God will be with us ; wherever the Iṣṭa-Mantra is placed, the Divine is revealed there.

Man begins to struggle and fight against nature. He makes many mistakes, he suffers. But eventually, he conquers nature and realizes his freedom. When he is free, nature becomes his slave.

—Swami Vivekananda

THE HOLY MOTHER IDEAL*

SWAMI HIRANMAYANANDA

The subject of our discussion 'Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the ideal of Indian womanhood and of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement', implies that she is the ideal of Indian womanhood and also the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. If that is what it means, then it becomes a little confusing because she is not the only ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. So, I take it to mean that she is the ideal of Indian womanhood, and her relationship with the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement supplies great inspiration and correct direction to it. On the basis of this view, I shall try to show how the Holy Mother's life and teachings fulfil these two parts of the subject.

But the real difficulty about understanding the life of spiritual persons is that their lives which we see or read about are just a minute portion of their life in its totality. What we see as the activity of these holy persons is what they put forth before our limited understanding. Though we may see occasional flashes of their supernatural depth of being, most of their conduct and behaviour resemble those of human beings at their best.

Western psychology tries to understand man by studying his behaviour. But in that way only a small portion of the lives of great people can be studied. Only through the development of the supersensuous dimension of our mind can we to some extent comprehend the totality of their lives. So, whether it is the life of Ramakrishna or of the Holy Mother or of Swami Vivekananda, the best way to study

it is to study it by developing spirituality in us. The mere worldly achievement of a person is not the true criterion to judge that person in the spiritual field. We may build great institutions, raise great buildings or start great activities, but these alone do not make us great in the spiritual field. The Holy Mother spent her childhood and adolescence at Jayrambati; after her marriage she visited Kamarpukur several times; then she came to Dakshineswar to be with her husband; and finally she went to Cossipore to attend on her husband during his last days—in all these situations we find several facets of her character which are extraordinary. But we cannot comprehend her greatness in its totality by studying her personality during those early days. After the passing away of the Master, she came to occupy a position which was much higher than that she had occupied before. It was during this period that she revealed the universal dimension of her motherhood, her luminous power as a spiritual teacher, and her role in the mission of the Avatar. But even by studying these aspects of her life we cannot fully comprehend her true nature which transcended all these.

Then again, our vision is time-bound. In the case of ordinary men, most of their achievements die out or dwindle away after their death. But in the case of these spiritual persons you find their significance growing more and more with the passage of time. But will their achievements, their mission on earth, finally come to an end someday? From the historical point of view, progress is never a linear process. Progress is like the sine curve of mathematics: it moves like waves, with crests and hollows. So, in the case of the Holy

* Speech delivered on 5 May, 1984 on the occasion of Holy Mother's birthday celebration in Bombay.

Mother also, whatever she has contributed will go on augmenting and spreading for several hundred years until its work is done. Then there may rise another spiritual wave, produced by another spiritual person, which is more in accord with the new age.

Swami Vivekananda has said that on account of changing circumstances great souls come down to the earth at different periods in history, each standing on the crest of the wave of progress generated by him. Kṛṣṇas, Buddhas and Caitanyas come, and through them the spiritual progress of humanity goes on. These great men have been characterized in the Gītā as Avatars. At the present moment in our country and elsewhere we have a plethora of religious leaders who claim themselves to be Avatars. But look at them in the historical perspective. The advent of a true Avatar is a historical phenomenon, and heralds the birth of a new movement or global mission. Those that come with a sense of mission for the welfare of the whole world are the real Avatars. As it is stated in the Gītā, they come for the establishment of *dharma* or welfare of the world: 'Whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I embody myself for the establishment of *dharma*'. This has happened in Indian history time and again.

Of course, it is true that in the histories of other countries and religious traditions this phenomenon is not taken into consideration. As Pitirim Sorokin, the great sociologist, says, there are two types of culture. One is the sensate type and the other is the ideational type. The sensate type is based on materialistic values and holds sense enjoyment as the goal. Sense enjoyment exhausts vital energy, and so sensate cultures gradually become decadent. This is the state of modern western culture. It is a decadent culture which, as Swami Vivekananda has said, is going to perish, unless

it is rejuvenated by an infusion of spiritual power from an ideational culture like that of India. It is only an ideational culture that can rejuvenate itself periodically. This rejuvenation of spiritual vigour of human culture takes place through the rise of an Avatar. We believe this rejuvenation is the chief purpose and significance of the Avatarhood of Sri Ramakrishna.

So far so good. But what about the advent of the Holy Mother? Why put a woman, a common-looking, rustic, nearly illiterate, woman on the same pedestal as that of Sri Ramakrishna? Remember that it is said that an Avatar or a spiritual man himself practises the ideals which he teaches others: *āpani ācari dharma, jibere śikhāy*. This we find is true of Sri Ramakrishna, Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya, Christ and Buddha: they taught what they practised. But what they practised was accomplished in a male body. What about the other half of the population of the world? How can the ideas and ideals which the Avatar brings with him be practised in a woman's body? Who is to show that? Evidently, a woman-exemplar is also needed. That is why with every Avatar there comes a great woman as his partner in life. With Rāma came Sītā, with Kṛṣṇa came Rādhikā, with Buddha came Yaśodharā, with Caitanya came Viṣṇupriyā. They came and placed themselves before women as ideals. How the Avatar's Dharma gets fulfilled in the lives of women can be shown only by a divine Woman. This is true of the Incarnation of Sri Ramakrishna. That is why the Holy Mother was needed and she was born.

Now it has been said that the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is the ideal of Indian womanhood. In order to understand the meaning of this statement it is necessary to study the evolution of the feminine ideal in India. Even in the *Rg-Veda*, believed to have been composed five

thousand years ago, God is often described as the great all-pervading Mother, Aditi. Most of the Vedic hymns speak of the spiritual realization of men. But in the tenth maṇḍala of the *R̥g-Veda Samhitā*—may it be said to the eternal glory of Indian womanhood—is recorded one of the most spiritual and sublime hymns voiced by a woman-seer. In that hymn a woman-saint named Vāk, the daughter of the sage Ambhr̥ṇ, declares: 'It is I who move about as Rudra, Vasus, as Āditya and Viśvadevas.'¹ Rudra with his bow and arrow is the terrible aspect of Śiva as the destroyer of the world. And 'It is I who string the bow of Rudra',² says that great woman-seer. That was the Vedic woman's ideal. It was voiced forth 5000 years ago. When we come down to the Upaniṣadic age, we find another great ideal of womanhood—the *brahmavādinīs*, women who sought and spoke of Brahman. The sage Yājñavalkya wanted to become a Sannyasin. In those days, after living a householder's life, people used to take Sannyasa. Before renouncing the world Yājñavalkya wanted to divide his property between his two wives. One of them, Maitreyi, was a deeply spiritual woman. He told her that he wanted to give her share to her. Maitreyi looked at him and asked, 'Sir, if the whole earth full of wealth be mine, shall I be immortal through that?' In no other scripture in the world do we find a woman asking this question. The sage replied: 'No, Maitreyi, there is no scope of attaining immortality through wealth.'³ Then she said: 'What shall I

do with that which will not make me immortal?'⁴ Then Yājñavalkya instructed her in Brahmajñāna. There were many other great women in the Upaniṣadic period: Gārgī, for instance, who challenged Yājñavalkya in a debate over the nature of the absolute Reality.

Then we come down to the period of the epics. In *Rāmāyaṇa* we find the character of Sītā about whom Swami Vivekananda has said that we are proud to be the sons and daughters of Sītā. 'Sita purer than purity itself, all patience, all suffering...the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she is the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sītā, our national God she must always remain.'⁵ In the *Mahābhārata* we come across another glorious ideal, Sāvitrī. Sāvitrī knew that Satyavān would die after a year. Even then, because she had fallen in love with him, she married him. When the death occurred in a forest, Yama, the god of death came to collect the soul of Satyavān. She vanquished the great god in an argument and got back the life of her husband. This is the ideal, the ideal of constancy, the ideal of purity, which is the distinguishing feature of the Indian ethos, though we are fast forgetting it.

Coming down to historical times, we meet several women who represented another ideal, the ideal of martial heroism. The Rani of Jhansi, the woman who fought the British, has been much praised by Swami Vivekananda. Then there are other women—Śivāji's mother, Padminī, the queen of Chittore, and a galaxy of others. In all of them we find invariably present the virtues of chastity, single-

1. अहं रुद्रेभिर्वसुभिश्चराम्यहमादित्यैरुत
विश्वदेवैः ।
R̥g-Veda 10.125.1

2. अहं रुद्राय धनुरातनोमि
Ibid 10.125.6

3. अमृतत्वस्य तु नाशास्ति वित्तेन
Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.2 and 4.5.3

4. येनाहं नामृता स्यां किमहं तेन कुर्याम् ।

Ibid 2.4.3 and 4.5.4

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) vol. 3, P. 256

hearted devotion to one husband, and forbearance, in addition to extraordinary courage which they manifested in critical situations.

When Swamiji went to America he was happy to see that women enjoyed considerable freedom in American society. But he said: 'I want our women to be free, but not at the cost of their purity.' Unfortunately, this very ideal of purity is being assailed today in our society. Swamiji said that he could not think of an Indian woman to be without spirituality. At the blowing of the conch in the twilight hour, the lady of the house goes to the place of worship, lights the lamp, and sits for sometime in Japa and meditation. This spiritual discipline is an invariable part of a Hindu woman's life.

Now take all these good qualities of all these great women of India, blend them together and study them dispassionately in the light of the life of the Holy Mother. You will find that she is the quintessence of the lives of all of them and of all their virtues. To understand the real greatness of the Holy Mother her life must be studied in the historical perspective. She embodied in herself the noble characteristics of all those great women who preceded her. It is in this sense that she is to be considered the ideal for modern Indian womanhood. Sister Nivedita writes about the Holy Mother: 'To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.' Nivedita then raises the question: 'Is she the last of an old order or the beginning of a new?' To my mind, the answer is that she is both. There are many superstitions, the accretions of ages, in our religious observances, in our personal conduct and social life. These have to be discarded. But those ideals which are basic to religion, which deal with the eternal truths of spiritual life, must remain.

However, these are to be adapted to the conditions and needs of contemporary society and put into practice. This was what the Holy Mother did. That is why we have said that she is both the last of the old order and the first of the new.

Next we have to consider her connection with the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. In the case of the spouses of other Avatars we find that their role was mostly passive. Sītā had to undergo great suffering which she did with great patience. Rādhikā also suffered. Yaśodharā, the wife of Siddhārtha, became a Sannyasini. Viṣṇupriyā, the spouse of Gaurāṅga had an image of Śrī Caitanya made of Nimba wood and worshipped that and a pair of his sandals. They were all contented to remain holy spouses, reconciling themselves to their fate. But in the case of the Holy Mother we find that her life was an active participation in the *līlā* of the Avatar. Sri Ramakrishna himself had asked her to share the burden of his mission through active participation. Towards the close of his work on earth Sri Ramakrishna asked her: 'Won't you do anything? Should this (pointing to his own body) alone do everything?' She protested: 'How can I, being only a woman?' He said: 'No, no. You will have to do much.' After the Master's demise the Holy Mother took up his work of spiritual ministration. She became a guiding force not only to her own hundreds of disciples but also to hundreds of other people including the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. However, she did all this without giving up her domestic duties. She continued to live the life of a simple housewife and mother till the end of her life thereby making herself an ideal for women. Spiritual ministration to aspirants and working out an ideal for women—these are two important aspects of her life. It had an equally important third aspect: the consolidation of the

Ramakrishna Movement. Sri Ramakrishna had gathered around him a group of disciples at Cossipore. But after the demise of his body, his young monastic disciples led a predominantly mendicant life. Once when Mother was at Bodh Gaya, she saw there the well-known Hindu monastery where monks lived in comfort. Immediately she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna, 'O Lord, give my children a house to live in, where they can get the necessities of life without having to wander here and there'. It was this prayer that welled forth from the Holy Mother's great heart that has brought into existence all these Ashramas, Maths and social service institutions of the Ramakrishna Movement. Her mighty power and loving presence brought about the consolidation of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. She brought it into being, nurtured it, and her unseen hands have been supporting it to this day.

Swami Vivekananda himself looked upon her as the guiding Force and never dared to go against her wishes. Once Swamiji dismissed a servant who had committed a theft. The man went straight to Mother and said: 'Mother I am a poor man—I shall lose my livelihood. So please forgive me.' When that evening Swami Premananda came to see her, Mother told him: 'Baburam, take him back.' Baburam Maharaj was afraid of taking back the man who had been turned out by Swamiji. But Mother said firmly: 'I say, take him back.' As Swami Premananda, accompanied by the man, was entering the gate, Swami Vivekananda saw from afar and said: 'See, Baburam is bringing back that fellow again.' Then Baburam Maharaj from there cried aloud, 'Mother asked me to do so.' Swami Vivekananda became silent, and the man was reinstated in his job. Mother's words were law in the Organization.

Another incident I shall relate which

will give you an understanding of the depth of spiritual insight the Holy Mother had. Once Swamiji went to Mayavati where he had established an Advaita Ashrama in which image worship or ritual was not allowed. But he found in a room a picture of Sri Ramakrishna being worshipped. He called the president of the Ashrama, Swami Swarupananda, and told him, 'You have betrayed my trust.' After Swamiji left the place Swami Swarupananda asked his brother monks to discontinue the worship and dismantle the temporary shrine. This instruction was carried out. But one of the inmates, Swami Vimalananda, who was a disciple of both the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda, wrote to the Holy Mother seeking her opinion on this issue. Mother wrote back, 'Our Thakur was Advaita; since you are all his disciples, you too are Advaitins.'⁶ This incident shows how much spiritual acumen and practical foresight she had. Sister Nivedita says in one of her books that there was no spiritual or worldly problem which the Holy Mother could not comprehend or suggest a solution for.

To my mind, Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother are one and the same—the same Reality appearing in a man's form and in a woman's form. Sri Ramakrishna, though he taught and lived among householders, was a Sannyasin. His blazing spirit of renunciation is beyond the reach of common people who are in the midst of work in the world. Mother never took Sannyasa. She lived with her own people, and those people were not nice people. Rather, they were narrow-minded, worldly and always quarrelling; some of them were almost mad. As a matter of fact, she had

⁶ Readers interested in knowing more details of this incident may refer to *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) vol. 2, Pp. 571-72

to face more difficulties and trials than an average householder. And though she lived in the midst of all the troubles of the world, she perpetually radiated peace and equanimity, and everything she did was a blessing to others. To the end of her life she lived like an ordinary village woman following all the duties of life—spiritual and secular. She used to get up at 3 in the morning, do Japa, dress vegetables, worship the Lord, distribute *prasada*, work in the kitchen, give spiritual initiation, console suffering people, dictate replies to letters, serve food, sweep the rooms and wash clothes. She presided over her large household, supported a growing number of relatives, married off her foster-daughter, nieces and nephews—in a word, discharged every responsibility of a householder. Yet she towered over everything and everybody around her like a great lighthouse of spiritual consciousness. There she stands—a great, shining, immaculate ideal before Indian women, within their reach.

Women of India! don't let yourselves be lured by the glamorous achievements and culture of the powerful West. As pointed out by western thinkers themselves, it is a sensate culture, decaying and destructive. For its survival it needs the infusion of spirituality. People in the West are looking to India for spiritual help. It will be therefore foolish for Indians to

blindly imitate the ways of life of western people which they themselves want to change. We have here in the Holy Mother a source of great consolation and a great ideal for all of us, whether householders or Sannyasins.

She is indeed the mother of all people in the East and the West—not metaphorically but in actual reality. What she told Girish Chandra Ghosh, 'I am your true mother, a mother not by virtue of being your Guru's wife, nor because of any assumed relationship, nor by way of empty talk, but your own true mother', may be taken as an indication of her relationship with everyone in this world. 'No one is a stranger'—these were her last words.

But, for the realization of even a little of her true divine nature it is necessary to develop the supersensuous faculty lying dormant within us. Those who develop this faculty realize her as the supreme embodiment of Śakti, Divine Energy, which has been described in the Tantras as *jñānecchākriyāmayī*, and in the Southern Tantras as *seyam sarveśvareśvarī*—'She is the Queen of all the gods and goddesses.' This is our Mother whom we try to somehow understand with our limited intellect by reading her teachings and by reading the history of India. Our salutations to the Mother.

I am sure God will pardon a man who will use his reason and cannot believe, rather than a man who believes blindly instead of using the faculties He has given him.

—Swami Vivekananda

TRUE CREATIVITY: CREATING ONESELF

SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA

A colloquy on spiritual research was organized in Paris by the Sufi Centre near Paris in March 1984. The general theme for discussion was 'Creativity and Development of the Person'. Representatives of world faiths, a scientist and a psychoanalyst were the participants. The present writer was invited to represent Hinduism—Vedanta. The speakers were allowed to choose a specific theme in harmony with the general one. The sessions were well attended and it was a remarkable event.

The Director of the Colloquy, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, spoke on the role of creative imagination and the application of meditation to the creativity of the person. The scientist Bernard d'Espagnat, speaking on his theme 'Scientific asceticism and research into the real', said that in the same way as spirit is indefinable, matter too is indefinable. It is a mystery. To uncover the truth behind matter one should give up all preconceived notions about matter, should renounce all speculations. Wonderment is the key to open the mystery of matter.

The Jewish representative, Rabbi Marc-Alain Ouaknin chose as his theme 'The letters and the crowns: the journey to the world of the future'. The Jewish contribution to the dialogue, he said, can be condensed into three archetypal ideas: creation-creativity, revelation and redemption. The Jewish revelation was first an oral tradition and then a written one. The Jewish religion has no dogmas, as one master is allowed to contradict another. One prophet juxtaposes his opinion with that of the other. The great sentence which God the Eternal pronounced to Moses 'I am that I am' (Exodus III, 14) was, according to Rabbi Ouaknin, a wrong

translation from Hebrew. It should be 'I will be what I will be'. The accent is on the future, on *becoming*.

The psychologist, who was also an adept in Buddhism, had as his theme 'Creativity in Buddhism: the void in which none creates'. Obstacles to creativity are our inveterate attachments to the non-substantial and changing elements of our individuality like sensation, perception, memory etc. The neurotic patient is obsessed, because he or she is unable to cut through the link of his perceptions and sensations. The objectivity which the psychoanalyst can give to the patient has much in common with the void of which the Buddha spoke.

The topic chosen by the representative of Islam was 'Divine creation and human responsibility according to Islam'. Father Guy Boue, who represented the Catholic faith, spoke on 'Divine Grace and human freedom', and the Protestant participant dwelt on the subject 'The Absolute of God and human engagement in Calvinistic spirituality'. The present writer's theme was 'True Creativity: creating oneself.'¹

In the Vedantic perspective all creation is from something pre-existing and not from nothing. The term 'emanation' is more appropriate than the term 'creation'. So, creating oneself is fashioning oneself out of the substance-essence already existing.

Freedom and joy are the source and substance of all creation. In order to create, an artist must feel himself free in his conception of beauty and also in its expression. He gives himself to his creation. An artistic creation is another self

1. What follows is the English translation of the substance of the author's talk which was given in French. *Ed., P.B.*

of the artist. He draws great joy from this complete consecration.

In fashioning ourselves our freedom and our joy touch their summit. Self-creation is self-renewal. We renew body, soul and spirit thanks to the Spirit's abundance of auto-creativity.

To the question 'who am I?', we reply 'I am'. But we rarely realize that by affirming our existence we exercise freedom. Within and without us there are various factors which threaten and deny our existence: negative thoughts, pessimism, etc. By affirming 'I am' we free ourselves from restraining factors.

The 'I' which we emphasize is the place of our first freedom. The 'I' is the human person. The human person is never alone; he is accompanied by the Divine Person. Vedanta uses the term 'Puruṣa' to indicate the human person as also to signify the Divine Person, the Absolute, Brahman. *Puruṣāt na param kiñcit*², above the Divine Person there is nothing. The presence of the Divine Person in us is an operating presence. It acts on our psychological and spiritual capital with love and understanding. Three modes can be distinguished in its action: (1) our quality of being increases; (2) the quality of knowledge becomes sharper; and (3) our faculty of bliss becomes more refined. To understand and live these three modalities means to create oneself in the image of the Divine; to reap and enjoy the last freedom. Why the last?

We say 'last freedom' because here all notion of limit, all means of measuring freedom vanish. When the measure disappears, 'forms' also disappear. The moment I say 'freedom', I have the notion that I am free to do this or that. Political freedom, social freedom, these are all 'forms' of freedom. But in the context of

the last freedom which is the freedom of the spirit, there are no more forms. The freedom of the spirit is its own measure, its own support. To use the upaniṣadic language: 'There, the Self is established and nourished by itself, by its own glory', *sve mahimni (pratiṣṭhitah)*.³

The first step towards self-creation/creativity is achieved by increasing our quality of being. This is made easy by the fact that the Divine is a presence which encourages us under all circumstances. He is Being which conquers non-being at every moment. He is pure Being without any mixture whereas man is made up of being and non-being. The elements of non-being such as anguish, doubt and abdication are mixed with being in man. Man has to conquer the non-being in him by brightening the flame of being, by the 'courage to be'.

In the context of auto-creation, knowledge is transformed into knowledge with involvement. In intellectual knowledge involvement is either nil or almost nothing. Knowing the philosophical system of Hegel or Spinoza and giving lectures on them bring about no transformation in us. Whereas studying Śaṅkara or Ramanuja brings about spiritual consequences. The upaniṣadic phrase *yo brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati*, 'the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman',⁴ notifies the involvement implied in self-creation and self-knowledge.

With self-creation the faculty of bliss also changes its face. It gets actualized and stabilized without any external help. We owe this to our self-abundance. Self-creation strengthens our self-abundance.

Now comes a crucial point: is it possible to create oneself during suffering?

Tears are in creation, also smiles. We cannot create ourselves without understand-

2. *Katha Upaniṣad* 1.3.11

3. cf *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.24.1

4. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.9

ing the laws which govern the functioning of creation. Nature works, moved by opposites. If we want and obtain a desired thing then we avoid and move away from something undesirable. Love and hatred as well as life and death coexist in creation; this is the law of equivalence. But being aware of the equivalence of opposites does not give us the dynamism to climb up the slope of suffering. We need an excess of the positive over the negative, an excess of optimism over pessimism. The question is: are we able to generate within ourselves this excess without which self-creation is not possible? Yes, we are able to do so. How many times have we not said to ourselves in the past when we were suffering: 'O body, you suffer, O mind, you suffer, but O Spirit, be in peace!' And with good results. Spirit is far above manifestation with its smiles and tears. 'Even Brahman weeps caught in the net of Maya', Ramakrishna used to say. But Brahman knows He is far above Maya's tears and smiles.

What is the role of time in self-creation/creativity?

In our research the notion of time is important because an experience we have lived through is time lived. The residual time of a lived experience must make us free instead of assailing us by regrets or by a guilty conscience.

The time of the clock does not liberate us, does not make us autonomous to create ourselves. Nor does the bi-dimensional time which is the measure between two acts or two events. When I say 'Please wait, I am bringing you the book in a minute', I am using the bi-dimensional time. The term 'linear time' is also used to indicate the bi-dimensional time, as it marches in a line. Linear time pushes us from a 'before' to an 'after'. It implies the movement necessary for life. But it does not imply the 'presence' which is the

author of the movement and which is more vital than movement. A religious thought which says that after death there is either paradise or hell is the typical example of linear time. This thought makes the Presence (*satbhāva*), the Self in us, a victim of the linear time. In this context, the paradise and hell are creations of another force extraneous to the self. According to Vedanta, the Atman-self is absolutely autonomous and free to refuse paradise or hell after death. It is free to refuse the action of linear time. It has the potentiality to begin on another orbit, the orbit which is usually called reincarnation. The Atman has the potential to make a new beginning on a higher orbit, which is to say that it can make time come back on itself. It is capable of making time circular.

Circular time which comes back on itself is more liberating and creative than linear time. Witness for instance the Greek idea of eternal return. Plato seems to have said that after two hundred years he would give the same lesson in the same hall. This is a pointer to circular time. But then no philosopher repeats what he said after a number of years. He renews himself by time and with the world that renews itself.

But the circular time lacks the vertical dimension. The vertical represents man's aspiration towards the high, the transcendent.

When one is at the end of the tether, or at the foot of the wall, as they say, one heaves a sigh of anguish and looks up. If he is a believer in God, he says 'O God! into your arms I surrender'. If he is a non-believer he says, 'What a life, where am I?'. Something happens after this sigh. The vertical dimension is born in him. And with the vertical is also born the spiral.

The spiral is a coil that rises up in concentric circles pressing into service the horizontal and the vertical dimensions. What is relevant to the context is that the

spiral time adds a vertical dimension to the circular time.

The idea of spiral time is set forth in the doctrine of the four yugas. We are now in the fourth yuga, the Kali yuga. At the end of this yuga, the Satya yuga will begin taking the world-manifestation of space-time-causality in the vertical direction.

The symbolism of the spiral goes far beyond the idea of spiral time. The Maya of space-time-causality can be contemplated as the spiral coil. The beginning and the

end are in the invisible. The central axis of the spiral is Brahman, sustaining the periphery of concentric circles with its horizontal and vertical dynamism.

The divine spiral lives in us, inspiring us to horizontal (social) action and vertical aspiration.

Let us open ourselves to its two-fold dynamism. That is real and authentic creativity. That is creating, fashioning and accomplishing ourselves and taking the world around us to higher and higher stages of fulfilment.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE GITA

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

Dialogue between man and God

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is a part of the epic *Mahābhārata* and placed in its Bhīṣmaparva. The Mahābhārata war is dated anywhere between 2500 B C and 1500 B C though the epic itself, as it exists, today might have been revised at a later date. So it is much too ancient to have historical value and comes within the domain of mythology. Hence questions are often raised about the historicity and authenticity of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. One school of scholars holds that the language of the Gītā is so simple and easy, compared to the archaic language of the original *Mahābhārata*, that it must have been composed by some poet at a later date and interpolated in the epic. Certain rationalists taking their stand on reason ask: how could Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa have three hours on the battlefield to hold this discussion? There is no need to get involved in such pedantic arguments: it is immaterial whether the Mahābhārata war ever took place, whether Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa ever

lived, whether the Gītā is an interpolation in the body of the epic or was really preached by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The important thing is to realize the depth of wisdom of the author of the Gītā. When Swami Vivekananda who was still Narendranath Datta first came to Sri Ramakrishna as an uninhibited young rationalist, he said bluntly that he did not believe that such persons ever existed as depicted in the Purāṇas and the *Bhāgavata*, nor could he believe that these scriptures were authentic compositions. Sri Ramakrishna, in a most practical manner, told him not to be troubled by those minor details but to get into the spiritual mood of the teaching.

Going beyond the domain of history and scholarship, the Gītā has been described as the 'Song of God'. Since it is the utterance of God in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa it brings in the concept of the Avatār. However, without getting involved in the intricacies of *avatāra-vāda* we may look upon the dialogue between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as the expression of an inner cogitation upon the existential problems of

life. To understand its spirit one must take Arjuna as the representative of mankind and Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the representative of the collective wisdom of Hindu civilization and its ethos or way of life—call it the wisdom of God. Arjuna was as modern in his time as each man is in his. Faced with his problems, man puts his questions to God, to be answered by His supreme wisdom. Life is a relentless struggle from birth till death, at the level of principles—intellectual and moral. Every situation, small or big, becomes a crisis. Decisions have to be made and action must follow. In making a decision the advice of a wiser person who has gone through the whole range of life's experiences and activity is needed, but to act upon it man must exercise his own freedom of choice.

