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

ETERNAL VOICE OF INDIA

Vidyayā vindate amrtam

'Immortality is attained through Self-knowledge'

In the beginning (all) this was verily the Ātman alone. Nothing else whatsoever living, existed. He thought: '(Now) verily shall I create the worlds.'

It was declared by the Ṛṣi (Vāmadeva)—'Even being in the womb have I known the births of all the gods. A hundred iron holds held me down, (but) like a hawk I have broken them by force', thus spoke Vāmadeva even while being in the womb.

Who is this Ātman Whom we worship ? What is that Ātman by Which (man) sees form, hears sound, perceives smells, utters speech and knows the tasteful and also the distasteful ?

What is heart is the same as mind. The consciousness, command, particular knowledge, cognition, retention, perception, perseverance, reflection, self-mastery, depression, memory, imagination, determination, desire, attachment—all these are (but different) names of the consciousness.

... The world is Knowledge-manifested, so Knowledge is its basis ; and hence Knowledge is the Brahman.

After having gone beyond this world, he by that Ātman of knowledge attained that Heaven (of Brahman) where all his desires were fulfilled and attained immortality.

Aitareya Upaniṣad (1.1.1, 2.1.5, 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4)

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is based on the recent interest taken by Russian academicians in Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's message of universal peace and harmony, and in the spiritual ministrations of the Ramakrishna Order towards that goal.

Swami Ranganathananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and the celebrated preacher of Vedanta, was awarded the first INDIRA GANDHI AWARD FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION FOR 1985. This acceptance speech was delivered by Revered Swamiji on 31 October 1986 at the Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.

Swami Hiranmayananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission recently visited Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and Moscow. In his MEMOIRS OF FOREIGN

TRIPS Revered Swamiji recounts some of his experiences in those countries.

150th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA, PRIME MINISTER'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS is a short speech delivered on 10 February 1987 by our Prime Minister Sri Rajiv Gandhi during the inauguration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna organized by the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.

Swami Siddhinathananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Calicut, discusses the age-old Indian way of attaining peace through the observance of Dharma. RELIGIOUS RESOURCES FOR PEACE is the text of his paper presented at the 'Inter-Religious and Ideological Dialogue' held at the Sophia Centre, Kottayam, Kerala, on 5 December 1986.

RAMAKRISHNA VIVEKANANDA IN THE RUSSIAN HORIZON

(EDITORIAL)

In the mid February of this year Moscovites suddenly saw something which they had never even dreamt before. Three best hotels of Moscow, especially the Kosmos Hotel, suddenly began to hum with one thousand celebrities from eighty different countries. They were all invited to Moscow to attend a three-day International Forum on *Nuclear-Weapon-Free World for the Survival of Humanity*. The host, of course, was Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev who reminded the audience in his concluding hour-long speech, 'You have arrived in the Soviet Union when essentially revolutionary changes are under way.'¹

Revolutionary, indeed, was this gathering in the Kremlin Palace in the entire history of Russia. Among the participants in the three-day Forum were Peter Ustinov, actor Gregory Peck, writer Graham Greene, economist John Kenneth Galbraith, fashion-designer Pierre Cardin, noble-peace prize winner Physicist Andrei Sakharov just released from long solitary imprisonment in Siberia, and American actor Kristofferson who is running a mini-series on *Amerika* (a new T.V. film in which Kris stars as the leader of a guerilla movement opposing a Soviet rule in U.S.A.). Besides these internationally known artists, writers, and intellectuals there were one hundred and thirty religious leaders including Christian

1. *Time* (New York) 2 March 1987, p. 4.

monks representing different churches, and two ochre-clad monks from India, Swami Hiranmayananda and Swami Gitananda of the Ramakrishna Order, Belur.

Never before in Soviet history the iron curtain was lifted both for the insiders and outsiders in such a way. Gorbachev called this lifting 'broad democratization' and the beginning of our 'New Approach to Humanitarian Problems!'²

The Forum was meant for an all-out effort to end nuclear proliferation. But the most important aspect of this Forum is that it was not just political. The participants were not just diplomats. They were mostly thinkers, intellectuals, artists, writers, and even religious leaders. Gorbachev's chief aim now was to take leading men and women from all walks of life, of all nations, especially the thinkers and academicians, into confidence for an all-out effort to stem the possibility of a nuclear war. In the Peace Conference he gave a bold call for a change: 'Society is ripe for a change', he said, 'If we back off now, society will not agree to a return. We have to make the process irreversible. If we do not, who will? If not now, when?'³

Moscow's warm invitation extended to Swami Hiranmayananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, to speak in the very opening session meant for the Religious leaders from different parts of the world, was striking. The Swami spoke on Sri Ramakrishna's harmony of faiths and religions as the way to ensure global peace and harmony. And this is the message through which a super-power like Soviet government could proceed in order to ensure peace in a war-free world. Post-revolutionary Russia deplored religion as an opium for the masses. Today after seventy years of the revolution

Russians are in need of a religion, a new religion which is rational, universal and man-centred. In Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideals Russians may discover *that* religion which would help them fulfil their great dream as the peace-maker of modern times.