The Gītā is, thus, a conversation between man and God regarding the end of life and the ways of attaining it. The discussion on the end and the means is not, however, divorced from the day-to-day problems of life. The reality and demands of the battlefield are never forgotten. Human life is an integral whole. At its core is the Ātman or the true Self, with the intellect, mind, prāṇa and body appearing as its garments or sheaths. Man has to be accepted as a whole with all the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual problems he faces every day. The essence of the Gītā is to place before him an integral view of the goal of life—to discover his lost identity or to be at peace with himself through knowledge of Self. Since God is the true Self of man and the all-pervading Supreme Self of the universe, to find our lost identity means to attain identity with the eternal Divine, to be in communion with God within and God without. For the attainment of this goal the Gītā teaches, not one, but several methods like devotion, self-surrender, meditation, austerity, self-knowledge, right

action etc., covering the whole gamut of human capacities and possibilities. Thus the spirit of the Gītā is that of harmony and synthesis. The result is, we have in the Gītā a complete philosophy of life.

The four related topics

In studying the Gītā much benefit will be obtained by adopting the traditional method of studying all scriptures through *anubandha catuṣṭayah* or the 'four relevant topics'. These are the person who studies, *adhikārī*; the subject matter of the book, *viśaya*; the object or purpose of the book, *prayojana*; and the relation between these three, *sambandha*.

The *adhikārī* here is, according to Śaṅkara, one who has experienced all that the world offers and seen through its hollowness and by means of analysis, has realized that the pleasures it offers are all transient. He has become dissatisfied with worldly pleasures; he is *alam pratyayavān*, one who feels that he has had enough of it. If such a person is also seeking to qualitatively improve himself, he will receive the greatest benefit by a study of this scripture.

The *viśaya* of the Gītā is knowledge of one's true original nature and the means of realizing that. The wisdom of the Vedas is the sum total of several centuries of experience of great saints and seers of very ancient times; the Upaniṣads are the philosophical culmination of Vedic thought; and the Gītā was composed to make that philosophy easily understandable to common people. It is described as pure nectar without any adulteration, *amṛta*. It is by realizing oneself as nothing but the Divine that eternal bliss can be obtained. A well-known verse compares Gītā to nectar milked from the Upaniṣads by Kṛṣṇa for

Arjuna.¹ Here the cow is the collective wisdom of the Vedas ; or the whole wisdom of humanity, which reached its highest level in the Upaniṣads. The milk is the essence of that wisdom, the nectar epitomized in the Gītā. The person milking the cow is Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the eternal teacher who is drawing the essence out of the whole body of knowledge. And Arjuna is the calf who, nurtured by this knowledge, becomes strong and wise.

The *prayojana* of the Gītā is, in brief, the complete cessation of sorrow and the attainment of supreme bliss.² By realizing its truths we attain peace and tranquillity. The ultimate goal that the Gītā aims at is not only a negative experience of freedom from all misery, but also a positive experience of being filled with the bliss of God. About this experience the Gītā itself speaks: 'Attaining which there remains nothing higher to attain, and established in which one remains unshaken by even the greatest calamity.'³

The *sambandha* here refers to the relevance of the study of the Gītā in one's own life. The *adhikārī* or qualified student has to convince himself that the subject matter and its purpose have a direct bearing or relationship with him. Thus by following the four-fold approach to Gītā we get a comprehensive understanding of this great scripture. Their mutual relation is one of cause and effect. The ideas thrown out of the printed matter of the book arouse certain ideas in the living entity, namely the reader, and these cause the removal of darkness within him, that is, the confusion

from which he is suffering owing to the lack of true Self-identity is cleared up. By the power of the ideas contained in Gītā, emanating from the Divine Mind, a new *dr̥ṣṭikōṇa* or angle of vision develops, a *darśana* or intuition occurs, by which the world changes its colour or meaning. After discovering his true identity, he no longer identifies himself with the various objects, situations and relationships of the world, not even with his own psycho-physical mechanism, the *aham* or ego which transmigrates from body to body. This does not create a vacuum or deprive him of the human sweetness of life, for he now identifies himself with the Reality permeating the whole universe.

Meaning of Dharma

The first chapter sets the stage for the delivery of the Gītā proper. It should be understood not in the narrow sense of depicting a critical situation that developed in a certain battlefield, but as representing human situation in general in every walk of life. It graphically depicts the crisis of human character as, at the end of it, Arjuna breaks down and admits that he has reached the end of his tether. With all his vanity and pride in his own ability and prowess, he was unaware that his self-confidence had gone beyond the limits of propriety. Self-confidence or even pride is good to a certain extent, as far as correct human life is concerned. But Arjuna, the representative of a perfect specimen of humanity, had transgressed that limit and landed himself in great trouble, namely, confused thinking. In his self-confidence which was based on his acquired qualities, he had been unknowingly feeding his ego and thinking that nothing in life was a problem for him. But the capacity to manage money, things, situations, personnel etc is external ; the most important thing is

1. सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः ।

पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥

2. आत्यनिक दुःखनिवृत्तिः परमसुखप्राप्तिश्च ।

3. यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते नाधिकं ततः ।

यस्मिन् स्थितो न दुःखेन गुरुणापि विचाल्यते ॥

the ability to manage oneself. The art of self-management through Self-realization has now to be taught to him. The crux of the matter is the qualitative improvement of the human self so that it becomes a vehicle for acting in a manner which will leave no bitterness or dejection in life.

Let us now see how the *Gītā* actually begins. It begins with one of the most significant and comprehensive words in Hindu religious thought—Dharma. Dharma is the very first word of the *Gītā*. The term *dharmakṣetra* is added as an adjective to *kurukṣetra*, the name of the battlefield. Why? Because there is a crisis of Dharma on the plain of battle. The term Dharma is derived from the root 'dhr' which means to uphold or hold together.⁴ The power of Dharma to sustain and regulate human life is brought out by the great Hindu law-giver Manu in his famous dictum: 'If Dharma is violated it will destroy (us); if Dharma is preserved it will preserve (us); therefore Dharma must not be violated, lest it destroy us.'⁵ In Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra* the word Dharma is used in the sense of attribute or property of a substance (which is called *dharmī*).⁶ Everything has its principle of self-existence by virtue of which it is what it is. Everything depends upon its own *dharma* for its own existence. Subjectively, it means 'virtue' or 'religious merit' in man, and objectively it means 'duty' whether in the form of obligatory ritual or of one's station or position in life.

The crisis that developed on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra was the result of a total

confusion about *dharma*. This is true of every crisis in life. And when there is such loss of clarity about the nature and direction of *dharma*, which holds man and society together in organic unity, then it is necessary to restore it.

The personification of adharma

The crisis of Dharma that faced Arjuna is presented in a dramatic way in the first chapter of the *Gītā*. To intensify the poignancy of the situation the *Gītā* first introduces Duryodhana, the arch-rival of the Pāṇḍavas and the villain of the piece. He surveys his army and, with a view to boosting the morale of his generals, points out: 'And there are many other valiant fighters in my camp, armed with various kinds of weapons and missiles, all experts in the art of war who are prepared to give up their lives for my sake.'⁷ Here *artha* (in *madarthe*, 'for my sake') means both 'cause' and 'money'. Duryodhana says that the people on his side are prepared to lay down their lives for his cause, but being a mean-minded man, he also implies that he has bought them over. They might not have been convinced of the rightness of his stand, but they could not desert him because of extraneous and ulterior motives. Some felt obliged to side with him because of ties of blood and other relationships. In the case of others, the Pāṇḍavas having been out of the picture for thirteen years, all had depended upon Duryodhana, as the king, for their livelihood.

Here arises the question as to what he himself thought of his cause. Throughout the *Mahābhārata* Duryodhana is seen to be more concerned about quantity and

4. cf धारणाद्धर्ममित्याहुः धर्मेण विधृताः प्रजाः ।
Mahābhārata 12.109.14

5. धर्म एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ।

तस्माद्धर्मो न हन्तव्यो, मा नो धर्मो

हतो वधीत् ॥

Manu-smṛti 8.15

6. cf *Yoga-sūtra* 3.14 and 4.12

7. अन्ये च बहवः शूरा मदर्थे त्यक्तजीविताः ।

नानाशस्त्रप्रहरणाः सर्वे युद्धविशारदाः ॥

Gītā 1.9

numerical strength. For instance, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave the choice between his vast yadu army and Himself without arms, and Arjuna chose the Lord out of devotion, Duryodhana gave expression to his joy at having scored a point over Arjuna. And out of the eighteen akṣauhini forces at Kurukṣetra, eleven belonged to him and only seven to the Pāṇḍavas. He has been depicted as a villain who, in his overbearing desire to have the whole kingdom, became totally blinded in all aspects of his conscience. He really felt that as a kṣatriya, might was right, and he had the moral right to destroy the Pāṇḍavas by his superior might. Since his father was the king, he was not willing to share his kingdom with them. It is common human psychology that a man who is not morally strong tries to build a moral atmosphere around himself; one who is not virtuous protests too much of virtue. Had he morally justified, he would not have so loudly and repeatedly asserted the superiority of his forces over those of the Pāṇḍavas. In contrast, the Pāṇḍavas, though numerically inferior, had the full confidence of the rightness of their cause.

It is interesting to note here that, before the beginning of the war, Gāndhārī was approached by Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira for her blessings, because both knew that owing to the power of perfect chastity and truthfulness, her word was infallible. She had been trying to dissuade her sons from the wrong path and urging Dhṛtarāṣṭra to disown Duryodhana as a *kulāṅgāra*, a black sheep. Duryodhana tried to cajole her into saying that he would be the winner. But to both him and Yudhiṣṭhira she gave the same reply, *yato dharmah tato jayah*, 'where dharma is, there will victory be.' Thus, perhaps, even at the commencement of the great war he realized that he was in the wrong, but was not willing to give up the wrong path.

Arjuna's egoism

By presenting first the unscrupulous, vain and insecure leader of the Kaurava army the Gītā brings out clearly the contrasting personality of Arjuna. Through this contrast the Gītā heightens the moral crisis that Arjuna had to face. Moral conflicts occur only in a virtuous person. Duryodhana had no scruples to prick his conscience. Arjuna felt the conflict and the resulting dejection or *viṣāda* because he was a *dharmabhīru*, one who is afraid of transgressing Dharma. The Gītā displays considerable skill in focusing our attention on Arjuna's situation. The whole battlefield soon becomes astir with expectation and resounds with the blowing of conchs. When our feelings have been worked up to a climax, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to place his chariot in the middle of the two armies. He explains the reason for his request 'I would like to observe carefully the warriors stationed here, eager and prepared to fight. Let me behold the people with whom I have to engage in battle, in this impending war.'⁸

Here Arjuna's psychological problem surfaces and his spiritual weakness is exposed. He uses the words: *kaiḥ mayā saha yoddhavyam*, 'who are the people who want to engage me in fight.' From this statement it is clear that he is giving a tremendous amount of importance to himself alone. He does not say: 'I want to know who are the people wanting to fight with us, the Pāṇḍavas'. The attitude of identification with the collective whole has disappeared from his mind at this time, and he is thinking only about his own prowess, valour and achievements, as

8. यावदेतान्निरीक्षेऽहं योद्धुकामानवस्थितान् ।
कर्मया सह योद्धव्यमस्मिन् रणसमुद्यमे ॥

also his reputation as a brilliant warrior.

From this very statement of Arjuna the Gītā proper starts. Two things have to be marked. Firstly, giving Arjuna the benefit of the doubt, we do not condemn him for the vanity, pride and ego that have overcome him. Let us admit that here is a completely successful man who has never known failure or defeat, and who has been acclaimed by the whole world for his strength, courage and competence. It is only natural that as a normal human being he should be aware of his own abilities, and that in his statement there is a little vanity and pride and a lack of understanding that it is God who runs the whole show. Arjuna has betrayed the failings of a highly successful individual who gives no importance to anything but his own self.

Secondly, this statement did not escape the notice of Śrī Kṛṣṇa but, being an excellent teacher, he did not check him then. He wanted this tendency in Arjuna to go to its logical end and reach a state of impasse from which he will not be able to proceed any further with the egoistic attitude. Unless a question arises in the mind of the student himself, the teacher cannot teach. Therefore, realizing that if he hauled up Arjuna at this point he would not understand the depth of his deviation, Śrī Kṛṣṇa allows his pupil to proceed a little further, until it dawns on him that he has come to a dead end. When he breaks down completely in utter confusion, then only will he look back on his path and ask the teacher, 'Where did I go wrong?' That is the time when truth should be taught; so the excellent teacher waits for Arjuna to continue.

And Arjuna continues,

I would like to scan those who are assembled here, ready to fight; to measure and assess people whom I knew to be just and moral, but who have become well-wishers of and desirous

of pleasing this evil-minded son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, by fighting on his side.⁹

Arjuna takes a further step on the wrong track by saying that the opponents are ignorant and evil-intentioned people who have the temerity to take up arms against him. So the first sprouting of the seed of ego in *kaiḥ mayā saha yoddhavyam* has now become a full grown plant when he refers to his opponents as wicked, *durbuddheḥ*. Under the excitement and stress of the imminent battle Arjuna is no more able to cover his innate feeling of egoistic pride and over-confidence. But he is still on the border-line, and cannot be said to have exposed himself fully as a spiritually undeveloped person. He has not yet realized the full extent of his own weakness, and the teacher is quietly watching the movements of his mind.

In a most unassuming and innocent manner, Kṛṣṇa follows Arjuna's command like an obedient charioteer. He stations the chariot at a place in front of Bhīṣma, Droṇa and all the rulers of the front rank and says, 'Arjuna, see all the Kauravas assembled here.'¹⁰ The suggestion is, 'See them all in the right perspective'.

What does Arjuna see? Arjuna sees standing there on both the sides, people who are verily like his father and grand-fathers, his teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grand-sons and friends; fathers-in-law, as well as people who have been his well wishers and benefactors. As soon as he sees them in this light, he finds that (except perhaps, Duryodhana) all the rest are his kith and kin, near and dear ones, without whom life is not worth living. He

9. योत्स्यमानानवेक्षेऽहं य एतेऽत्र समागताः ।

धार्तराष्ट्रस्य दुर्बुद्धेर्युद्धे प्रियचिकीर्षवः ॥

Gītā 1.23

10. उवाच पार्थ पश्यैतान् समवेतान् कुरुनिति ॥

Gītā 1.25

now sees only the relationship between himself as a human being and all the others on the opposite side, in the order of reverence and human ties.

The seemingly innocent action of the teacher was calculated to give a new slant to Arjuna's thoughts. Arjuna made at first a slight deviation by equating the fight with himself, and thought all those not on the side of the Pāṇḍavas to be crooks. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa realized that he was not looking at things in a proper perspective, he forced him to see his opponents in all human relationships, and not as wicked people hostile to him.

Arjuna's loss of self-confidence

Arjuna now experiences, perhaps for the first time in his life, a sudden invasion of feelings which he is unable to resist. The Gītā brings out the dramatic suddenness of this phenomenon (which can happen to any man at any time in his life) through a few quick strokes. Seeing all the relatives and friends, Arjuna was absolutely saturated, as it were, with pity and, in great sorrow spoke these words:

O Kṛṣṇa! seeing my kinsmen all gathered here, longing for battle (it has dawned on him that his relatives and friends are not assembled for a friendly meeting but to kill one another), my limbs give way, my mouth is parched, my whole frame is shivering and the hairs on my body stand on end.

My bow, Gāṇḍīva, is slipping from my hand; I have no longer any hold on it. My skin is burning all over. I have so totally lost control of myself that I cannot even stand upright. My head is reeling, my mind wandering, so that the concentration of mind and will necessary to start this fight is gone. I am not myself any more.

O Kesava! I see only evil signs, all inauspicious omens around me. Nor do I see any good, advantage or gain of any kind coming out of this war in which I shall be forced to kill my own relatives.

Look, Kṛṣṇa, I do not desire victory, nor do I want dominion and all the luxuries and enjoy-

ments which go along with it. O Govinda, what shall I do with this kingdom, what shall I do with these pleasures? Of what use will these things or even life be to us?¹¹

At this point there is no positive spiritual realization in Arjuna's mind that the soul is superior to the world and its goods; he is merely prepared to give up everything in the world just to avoid the battle. There is no high realization but only total confusion and weakness which he is trying to justify.

Two types of ignorance

In terms of Vedantic thought, we may say that Arjuna has been overcome by spiritual ignorance. Ajñāna is a concrete, tangible power with two aspects, *āvaraṇa śakti* and *vikṣepa śakti*, of which the classical example is the illusory experience of seeing a snake in the rope. This process is regarded as *anirvacanīya* or indescribable, for it is inexplicable how one experiences something neither absolutely real (which is never contradicted, but the snake is contradicted on closer inspection) nor absolutely unreal (which is never experienced, but the snake is experienced for the time being). This ignorance has the capacity to hide the true nature and qualities of the real thing (rope) as well as the capacity to project some other thing and qualities (snake) on it. To cover up the *adhiṣṭhana* or ground, and next to deviate and diversify on it, is precisely the nature of *bhrama* or illusory perception *atasminstadbuddhiḥ*—'that which it is not, you think it to be'.

Arjuna's ajñāna was his failure to see the situation in the correct perspective he had been seeing it up till now. The truth was that injustice had been done to the Pāṇḍavas and the right attitude for a

¹¹. Gītā 1.28-32

kṣatriya, though not for a jñānī or sannyāsī, should be to fight for justice and equity in society. But at that critical moment, when he saw his relatives arrayed against each other, he lost his clear sight of the principles for which he had come to fight, and began seeing only human relations and the price he had to pay for defending the right. Emotional considerations clouded his understanding. The *āvaraṇa* of reality is that his intellectual conviction regarding fighting in the cause of justice, *dharmayuddha*, is clouded. Right understanding here is related to the Dharma of a kṣatriya and not necessarily to the ultimate goal of life, and that has been covered up. The *āvaraṇa śakti* of *ajñāna* started operating as soon as he gave prime importance to himself as, 'I, Arjuna, the mightiest of the mighty, etc'. And the veiling of truth has gone on to the point where he says that he finds only 'my own' people ranged against 'me', and is overcome by pity and misery. This completes the description of the *āvaraṇa* aspect of *ajñāna*.

Ajñāna does not stop here. Life would have been much simpler and better if we had stopped at, 'I don't know what it is'; but we immediately add, 'It is a snake' and start acting accordingly. The superimposition of something else or appearance on the ground, which it is not, due to the law of association, resemblance or similarity, is the *vikṣepa śakti* of *ajñāna*. The explanation and understanding of these two processes take time, but in actual happening they are simultaneous. The false projection is that not only is Arjuna not prepared to fight for the right any more, but that he is submitting a series of philosophical reasons for not doing so, thereby painting himself in very noble colours by implying that he is not so greedy, heartless, merciless etc. Trying to rationalize the weaknesses of his character, and acting emotionally, he takes recourse to all sorts of excuses. In place

of true reasons, he advances false reasons for the war, such as kingdom, pleasures etc., and abjures them.

Arjuna's self-defence

Through these wrong or false arguments he tries to build up his image in his own estimation. Listen to his oratorical bombast:

O Janārdana, what joy can we derive from killing the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra? Sin alone will take hold of us as a result of slaying these desperadoes.

Therefore, Mādhava, we ought not to kill our kinsmen, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, for how shall we obtain happiness after slaying our own relatives?

Although these people with their understanding overpowered by greed (*lobhopahata-cetasah*), see no guilt in the decay of families and hostility to friends, why should we, O Janārdana, who see clearly the evils involved in the destruction of one's clan, not turn away from this sin?¹²

'The other party does not see things in the correct perspective because their intelligence has been undermined by inordinate desire and ambition; but we, on the other hand, are enlightened people and know what is good and bad. Why do we overlook the inherent crime and sin of this action of ours and not think of desisting from it?' This is Arjuna's chief argument.

It may be asked: if a person does not see his fault, how can he be subject to sin? The answer is that whether he sees it or not, if his action transgresses the moral laws of the universe and the ethical principles of society, sin will accrue to him. The difference is that the sin being committed unknowingly will be less in intensity and will cause less damage to the doer than if done wilfully. The Dhṛtarāṣṭras are unenlightened people,

12. *Gītā* 1.36-38

their minds being blinded by self-interest, but the actions they do are extremely grave. At the end of the Mahābhārata they did reap the fruits of their evil deeds. Whatever their motives and whatever the loyalist motives of their supporters, being on the side of *adharma*, they suffered total destruction as a result of their actions.

Next Arjuna turns a sociologist and marshals some sociological arguments against war.

On the decay of the family, the immemorial religious traditions of the family disappear. On the destruction of family traditions, evil overtakes the entire family.¹³

Kuladharmā is ageless—every family has to uphold certain norms of conduct consisting of religious rituals like the *pañca-mahāyajña*,¹⁴ *varṇa-āśrama dharma*, and practice of other customs, besides the inculcation of certain virtues irrespective of caste and stage of life, laid down by the Dharma-Śāstras, called *sāmānya-dharma*.¹⁵ When the family is wiped out, the values of Dharma encased in its functioning will perish. And when *dharma* or moral law is disregarded, then obviously *adharma*,

13. *Gītā* 1.40

14. The *pañca-ṛṇa*, the five-fold debt of man, can be discharged only by performing the *deva-yajña*, *ṛṣi-yajña*, *pitṛ-yajña*, *nṛ-yajña* and *bhūta-yajña*, or daily sacrifice to the gods who have created and sustained us; teaching and repetition of scriptures to preserve the spiritual heritage handed down by the seers; libations to the ancestors who are our progenitors; sharing of food with the hungry who constitute the community in which we live; feeding the animal kingdom on which we depend for existence.

15. cf धृतिः क्षमा द्मोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।

धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् ॥

Manu-Smṛiti 6.6.92

‘For individual perfection the tenfold mark of *dharma* or ethical qualities of righteousness must be exhibited: fortitude, forgiveness, equanimity, probity, purity, self-restraint, reasonableness, truth and freedom from anger.’

immorality will reign the land. Arjuna continues:

When *adharma* preponderates, O Kṛṣṇa, the women of the family become impure and, with the corruption of women, O Vārṣṇeya, ensues intermixture of castes.¹⁶

In war when men are killed, the women of their families would be captured and made slaves of the victors. When there is nothing to protect and control them, the dignity and virtue of the woman will be violated and the end result will be a cultural crisis. For the progeny resulting from *varṇa-saṅkara*, inter-mixture of castes, will give rise to a race of people who cannot be integrated with the existing framework of society.

Aryan culture was maintained by the institution of *jāti-dharma*. The brāhmaṇas formed the brain-trust of society, an intellectual group to give knowledge, guidance, inspiration to society. The kṣatriyas were the executive power to implement the rules and laws in society. The vaiśyas earned and invested wealth to fulfil the material needs of society. And the śūdras maintained the social structure by operating the social-service machinery. To a society which was built on such a system with the four castes as its pillars, confusion of castes, *varṇa-saṅkara*, was a serious matter. Nay, more: it has even eschatological repercussions, as Arjuna points out next:

This intermingling of castes will drag the destroyers of the race as well as the race itself into hell. And surely the manes of the race, deprived of offerings of rice-balls and water libations, will also fall.¹⁷

To maintain the sanctity of this tradition the ancient law books hold that the

16. *Gītā* 1.41

17. *Gītā* 1.42

progeny resulting from *varṇa-saṅkara* has no right to perform *śrāddha*, offering of libations for the manes, because being born of cultural admixture, he does not have that cultural continuity to appreciate the values of his ancestors. Thus, being deprived of libations, the manes will also suffer, that is, suggestively, the principles they represented will lose their hold on successive generations, and values of life will be totally changed.

The Yoga of Despondency

After a series of arguments like this, in which he displays considerable oratorical skill but lack of wisdom, Arjuna brings them to a conclusion by suggesting a kind of *satyāgraha*, non-resistance, or self-immolation as the alternative. He says:

Truly, it would be far better for me if I remain unarmed and offer no resistance, while the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra armed with weapons slay me in this battle.¹⁸

So Arjuna declares that he is no longer prepared to fight. Before the war started he had been spoiling for the fight, and had called Kṛṣṇa and other peace-makers names. In his eagerness to start the battle he had asked his chariot to be placed between the two marshalled forces to see the opponents who had so recklessly

challenged him. His *ajñāna* was operating to magnify his own prowess. The teacher, knowing him to have gone wrong, prompted him to look at his own people. The *āvaraṇa* aspect of *ajñāna* fell upon his soul when his perspective shifted to his close relationship with his opponents rather than to the injustice done, and, consequently, he lost his courage. The *vikṣepa* aspect of *ajñāna* started operating when he started defending his error—spinning out plausible arguments to enable him to run away from the situation of the battle.

The Gītā concludes the first chapter with the picture of Arjuna seated in the chariot unarmed, overpowered by sorrow.

Having spoken these words, on the plain of battle, Arjuna threw down his bow and arrows, and with his mind completely overwhelmed with grief, sank down on the seat of the chariot.¹⁹

Thus Arjuna who had been ready to strike the first blow in battle, has been brought now to the last stage of dejection and despondency. His egoism has been crushed and his inner life has reached a breaking point. It is at such breaking points that divine Light streams in; God's grace comes when egoistic resistance stops.

The first chapter has been aptly termed *viśāda-yoga*, the Yoga of Despondency. This yoga of anguish prepares the ground for all the other yogas that Kṛṣṇa teaches in the remaining seventeen chapters of the Gītā.

18. यदि मामप्रतीकारमशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः ।

धार्तराष्ट्रा रणे हन्युस्तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥

Gītā 1.46

19. Gītā 1.47

PALLIMANGAL : AN EXPERIMENT IN RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

(Illustrated)

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Bharati is a mother of three children. Her husband lay ill. With no other earning member in the family, she was driven to desperation. What is the use of living this way? She decided to end her life and took poison. People around referred the matter to the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission, working on village development projects in the area. She was taken to a hospital. In the meanwhile, her husband, now a little better, started working on a building project as a day-labourer. But cruel fate was against him. A cement bag fell on him and he lay dead.

Bharati, fully recovered now, had nowhere to go. In 1978 when floods ravaged the districts of West Bengal, her little cottage in the district of Hooghly had been washed away. The Ramakrishna Mission which conducted relief in various districts, took up in addition a house building project in the district of Hooghly. Bharati got one of these houses. But, now, how was she to live and bring up her three children?

'Pallimangal', a rural reconstruction project started in the area by the Mission as a follow-up action, came to her rescue. She was trained in weaving and was provided a hobby loom. Her son, studying in school, too learnt the work. Now they weave dusters, towels, and earn nearly Rs. 250 to Rs. 300 a month. Bharati, though a widow, now looks at the future with hope. With her two sons and a daughter studying in school and also adding to the common pool of the family income, she has now settled down to a new way of life.