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As a nation Russia was always conscious of its own greatness, and of a great role it was destined to play in the world civilization. The old Russians thought of their society 'as the one society pregnant, as the Old Believers maintained, with the future hopes of Mankind.'⁴ In the mid-sixteenth century Moscow emerged as the fourth great capital of a universal state under Christian inspiration. Like Rome, Russia built up its new great holy city of St. Petersburg. For two hundred years it stood until with the communist take-over of Russia, its name was changed into Leningrad.

Modern culture in Europe, according to Historian Arnold J. Toynbee, was primarily a culture of middle class intelligentsia or the bourgeoisie. With the fall of bastille in French revolution, monarchy in the West got shaken and stood in fading glory. Long before the Bolshevic revolution, Russian bourgeoisie intelligentsia stood against the domination of the Petrine Czardom. It is from the great bourgeoisie writers like Gorky and Tolstoy that the revolutionary Russia drew inspiration. When the Petrine policy of westernization failed to deliver the goods, says historian Toynbee, 'a long-suppressed insistence on the uniqueness of Russia's destiny reasserted itself through the communist revolution'.⁵

The bourgeoisie culture brought the

2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

4. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Abridgement of volumes VII—X) London: Oxford University Press, 1957) p. 152.

5. Ibid., p. 153.

trend of modernity in the West. One of the foremost factors in this modern culture was the 'ghost of Aristotle,' the spirit of critical enquiry and the scientific investigation into everything in life. With the rise of this critical spirit, the old religion was found to be wanting. Tolstoy's persistent abhorrence of 'miracles' and dogma is well known. Pre-communistic Russian intelligentsia developed the new humanism whose foundation was MAN and his basic nobility in the face of struggle for existence. The exploitation and impoverishment of the common man despite his undying nobility, under the Czarist regime, became the central theme round which the new socialistic system built up like a huge monolithic structure. A basic humanistic outlook on life, a deep respect for common man's essential goodness and greatness unspoiled by Czarist oppression, was the theme of the pre-revolutionary Russian writers like Maxim Gorky whose *Mother* stood out as the glorified symbol of Russian humanism.

But as the modernization of Russia began with the successful implementation of western technology, a new spiritual problem arose. The blasting success of technology had opened new avenues for the passage of western liberalism into the Russian soil. From the very beginning there was, as Toynbee shows, a marked 'determination of Russian souls to preserve their spiritual independence.'⁶ This cry for 'spiritual independence' is being increasingly heard today in all materialistic societies. And 'spiritual independence' presupposes the existence of freedom both in the physical and spiritual levels of life. Toynbee wrote as early as 1955, 'If Russia's reaction against the West was to succeed, she must appear as the champion of a faith that could contend on equal terms with

liberalism'.⁷ Recent policy of liberalization in Russia is, in a way, a vindication of the historian's vision of the emerging Russia of the future. Economic liberty is a must. But it is never enough. Man does not live by bread alone. The spirit of struggle, sacrifice, and dedication with which the Bolsheviks served their homeland is unknown today to the younger generation who are born in a society economically provided in many ways by the all-powerful state machinery. But the spirit remains starved despite all wealth. The recent hunger for the 'inner aspect of religion' in most of the affluent countries is a striking pointer to the failure of a mere economic or utilitarian society. Such societies are creating youth who are suffering, as Alvin Toffler writes, from a sense of 'perpetual purposelessness, which drives the younger generation to drug addiction and such other modern abuses like alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, psychological depression, suicide, vandalism and crime. The juvenile problem threatens, as Toffler points out, not merely the *how* of production, but the *why*.' 'The issues raised by it will reduce', continues Toffler, 'the great conflict of the twentieth century, the conflict between capitalism and communism, to comparative insignificance. For these issues sweep far beyond economic or political dogmas. They involve, as we shall see, nothing less than sanity, the human organism's ability to distinguish illusion from reality.'⁸