This is only one of the stories of the many families in the area, about a sick husband, the only earning member in the family, or about a destitute woman, deserted by her husband and burdened with children—stories about poor villagers left with no hope, with only darkness surrounding them all round. They depict the true picture of Indian village life: marginal farmers in the clutches of village money-lenders and praying for the mercies of the rain god, day-labourers getting work only for 120 days in a year, whole families living on starvation diet for days together, handicapped children left uncared for, village artisans compelled to sell their products to wholesalers at throw-away prices.

The call of Swami Vivekananda

The inspiration for the social service activities of the Ramakrishna Mission comes from the vision and message of Swami Vivekananda. Nearly a century back Swamiji declared: 'Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. But, alas! nobody ever did anything for them. ... Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature?'¹

He wanted the new India to arise 'out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman,

1. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol. 5, Pp. 29-30

the cobbler and the sweeper.² Wandering through the length and breadth of India, he had clearly discerned that unless the rural masses were raised, India could not rise. And for this purpose they needed to be educated and taught to stand upon their own feet. 'Educate and raise the masses, and thus alone a nation is possible.'³ 'Your duty at present is to go... from village to village, and make the people understand their real condition and say, "O ye brother, arise! Awake! How much longer would you remain asleep!" Go and educate them how to improve their own condition.'⁴

Swamiji did not mean by education the formal education given in schools and colleges. He knew that it would not solve the problems of villages. He laid more stress on non-formal education. 'If a ploughman's boy cannot come to education, why not meet him at the plough, at the factory, just wherever he is? Go along with him, like his shadow.'⁵ Again: 'All the wealth of the world cannot help one little Indian village if the people are not taught to help themselves.'⁶

Rural development in post-independence era

After the country's independence in 1947, successive national governments have invested huge amounts of money and employed thousands of men in rural development programmes. While it is true that much progress has been made, it is at the same time patent that it is not commensurate with the resources employed. One of the main reasons for this is that

the perception and understanding of the rural problems has not been as deep as Swami Vivekananda had understood them. As pointed out by him, mere monetary help may be counter-productive in the long run, if it is not accompanied by appropriate education which will enable the rural masses to 'help themselves'. This has been proved by the results of various rural development programmes tried out during the last three decades in India.

Even today nearly fifty percent of our rural population live under the poverty line. Agricultural production has no doubt multiplied. But the small and marginal farmers, the self-employed in cottage industry, the day-labourer and such others are even now finding it difficult to eke out their livelihood.

Rural work of the Ramakrishna Mission

Working in rural areas is not something new to the Ramakrishna Mission. Even in its incipient stages, some of the centres of the Ramakrishna Mission were started in the countryside. For instance, way back in 1897, famine relief was organized in some villages of Murshidabad district in Bengal by Swami Akhandanandaji, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. As a follow-up to these relief operations, he started a Boys' Home for children orphaned by the famine.

Since then several other centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have come up in rural areas, catering to the needs of the rural population, as for example at Sarisha in 24 Parganas (W.B.), Nattarampalli in Tamil Nadu and so on.

However, it was only after the independence that Integrated Rural Development work was taken up on a much bigger scale by some of the centres of the Mission. Work in tribal belts was also started. Special mention should be made

2. Ibid Vol. 7 (1972), Pp. 327-28

3. *Rebuild India* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Convention, 1980) p. 28

4. *Complete Works* 5:381

5. Ibid Vol. 8 (1977) Pp. 88-89

6. *Rebuild India* p. 27

of the work done by the Lok Siksha Parishad under the auspices of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur. The Parishad has been working in a large way at least in 600 villages in three districts of West Bengal. Its work has made a definite impact on the rural population, both economically and socially. Similar is the work done by the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. The Divyayana, an institution run by the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi, Bihar, trains up tribal young men of Chota Nagpur area and follows up the training by helping the tribals to stand on their own feet economically and at the same time attain social respectability.

Work in tribal areas have also been undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission centres at Raipur (M.P.), Silchar (Assam), Kaladi (Kerala), and these activities are being expanded to cover a large section of the population.

Self-reliance: key to Pallimangal

However, Pallimangal is a new experiment in rural reconstruction, started in some villages of the Hooghly district in West Bengal, in the year 1980. The area covered is not vast, the scheme has not been at work for very long, and the targets have also not yet been fully achieved. But what is significant is that the philosophy that inspired the project and the modus operandi followed have for their basis the following concepts: (1) self-reliance, (2) using the renewable resources, (3) releasing the beneficiaries from the grip of the village money-lender, (4) strengthening the moral and spiritual base of the villagers.

Self-reliance came first in the list of these concepts and the basic assumption was that any project taken up should make the beneficiaries 'self-dependent' within a period of three to five years. Ways were

to be found to actualize these concepts in and through the life of the rural people, whom the project was to serve. How was this to be done?

The background

In September 1978 unprecedented floods laid waste vast areas in eight districts of West Bengal. The districts of Hooghly, where Sri Ramakrishna was born, was one of them. The river Dwarakeshwar inundated vast areas of Arambagh subdivision and left death and destruction in its wake. Nearly 500 acres of agricultural land producing three crops a year were turned into a desert. Sand from the river lay 10 to 14 feet deep over lush fields.

The Ramakrishna Mission conducted relief operations here too, as in many other districts. After the primary relief was over, a project of rehabilitation was taken up, and as many as 260 houses were built, besides a beautiful building for a girls' school the original building of which had been totally washed off by the floods. In addition to this, a community hall and a Śitalā temple were also erected. All these cost nearly Rs. 2.5 million, the whole amount having been collected as donation from the public.

This was the area that was selected for the Pallimangal project, along with two more villages, Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, the place of birth of Sri Ramakrishna and of the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, respectively. These holy places are visited by hundreds of devotees round the year. But still, they are afflicted by the usual malady of all Indian villages: poverty, lack of proper medical facilities, want of facilities for nonformal education etc.

The beginnings

The main hurdle in making any new venture successful is to find the right man to carry out the scheme. This is particularly

so in rural development. For, while the rural people lack right awareness of their problems, they are loath to put their faith in the educated city-dwellers. Their past experiences with them do not permit or encourage such credibility.

Therefore, first of all, it was necessary to create a band of *local* young men, who could be trained in implementing the scheme. They would find it easier to establish rapport very quickly with the rural folk. With this end in view twenty educated young men were recruited from the project areas. They were unemployed youth who could not themselves find a way out of their sorry predicament. These young men were offered training and some stipend. The training was organized at the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math, for two months. After preliminary orientation with regard to developing the right perspective for this work, the boys were given special training: some in pisciculture, some in improved methods of agriculture, and some others in poultry-farming and so on.

After the training was over, the trainees returned to their villages and started improved methods of resource management on their own lands and ponds. At the same time, they began to help the monks of the Mission in organizing the Pallimangal activities.

The method

Marginal and small farmers were called and their problems were discussed. They were made to understand that, with improved methods, their farm yields could go up considerably. They were given interest-free loans, mainly in kind, so that they would not need to go to the traditional village money-lender for the purpose. Similarly, those who owned ponds were given necessary inputs for better pisciculture.

A dairy-development scheme too was started with the objective of improving the livestock in the area.

Before the start of the work, a thorough survey was undertaken so as to ascertain the economic and social conditions of the villagers. It was realized that every village contained people belonging to different professions and they should be helped to increase their earnings as far as possible through their own professions. However, new small-scale and cottage industries were also introduced.

Besides these, non-formal education and cultural activities, too, were encouraged and the trained cadre began to handle these activities successfully.

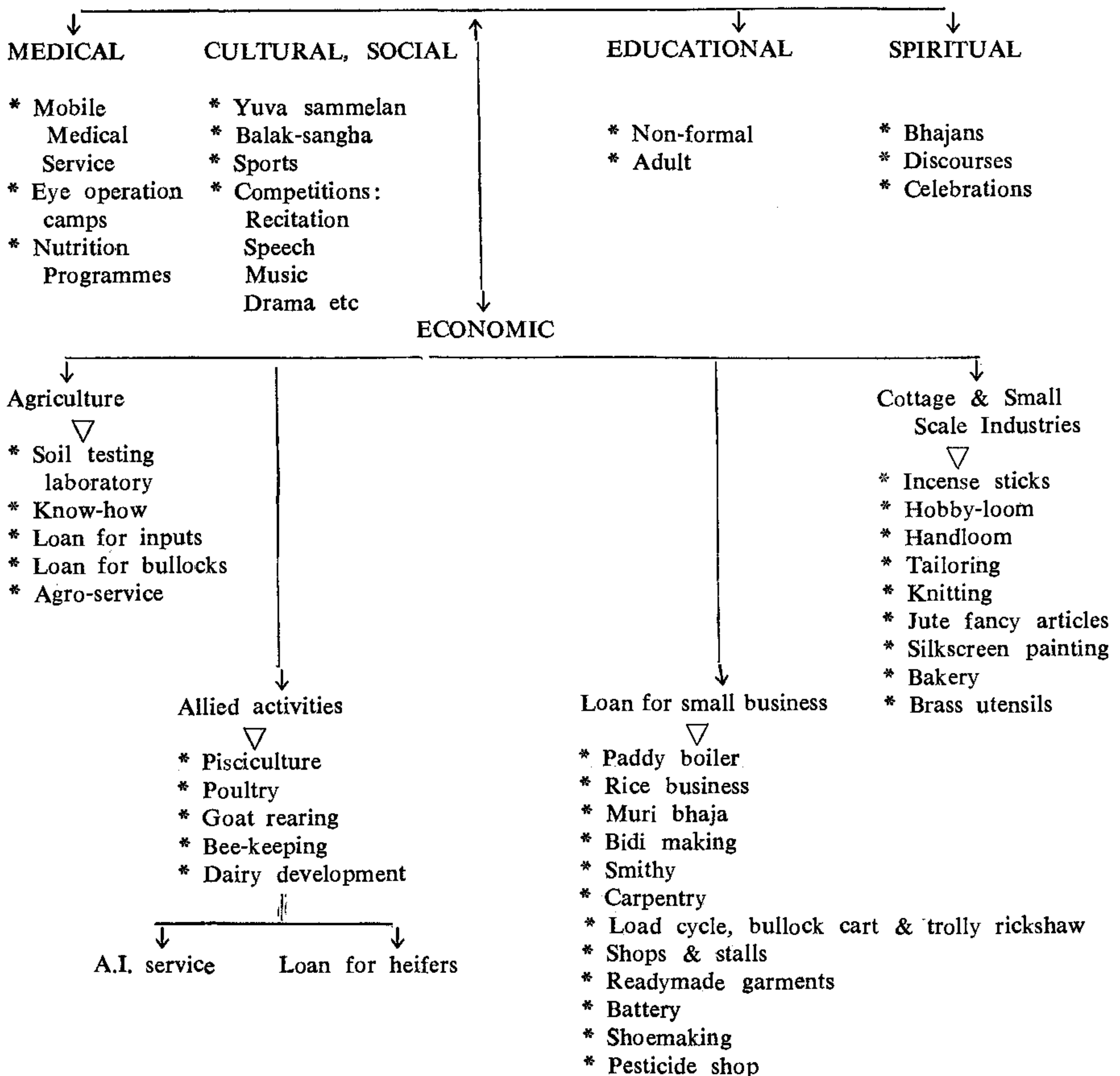
One of the special activities was to start a model farm on a small plot of sand-filled land. At least experimentally it was proved that, given adequate availability of water, many crops could be raised even on sand: peanuts, vegetables, potatoes and so on. But these successful results could not be copied widely for want of irrigation facilities.

Three years of work have brought the benefits of self-reliance to a large number of poor villagers. The tables given below give an idea of the work done and the results achieved.

One of the permanent contributions to the work in this area is the soil testing laboratory set up at Kamarpukur. This is being managed by one of the boys trained for the project. The benefit of soil testing before manuring the field and sowing the seeds is now being realized by farmers. It helps them to identify the defects in the soil and rectify them. Moreover, excess application of chemical fertilizers not only involves unnecessary extra expenditure, but also causes failure of crops. This could be prevented by assessing the *actual* need of fertilizers in a land. The value of such scientific methods is being realized gradually

Table No. 1

PALLIMANGAL ACTIVITIES



by the farmers, and the soil testing laboratory is helping in the work.

Another area where attempts are being made to create a new awareness is the saving habit. With the help of Pallimangal, its beneficiaries have started earning regular income, but the tendency to save at least some amount for the future is not cultivated easily. The Pallimangal is trying to inculcate this habit through slow persuasion.

One more important work of the Pallimangal is the running of a mobile dispensary, which covers nearly 80 villages through four centres, every week.

The population covered by Pallimangal activities so far is as follows:

Jayrambati village	1,045
Kamarpukur village	3,357
Baji-Dewanganj (15 villages)	30,000 (approx.)

Table No. 2

NO. OF BENEFICIARIES.

Activity	Type of help	Number of beneficiaries			Total
		Kamarpukur	Jayrambati	Balidewanganj	
Agriculture	loan for inputs	43	39	120	202
	free seed distribution	—	—	100	100
	agro-service	25	—	100	125
	loan for bullocks	35	—	8	43
	know-how	60	35	100	195
	soil analysis	—	—	—	800
Pisciculture		15	—	32	47
Dairy-development	A.I. Service	180	—	73	253
	loan for heifers	6	—	8	14
Poultry	loan	1	—	—	1
Bee keeping	know-how	—	6	6	12
Bakery	(one unit) training & loan	—	14	—	14
Cottage Industry		35	23	50	108
Small-business	loan	93	5	42	140

Medical: Cases treated in 1983-84 were 51,268

Free eye camp: Two eye camps were organized one at Jayrambati and another at Kamarpukur. 105 cases were operated; so far all successful. Free spectacles were also distributed to all.

However, it should be noted that the objective of the Pallimangal is not to restrict itself to the present area, but to start more such projects in other areas, after this first attempt has been put on a permanent footing. With this end in view, a small society named 'Vivekananda Palli Seva Samstha' has been started in Bally-Dewanganj, with the erstwhile trainees as its members. These men have already found an opening in life, as they have become usefully employed in various ways. But, at the same time, they are to continue the Pallimangal's work with other people in their villages and help them on to travel towards the goal of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

It is not claimed that Pallimangal has solved all the problems of the villager. Far from it. For instance, freeing them from the

clutches of the village money-lender is not yet complete. But what the Pallimangal has achieved is to create an awareness that, if renewable resources are managed intelligently, every village can find the wherewithal to remove poverty. Moreover, it has made the villagers realize that educating the people and creating a healthy social atmosphere, where caste and such other causes of dissension are eliminated, are an essential prerequisite for a total, integrated development of the village.

Obviously, the work done in a few villages of West Bengal is not a complete answer to all the problems of rural India. But if projects such as the Pallimangal are extended to the maximum number of villages in India, the possibility of the villagers finding the answers to their own problems will be bright.

BHAGAVAN BUDDHA MEETS LORD CHRIST IN A MOMENT OF TRUTH

DR. GOURIE NAG

BUDDHA: Why did you suffer so dear friend ?
For what cause in *samsāra* did you enact
What we know already ?
What great desire did you not finally renounce
Which gave you so much pain
To be denied by your kinsmen
And crucified like a common crook ?
I ask—what did you gain ?

CHRIST: You say that all is suffering
That its cause must be renounced, but why ?
Are you afraid to weep and bleed
And bear the accusations of the crowd ?
Why are you afraid of wearing the crown of thorns ?
The peace you speak of—Great Nirvana—
Ah, is it not escape my friend ?
High above the sufferings of men, the view indeed is tranquil,
But is *Nirvāna* final proof while *Māra* reigns ?
What will you do without him and his laws
That rule the hearts of men ?
No, rather would I see the great foe cleansed through tears,
Here deep in the agonies of the world,
Which I do not wish to flee.
I renounced your sage-like wisdom for the fray ;
I wore the crown of thorns and paid with blood
For I would have this Satan scorched through pain
That burns all dross in one Great Sacrifice
Which none can dare perform ;
And through that sacrifice, I dare say
Will mankind be redeemed.

BUDDHA: Redeemed ? Can you undo what these others have done ?
Can you save all mankind ?
Have you not fallen by the last infirmity,
That noble pride that takes all the debts
Of human *karma*, upon itself not in sweet humility
But in manifest majestic prodigality,
Which blinds the faltering pride of sinners
And leaves them with a gift whose price
They cannot fathom or repay ? And so—
They call upon your name and worship,

Build your church and ritualize your death
 And eat your body, drink your blood in bread and wine
 And recollect half-stricken with fear
 The alien taste of Truth ;
 They go their daily round, in sleep they walk
 Seduced by that same Satan whom you thought you
 Overcame upon the cross.
 Now tell me, was it worth it after all ?
 Confess, you kept your secret hidden,
 Left only recollection in the end,
 Not mankind's own but yours alone,
 Who had already escaped the wheel of all illusion
 And knew salvation.
 Did you teach men to quench the last desire,
 The last illusion, in the urge to serve ?
 I thought that way was best—
 To leave grown men to work out their *own* salvation,
 Not through me ; for to provide a surrogate
 Would be not to defeat the sin
 We both despise, but to add fuel to the fire ;
 For see how men will kill, love, hate, suffer, be tormented
 With untrue recollections of our thought and deed
 As they have done in memory of you
 (No doubt of me, as well).
 Come then, tell me was it not
 Your own last shred of mortal self-deceit
 That left mankind so thriftless in desire ?
 For had you shed that too
 You would not have borne the cross
 Nor given traffic to passing imagery
 And tricked the memories of poor, haunted men
 Confused and lost within the wheel of Time.

CHRIST: No, no dear friend, do not accuse we thus,
 I came and died and rose because *you* failed, alas!
 Compassion drove us blind before the light of Truth
 'twas not enough I know—
 But then, your way was one
 My way an other.
 And now between us we have said it all,
 And if men care to listen, they will hear ;
 If not, we can only look within,
 Not by ourselves but *together* lodged in Time,
 You in my heart, I in thine,
 And see perhaps how your desire to win,
 And mine to lose—

Twin passions to renounce sin and power
 Must burn between them all the schemes of Hell.
 The face of Satan, Yea and Mara's hosts,
 See how they melt and vanish with the dawn.
 And from this *ay* must mankind find its way
 And seize the Truth at once without hearsay.

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO MARY HALE?

SWAMI VIDYATMANANDA

(Continued from the February issue)

[Illustrated]

[Mary Hale, born in 1865, was the eldest daughter of George and Ellen Hale whose home in Chicago Swami Vivekananda used as his 'head quarters' during the early years of his stay in America. Mary had a sister by name Harriet and a brother Samuel. Her two cousins Isabelle and Harriet Mckindley were also living with the Hale family at the time of Swamiji's visit. The first part of this article described the close and holy relationship that Swamiji had established with these young ladies. Harriet Hale was married in 1899 but Mary could not find a suitable partner in life, and Swamiji was much concerned about this. Between 1899 and 1900 Sister Nivedita was in and around Chicago. Mary Hale and Nivedita met each other several times. They were of widely different temperaments and, whereas Nivedita looked upon herself as a daughter and disciple of Swamiji, Mary's attitude was only that of a sister. Now read on.]

Mary must have written Swamiji of her distressing situation and suggested a foreign vacation as a means of getting away from it all. He agreed from San Francisco (22 March, 1900): 'I am glad you are going over to Europe for a long period. Make a long tour, you have been long a house-dove.'

Mary, always the determined optimist, at this time provoked from Swamiji one of his greatest letters. Dated 28 March, 1900, the letter corrects Mary's Christian Science doctrine which claims that good is more real than bad and can be directly cultivated. It is written in an ecstatic mood and contains the famous lines: 'Ha! ha! you silly girl, all is good! Nonsense. I was Jesus and I was Judas Iscariot: both my

play, my fun.'

But Mary did not leave until later, as we know that Swamiji visited her in Chicago on his way back east and eventually to Paris for the Exposition Internationale Universelle in the summer of 1900.

But the blows that had come to Mary were waking her up. We may believe that Mother Hale never 'tumbled' as to ~~who~~ this dear Indian boy really was whom she had discovered almost on her front steps a few years before. And Mary had always thought of him as hardly more than a particularly talented, friendly big brother. But by mid-1900 Mary was beginning to understand. For the first time she must have laid before him some serious questions as his reply of 17 June makes clear: ~~it~~

this letter he explained such matters as Kali worship, class prejudice in India, pujas and ritualism, what it means to be committed to religion, what education truly is, the place of emotionalism, and what is the function of the guru. This later topic confirms us in our supposition that Mary did not become a disciple in the generally accepted sense. Mary and Swamiji never met after his visit in June, 1900, to the apartment on the near-north side of Chicago which Mary at that time shared with her mother. Indeed it is reported (see Marie Louise Burke's "Swami Vivekananda: His Second Visit to the West: New Discoveries", page 641) that on that occasion he spent a sleepless night apparently knowing and regretting that he was about to break these sweet human bonds forever.

Mary did go to Europe, but apparently not in time to visit the Paris Exposition, which closed in November, 1900. A letter from Swamiji, now in India, dated 18 May, 1901, is informative: "So you have been enjoying Florence and Italy..." He called her "fat old laidy".

Florence, and equally Venice, in northern Italy, had been especially dear to English and American tourists and expatriates for a hundred years or so. As the Columbia Encyclopedia says of Florence: "The jewel of the Italian renaissance...one of the world's great historic cities...the list of artists working in the city was headed by Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Donatello." It was the city also of Savonarola, Dante, and the Medicis. In the 19th century 'everyone' went there to see the art collections, and many artists and writers, loving the atmosphere, chose to live in Florence or nearby. It is natural that Mary, travelling with her brother Samuel and probably with her mother, should go to Florence. Mother Church was already familiar with the city.

Here began to occur events leading up to the astonishing break in the course of Mary's life. We begin to learn of them from a letter from Swamiji dated 5 July, 1901:

So you are enjoying Venice. The old man must be delicious; only Venice was the home of old Shylock, was it not? The Raja of Khetri... died of a fall from a high tower in Secundra, the tomb of Emperor Akbar...Thus we sometimes come to grief on account of our zeal for antiquity. Take care, Mary, don't be too zealous for your piece of Indian (Italian?) antiquity.

Marie Louise Burke has observed that the word 'Indian' in the last line must surely be a misreading of Swamiji's handwriting by the editor who transcribed the letter for publication. The warning, in the light of later events, makes sense only when the word 'Italian' is substituted.

But Mary must have argued in favour of the old Italian gentleman she had met and was, we may believe, contemplating marrying. Thanks to the remarkably efficient postal services which England had established with her colony, a letter from Europe to India by surface mail took as little as two weeks in those days. Swamiji's immediate response is dated 27 August, 1901. He refers to Mary's presence in Switzerland where she is busy studying Swiss 'and other' antiquities, and then continues:

What I am exercised with just this moment is that you get a little bit of manliness about you. Oh! Mary, with your brain, health, beauty, everything is going to waste just for lack of that one essential—assertion of individuality. Your haughtiness, spirit, etc. are all nonsense, only mockery: you are at best a boarding-school girl, no backbone! no backbone!

Alas! this lifelong leading-string business! This is very harsh, very brutal: but I can't help it. I love you, Mary, sincerely, genuinely; I can't cheat you with namby-pamby sugar candies.

...Wake up, girl. I expect now from you letters of the right slashing order; give it right straight; I need a good deal of rousing.

Good-bye, dear Mary; hope we shall meet again somewhere in this life, but meeting or no meeting, I remain

Ever your loving brother, Vivekananda

*

From the evidence gleaned from Swamiji's and Nivedita's letters to her, may we try to understand what sort of person was Mary Hale and why she, at thirty-seven, took the extraordinary step we are about to reveal? How, most of all, did her association with Vivekananda determine—if it did, the events of the second half of Mary Hale's life?

Harriet, who seems to have been a lively, good-natured young woman, had fulfilled her destiny at twenty-five. Mary, nearly seven years older, had found no suitable alliance. Swamiji frequently referred to her spinsterhood and often expressed the wish that she might find a suitable husband (although he also warned her against the disappointments of marriage). By 1901 he was moreover calling her an old lady.

We may believe that her failure to follow the usual course was painful to Mary. She seems to have come close to forming a union some time before, and there had been those trips to the East Coast which had permitted her to make new contacts. Surely Mary, handsome, wealthy, and socially well placed, must have had many opportunities to marry.

The fault, if it was a fault, was in her character. And perhaps Swamiji's talk of dispassion had had an effect. There was in Mary an abstemiousness, an idealism, a pride which made her resist, like the Arabian thoroughbred Swamiji had compared her to, yielding to any ordinary cavalier. She was too reflective, too demanding, to settle for any of the 'silly boys' of rich families available to her. Over the years she had settled ever more firmly into family, respectability, and a determined—perhaps

pitiful—sterile high-mindedness. She was probably quite lonely.

It is not to be wondered at that Mary and Nivedita had not hit it off well. As perfect ladies and naturally kind persons, they tried, each of them, to like the other. But Nivedita was too unconventional, too independent, for Mary's taste; and Nivedita found Mary unsusceptible to her evangelism, to the kind of fiery commitment to India and Hinduism she was intent on mobilizing.

At the heart of everything there was Swamiji. The Hales had known him far longer than had Nivedita, and in a different way. Nivedita knew his Indian setting and understood who he really was. She expressed in many letters her astonishment that she, she, should have been privileged to know such a being. To the Hales Swamiji was a delightful family friend—a jolly, interesting, talented brother. You could look after him; you could give him advice, you could even scold him, as had Mother Church. 'I see you are all mere babies,' Swamiji had scolded back on February 1, 1895, to some admonitory advice demanding he be more accommodating to priests. It is only in the latter months of their association that Mary seems to have seriously inquired into the religious subjects that concerned Swamiji, and then mostly after having been impelled by Nivedita's enthusiasms. It might be said that Swamiji's concern for her and her awakening respect for him intensified Mary's predicament. He had suggested she might marry, but a certain fastidiousness had held her back. He had urged her to take up some intellectual or spiritual pursuit, but such was at variance with the way of life she had always known. Swamiji had been trying to make Mary face herself, and no doubt she wanted to, but how?

What was Nivedita's 'purpose' in Vivekananda's life; what was Mary's? Nivedita's part in the Vivekananda world appearance

may be said to have been essentially publicist, chronicler. She accompanied, observed, and interviewed Swamiji and recorded what she heard and saw. She gathered his letters for publication. The destiny that brought her to Chicago for a few months in 1899-1900 was, I venture to say, not meant so much to organize Chicago society to support her educational project as to meet Mary Hale so that in later years she could claim from her Swamiji's wonderful letters—which she did. Thanks to what Nivedita called her incessant scribbling we have Swami Vivekananda recorded in massive and meticulous detail. No one else preserved him for posterity as Nivedita did.

What was Mary's 'purpose'? Something in her inspired him to be confidential in his correspondence with her. Mary Hale's 'purpose' was that of encourager of self-revelation on his part. She was, in a spiritual sense, an 'agent provocateur'. Because Mary was Mary we know more about the personal side of Swamiji than we should have known had she not existed: how fun-loving he was and how natural, how tender, how concerned he was about the welfare of other human beings; and when he wrote to her out of ecstasy, as he did on the 28th March in 1900, and on other occasions, what was going on in his soul. Mary existed for us just as Nivedita did, so that we and those who follow us might know Vivekananda more fully.

Does it really matter what happened to Swamiji's Chicago sister after 1902? Her historic function had been by then accomplished. Why try to find out what ever happened to M. H.? Why not let her rest in the obscurity she has enjoyed for the past eighty years—merely a shadowy vestige to whom he addressed marvellous letters?

No. Persons connected with a historical personality become historical personalities by virtue of that association. So let us try

to follow Mary's post-1902 story to the very end.

*

On July 10, 1902, Nivedita wrote a sweet letter to Mary telling her about Swami Vivekananda's death. Now the 'Aunt' is gone. It is 'My dear dear Mary': 'Swamiji is ours today as he has never been...I dare not say more, for knowing how you loved him, I fear by any word to give you pain.'

A year before, Mary had been in Italy and Switzerland; whether she had remained there or had returned briefly to Chicago in the meantime is not known. But four months after Swamiji's death Mary Hale married. According to the Registry Office of Pistoia, near Florence, Mary Hale and Giuseppe Matteini were married in Pistoia, Italy, on 5 November, 1902. The bride's age was given as thirty-seven and the groom's as seventy-two. His profession was entered as property owner and hers as 'person of independent means'.

How and when the two met is not known, but now it seems we can understand the significance of Swamiji's July and August letters of the previous year in which he seemed to warn her against an older man she had met in Venice. Whether the reference was to Signor Matteini or not we cannot be sure, but such would seem likely. The allusion to Shylock suggests that Swamiji was afraid Mary's 'antique collecting' might cost her a good deal of money.

Between times Mary had apparently written Swamiji describing the situation. His letter of August 27 using the words 'lifelong leading string business' suggests that she had justified her attachment to the older man on the basis that with her father dead, family matters now her concern, and the future care of her mother her

responsibility, she felt demoralized; she needed some order, fatherly presence. 'Leading string' refers to the strings by which children are supported when learning to walk. Swamiji exhorted her to be manly, not dependent on any man.

*

What do we know about Mary's husband? In 1902 Commendatore Giuseppe Matteini was a recent widower and owner of a historic stately home at Santomato between Prato and Pistoia, near Florence, called La Villa di Celle. A book published in 1983 by a local cleric, Amerigo Bucci, recounts the history of this estate and tells us something about Mary's husband.

Giuseppe Matteini, born in 1830 at San Casciano near Florence, belonged to a well-known upper-class family of the region. As a young man he travelled to America and elsewhere, and on one of these trips he met an English heiress named Grace Green. The two married. Matteini brought his wife to Tuscany where they bought the historic Villa di Celle. The Villa dates from the 17th century. It is a very large house of Florentine style set in the hills overlooking the valley of the Arno River. The estate in Matteini's time consisted of a thousand or more acres planted for the most part in olive trees and wine grapes, where lived as labourers perhaps as many as fifteen or twenty extended families. Some sixty domestics, grooms, and gardeners were attached to the house itself. The estate in the past had belonged to several aristocratic families, including one which had produced the Cardinal Carlo Agostino Fabroni (1651-1727). The wealth of Matteini's new wife made it possible to repair and embellish the Villa and park. They built a new wing, redecorated the rooms, and installed a great fountain before the south facade.

Matteini emblazoned the exterior of the house with his coat of arms and had stained glass windows displaying his coat of arms placed in the estate's private chapel dedicated to the memory of Cardinal Fabroni. At some time after he married Mary Hale, perhaps wishing to accommodate any Americans his wife might receive as guests, Matteini had a private bowling alley constructed on the estate—said to be the first bowling alley seen in Italy. Matteini was a member of the Italian parliament. 'Commendatore' is an honorary title bestowed by the Italian government in recognition of services to the state.

In course of time Grace Green died. And as we know, Mary Hale came to the Villa di Celle as its new mistress in 1902.

Shortly after Signor Matteini's death in 1919 Mary sold the Villa. The present owner is Signor Giuliano Gori, an industrialist and collector of modern art. The villa and the park are today well maintained and are occasionally open to the public. Signor Gori himself showed me through the Villa and over the grounds.

*

How many times Swamiji had blessed Mary and wished her well! As that difficult period of 1900-1902 drew to its end it may have appeared to Mary that her brother's wishes for her were coming true. The arrival of Signor Matteini in her life may have seemed to offer her an opportunity to fulfil Swamiji's prophecy that she should make a splendid queen, for the property of which she should become chateleine in marrying Matteini was indeed almost a small principality. A magnificent house, a large, productive property in Tuscany, one of the most favoured regions in the world. And at the same time heed Swamiji's warning that she would make a poor wife—since the aged, distinguished

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the same things, nor have the same influence, if anyone went with me.

*

To help in tracing Mary Hale's life as Mme. Matteini, Signor Gori, present owner of the Villa di Celle, contacted the estate's former manager, Signor Mario Masoni, who had supervised the personnel of Celle for many years, from about 1930 onwards. He had several employees who had worked on the estate during Mary Matteini's time. The recollections of Signor Masoni are informative:

The old employees of the estate whom I knew some fifty years ago when I began to work there used to talk a good deal about the first Mme. Matteini, nee Grace Green, and her vast wealth which had helped to finance many improvements in the property. Very little was said about the second wife. It was known that she was a good and generous person who, during the Great War, busied herself sending packages of clothes and other things to the soldiers on the battlefield. These old servants used to say, I do not know why, that she must have been English. (The Italians of that period did not easily distinguish English from Americans since both spoke the same foreign language.) They believed that all American women were immensely rich. After Commendatore Matteini's death the widow sold Celle and retired to Florence at the Hotel Anglo-American, where she occupied an apartment. She continued to receive old servants and employees, to whom she often made gifts. When the second wife died, she left, I have heard, to the few surviving estate employees, 11,000 liras to each one.

Thus we see Mary in the 1920's quietly living out her life in a suite at the Anglo-American Hotel at 9 Garibaldi Street, Florence. It is a quiet hotel in the old style near the Arno, not far from the American consulate, and close to the great park known as the Cascine. Mother Church was with her, and Harriet. Three aging women, far in time and distance from the historical events in which they had

participated, and the historical figure whom they had known. Did they realize that, because Swamiji was to become beloved by so many, they in turn who had been loved by him would become the objects of worldwide affection also ?

Harriet died in Monte Carlo in April, 1929. She was fifty-seven. Next, Mrs. Hale, who died in Florence on 10 January, 1930. She had attained the great age of ninety-three. Finally, Mary. Mary Hale Matteini died in Florence on Kalpataru Day (January 1), 1933, aged sixty-eight. Her body was cremated at the Trespiano Cemetery in Florence on 20 January. A Mr. Fernando Metti withdrew the ashes and sent them to Kenosha, Wisconsin, to be buried in the family plot at the Green Ridge Cemetery.

Samuel Hale Sr's imposing monument is the largest in the cemetery. The burial places of his descendants are ranged around, marked with headstones, including those of Father Pope, Mother Church, Harriet Hale Woolley, and Mary Hale Mattieni. Brother Samuel, whom Swamiji always referred to simply as Sam, is buried there too ; he died in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on 25 October, 1924. He was fifty-five.

What ever happened to Mary Hale ? We have now for the first time the essential facts. But facts are only facts. I am the first to acknowledge that there is much we do not know ; the real Sister Mary escapes us still. Was hers on the whole a satisfying life ? We do not know. But I console myself by remembering that the words of a holy man must come true, and that what Swamiji wished for his 'sweetest notes' on 1 February, 1895—and many other times as well must in some subtle sense have worked out exactly as he wished:

Lord bless you all ever and ever—and may He lead you quickly out of this big humbug, the world! May you never be enchanted by this
(Continued on page 149)



THOREAU: THE FIRST 'SANNYASIN OF AMERICA'

SWAMI SARVESHANANDA

The great Swami Vivekananda referred at least once to Walt Whitman as 'the sannyasin of America'; and though we know of no discussion by him of other such 'sannyasins', we do now know, in the light of recently accumulated history, of at least one other candidate, namely Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), of whom, it appears, Swamiji had not heard much. So far as we know, he never mentioned the name; and as one browses through the literature available to Swamiji in 1893 (only 1½ years after Whitman's death), one feels the force of Carl Jackson's statement 'his (Thoreau's) lack of recognition...provides a classic example of greatness unrecognized.'¹ And a large share of the cause of the phenomenon lies just in Thoreau's Indian-Sadhu qualities: relentless devotion to truth; penetrating insight into the faults and foibles—in himself first, but then in friends, society, nations—(as Emerson put it, '...those Terrible Eyes'), disgust with the ways of politics, and even of the most 'reformers' or do-gooders—in fact a striking resem-

blance to our Old Testament Prophets, as well noted by several of his friendly critics.

But none of this is at all meant to detract from Swamiji's regard for Whitman: we simply say 'the first sannyasin...' since Thoreau happened to have been born two years ahead of the latter!

Sister Nivedita once wrote—doubtless having learned from her great Master, Vivekananda—'Greatness is (but) another word for Interpretation.'² Clearly, this has little to do with mere commentaries or even with words of any height:—Swamiji often said the Greatest were the Silent ones. But to 'interpret', one has first to *see*—to understand, realize and live up to the truths oneself. And 'only a lion can understand a lion.' *Then* he can, if he likes, 'speak the thoughts of the ancients in the language of the moderns,...the thoughts of the angels—the thoughts of God in the language of poor humanity...'³

1. Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought—Nineteenth Century Explorations* (London and Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981) p. 68

2. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita School, 1967) Vol. 1. p. 481

3. Swami Vivekananda, 'The Cosmos: The Microcosm' *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978) Vol. 2. p. 213

Since Thoreau seems to have accomplished this high task, with the unique speciality that he dealt with the Truths of a distant land—and succeeded so well in interpreting them to the West that the great Gandhi took him as authority for his nation-building in the East—we make bold to say that there is no example in recorded history of such an interpreter of Vedanta 'from outside'. Never, of course, can we overlook the spiritual giants in other faiths, such as Meister Eckhart, Brother Lawrence, and certain other saintly mystics, who seem to have reached the highest ideals of Vedanta with no visible helps; but one could hardly call them 'Interpreters' in our sense.

Since any Profile must be a Reflection—at least off the mind of the artist, onto a printed page, etc—let us glance now at this remarkable series of reflections: from Manu and the *Gita*—to Thoreau—to Mahatma Gandhi and thence all India. As with almost everything 'Indian' about Thoreau, the facts of the matter have been studiously neglected by almost all good Americans. But search does reveal one factual study⁴ in a distinguished American journal, documenting Gandhiji's repeated mention of indebtedness to Thoreau—not as his sole inspiration, of course, but beginning in 1906, before the first 'test' of Gandhi's Passive Resistant movement.⁵ Gandhi carefully studied not only Thoreau's classic essay 'Civil Disobedience', but also 'Walden', wherein all Thoreau's basic philosophy appears, and also several of his great essays. Webb Miller, an American reporter, after a long talk with Gandhi in London in 1942, concluded: 'Gandhi

received back from America what was fundamentally the philosophy of India after it has been distilled and crystallized in the mind of Thoreau.'⁶ With typical frankness, Gandhi often mentioned this fact—along, of course, with similar but less noted debts to Tolstoy, Ruskin, etc—but naturally, his Indian admirers tended to downgrade such 'foreign' importations; and the above-mentioned lag in our own acceptance of Thoreau, further postponed the realization of these great Reflections.

But now, although the Reflection—the fact of a great Interpreter of Vedanta to Vedantins—is clear, the Profile of the reflector is, far from simple. As one of his sharpest critics puts it, Thoreau was such a many-sided genius, with insights which unsettled so many aspects of his society, that 'our first task...is distinguishing the real man from the various cardboard Thoreaus which commentators have created...'⁷ To his great friend Emerson, he was 'a bloodless character distinguished for his ascetic renunciations'; to Ellery Channing, he was 'the poet-naturalist, a sweet singer of woodland beauty'; to his Abolitionist friend, Sanborn, 'a Concord warrior', etc. And the passage of time with growing research data simply multiplies the problem: hundreds of 'Thoreau Clubs' have sprung up, idealizing him in such diverse ways as 'Philosophical anarchist', conservationist, pacifist, and—specially jarring in our ears—'body mystic...(who) worshipped...at the shrine of Pan...the upright man of the Arcadian fertility cult.'⁸

Now, all this was inevitable—especially

4. Owen Thomas (Ed.) *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: W. W. Norton Co, 1966) p. 364 ff. (Article by George Hendrick, from the *New England Quarterly*). Hereinafter referred to as 'Walden'.

5. Ibid p. 371

6. Ibid p. 365. We may add that there is no evidence that Gandhi ever saw 'A Week on the Concord and Merrimac...' which contains Thoreau's most remarkable flights of Vedanta philosophy.

7. Ibid p. 316 (also 314 ff)

8. Ibid p. 421

in our restless West, ever on the watch for the new and dazzling; for Thoreau was dazzlingly many-sided. To take the highest comparisons: Vivekananda often praises Krishna's many-sidedness; but more and more emerge the dangers of hasty imitation thereof. Even Sri Ramakrishna's divine ability to become 'all things to all men' has set some of our alcoholic friends off on sprees in fond imitation of Girish's 'giving power of attorney'! But Ramakrishna had his 'M' to record the checks-and-balances, and his Vivekananda to hammer them in. Back down to our level, Thoreau also left a valuable safeguard in the form of his priceless *Journal*, allowing all serious students to glimpse the high moral levels he spoke from. Even the most hearty 'Pan-worshippers' would falter there. Again, his noisy and omnipresent critics do him spectacular service in what they *do not* say! We have searched through dozens of their treatises, new and old, without lighting on a single aspersion on his chastity, truthfulness, or interest in money beyond bare essentials. Incidentally, the tedium of such fact-finding is greatly relieved by the self-contradictions among these critics. It seems, one can hardly be impartial about Thoreau: one must either be an enthusiast (cultist?) or a critic (at least a warn-er!)

Even for us, claiming to be Vedantists and loving all, it's not so easy. The present writer, as a former pacifist, had heard much of Thoreau, pro and con; but when he started reading him, keeping in mind the advice to 'see no fault in others', he was repeatedly turned off by Thoreau's polemics. And when, about twenty years ago, the New York City 'car-cards' carried aphorisms from Thoreau for months, these were slanted mainly in that direction. After all, criticism is more fun than high philosophy, especially if the latter smacks

of Vedanta! Further, the 'car-cards' were in a way repaying the nation's debt to the author for the half-century of studied neglect, after his death. As one of his most noted critics summarizes '...though ignored by his own age, ours listens closely as the things he valued—privacy, liberty, the good earth—fall into increasingly short supply.'⁹

In our own case, however, we were simply driven *back to Thoreau* by the obvious *gap* in our Vedantic summaries of pre-Vivekananda Hindu influence in the West. Paradoxically, it appears that 'we' have contributed substantially to the 'greatness unrecognized' noted in our first paragraph! After all, none of us doubts that Vivekananda, with Ramakrishna working through him, *could* have spread The Word with no previous help; so why bother with the rumblings before him? They might even seem to lessen his importance in the picture. Of course, mention is made of Whitman and Ingersoll, whom Swamiji himself mentioned, along with Emerson and a few other Transcendentalists. But can there be even the least doubt of what Swamiji would have said, had he known the facts we now know? Josephine McLeod records a striking comparison of two of the 'biggest' men she ever met: Kaiser Wilhelm and Swami Vivekananda: The Keiser was so big, he made all else look small; Vivekananda, so big that all else looked bigger than before!

And surprisingly, this attitude among Vedantists still persists. How else to explain the phenomenon of lack-of-information among almost all our friends—plus several distinguished acquaintances questioned by mail—about the only classic study *from*

9. Wm. Howarth (Ed.) *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Modern Library—College Edition, 1981) pp. xxvii-xxviii. We could well add to 'the things he valued...', '...peace of mind, simplicity, purity'.

the Vedantist viewpoint, before 1981, namely, Arthur Christy's *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*?¹⁰ Yet this was published by Columbia University in 1932 and had four reprints through 1978! Even our greatly respected friend and advisor, Mr. C. H. MacLachlan, author of two fine articles on Thoreau in this Journal,¹¹ had never come across that book; and in fact this is one reason we venture now to re-study the ground he so well covered. But meanwhile another and even more impressive study appeared in 1981 by Dr. Carl Jackson¹² covering 'the Orient's' influence on America for the whole century before Vivekananda. Since the author corroborates the work of Christy, and adds enough to justify our assertions about Thoreau, we refer the reader to his book for any doubts or further data. The purpose of the present study is to focus attention on four important facets of Thoreau's personality.

(I) He was a sannyasin, so far as was then possible in U.S.A. without either being jailed for vagrancy or mental aberration or both! Already we have noted that nobody seems ever to have questioned his chastity or truthfulness. We may add one among the many tributes to the latter, 'At his best, Thoreau is the clearest voice for social ethics that ever spoke out in America.'¹³

10. Arthur Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press; 4th reprint by New York: Octagon Books. 1978)

11. C. H. MacLachlan, 'The Spiritual Life of Henry D. Thoreau'. *Prabuddha Bharata* 70 (1965): 248 and 'Vivekananda and Thoreau' *Prabuddha Bharata* 72 (1967):207

12. *The Oriental Religions and American Thought*. Dr. Jackson was earlier author of a remarkable Ph. D. thesis, 'The Swami in America' a scholarly review of the history of the Rama-krishna Mission in the West. Yet he retains complete scientific detachment in his presentations.

13. *Walden*: p. 321 (Article by Stanley Edgar Hyman)

Emerson went further: no mere 'voice', but 'Thoreau was sincerity itself, and might fortify the convictions of prophets in the ethical laws by his living.'¹⁴ Then as to worldly possessions, Emerson summarizes, 'He had no talent for wealth and knew how to be poor without the least hint of squalor or inelegance'¹⁵

At this point, Emerson becomes a bit rhapsodic, mentioning 'no temptations...no appetites, no passions...' whereas it is clear from his Journal that Thoreau had plenty of such, but withal wonderful self-control. And here of course comes a big question, consistently ignored by most biographers: how many of these traits of renunciation came 'from Vedanta'? It now seems clear that they were all 'innate'; and barring a speculation on 'recent past birth in India', we can only point out that they were of the sort that blossomed out with amazing rapidity as soon as 'exposed' to Vedanta. And this happened without benefit of any Hindu Guru—unless one considers Emerson such—and with only a few available of the wondrous array of Vedantic literature we know today.¹⁶ Again, of course, Emerson introduced his young friend not only to Vedanta but also to the religions of China, Persia, Islam etc; but none doubts that the Indian influence was most basic.¹⁷

Jackson says that Thoreau not only 'was swept away in one year' by 'the profundity of Oriental thought' which 'it had taken Emerson almost twenty years to begin to appreciate', but he kept on from

14. Ibid p. 278

15. Ibid p. 267

16. Beyond 'Manu', the *Gītā*, and scattered portions of 'the Vedas' and 'Puranas', one finds little of what we know as Vedanta. Nor even of the major epics: Mahabharata and Ramayana.

17. Of course we include Buddhism here; but remarkably little of it had yet filtered into U.S.A. Eg. Emerson coolly refers to the *Gītā* as the '...renowned book of *Buddhism*' (italics ours).

there. Like Sri Ramakrishna, he had remarkable capacity—and determination—for carrying into practice whatever seemed to him true and good. Having heard nothing, it seems, of Vedanta throughout his four years at Harvard, he soon met Emerson, and by mid-1938 was thoroughly his disciple. But, though he shared his teacher's acceptance of truth from all sources, he was impatient to apply as much as possible of what he found, in his own life. And, though he rarely if ever spoke or wrote about it, his lifelong chastity must inevitably have been fortified by Manu and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. (Was there ever another like Manu—law-giver even to Sannyasis?) Only once he did seriously consider marriage; but the lady was also sought by his elder brother, whom he admired fervently; hence he kept himself in the background and she finally had to decline them both—on sincere doctrinal grounds.

It is clear that the Thoreau ancestry had a lot to do with his monastic tendencies. Not that all were monks. But our teachers say 'it takes several generations of good householders to produce a good monk.' We do know some facts: the Thoreau family had been in New England from pre-Revolutionary days and, though rarely outstanding, seemed always to have been good citizens. They seem to have had little of the 'American' urge to 'get on in the world'; Henry's father was a store-keeper and manufacturer of pencils; his mother a lover of outdoor Nature with a genius for 'a rich home life from simple materials'.¹⁸ As if to testify to this latter, none of her children ever married or left home (permanently). Small wonder that our Thoreau came to smile at Utopian communities such as 'Brook Farm', where

his Transcendentalist friends tried to simulate family life on idealistic bases. He grew up in a family strikingly resembling the Hindu joint-family tradition. In fact, the longest periods he spent away from home were (1) in the Emerson household (1841-3) and (2) his two years at Walden Pond (1845-7); both were within easy walk of his own family. And when his father died, in 1859, Henry took over full responsibility for carrying on his business.

Here, perhaps the reader's eyebrows may raise: 'business' for a sannyasi? This takes us to the second main facet of the Profile.

(II) He remained an *American* in the best sense of the word. Although his many-sided nature had strong resemblances to the old Jewish prophets, and though he took up the practice of yogas in all sincerity,¹⁹ still he was an eclectic and pragmatist, much like Emerson. In fact, the whole New England Transcendentalist group, centring on Concord where Thoreau spent most of his life, had this strong assimilative tendency. Starting from Unitarianism—which also had strongest roots around Boston and Harvard University—these bold speculators, keeping fresh the memories of 'the shot heard round the world'²⁰ brought together the most advanced idea of the great German transcendentalists from Kant, Goethe, Schelling, and others, down through their English interpreters, notably Wordsworth, always keeping the 'Light from the East' sharply in view. Convinced that Truth *must* be One, God *must* be in all—full of that *self-reliance* which Vivekananda found America's most precious trait for India to emulate—they

19. *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, p. 201 (also pp. 199 ff)

20. Last line of Emerson's poem immortalizing the 'battle of Lexington and Concord' which began the American Revolution.

18. *Dictionary of American Biography* Vol. 9, p. 491

felt they could institute a 'religion by revelation'.²¹ And this to include—along with all the above—the American strains of democracy, etc, which of course clash on many points with the great conservative tendencies in the religions of China and India particularly.

Now all this shines out clearest in Thoreau, since he, of all the group, tried hardest to practise what they preached, especially as regards money and 'business'. In his famous 'Walden'²² the first and longest chapter, titled 'Economy', details almost fanatically his preoccupation with *simplifying life*—again returning to it in the next chapter with prophetic zeal, pounding: 'Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity'²³ ...keep your accounts on your thumbnail...Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary, eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five...The nation...lives too fast. Men think it is essential that the *Nation*...talk through a telegraph and ride thirty miles an hour (sic)...If we...go to tinkering with our *lives*, to improve *them*, who will build railroads? ...But if we stay at home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride upon the railroad, it rides upon us...'

Already we glimpse why Gandhi took to Thoreau so readily! For *Walden* was one long 'Experiment with Truth' (Gandhi's term, though we do not know if he applied it to Thoreau.) It has been well said that, while the West was experimenting with how much a man can live on, Gandhi was, with

'how little...'. But, unlike Gandhi, he was a prophet, not necessarily a reformer. Though he vigorously warned, scolded, threatened his friends and countrymen for their ways, Thoreau never felt obliged to drag them into line himself. Specially, he had a profound contempt for politics and would have loved Samuel Johnson's definition of it as the 'last refuge of a scoundrel'. And he was not burdened with Gandhi's task of freeing an oppressed nation. So Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience' could function—albeit very dramatically—within the framework of his beloved democracy.

The point to be noted, however, is that both Gandhi and Thoreau adhered to the ideals of simplicity and freedom from possessions, far beyond most monastics in any but the most austere Orders. As Emerson put it, Thoreau 'had no ambition';²⁴ and here is one trait which clearly antedates his acquaintance with Vedanta. For he never studied for any profession:²⁵ and would doubtless have jumped for joy if he'd heard his wonderful contemporary, Ramakrishna, ask his elder brother, '...what shall I do with a mere bread-winning occupation?' Again, though he didn't literally 'renounce hearth and home'—the alternative to all practical purposes in America as it was, being jail for vagrancy—he remained as dutiful son and brother, with a detachment almost unparalleled in American annals. His Journal, to which he confided amply, and often highly self-critically, carries many passages of this sort: 'Rise, free from care, before the dawn, and seek adventures. Let the noon find thee by other lakes and the night...

21. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Bramhall House, 1951) p. 12

22. One of the only two books published in his lifetime: the distilled essence of his noted experiment in simplified living, followed by seven years in perfecting his account thereof.

23. Cf *Walden* p. 337 (Article by Sherman Paul): 'For simplicity, Thoreau often substituted poverty...' Then he quotes Thoreau: 'By simplicity, commonly called poverty, my life is concentrated...'

24. *Walden* p. 279. 'I cannot help counting it a fault in him, that he had no ambition... instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of a huckleberry party!'

25. *Walden and Other Writings*, (1950) p.x, Introduction by Brooks Atkinson.

everywhere at home. Let the thunder rumble...take shelter under the cloud, while they flee to carts and sheds. Let not to get a living be thy trade, but thy sport. Enjoy thy land, but own it not."²⁶ Again, throughout his *Walden*, discussing from all angles his two years in the cabin he built there with his own hands, he always refers to it as 'my house'—never, so far as we have found, his 'home'. And he was very careful in the choice of words.

So, to the third facet of the 'Profile'.

(III) Thoreau was Interpreter of India to America. Obviously his above-noted resemblance to the Prophets is in point. A prophet literally means, 'one who speaks for another...', 'the other' usually meaning 'God'. His critics often jibed that Thoreau 'Spoke like a god' or an oracle and, clearly, his sharp criticism of contemporaries and society was the sort that in old Israel might have ended in stoning, or in Greece, in drinking hemlock! At the end of *Walden*, his 'vast rebirth ritual'²⁷, while drinking in the joy of all Nature at Spring's return, in mystic exhaltation he exclaims, 'Thru our own recovered innocence we discern the innocence of our neighbors.'²⁸ And these were no mere words: he had worked steadily for nine years on the living and writing of that book.

In fact, his two years' residence in his self-built cabin at Walden Pond, could itself be a Profile: the profile of a 'Gesture' (Joseph Wood Krutch's term)²⁹ but a gesture on the lines of Gandhi's 'salt march'—yet done by a single man. And a man *driven* to it by his burning idealism, his wonderful assimilation of the best of the Indian traditions of search for the

highest,³⁰ *plus* his prophet's vision of the greatness of his American heritage. His bosom friend, Ellery Channing, wrote him at the time, 'I see nothing for you in this earth but that...(you) go...begin...(the) process of devouring yourself alive!'³¹ As we have noted, the wonderful group of Transcendentalists had brought Oriental philosophy to our front door; but, as for applying it in everyday life, they were limited by their conservative, businesslike backgrounds. Eventhough Emerson had resigned his Unitarian ministry for conscience' sake, he was dependent on popular support for his living, as lecturer and writer; and none of the noted Transcendentalists seem to have had monastic leanings—except Thoreau. And though he rarely speaks of it himself, his friend's keen advice was truly monastic; to 'devour yourself' anticipates by half a century, Vivekananda's exhortation to 'die a gradual death' (to his young monks).³²

In fact, Channing would have agreed: Thoreau had already 'died to' most of what we call the world. Though he 'studied for no profession', he did try at several trades, notably his father's pencil manufacturing, school teaching, surveying, etc—he did *well* at each of them, well enough to see through them, to Ramakrishna's 'bread-winning...' only. He constantly asked, 'for what?' No need to detail his answer: as mentioned, the New York car-cards carried such for months! Yet his Transcendental reasoning and intuition led him to such glowing predictions (for all of

30. Cf *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, p. 207; '...little doubt that, had he been born among the forest seers who wrote the *Upanisads*, he would have felt neither consternation nor any want.'