Theodore Roszak wrote in his book *Where the Wasteland Ends*, 'We can now recognize that the fate of the soul is the fate of the social order; that if the spirit within us withers so too will all the world we build around us.' *The Modern*

6. Ibid., p. 152.

7. Ibid.

8. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (U.S.A.: National General Company, 1972) pp. 219-21.

experiment to live without religion has failed, and once we have understood this, we know what our post modern tasks really are', writes E.F. Schumacher⁹. He thinks that the 'right direction' lies in what he calls the 'Yoga of a new consciousness', 'the applied science of religion' which help the scientist to manifest 'the divine power that dwells within him.'¹⁰

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In 1896 when Swami Vivekananda was in London, his devotees desired him to visit Russia. Initial preparations were also made. The trip however did not materialize. Yet Vivekananda was very much drawn to this great country. In the same year Vivekananda was struck by the Russian Emperor's fascination to India which was evident in his book *Travel in the East of Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia*. Vivekananda read the book and sent at once to India the following passage from the book to be published in *Indian Mirror* and *Brahmavadin*.

To-morrow, India! Sleep deserts mine eyes. I vainly sought it in the balmy night;—in the gold and crimson of the rising sun, the dawn greets the promised land, where the heavens are pervaded with the charms of love, but passion is conquered by an unspeakable sadness—where life glows bright, yet all is as a dream, and breathes with beauty irresistible as death. O land of daring dreams and soaring thought! Thou risest out of the azure deep, whose mournful moaning echoes sadly back the discord reigning in the weary heart. India lies before us! Here holiness and peace appeared in visions unto men contemptuous of pleasures; since their age the people live the self-same life, yearning for the Divinity for freedom, and atonement. Here, where the earthly realm of sorrow borders on the heavens, and when the soul is crushed by unceasing torments, this magic land calls us into

a world of wonders, into the realm of the eternal mysteries of boundless wisdom.¹¹

In spite of Czar's appreciation of India, Swamiji, with his prophetic vision, was conscious of the fading glory of all monarchy, and especially of the pathetic failure of Czardom so far as the condition of the masses were concerned. When he was in London in 1896, one morning the newspapers brought the news of a catastrophe that had taken place during the coronation of Czar Nicholas II. A vast crowd of thousands of Russian peasants from far-off villages had gathered to procure an enamelled coronation cup promised for each of them. Arrangements were poor. A stampede followed in the disorganized crowd. 2,000 people died on the spot, others got crushed or trampled by one another. In desperation the police, failing to control the crowd, fired. When the news was read out to Vivekananda, at once he burst out in pain, 'What misery! What suffering! For the sake of one cup all those people left their villages and came to the city! And so many killed! How poor the country is! They have given their lives for a two-bit enamelled glass!' That morning Vivekananda became silent. He strolled restlessly to and fro, his heart still in agony for the unfortunate victims of a royal coronation.¹²

Already Vivekananda saw the foreshadowing of a great upheaval in Russia. In 1895 he had made the prophetic revelation to a group of chosen disciples in Thousand Island Park in America, 'The next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China. I can't quite see which, but it will be either

9. E.F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Abacus, 1981) p. 159.

10. *Ibid* p. 104-5.

11. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986) Vol. 4, p. 529.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

Russia or China'.¹³ After twenty-two years came the explosion.

Vivekananda was fully aware of a historic antithesis rising against a self-centred Petrine Czarism. He was acquainted with communistic theories even before the first communist revolution did really happen in Russia in 1917. With his deep identification with suffering masses of India, and the negroes of the West, Vivekananda felt the urgent need of socialism for a total uplift of the masses. So far as our knowledge goes, in India Vivekananda was the first man who could declare—'I am a socialist'.

But Vivekananda also foresaw that the only philosophical or rational basis on which true socialism or communism could stand with confidence and satisfy the needs of humanity, was the Vedanta philosophy with its supreme respect to the infinite potentiality and divinity of each individual, high or low. After his return to India he spoke out these ideas to *Hindu* in 1897:

All the social upheavalists, at least the leaders of them, are trying to find that all their communistic or equalising theories must have a spiritual basis, and that spiritual basis is in Vedanta only. I have been told by several leaders, who used to attend my lectures, that they required Vedanta as the basis of the new order of things.¹⁴

And again to his English friend Mr. Sturdy, Vivekananda wrote, 'There is only one basis of well-being, social, political or spiritual—to know that I and my brothers are *one*.'¹⁵ Whenever the advocates

of equality struggled to bring this equality on the physical plane by the use of force, the result was a failure. No two blades of grass in the universe are equal. At the same time behind the small ripple and the gigantic wave remains always the same infinite ocean. It is only at the spiritual level, behind the physical plane, that equality abides.