31. *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 9, p. 493

32. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol. 3, p. 447

26. *Walden* p. 138

27. *Ibid* p. 319 (Hyman) adds, 'the purest and most complete in our literature.'

28. *Ibid* 207.

29. *Ibid* pp. 331-2

us) as: '...if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams...he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind; ...new, universal and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves...or the old laws be expanded and interpreted in his favor...In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex...If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost...Now put foundations under them.'³³

History seems to bear out that this was what Thoreau's Walden-years did: 'put foundations under' the wonderful 'dreams' of life-in-the-light-of-the-Ideal, propounded by Emerson and his friends. They had done enough 'interpreting' of the Orient for the time—in words and ideas. But Thoreau's 'terrible eyes' saw yawning gaps between theory and practice. Leave aside the 'mass of men' who 'lead lives of quiet desperation',³⁴ he had found even the highest of the land to be not 'quite awake'—and 'to be awake is to be alive'.³⁵ As we have noted, he had much of Ramakrishna's capacity—and ardour—for carrying at once into practice whatever he found to be the highest.³⁶ After the death of his beloved elder brother (in 1842) removed his enthusiasm for school-teaching, he was driven more and more to 'live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life...

learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived...I wanted to...drive life into a corner...and, if it proved to be mean...get the whole and genuine meanness of it...or if it were sublime, to know it by experience and be able to give a true account of it...'

Well, we know he emerged from the two-year Walden 'purification ritual'³⁷ with ample *experience* of life's basic goodness.³⁸ But unlike most mystics—specially the Indian sannyasis whom he so much resembled—he longed to convey his 'true account' to all. And unlike most prophets, he had great literary talents and great love for the art, or rather, the 'craft' as he would put it.³⁹ Further, despite his polemical tendencies (the perfectionist, rough,⁴⁰ solitary Indian sadhu plus the fiery Hebrew prophet) he had ever-growing compassion for our frailties, and kept generally towards the 'Middle Way'.⁴¹ His two most famous 'gestures'—the Walden Purification and the jail-sentence for refusal to pay poll-tax (protest against Mexican War with resultant extension of Slave Territory)—were both thought-out carefully, coolly, with minimum of inconvenience to *others*, and minimum display or fanfare. Although simplicity—poverty—was his ideal, he rarely pushed it to the lengths of a Gandhi, who distrusted machines and actively

³³. *Walden*, p. 214. This was his Conclusion of *Walden*; and typifies the 'perilous stance' (See fn 46 below) of the Romantic Transcendentalists. But Christy (*The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, p. 206) still felt it was 'essential Vedantic teaching'. So do we.

³⁴. *Walden*, p. 5

³⁵. *Ibid*, p. 61. Note resemblance to St. Paul, among others; but Thoreau rarely if ever quotes him; whereas in this same paragraph he quotes the *Vedas*!

³⁶. Cf Vivekananda's 'My Master', *Complete Works* (1978) Vol. 4, Pp. 154-87, especially as to Ramakrishna's cleaning a pariah's house (p. 175).

³⁷. *Walden*, p. 320

³⁸. Instead of 'experience' we could well say 'realization'. But space-limits prevent discussing it now.

³⁹. Cf *Walden*, p. 317: 'At his best, Thoreau wrote the only really first-rate prose...by an American with the possible exception of Abraham Lincoln.' And (p. 315) 'the most ringing and magnificent polemicist America has ever produced.'

⁴⁰. Cf *Walden*, Pp. 248-9: e.g.: '...to grasp (...his pen) and wield it as...effectually as an axe or a sword.'

⁴¹. Although we have not found him use the term, Thoreau was fond of Confucius and Mencius; and one must remember that Buddha's Middle Way was primarily for the *monks*,

promoted hand-weaving. He made no appeal to *upset* our economy, but only to slow it and allow time and space to *think* about it.⁴² He aimed for self-sufficiency at Walden Pond, but did not hesitate to borrow tools, use second-hand materials, even 'borrow' the land from friend Emerson, despite sneers from others as a 'squatter'. He freely acknowledged all such debts, and specially his debt to his Society; and like Manu's faithful follower, daily repaid all debts by hard work, holy thinking, reverence for elders, meditation, etc.⁴³

(IV) One other major 'facet' we should mention in closing: Thoreau's scientific bent. Though he 'studied for no profession', he had multiple natural talents—great manual skill and strength, 'terrible' powers of observation, memory, etc, which he applied progressively to the Ecology⁴⁴ of his town and country, especially during the two years at Walden. Even his 'sannyas' he based on strictly empirical grounds:⁴⁵ he gradually stopped eating meat because it was hard to keep kitchen clean of its remnants; moreover, he simply felt less and less happy while hunting or fishing. You see, everything came down to the touchstone: 'Simplify'! In practice, it meant 'purify!'; and though he rarely quoted Jesus, we doubt not that 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' was often on his mind, if not on his tongue.

Of course, Thoreau's '*science*' (19th-

42. *Walden*, pp. 77 ff: The 'Iron horse'—railroad—which Thoreau loved to admire, yet warned against its dehumanizing potentials.

43. Cf *Walden*, p. 345 for ample details on reverence for his Society.

44. Though the term 'Ecology' had not yet been coined, critics often refer to Thoreau as an Ecologist, far ahead of his time! Particularly appealing are his studies on Red Indian culture and religion.

45. Cf *Walden*, p. 61: 'nor did I wish to practise resignation unless it was quite necessary.

century style) was bound to clash with his Transcendentalism, specially when he set out to 'Put foundations under it'. All critics tend to agree that the resulting Metaphysics was wobbly: one of his incisive reviewers calls it a 'Perilous stance' which 'in the end...killed him.' 'And yet, he refuses to be consumed.... Robert Frost, while objecting with all his Yankee soul to Thoreau's epistemology, still proclaims that with him Thoreau is a "passion".'⁴⁶ Metaphysically, he held to the one benign Reality, within which all Nature *had to* run benignly 'if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams...' Yet as Ecologist, he dealt daily with countless beings (we would say, 'souls') being daily crushed for hopeless 'causes'. If only he had had a Vivekananda—or at least a post-Einsteinian physicist, to show the way out! But, metaphysics is not life: Buddha threw the whole of it aside, to pound only on psychology: 'Do good and be good, and this will take you to Freedom...'⁴⁷

And so, our confirmed anti-do-gooder,⁴⁸ Henry Thoreau, did—and *was*—good, both in studying and helping *this* world, ecology and all, and in *that* Higher World, in whose light he seems to have moved.⁴⁹ And he lived and died in much the spirit of Vivekananda's *Song of the Sannyasin*:

Few only know the truth. The rest will hate and laugh at thee, great one; but pay no heed. Go thou, the free, from place to place, and help...

For though he died an untimely death, while the Civil War was tearing apart the

46. *Walden*, pp. 393 and 399 (Article by Perry Miller).

47. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1 (1977), p. 117

48. Cf *Walden*, pp. 51-52 for delicious 'lampoon' of philanthropists.

49. Cf *ibid*, p. 272 as to his 'unsleeping insight' into 'the other world'.

hopes of most Transcendentalists, his vision of the future was clear: he had 'bathed his soul in the...cosmogonical philosophy of the...*Gita*;' ⁵⁰ he had faced the terror of the Universal Form; and knew that everything moves in cycles of birth-death-rebirth—including that of his own body and his friends' and his beloved

50. Ibid p. 197 (we have 'warped' the quotation into past tense and third person.)

Americas's, whose Civil War of 1861-5 had become inevitable in a 'land of the free' which was perpetuating the horror of slavery. And though neither North nor South in 1862, with passions at full-tide, took much note of his warnings, nor of his quiet dropping-off of body, he was content to have planted good seed in straight furrows, whose fruit we are only beginning to reap.

(Continued from page 139)

old witch, the world! May Shankara help you! May Uma open the door of truth for you and take away all your delusions!

(Concluded)

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Several quotations were taken from *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries. Part One: His prophetic Mission*, by Marie Louise Burke, Advaita Ashrama, 1984, and her *Swami Vivekananda: His Second Visit to the West: New Discoveries*, Advaita Ashrama, 1973. The portrait of Mary Hale was taken from the latter book.

PILGRIMAGE TO PAVAPURI*

[*Illustrated*]

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

My trip to Pavapuri,¹ the Jaina *tīrtha* or sacred place, where the twenty-fourth and last Jaina tīrthankara Lord Mahavira attained *nirvāna*,² had been much delayed and, when I finally reached there on the sixth of November, winter had just set in. A village in the State of Bihar, Pavapuri is situated 59 miles south-east of Patna and 54 miles north-east of Gaya. It is nine miles from the nearest town Bihar Sharif, and is located on the Bakhtiarpur-Ranchi national highway (see route map).

Passing along the western and the northern banks of the lotus lake and then through the village (see area map) the jeep carrying me reached a place called Samavasaran. It had two temples with an annexe of Dharmashalas or inns for pilgrims and was situated one mile east of the main pilgrimage spot, the Jal Mandir. The bus route which skirted along its western and southern compound walls proceeded to a village named Ghosrāvā. I was put up in a spacious newly constructed room on the first floor in the south-

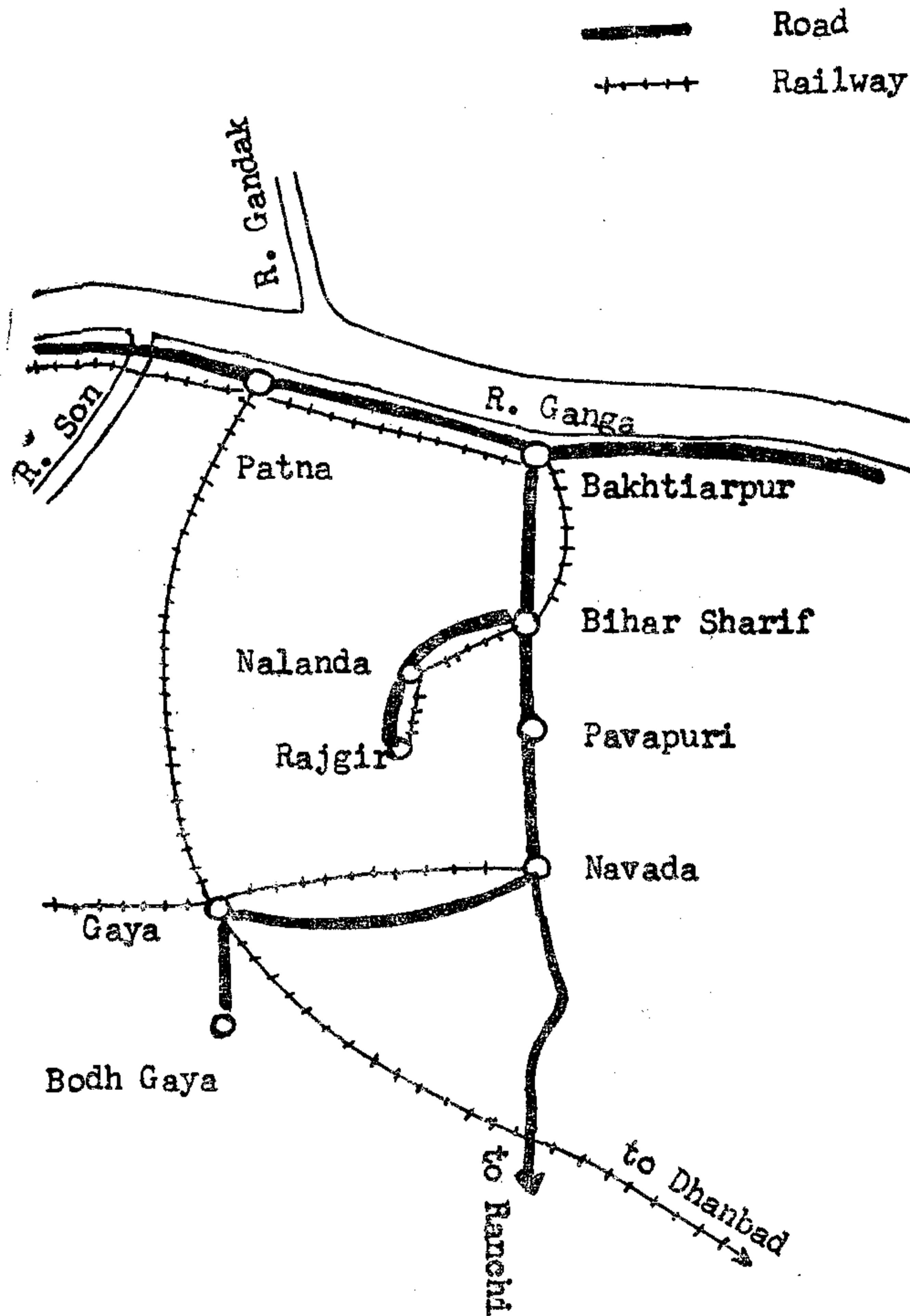
eastern corner of the Dharmashala. There were no electrical fittings and, except for two wooden bedsteads and a mattress and pillow, the room was unfurnished. Although electrical wiring could be seen, Pavapuri had no power supply, but the Dharmashalas had their own generators which they ran for two or three hours in the first part of night. Soon after dusk I realized that the generator was installed just under my room and, apart from making a loud booming sound, it made my room vibrate perceptibly. Except for this nuisance, which I soon learnt to avoid by going to another part of the premises during that period, the room was good. It had windows on three sides. From the eastern window could be seen a small orchard of mango, papaya, banana and other trees, beyond which were the rice fields. The golden orb of the rising sun could be seen every day. The view of the Rajgir hills towards the south-west was obstructed by a double-storey Dharmashala building a hundred feet away.

The place was so quiet that the slightest sound produced at the other side of the inn would be heard as if produced in the adjacent verandah, and at night the rumbling of automobiles plying on the Patna-Ranchi road could be heard distinctly. However, my room was so located that the noise of visitors and pilgrims coming and going at all hours of the day, or the constant shouts of the caretaker hardly disturbed me. There was also the tik-tik sound of the chiselling of the marble slabs for the temple under construction; this ceased to be a disturbance once I got used to it. I was provided with a kerosene lantern, a bucket and a tumbler. Tube-

* The author wishes to express his gratefulness to Sri Ramchhabila Singh, Superintendent of Police, Nalanda district, who arranged to get the photographs which are published with this article.

1. The ancient names of the place are madhyamā pāvā and apāpapurī i.e. a city without sin. It may be pointed out here that, according to some scholars, a village named pava, in the Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh is the place where Lord Mahavira attained nirvana.

2. In Jainism the highest spiritual attainment is called *kevala-jñāna* which may be equated to nirvana in Buddhism. The final liberation from the bonds of the body at the time of its physical death is called nirvana, which corresponds to parinirvana in Buddhism.



ROUTE MAP OF PAVAPURI

wells provided abundant quantities of excellent water for drinking and washing.

Jain vegetarianism

Orthodox Jains do not eat after sunset. This rule must be observed by all who stay here. So at 5 pm I was called by 'A',

the man in charge of the inn, to dine with him. 'A' is a devout Jain who, apart from being a strict vegetarian, does not take even water after sunset, does his spiritual exercise called 'pratikramana'³ every

3. This consists of introspection, self-analysis and confession of one's sins, specially against ahimsa, committed during the day.

morning and evening, and observes fast or half fast on the 8th and 14th days of the lunar month. I was surprised to learn that he hailed from the Burdwan district of West Bengal, and so we started talking in Bengali, although he could speak Gujarati and Hindi equally fluently. Contrary to my assumption that Jain population must be thin in the predominantly non-vegetarian Bengal, he informed me that a fair number of Jains lived in many districts of Bengal.

The talk on the narrow dining table, which could accommodate only two metal plates, soon drifted to the question of food partly because, as the person in charge, 'A' wanted to know my eating habits and partly because Jains are very particular about diet restrictions. He was satisfied to learn that I was a strict vegetarian among the many non-vegetarian monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Much like the 'non-touchism' of the nineteenth-century Hinduism, vegetarianism as an offshoot of the basic principle of Ahimsa or non-violence has become an obsession with the followers of Jainism. 'A' now wanted to know whether eating fish or meat by monks was justified, and whether Swami Vivekananda allowed it. I happened to have some of the works of Swamiji with me. I showed him some relevant passages in which Swamiji had expressed his views on non-vegetarianism.⁴ But 'A' would not stop even at this. He went on asking whether I ate potatoes and onions.⁵ Finally I brought

the conversation to a close with a rebuff, 'Your religion has been reduced to some regulations and fasting. Instead of thinking about the Ultimate Truth, you people only think of what to eat and what not to eat, and lose your religion if you eat potato or onion'. Only once more during my stay was the question of vegetarianism raised, and I used that opportunity to point out to him the exploitation of the poor by wealthy vegetarian Jains. However, 'A' like many other Jains who regarded killing of insects as cruel, failed to see the greater cruelty to human beings involved in amassing wealth.

After food 'A' washed clean his metal cup and plate with water and drank the washing, leaving not a particle of food. Later I learnt that this commendable practice was a habit with all cultured Jains.⁶

I soon settled down to a daily routine which included, among other things, going to the Jal Mandir after breakfast, returning for lunch and spending the rest of the day at Samavasaran. The gates of Samavasaran are closed at sundown. Hence, except once when I attended the vesper service at Jal Mandir, I avoided being away after dusk. My morning trips gave me enough opportunity to visit and see the various temples.

Jal Mandir

There are six major shrines at Pavapuri. Of these the most important, most sacred

4. The passages shown him are included in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1958) Vol. 7, p. 22 and Vol. 2 (1971): 298

5. Orthodox Jains do not eat after sunset for fear of injuring small insects in the darkness of night. Nor do they eat onions, potatoes and other roots and bulbs, since their digging out of the soil entails killing of great number of insects. They fast on the eighth and fourteenth lunar days. How relevant these rules are to the observance of ahimsa is a debatable question.

However, there is a sound medical wisdom behind some of these rules. Interested readers are referred to the article *Jaina āhāra kitanā vaijñānika* by Dr. N. L. Bordia in *Jinavāni* October, 1978 (Hindi).

6. Later I met the aged trustee of the temple trust who had taken a life-long vow of taking only two meals a day. He told me a lot more about diet, rules and sub-rules of fasting, their merits, and about Jainism in general as it is being practised today.

and most beautiful one is the marble memorial in the centre of the lotus lake at the spot where the mortal remains of Lord Mahavira were consigned to flames.⁷ As it is situated in the middle of a lake, this shrine is called Jal Mandir. The artificial lake is approximately 1400 feet long and 1200 feet broad and remains most of the year filled with lotuses. This year, however, lotuses were few but there were innumerable aquatic birds. A 600 feet long and ten feet wide bridge of red stone connects an imposing gateway on the bank to a marble platform in the middle of the lake. This platform, which forms the base of the memorial, is about 120 feet square having four small domes at the four corners, marble railings on all sides and steps descending to water level towards the east. In the centre of this square there is a raised platform with steps on all sides on which stands the shrine proper. The shrine faces east and has low entrances on three sides. Inside there are three large niches which serve as altars. On the central altar the footprints of Lord Mahavira, made of black stone and about 14 cms long, are installed. On the two side altars are the marble footprints of his first and fifth lieutenants, Gautama and Sudharma, who succeeded him one after the other as the head of his monastic order. The four domes at the four corners of the outer platform enshrine the footprints of some of the chief apostles, chief nuns, and other saints and Ācāryas. The whole structure is built to look like the celestial aeroplane mentioned in mythology. Pilgrims and tourists are allowed to go to the shrine and offer worship from 7 am to 7 pm.

Jal Mandir is indeed an extraordinary place. Apart from its scenic and architec-

tural beauty, the shrine has an unusual serenity, and the mind becomes calm and indrawn as soon as one enters it. Here one need not, rather must not, try to control the mind, but must relax and allow the peace and holiness of the place to permeate one's being.

According to legend, Lord Mahavira spent his last *cāturmāsya* (the four months of rainy season when monks do not travel from place to place) at Pavapuri. On the morning of the 14th day of the dark lunar fortnight of Kartika (*kārtika kṛṣṇā caturdaśī*) the last sermon of Lord Mahavira began. Knowing that his end was near, he continued to preach nonstop for 48 hours, what is now known as the 'uttaradhyāna sūtra', till the last quarter of *amāvasyā* (night of the new moon) when, as the Svāti constellation was in the ascendent, he entered nirvana. The gods showered flowers and sang praises. The assembly of devotees, both lay and monastic, was struck with grief and to compensate, as it were, for the loss of the light of knowledge kept burning so far by Lord Mahavira, lighted innumerable lamps. This is how, according to Jainism, the festival of Dīpāvali (Diwali) began.

As the news of the passing away of Lord Mahavira spread, people from all parts rushed to have the last *darśan* of his mortal remains. The body was then carried in a procession to a nearby spot where the last rites were performed. Later on gods and men, according to their relative status, gathered the sacred ashes into urns and carried them away to be worshipped. When all the ashes were exhausted, people started collecting the holy earth of the spot and as a result a ditch was formed, which was later enlarged into a regular lake. King Nandivardhana, the elder brother of Lord Mahavira installed the stone footprints of the Lord at the spot where he had attained Nirvana and also at

7. Jains are divided into two major sects: the *svetāmbara* and the *digambara*. According to the digambara sect, Lord Mahavira attained nirvana at the place where now stands Jal Mandir.

the spot where the last rites had been performed. These two places are now respectively the Gaon Mandir (Village Temple) and the Jal Mandir (Lake Temple).

It is difficult to prove the historicity of the above events, for the earliest inscription of AD 1203 mentions only a metal image installed by Abhayadev Suri. However, the worn out appearance of the central footprints at Jal Mandir suggests that they must be very old. The other two footprints are clearly of a later date.

The Gaon Mandir

The Gaon Mandir or 'Village Temple' (see photo) is situated to the north-west of the village and is surrounded by a big Dharmashala. The temple has a spacious hall (*nat-mandir*) with a dome the interior of which reminds one of the Dilwara Jain temple at Mt. Abu. The entrance pillars are beautifully carved. Apart from the images of Lord Mahavira and two other *tirthankaras*, there is a pair of footprints of Lord Mahavira on a high black marble pedestal. According to the inscription, they were installed in A.D. 1588 during one of the many renovations. The original footprints installed by king Nandivardhan are now in a corner, in the same shrine.

To commemorate the nirvana day of Lord Mahavira a grand festival is held on the Dīpāvali night when thousands of Jains from all parts of India assemble and offer *laddus* (sweetmeat balls) at the Jal Mandir, some of which may be as big as 15 kgs each. The festival includes processions, singing of devotional songs expressing sorrow at the passing away of the Lord, and feeding the poor and the disabled.

The Śvetāmbara sect believes that Pavapuri is also the place where Lord Mahavira delivered his first sermon in 556 B.C., and converted 4400 scholars, princess Chandanbala and eleven of his

chief apostles called *ganadharas* of which Indrabhuti Gautama was the foremost.⁸ He also established the *dharma tirtha caturvidha sangha* or the fourfold religious order, consisting of monks, nuns, male lay devotees called *śrāvakas* and female lay devotees called *śrāvikās*. Gautama was a Vedic scholar and a ritualist brahmin. He came with his followers to challenge Lord Mahavira but was converted even without a debate. He succeeded Mahavira as the head of the Jains. Some of the teachings of Lord Mahavira are addressed to Gautama or are replies to questions put to him. It is said that while many disciples of Mahavira of lesser eminence and even those brought to the Jain fold by the teaching of Gautama attained *mokṣa* (liberation) quickly even before Gautama, he himself had to wait until the passing away of Lord Mahavira, owing to his intense personal devotion to the latter. He had voluntarily preferred to forgo liberation in favour of devotion. To rid him of this subtle blemish and to sever the golden thread of bondage, Lord Mahavira sent him on a preaching errand just before he commenced his last sermon. When Gautama, still away, learnt of the passing away of the Lord from the rejoicing of the gods, the hidden motive of the Lord in sending away at the time of his nirvana flashed in his mind and, freed from the last trace of ignorance, he attained *mokṣa* (*kevala-jñāna*) instantaneously.

The two samavasaranas

The site of Lord Mahavira's delivering the first sermon is situated about one mile east of the Jal Mandir, and is called Samavasaran. But there is yet another place, which also goes by the name Samavasaran, opposite the entrance of the

8. According to the Digambara sect, this occurred at Rajgir (Rājagṛha).

Jal Mandir and across the road. (See area map). At this latter place there is a mound-like structure which rises in four successive broad tiers, the diameter of the basal platform being 32 feet. On the top there is a dome eight feet in diameter containing the footprints of Lord Mahavira on a pedestal. I was told that these were the original footprints which had earlier been installed by king Nandivardhan at the original site of the first sermon. But being away from the village, they were being neglected and dishonoured by ignorant people. Hence these footprints were removed from the original site and installed here. The four broad steps of the mound represent the four compartments of a *samavasarana* to be described presently. This is called the 'Old Samavasaran'. (See photo).

A new marble shrine or monument has been built at the original site of Lord Mahavira's first sermon, one mile away in 1957. The antiquity of this latter spot now called (the new) Samavasaran (where I stayed) is evident from the still standing stūpa (see photo) supposed to be built in 526 B C. The priest of the Samavasaran monument showed me around and described to me what a *samavasaran* actually is.

According to Jaina mythology, the king of gods, Indra, prepares an auditorium whenever and wherever a tīrthankara desires to deliver a discourse. This is called *samavasarana*. It is like an enormous cone 35,000 feet high with 20,000 steps, on the top of which Lord Mahavira sits in *padmāsana* under a huge Aśoka tree. It consists of four concentric compartments or galleries. In the topmost gallery sit gods, monks, nuns and lay disciples. In the next compartment there is place for birds and animals who sit forsaking their natural fear and hostility. The third compartment is for vehicles and chariots of gods which,

according to Jaina mythology, are living entities. The lowermost compartment actually consists of four enormous lakes in which aquatic creatures assemble to listen to the Lord's sermon. The construction of the *samavasarana* is such that every creature sitting anywhere is able to see the Lord facing him and, through the Lord's divine power, is able to understand the teachings in its own language. Evidently, *samavasarana* is a symbolic conception of the integral nature of creation and the basic spiritual harmony of the universe.

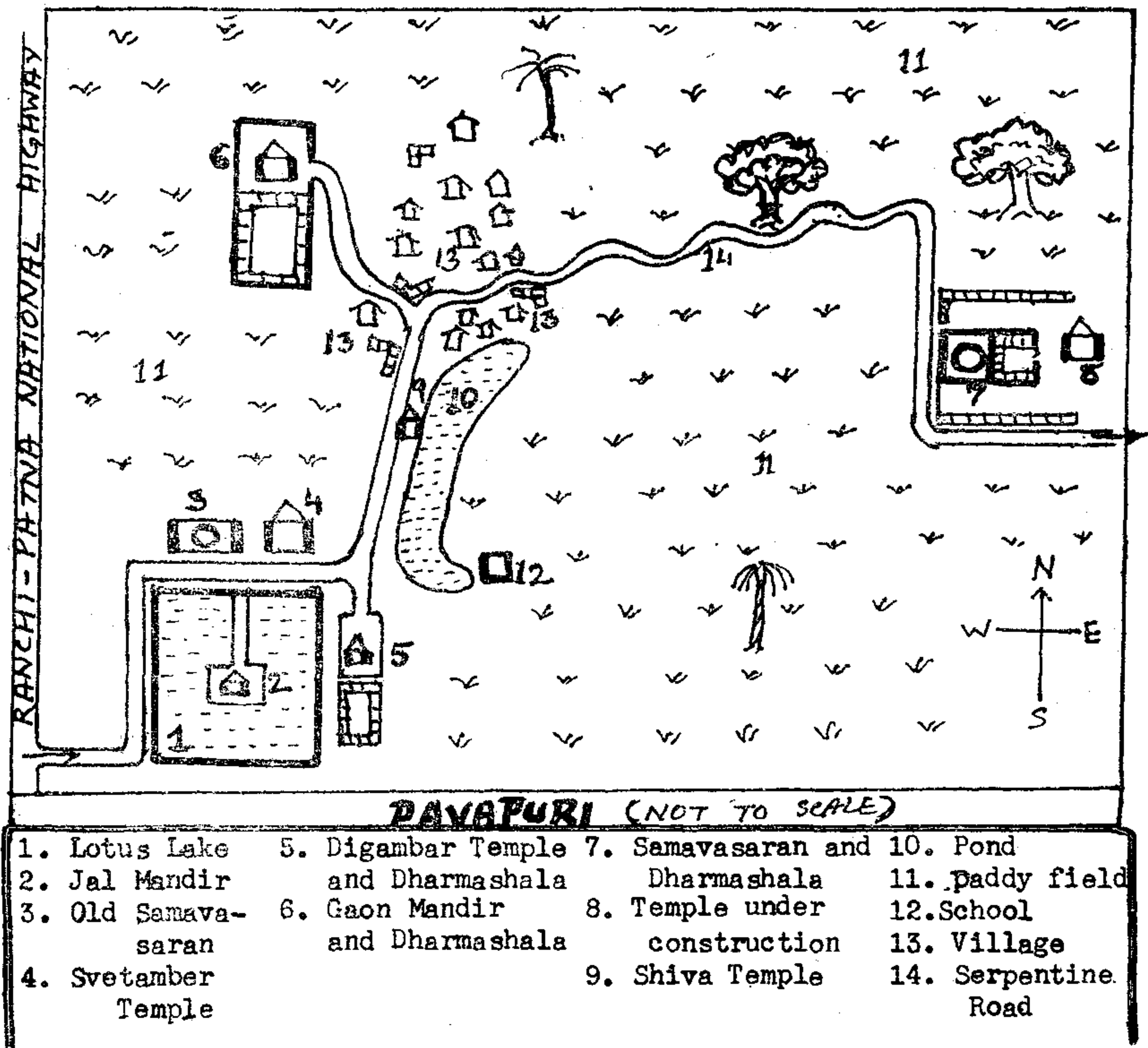
All the above features are depicted in the marble monument in a miniature form (see photo), at the 'new' Samavasaran. It is 35 feet high and has twenty steps, each step representing 1000 steps of the original. At the top there are four identical life-size marble images of Lord Mahavira facing the four sides under a big, beautifully carved Aśoka tree. The expression on the face of the image of Lord Mahavira is most sublime. There are three concentric galleries on the walls of which gods, monks and nuns, animals and divine chariots are depicted at their respective places. Below these is a broad terrace with four pits on the four sides which represent the four lotuses. The whole structure is most artistic and attractive. As I was staying in one of the rooms of the adjoining Dharmashala, I could see how enchantingly beautiful it looked in moonlit nights.

Thus the *samavasarana* is not a temple of the usual type. It is the earthly representation of the celestial ideal of the basic harmony of the universe. Near this marble 'samavasarana' a new temple is under construction in which huge (about twice the life-size) marble images of Lord Mahavira, Gautama and Sudharma have been installed. There is a remarkable expression of peace, bliss, and compassion on the face of the central, slightly bigger, image of Lord Mahavira.

Other temples

There are two more Jaina temples of lesser importance in Pavapuri. The Digambara Jaina temple surrounded by a Dharmashala is situated to the east of the lotus lake. A Svetambara Jaina temple is situated opposite the entrance of the Jal Mandir across the road. The Jal Mandir is equally sacred to both the sects and their devotees offer their worship here.

the open rice fields spread like a greenish yellow carpet on both sides for miles, with clusters of palm and mango trees standing out here and there. In the last part of my walk I had to pass through the village Puri⁹ which, like any other Indian village, is a cluster of mud huts and small brick houses arranged in a haphazard manner. I could see men and women carrying heavy sheaves of harvested rice on their heads, arranging them into heaps, threshing out



The village

My daily walks up and down the serpentine asphalted road leading to the Jal Mandir gave me a refreshing view of

the grains, ricking up the straw and thatching their huts. In the low-lying area

9. Another smaller village named Pava is about a mile away. The combined name of the two is Pavapuri.

along the road, water had accumulated to form a permanent pond which was used for fishing by the boys of the village and for washing and bathing. (Fishing is prohibited in lotus lake.) A small ill-maintained Śiva temple stands on its western bank. There is a primary school with about 100 children, a post-office, a branch of Punjab National Bank, a charitable dispensary and a small medical store selling only some essential allopathic drugs. There is only one telephone in the whole village. There are a number of shops selling articles of day-to-day use. Near the gateway of the bridge to Jal Mandir there are tea-stalls, fruit shops and booths selling pictures, guide books and articles of tourist interest. I was told that this village Puri is the biggest among the nearby villages with 400 families. Almost half the population belongs to the scheduled castes. The village itself is very dirty and the villagers are poor. My physician's eyes detected a number of cases of lathyrism, people walking on the roads with a spastic gait, produced by eating a poisonous pulse called *Lathyrus sativus*. Owing to the lack of a proper drainage system, waste water from the huts had flowed on the road converting it into a veritable drain. I had to cross this portion of the road by carefully stepping on the narrow raised edge along the side.

The rich Jain community has been pouring millions of rupees on building and maintaining marble temples but have never paid the least attention to the village. It appeared as if heaven and hell were existing side by side. Rich, gorgeous temples surrounded by slums—this is the picture of many Indian *tīrthasthānas*, places of pilgrimage. One of the many reasons for this is the common Indian teaching that one's earnings should be spent first of all for God, then for saints

and sages, next for devotees, then for the poor, and last of all for oneself.¹⁰

Since it is difficult to relegate oneself to the last place, the really needy and the poor are the ones who are deprived of a share in a religious man's earnings. Swami Vivekananda has altered this order by raising the poor, the downtrodden and the sick to the level of gods. I was reminded of an incident in the life of the Holy Mother. A disciple once informed the Holy Mother that Ramakrishna babu, the son of the late Balaram Bose, the great householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, had in his will set apart a large sum of money for the service of the Lord and service of monks. At this the Holy Mother asked him whether he had willed some money to the service of the poor also.¹¹ This simple incident highlights the new dimension the advent of Sri Ramakrishna has given to the concept of charity.

A few days later, on meeting R.S., a senior government official of the district, I raised this topic and asked whether something could be done to improve the condition of the village. If the Jal Mandir was the ancient *tīrtha* associated with a departed prophet, the village was the modern *tīrtha* where the living gods in greater need of worship resided. He was of the opinion that unless the villagers themselves took interest it was difficult to help them. Attempts had been made but failed owing to lack of co-operation of the local people. I appreciated the truth of his statement but maintained that though quick result

10. In Jainism the following eight types of *dāna* or charity in the order of merit are recognised: for god (and image of god); for the temple; for the propagation of knowledge; for monks; for nuns; for men devotees; for women devotees; for the disabled and the invalids.

11. Swami Saradeshnananda, *Śrī Śrī Māyer Smṛtikathā* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya. 1983) Pp. 223-24

could be obtained if the local people co-operated, in the absence of such co-operation it was still possible to generate such response and change the lives of the people through greater and persistent effort. It was these illiterate, poor, non-cooperative Indians, reduced to the level of brutes by centuries of slavery, that Swamiji specially wanted to be cared for. I requested R.S. to approach the local Jain community, if government help was not available. He agreed to do his best in that regard.¹²

Respect for all religions

A Hindu monk in ochre robes moving about in a Jain centre of pilgrimage was an uncommon site for the villagers who were used to seeing only white-robed Jain monks. Children ran away from me in fear, women gazed with curiosity from the fields and from their huts, and men gossiped about my whereabouts. On the third day a group of villagers, who had assembled in a shed, approached me as I passed by. After exchanging greetings they asked whether I was going to the Jal Mandir and was staying at Samavasaran. When I replied that I was, they took me to be a Jain monk and asked why I was dressed in ochre. They were highly pleased when I said I was a Hindu monk belonging to their own religion. Now they wanted to know why I was going to a Jain shrine for meditation. I replied: 'I have regard for the prophets, saints and sages of all religions. I have attended the Christian mass and prayed in their churches. I have also meditated in the gurudwaras of Sikhs and even in muslim mosques, besides offering my worship at the temples belonging to all the various sects of Hinduism. But I prefer Jain shrines for their attractive setting, artistic and pleasing appearance, overall cleanliness

12. Later on, through the efforts of R.S., a committee of the villagers was formed for village development.

and the serene atmosphere prevailing in them.'

The other thing which intrigued the villagers was my being allowed to stay at Samavasaran, where non-Jains were not allowed. I counter-questioned them, 'Will a digambara Jain be allowed to stay at a svetambara dharmashala?' 'Well, there was a time when they were not allowed, when a svetambara was also not allowed to stay in a digambara dharmashala; they were at daggers drawn', came the reply. 'Isn't it wrong?' I asked. 'Do they not worship the same Lord Mahavira? Although a Hindu monk, I practise the same principles of truth, non-violence, continence, non-stealing and non-covetousness which were preached by Lord Mahavira and are being practised by the Jain Monks.' Reciting from the *śiva-mahimnah-stotra*, I went on, 'All these are various paths leading to the same goal, like so many rivers reaching the same ocean through various routes, straight or crooked.¹³ Why should a non-Jain not be allowed to stay in a Jain Dharmashala if he observes the rules and regulations and is not hostile to the Jaina faith and its basic tenets?'

Our conversation ended here and I went my way. I did not realize then that my stay at the Samavasaran Dharmashala had been made possible by a special permission obtained by R.S. from its manager on the assurance that all their rules would be observed. Jains do not allow their Dharmashalas, especially those attached to temples to be converted into public hotels devoid of rules and religious sanctity. This is the reason why non-Jain tourists face the problem of lodging and board in spite of there being so many Dharmashalas.

13. ह्रीनां वैचित्र्याद् ऋजुकुटिलनानापथजुषाम् ।
नृणामेको गम्यस्त्वमसि पयसामर्णव इव ॥

After this talk, I ceased to be an object of curiosity, although children continued to remain at a safe distance from me. I saw some parents teaching their children to say 'pranam' to me with folded hands. One lady, to quieten her weeping child would often tell me, 'Sadhu Baba, take away this child with you.' I would smile and move on. One of the villagers who lived by the side of the road, would meet me and talk to me often. I discussed with him the problem of village development. He was surprised, for he never expected a monk to talk of secular things. He frankly told me that till then he had thought that monks spent their time only in contemplation of God. He did not know anything of the Ramakrishna Mission and wanted to know about it.¹⁴

Ritualistic worship

I was allowed to stay at the Jal Mandir for as long as I wished. Most pilgrims would have their *darśan*, do *pūjā*, sing devotional songs and leave within a few minutes. At times a crowd of tourists would arrive making the place noisy, but the moment they left, peace would return. Generally on Sundays there would be greater rush, and the limited space within the shrine would be so crowded that I would be compelled to stay out all the

time. I was amazed to see not only tourists but devotees from all parts of India.

Being a revolt against Brahminism and Hindu ritualism, Jainism has wholly and successfully got rid of priestcraft. I noticed priests wearing the sacred thread at various temples, and on enquiry learnt that they were Hindu brahmins employed by the Jains to perform the daily worship and to assist Jain devotees to do worship. I noticed that they were treated also as paid servants by the Jains. A certain sect of Svetambar Jains does not worship images. Hence its members neither go to temples nor do ritualistic worship. Instead, they offer their worship to the *ācārya* or head of the Order. However, ritualism in a simplified form has entered into Jainism. There are books available in which procedures for various types of worship are described.

To pay my respects to Lord Mahavira and to get acquainted with Jain rituals I once did *pūjā* and evening *ārati* at the Jal Mandir. Apart from bathing and putting on a washed dhoti and a *cādar* to cover the upper part of the body, I had to tie a cloth on my face to cover the nose and mouth. Jain men, in their white, cream or yellow silk *pūjā* dress, look very devout. First of all, the flowers and sandal paste sticking on the image were removed by washing with water and rubbing, if necessary, with a brush made by tying together *khus* straws. Now the image was bathed, first with milk and then with water, the priest chanting the appropriate mantras. After this the image was thoroughly dried with the help of five pieces of fine cloth, one after the other. The procedure upto this is called *prakṣālan* or *prakṣāl*. Now began the actual worship, which consisted of waving incense, applying sandal paste, offering flowers, and waving the lighted lamp. There were no preliminaries like *nyāsa*, *bhuta-śuddhi* etc

14. Later on, with the active help of R.S., the villagers and a local journalist, a 'Pavapuri Ideal Village Development Committee' was formed. The pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda were installed at a suitable place, collective cleaning of the lanes and drains was organized, and the inaugural function of the Committee was held which was attended by some members of the Lion's Club and the Indian Medical Association. Apart from this, in the nearby village of Durgapur, a 'Ramakrishna Seva Samiti' was inaugurated by unveiling the portraits of the 'trinity', singing of *arati* hymns and talks on the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji.

as in Hindu *pūjā*. The articles of worship were purified simply by waving them once or twice over the lighted incense stick. Sandal paste was applied on the big toes, knees, forearms, shoulders, crown of head, forehead, neck, chest, navel and palms in that order. For each application there was a mantra. Time permitting, the image may be decorated with more sandal paste and flowers. A bell or a metal gong was rung while waving the lighted lamp. Evening *ārati* consists of only waving the lamp, to the accompaniment of singing a hymn and ringing the bell, and lasts only four or five minutes. Digambara Jains do not offer sandal paste and flowers. Uncooked rice (*akṣata*), dry sweets (*naivedya*) and fruits are also offered, although I did not offer them. The rice grains are arranged on the offering table to form a diagram consisting of a crescent on the top, three dots in the middle, and a swastika at the bottom. Over this diagram dry sweets like sugarcandy and lozenges are placed. There is no custom of taking *prasada*: whatever is offered goes to the Brahmin priest.

The mantras actually consist of couplets or poems in Gujarati or Hindi which the devotees can easily memorize. There are also a number of Pali texts which the devotees know by heart. Most women-devotees could sing the hymns, and did the *pūjā* themselves. It was interesting to see a lady in a group of devotees reciting long Pali texts fluently and guiding the rest like a priest saying now and then: 'Now chant *navkār mantra* four times', 'now offer rice', etc. The mantra for making the final offering is in Sanskrit beginning with Om and ending with *swāhā*.¹⁵ I also saw

a group of South Indian Jains doing elaborate worship to each of the twenty-four tīrthankaras with Sanskrit verses and with a number of *bīja mantras*.

End of pilgrimage

During my sojourn I once went to Rajgir and met the aged Jain saint Sri Amar Muni. He said that like the twelve sacred Śiva temples of Hinduism famous for their *vyotirlingas*, Rajgir and Nalanda too are *vyotirmaya*—luminous with the light of spirituality. He advised me to meditate in the Jal Mandir at night when Pavapuri becomes intensely calm. The saint's wish was fulfilled and, as the crowning event of my stay, I spent the last night at the Jal Mandir. As the night advanced, the calm started deepening and by midnight even the shouts of night guards and the barking of dogs were silenced. One felt as if one were in a realm beyond time and space.

Generally, aspirants are not able to derive spiritual benefit from shrines belonging to sects other than their own. If, however, they could attune themselves to the spiritual vibrations of the Jaina tīrthankara which pervade Pavapuri, they can derive great benefit by doing spiritual practices here. But, as in most centres of pilgrimages, here too various kinds of disturbance occur, and these have to be borne with patience.

My memorable days at Pavapuri came to an end all too soon. As the car left Samavasaran and sped on the familiar serpentine road, I was aware of a change. The uniform greenish yellow carpet of rice fields, which had earlier greeted me, was no longer to be seen. In its place there stretched a gaunt landscape of bare brown earth, relieved occasionally by the dark green of the newly sprouted wheat, the

15. ओं ह्रीं श्रीं परमपुरुषाय परमेश्वराय जन्म-
जरामृत्युनिवारणाय श्रीमते जिनेश्वराय धूपं/चन्दनं/
पुष्पं यजामहे स्वाहा ॥

bright yellow of mustard flowers, and the movements of tractors, bullocks and ploughmen. The villagers had also changed. Their innocent eyes, which had once stared at an unknown sannyasin with curiosity, were now wet with gratefulness for the now familiar monk of the Rama-

krishna Order who had brought them the life-giving message of Sri Ramakrishna. Finally, I was conscious of a change within me too. There was a richness of experience, and a sense of fullness and peace which could be felt even after I returned to the din and bustle of city life.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

ACHARYA SHANKARA: BY SWAMI APURVANANDA. Published by Prasaranga, University of Mysore, Mysore 570 006. 1983. Pp. 12+362. Price Rs. 22.

Acharya Shankara is one of the greatest philosophers the world has produced. This fact by itself should entitle him to a perceptive biography with a wide perspective to bring his life and work before the world. However, his glory does not rest only on that. He was also an illustrious saint, a great social reformer, a thorough spiritual regenerator, an able organizer and leader, and a builder of the nation with an integral vision of the twin ideals of *abhyudaya* and *nihisreyasa*. Added to all this, he was a brilliant and profound writer and poet in Sanskrit commanding mellifluous diction. He propounded Advaita as a realizable philosophy which recognizes the oneness of all existence, non-duality of all animate and inanimate entities with the Supreme spiritual Reality, the divinity of the soul whether human or non-human, and the harmony of different ways of worship. His life and work are a practical demonstration of the great comprehensive philosophy which he propagated to humanity. Thus his relevance is not only to India, but to the entire humanity.

Though Shankara was so great, we do not have any precise historical biography of his life and work since in India truth and principles, which are eternal and universal, were considered more important than persons, the ephemeral media, through whom they were propagated. Hence, instead, we have his great works which are studied widely. However, it was not that no attempts were made to bring before the public his triumphal life and work. Several eminent contemporaries like Anandagiri and Chitsukhacharya, who were his disciples, as well as later

authors have produced what are entitled generally as *Shankara-Vijaya* (The Triumph of Shankara). Out of about ten such known old works in Sanskrit, only five of a later date are in print. In these *Shankara-Vijayas*, the very greatness of Shankara has naturally given rise to lot of admixture of mythological elements, just as in the case of other prophets and incarnations in other religions and cultures. However, if we recognize their mythological character, they serve to highlight the greatness of the life and serve as embellishments.

The present work by Swami Apurvanandaji is a reconstructed narrative of the life of Shankara collating some of the available *Shankara-Vijayas* and some recent Bengali and English works as mentioned in the bibliography. It may, however, be pointed out at the outset that the author has made the common mistake of confusing the work of a much later writer Anantanandagiri with that of Anandagiri, the disciple of Shankara, which is not available. This confusion may have been caused by a mistake in the Hindi publication which he consulted. It has been held on sound grounds that the present generally accepted date of Shankara as 788-820 A.D. really relates to a later Shankaracharya (Abhinava Shankaracharya) who was born at Chidambaram and died at Kanchi. The first or Adi Shankara was born in Kaladi; his date has to be pushed back to somewhere between 5th and 7th century A.D.

This apart, the present work is a very interesting, connected and readable narrative of the life and work of Shankara, avoiding the miracles as far as possible, explaining them in a natural way, and with relevant footnotes to elucidate things where necessary. It also gives variant versions of events and the author's preference. The work has not failed to bring

out the luminous personality of Shankara, his great contribution to the spiritual regeneration of the country, his constructive genius, and the significance of his life and work to humanity at large.

The book ideally fulfils the need of the average reader to have some idea of the great life of Shankara and draw inspiration from it instead of getting lost in critical bony discussions, of dates and miracles, etc. The absence of such a book was keenly felt and the Mysore University deserves the gratitude of the readers for publishing the book nicely and at a moderate price. However, a number of printing and spelling mistakes which have crept in could have been avoided with better proof reading. Dracritical marks are used only from page 127 onwards.

The language of the book is very nice suiting the subject, but at places (probably later additions) it needs to be revised. Some mistakes have occurred in Sanskrit quotations from the Vedas and the Upanishads such as on pages

257 and 259. A thorough revision and checking up and the addition of an index in the second edition will make the book more useful. The confusion of Anantanandagiri with Anandagiri has to be rectified. Whether the Gauda king Shashanka really persecuted the Buddhists is also a moot point (p. 125). Again, at the time of Shankara, the word Hinduism was not current. Hence, instead of using Hindus and Hinduism, Vaidika Dharma or Sanatana Dharma and Vaidikas could be used. In fact the modern comprehensive Hinduism is the result of the work of Shankara into which he assimilated the worthwhile aspects of Buddhism. The designation Hinduism came much later. A chapter may be added at the end devoted to the delineation of his great works in prose and poetry.

We recommend the book to all the readers interested in Acharya Shankara.

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

*Acharya, Probationers' Training Centre
Belur Math*

NEWS AND REPORTS

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION SEVA PRATISHTHAN

Report for the two year period ending with March 83 (April 81 to March 82 and April 82 to March 83)

The Seva Pratishthan completed fifty years of service to the people on 24 July 1982, the day which marked the beginning of the first of the two-phase golden jubilee celebrations. Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, consecrated the newly built three-storeyed building of the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences and Rameswar Tania Research Centre and formally inaugurated the jubilee celebrations on that day. As a part of the celebration a four-day symposium covering 13 medical disciplines was organized. A two-day symposium on nursing at the national level, an alumnae reunion of the school of nursing and an exhibition 'Health for All in 2000 A.D.' were the main features of the second phase of the celebrations which started on 6 November, 1982.

General Hospital: The total number of beds in the hospital was 535, and it had during the two-year period under review the following

departments: Medicine, general surgery, obstetrics, gynaecology, paediatric medicine, paediatric surgery, orthopaedics, urology, ophthalmology, E.N.T. surgery, dentistry and dermatology. It had also special clinics for anaesthesiology, heart, diabetes, neurology, psychiatry, hearing and speech therapy, physiotherapy, post-partum (family welfare), club foot, glaucoma, immunization and Well Baby. Some of the special needs of the departments were met by the departments of radiology and radiotherapy, blood bank, infusion production, pathology, biochemistry and human genetics. The community health service unit conducted clinics for both urban and rural patients.

All the departments were well equipped. Worth mentioning are the air-conditioned operation theatres, seven X-ray plants, a deep X-ray unit and image intensifier, six cardiac monitors, five E.C.G. machines, four temporary pace makers, one defibrillator, three baby incubators, an oxygen tent, a Bird mark 8 respirator, a cardioscope, an E.M.G. machine and a Zeiss surgery microscope. It also had an electrically operated laundry.

The number of patients treated in the

departments during 1981-82 was: indoor 19,586 (excluding 5,935 live births); outdoor 1,43,857 (new cases) and 2,24,048 (old cases). The total number of operations conducted was 9,255. The corresponding figures for 1982-83 are: indoor 19,487 (excluding 6,462 live births); outdoor 1,41,466 (new) and 2,17,189 (old); operations 8,649. In the outdoor departments the patients were given free consultation facilities and a large number of them were also given free treatment. In the indoor departments free treatment was given to 22.2% of the patients in 1981-82 and to 21.71% in 1982-83. Partly free treatment was given to 20.98% of the patients in 1981-82 and to 22.91% in 1982-83.

School of Nursing: The school has a capacity to train 300 students. An entrant to the general nursing and midwifery course lasting three years and six months is required to be a higher secondary school graduate between 17 and 25 years of age. Each student is given a stipend. After a course of three months an examination is held and successful candidates take part in an impressive 'Seva-Vrata Initiation' (capping ceremony) at which they receive their nursing caps and take vows of lifelong dedicated service to the sick and the suffering. 45 students passed their final examination in 1981-82 and 56 in 1982-83.

The Multipurpose Health Workers' course (Revised Auxiliary Nursing Midwifery course) of 18 months duration requires candidates seeking admission to it to be in the age group 17 to 25 and to have passed the madhyamic or an equivalent public examination. The procedure of selection is the same as in the general nursing course, and each student is given a stipend. The number of students who passed the final examination in the two years under review were respectively 59 (81-82) and 45 (82-83). The total number of students in the School of Nursing in 1981-82 was 285 and in 1982-83 the number was 235.

Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences: This service-oriented institute is recognized by the University of Calcutta as a unit of the University College of Medicine for postgraduate training and research in medicine. It is recognized also by the Indian Council of Medical Research as a research centre and by the Medical Council of India for compulsory rotatory training of fresh medical graduates, for postgraduate degree courses and for housemanship training. The academic council guiding the

affairs of the VIMS was replaced by a governing body in 1982-83. During 1981-82, 20 doctors did their dissertations for postgraduate degrees: 12 for M.D. (6 in Obs. and Gynae., 3 in general medicine, 2 in paed. medicine, 1 in dermatology) and 8 for M.S. (4 in general surgery, 1 in E.N.T. surgery, 2 in ophthalmology and 1 in orthopaedics). During 1982-83, 24 doctors were doing their dissertations for postgraduate degrees: 12 for M.D. (6 in Gynae., 3 in paed., 2 in gen. medicine, 1 in dermatology) and 12 for M.S. (4 in gen. surgery, 3 in E.N.T. surgery, 4 in ophthalmology and 1 in orthopaed.). 6,8,1 and 2 students in 1981-82 and 6,7,3, and 3 students in 1982-83, respectively, passed the diploma courses in child health (DCH), gynaecology and obstetrics (DGO), ophthalmology (DO) and oto-rhino-laryngology (DLO) conducted by the VIMS.

Community Health Service: As a part of the nursing training course, an area near the Seva Pratishthan and another near Sarisha in the 24 Parganas district of West Bengal were selected for the training of the nursing students. Besides collection of necessary data from these areas, the people there were given free immunization, hospital facilities and domiciliary treatment including ante- and postnatal care to the new and expectant mothers, and regular health check up of local school children.

The medical mobile unit attached to the Community Health Service covered 38 villages and 12 semi-urban areas with a population of 46,000 in its rounds twice a week providing free treatment to some 450 patients each day, bringing the critically ill to the main hospital when necessary. It served 1,13,228 and 1,05,780 patients respectively in the two years under review.

Present needs: 1. To pay off the accumulated deficit of Rs. 7 lakhs.

2. Endowments for the 112 free beds on which the hospital now spends Rs. 21 lakhs annually. Anyone may create an endowment for a bed in his or her name by contributing Rs. 1,17,000.

3. Purchase of medical instruments and equipments for which there is no reserve fund.

The generous public are requested to donate liberally to help the institution meet the above needs. Donations, which are exempt from Income Tax, may be sent as money orders, a/c payee cheques or bank drafts in the name of 'Ramakrishna Mission Sevapratishthan' to the Secretary at 99 Sarat Bose Road, Calcutta 700 026.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

National Youth Day

The UN has designated the current year as the International Year of the Youth. Evidently, the purpose is to focus the attention of global community not only on the problems of the youth but on the youth themselves, for modern youngsters themselves have become a problem. Unlike their counterparts in earlier periods, modern youths constitute a distinct social class which shows considerable homogeneity including the blurring of sex difference. The activity of this class is no longer restricted to college campuses, clubs and playgrounds, but is extending into social and political fields. The society has now to support for a longer period an increasing number of non-earning youngsters who demand a larger share of economic goods and power. It is not the young individuals who are the problem but youth as a state or stage. If life is regarded as a stream, youth represents a big whirlpool in it. There are certain social conditions which have created this whirlpool, and the focus would be upon these conditions.

It is only in the fitness of things that the Government of India has decided to celebrate the 12th of January, the day on which Swami Vivekananda was born in 1863, as the National Youth Day every year. This will serve as a periodical reminder of the importance of the youth and also of the noble ideals set by one of the great teachers of humankind. Nothing could be more appropriate than this identification of the birthday of Swami Vivekananda with the Day of the Youth. For Swamiji symbolized the highest of all the best that the youth could aspire for. He was a full-blooded leonine personality who combined in himself the attributes of a saint and warrior, of a philosopher and reformer, of a patriot and citizen of the world. His entire youth, devoted to Self-realization and service of man, was lived at such intensity of dynamism and exaltation of spirit that he virtually burned himself out before reaching old age. He belongs to the group of immortals whom Hindus call *ciranjivis* and, like the mythological boy Dhruva who was transformed into the polestar, Swamiji continues to shine as an eternal symbol of youth as well as a symbol of eternal youth. Perhaps Swamiji also prefigures the youth of the future, the unborn generation of enlightened and liberated young people of the coming Age.

It was also a happy coincidence that the first Youth Day was inaugurated at the Capital by Sri Rajiv Gandhi, the youthful prime minister of India, on whom the nation has reposed its trust and hope. He pointed out that 'almost 71 per cent of Indians are below 35 years of age; it is a young country.' He stated that a number of programmes would be initiated for the youth, and 1985, the Year of the Youth, would be an active year for the youth of the country. These programmes, he said, would build Indian culture and Indian values. In this connection the prime minister referred to Swami Vivekananda's stress on the need for cultivating physical strength. Sri Rajiv Gandhi concluded his speech by saying that the youth of today had a tendency to 'rise to a certain level and then relax. There must be the will to be the winner in every field.' What the youth lacked, he said, was that 'extra push' that would carry them beyond the ordinary. This was the main thrust of Swami Vivekananda's exhortation: 'Stop not till the goal is reached'. And Swamiji set before the youth a very high goal.



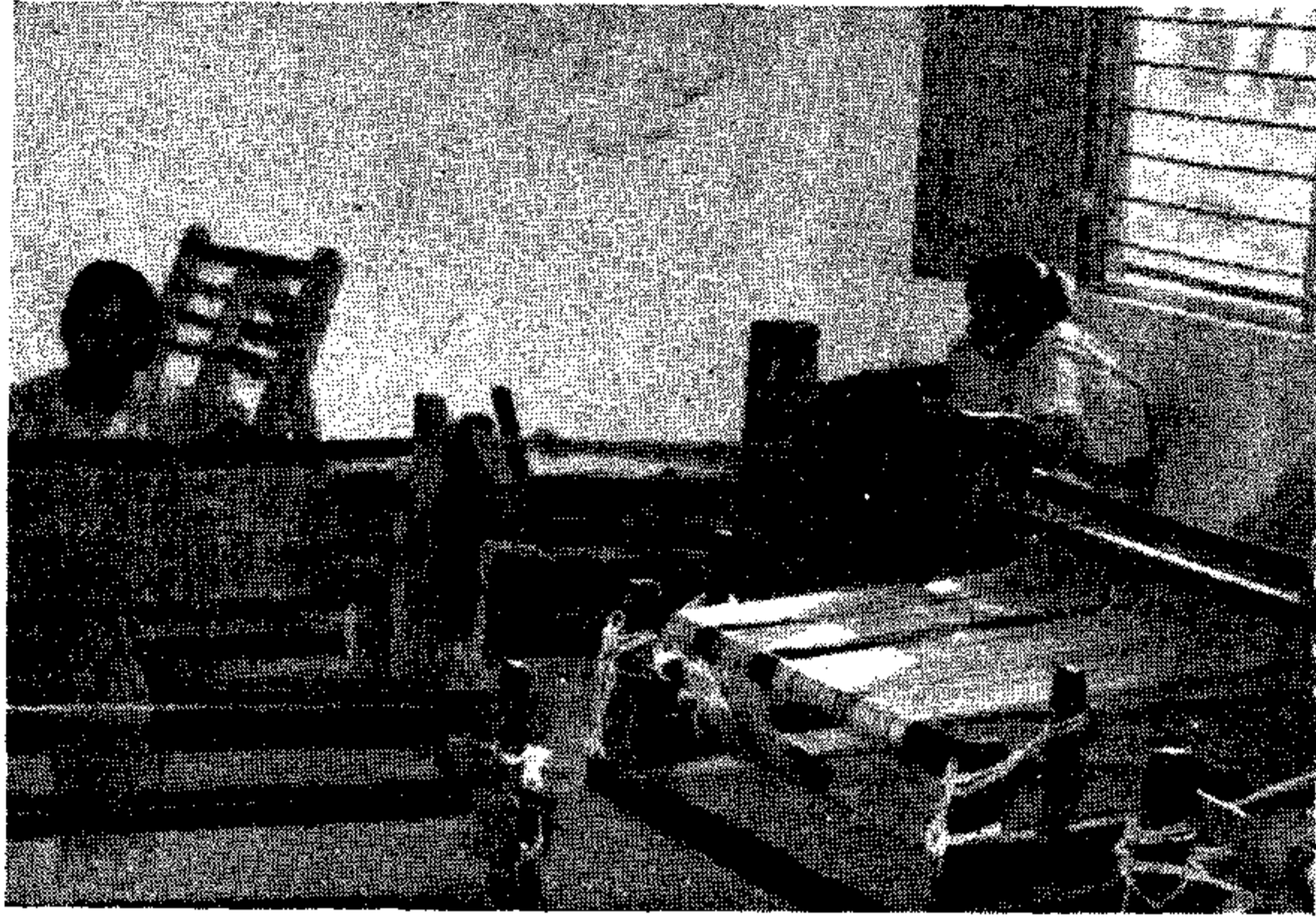
**Training of Managerial cadre
(Sanitary Village Latrine)**



Tailoring (Trainees)



**Progressive farmer (in his
paddy-field)**

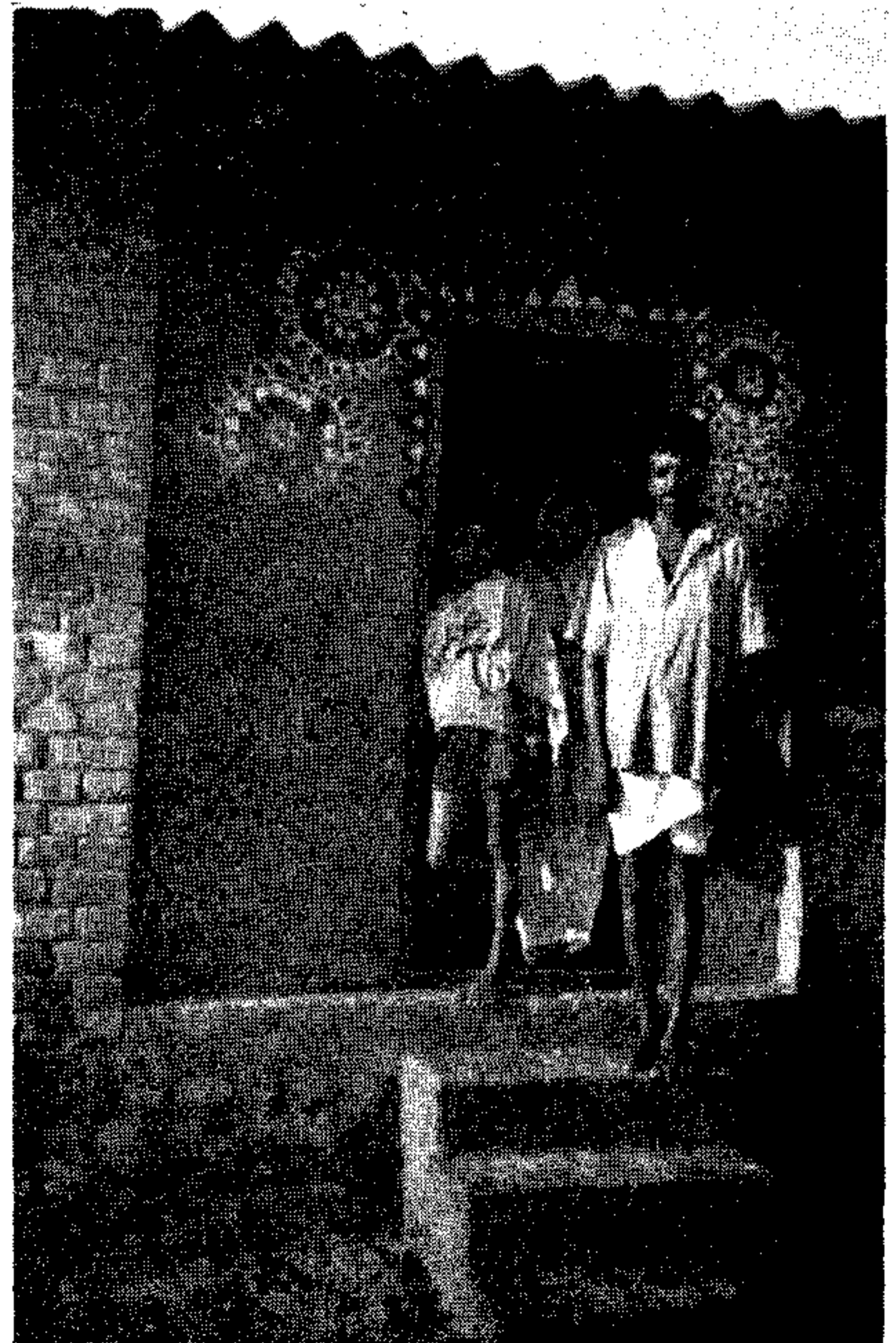


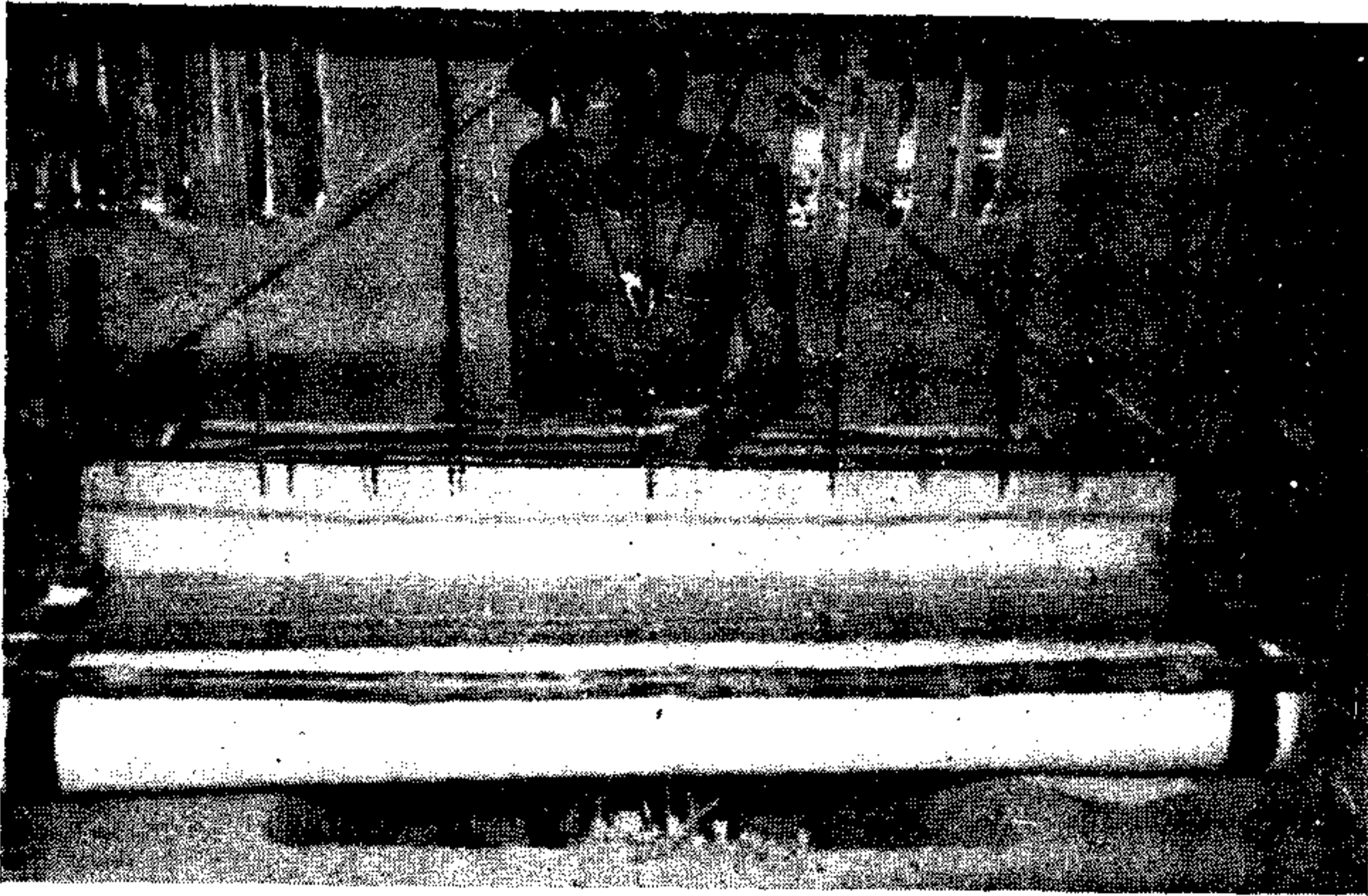
Hobby Loom (Making side-bags)



Basket making

A beneficiary family :
Learning to keep house
clean and decorated





Weaving



Genji stitching



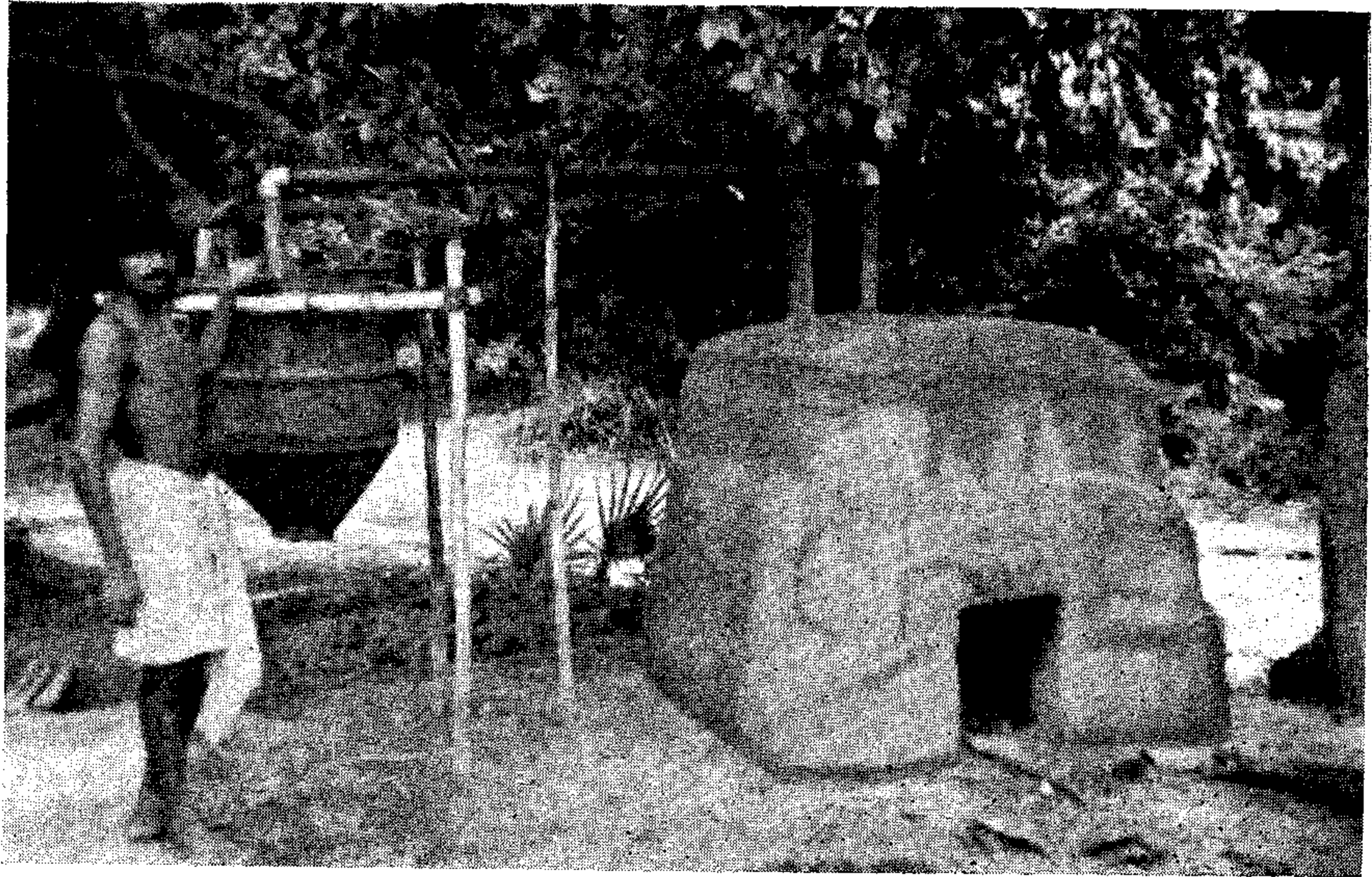
Handicapped children
rolling Dhoop-sticks



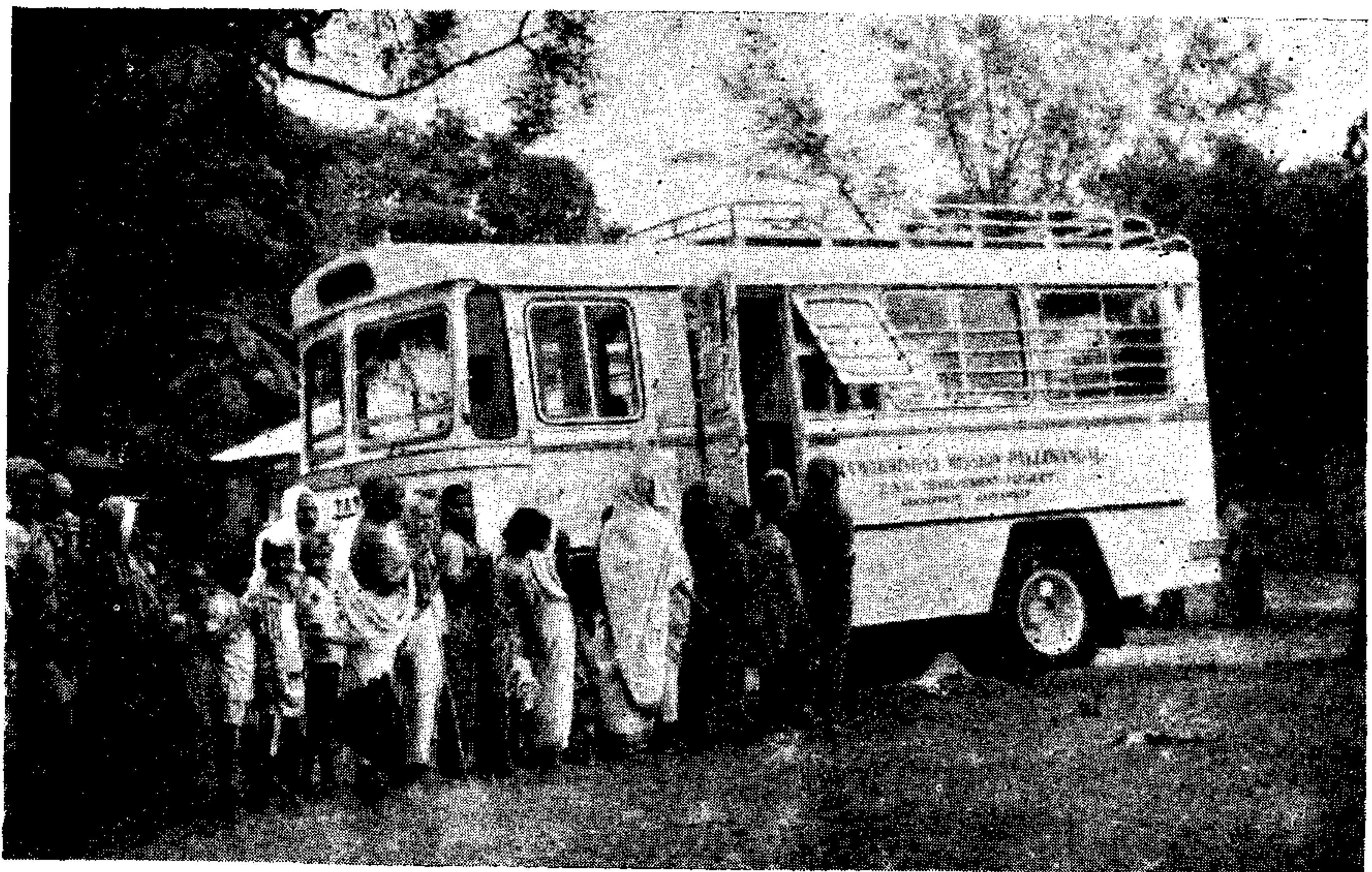
Poultry farming



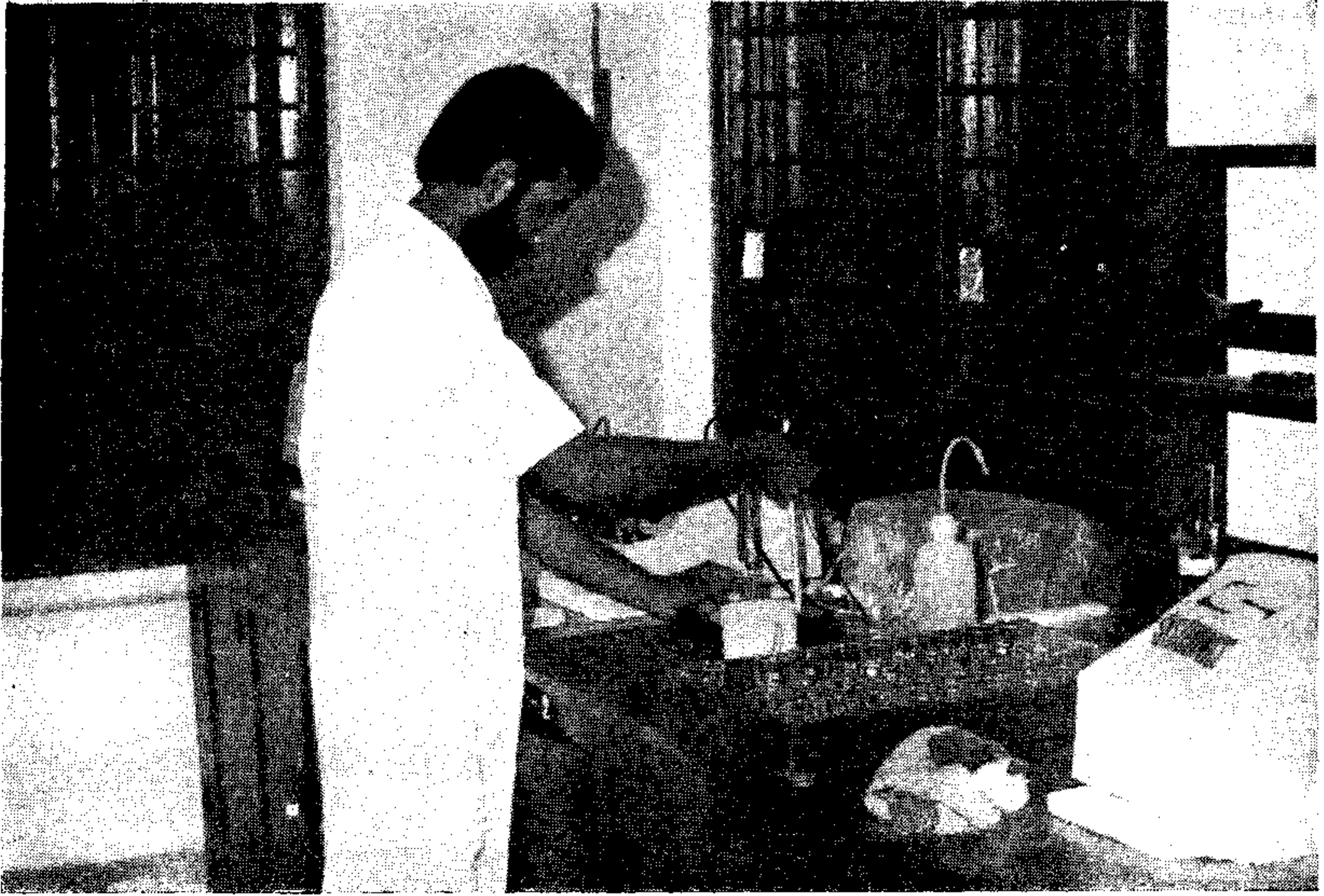
Night School



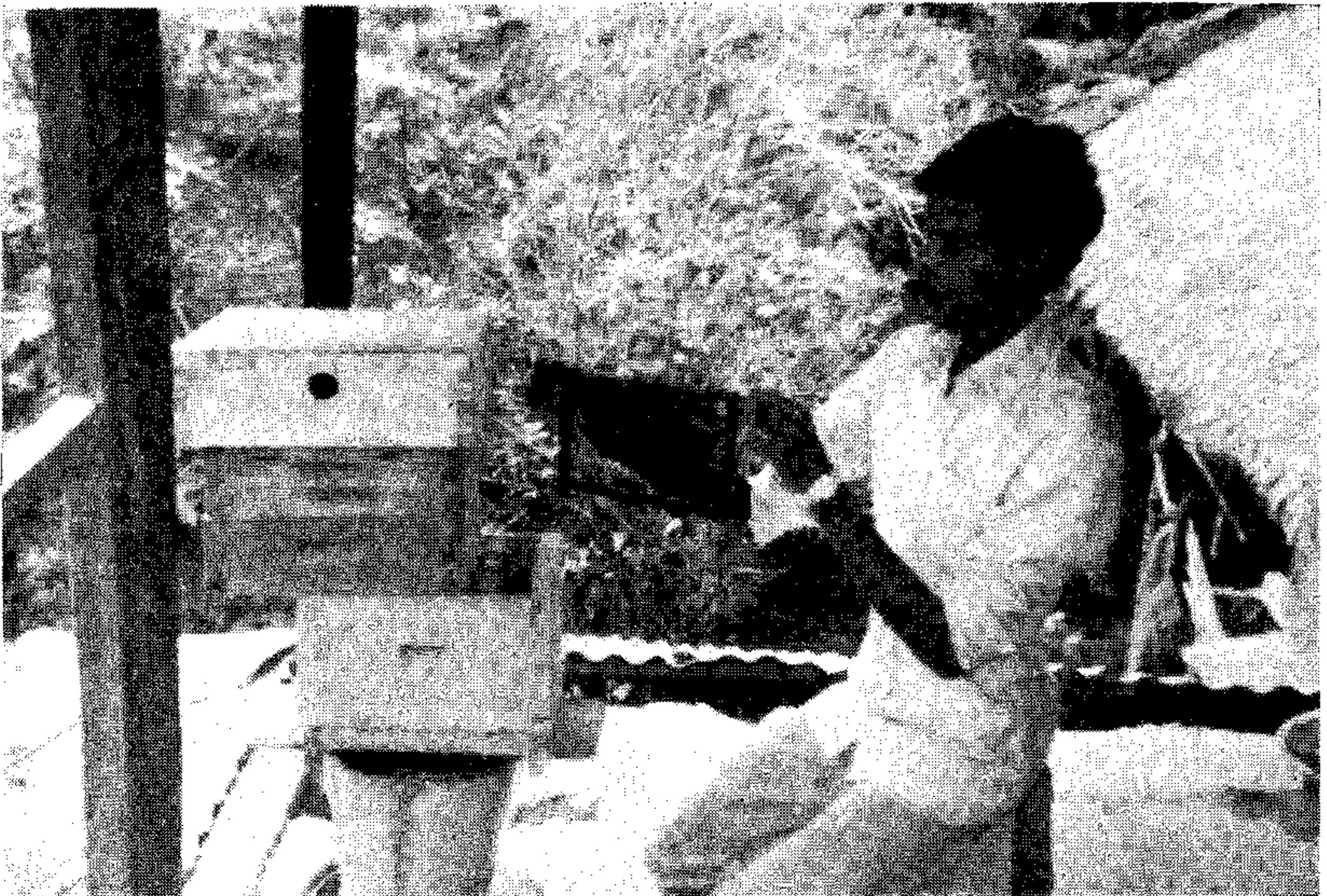
Paddy Boiler



Mobile Medical Service at Kamarpukur—Jayrambati



Soil Testing Laboratory



Bee-Keeping



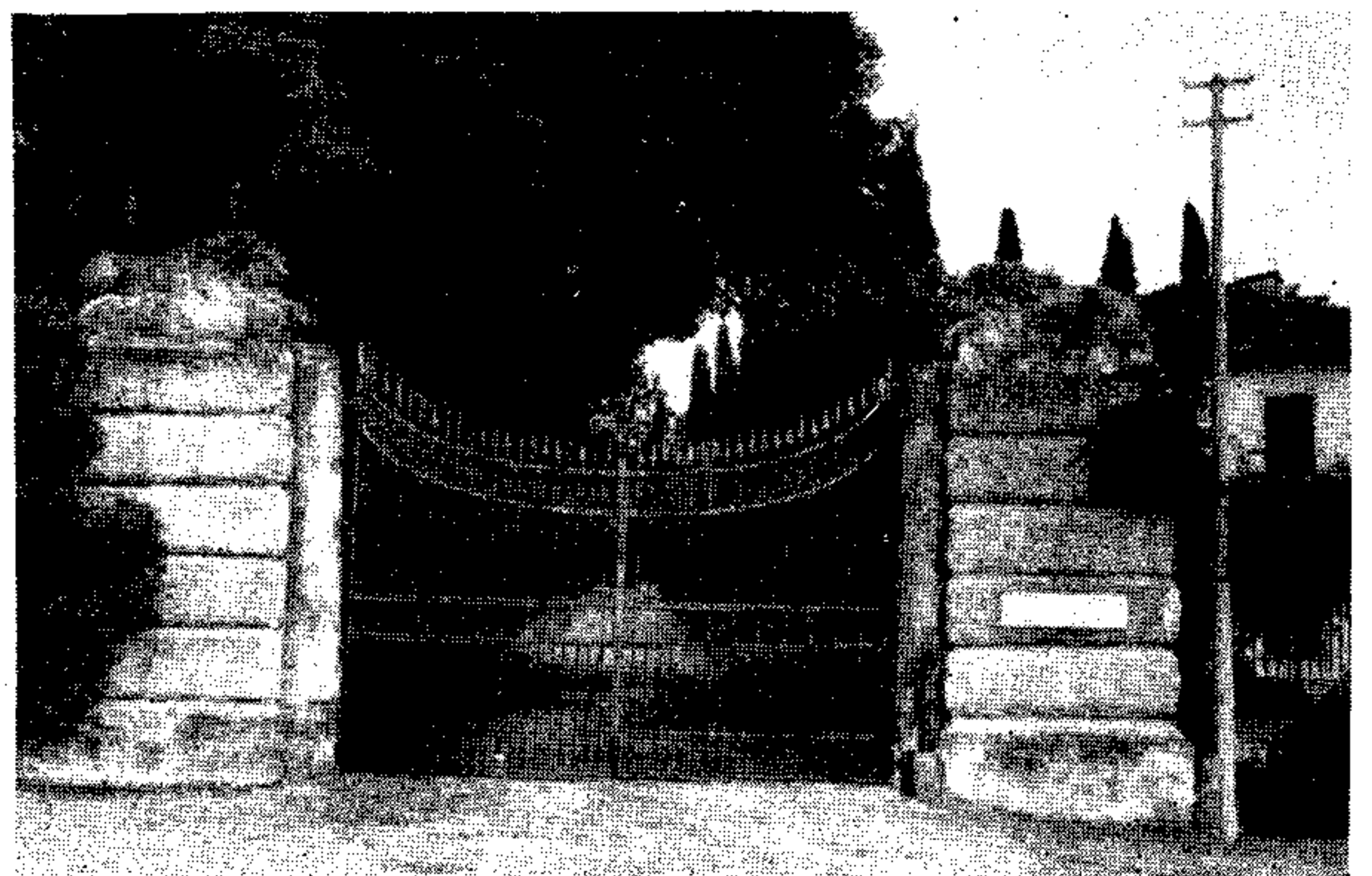
Mary Hale, about 1896



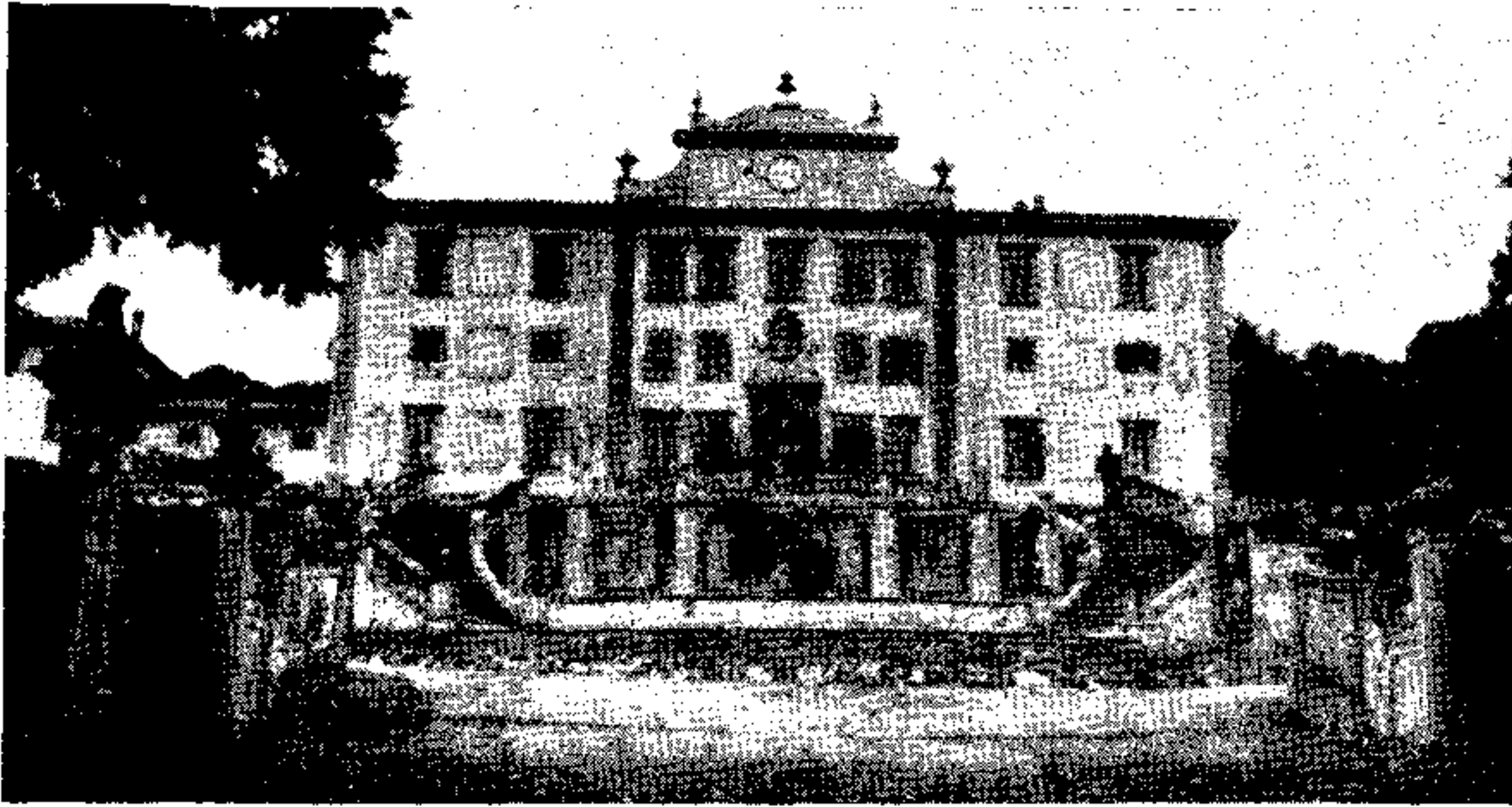
Hotel Minerva, Florence, as it is today, adjacent to the church of Santa Maria Novella. Swami Vivekananda stayed at this hotel when he passed through Florence in December 1896



La Villa di Celle, Santomato, near Pistoria, Italy



Main entrance gate, Villa di Celle



Main House, Villa Celle.
Mary lived with her husband,
Matteini, here

Hotel Anglo-American, Florence,
where Mary spent her last days

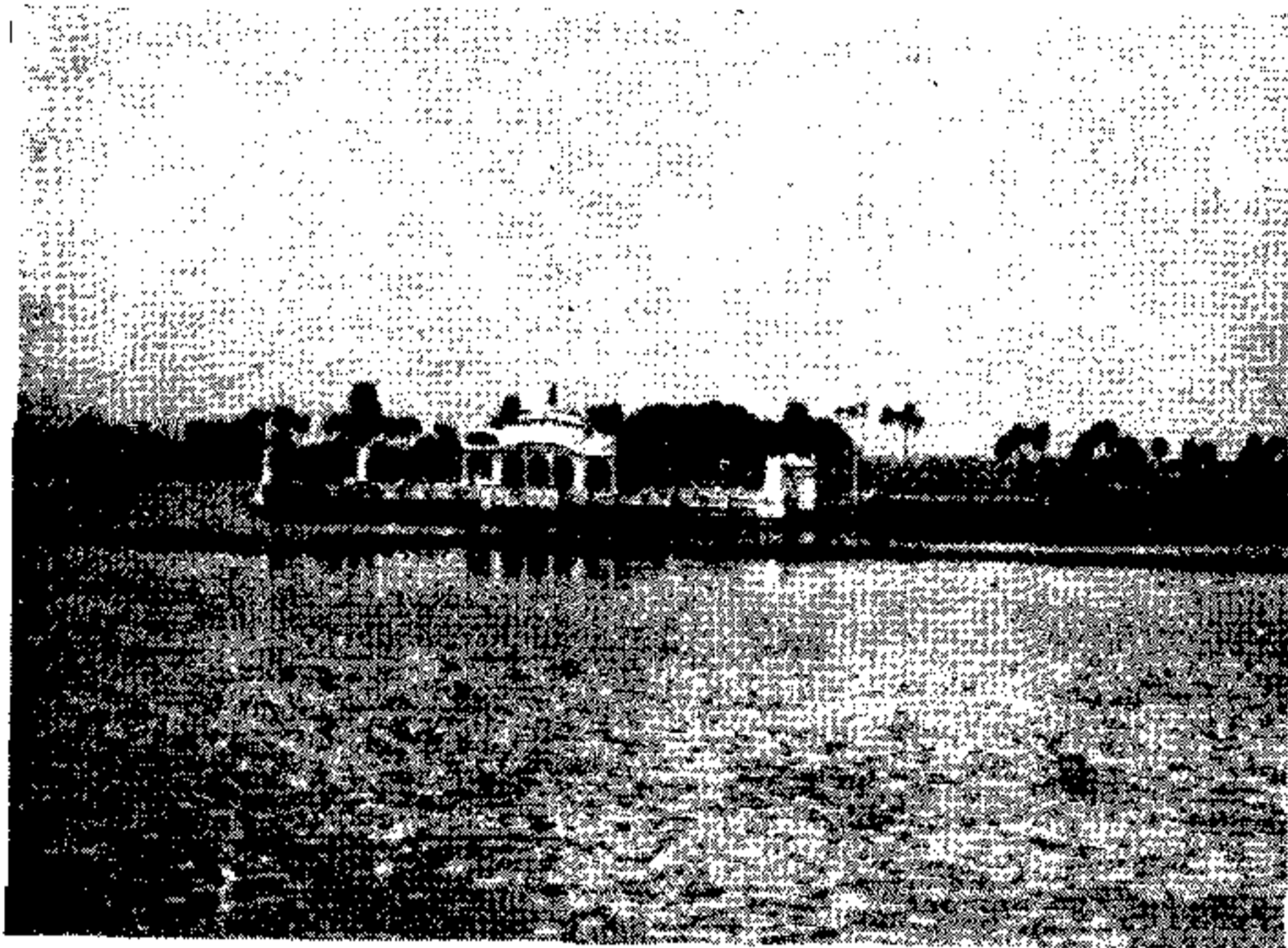


Hale plot, Green Ridge Cemetery,
Kenosha, Wisconsin. Headstones
of family members ranged around
the large monument of Samuel
Hale, Sr.



Headstone of
Mary Hale Matteini





The Jal Mandir and the Lotus Lake



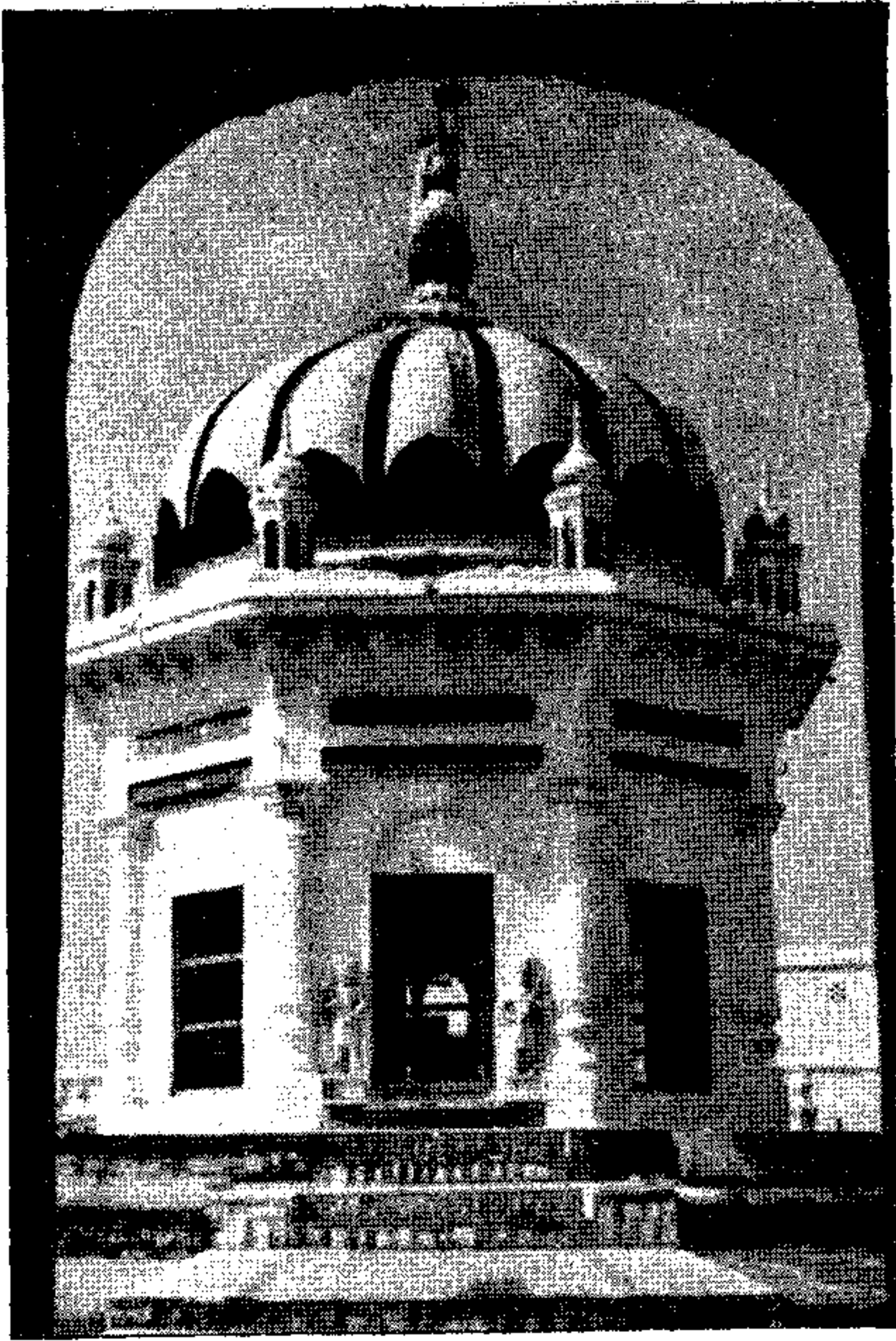
Gateway at the entrance of the bridge (to the Jal Mandir). Behind is the Svetambar Temple



Entrance of the Gaon Mandir built at the spot where Lord Mahavira attained Nirvana



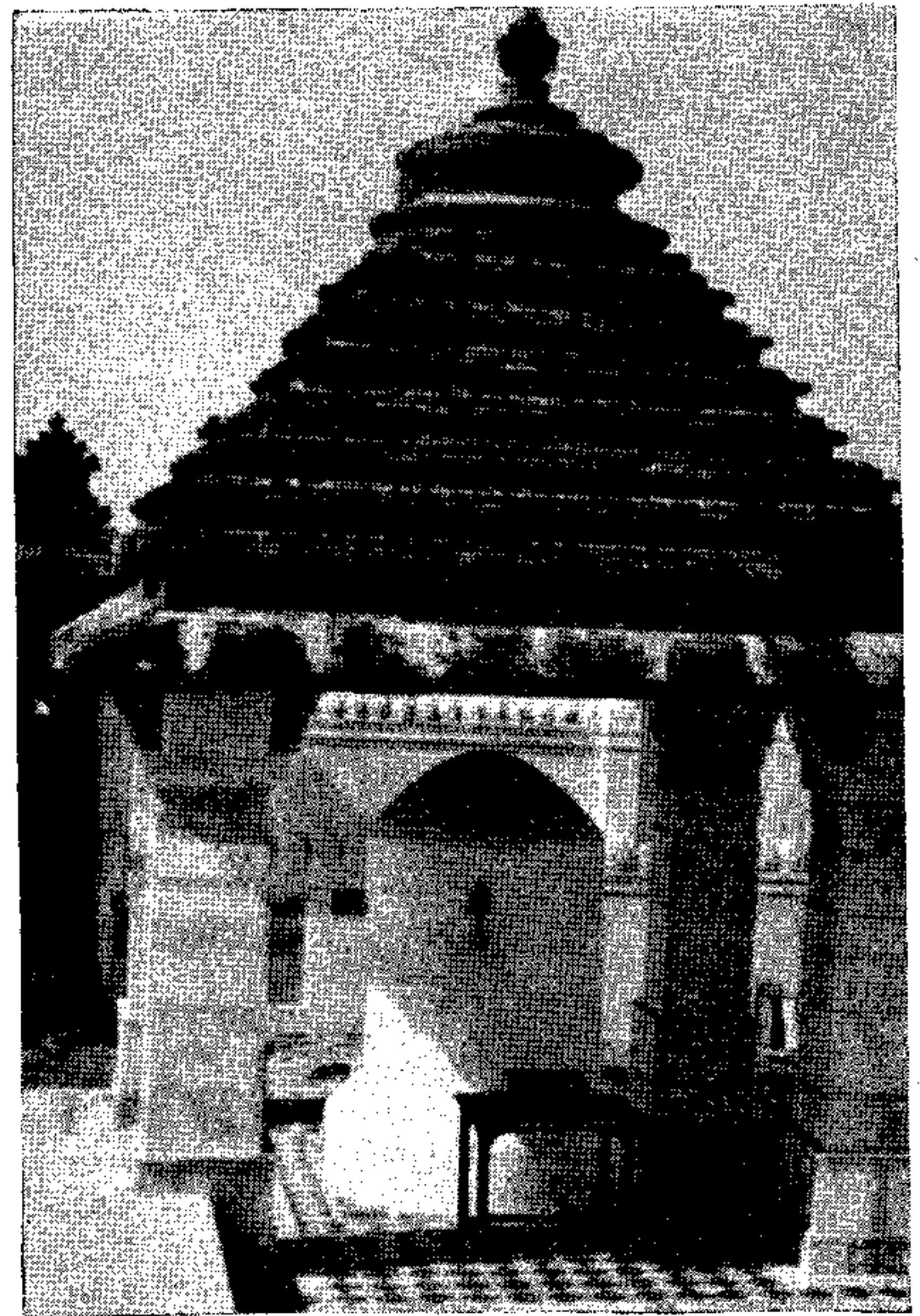
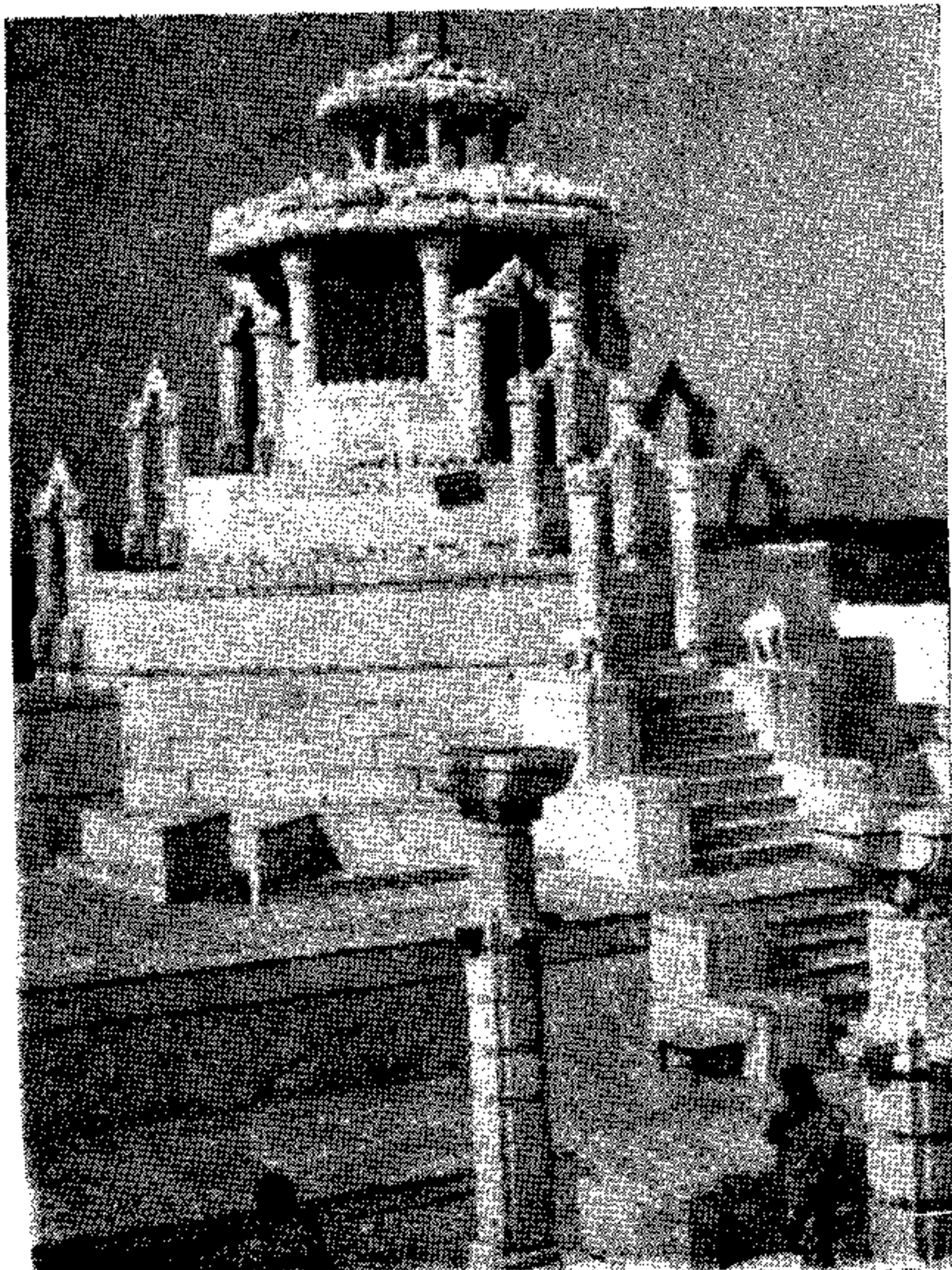
Interior of Gaon Mandir. The black stone slab bearing the footprints in the centre marks the spot of Lord's Nirvana



Old Samavasaran. The broad steps are parts of the three tiers which represent the three chambers of the celestial *samavasarana*



Footprints of Lord Mahavira inside the Old Samavasaran



An ancient stupa at the Samavasaran

The 'new' Samavasaran monument on the spot where Lord Mahavira gave his first sermon. The Asoka tree at the top, the three concentric galleries and the pit at the bottom represent the celestial *samavasarana*