Deeply impressed by the wonderful sense of freedom amongst American men and women, Swamiji wrote to his Madras disciples: 'Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and wellbeing. Where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down.'¹⁶

* * * *

The first impact of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in modern Russia was felt in the life and thoughts of Leo Tolstoy who got these ideas through letters or books sent to him. This was in the first decade of this century. From nineteen-sixties the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order started visiting Russia. Swami Dayananda and Swami Nityaswarupananda visited Russia before mid-sixties. Next to visit Russia was Swami Ranganathananda. His lecture delivered to the students and staff of the Moscow University is widely circulated in India in a small book with the title *Swami Vivekananda: His Humanism*. But more extensive and intimate relation with the Russian thinkers was made when Swami Lokeswarananda, Head of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, visited Russia twice in 1980s at the invitation of the Soviet Writers' Union. At once an intercultural exchange began between Russian intellectuals and the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Dr. E. P. Chelisev, eminent scholar of USSR Academy of Sciences recently spent three months at the

13. Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1961) p. 203.

14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964) Vol. 5, pp. 212-3.

15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (1977) Vol. 8, p. 350.

16. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965) p. 63.

Calcutta Institute of Culture on a special study tour on Swami Vivekananda. Russian intellectuals, mostly writers, thinkers, and scientists began to pour in. In May 1986 a group of eminent Russian intellectuals met the Indian Press at the Institute of Culture, Calcutta. There they openly declared that 'religion is opium', but the religion of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is not opium. It is the true religion since it dehypnotizes man of all miracles, slavish dependence on rituals or ecclesiastical authorities. This year, in January 1987, fourteen top level Russian intellectuals and scientists again came to the Institute of Culture to participate in two seminars—one on Sri Ramakrishna and the other on global peace. They visited educational centres of the Ramakrishna Order, and finally its headquarters at Belur Math where they met the senior monks of the Order, including the President whom they requested for a trip to Russia. This trip by the Russian academicians was followed by Swami Hiranmayanandaji's trip to Russia in February 1987 where he was invited to participate in the International Forum on *Nuclear-Weapon-Free World for the Survival of Humanity*.

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But the finest fruit of this new Indo-Soviet Cultural exchange is a book entitled *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union*. This book, released at the Institute of Culture on 11 March of this year, was compiled by the celebrated intellectual Dr. E. P. Chelisev. It is a collection of writings on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, by eminent Soviet intellectuals of today. The book, translated from Russian, is published by Swami Lokeswarananda but for whose acquaintance with Soviet writers, scientists and academicians this volume could not have seen the light of the day.

The 450 page book shows the gradual

evolution of understanding about Vedanta and Vivekananda by the Russian scholars right from Tolstoy to present day Russian thinkers. During the last years of his life Tolstoy suddenly came in contact with the writings of Vivekananda and the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. The great Russian savant was at once 'charmed by Vivekananda's writings'. According to Prof. Danilchuk of the Institute of International Relations of U.S.S.R. ministry of foreign affairs, 'Tolstoy considered Vivekananda a part of his inner world'.¹⁷ After reading for the first time in 1908, Nazhivin's translations of Vivekananda's speech, Tolstoy wrote back to Nazhivin, 'The Hindu's article has left a great impression on me. This is unusually good. Here are my thoughts obscurely expressed.'¹⁸ As Tolstoy's acquaintance with Vivekananda's idea deepened, the veil of obscurity was lifted. Tolstoy declared again and again, that Vivekananda belongs to the level of Buddha, Christ, Socrates, Plato, Kant and Schopenhauer.¹⁹ From the very beginning Tolstoy had nourished an abhorrence of all miracles and miracle-mongering in religion. The wonderful rationality of Vivekananda's thoughts now entered deep into his thinking. 'Read Vivekananda's article on God, an excellent one. Should be translated. I myself thought of this itself', Tolstoy wrote. In Vivekananda he found 'prajna' the teachings of the sages. In 1909 when a third volume of Vivekananda's speeches and writings was presented to him, he remarked, 'the most eminent of modern Indian thinkers is Vivekananda and he should be published.'²⁰

17. *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union* Translated from the Russian by Harish C. Gupta (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1987) p. 175.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Tolstoy had an instinctive abhorrence of miracles. In 1910 when Tolstoy read Annie Besant's *Theosophy and Modern Psychology*, he remarked, 'She rests on what is weak, what is erroneous, and Vivekananda on what is true.'²¹ The absolutely rational interpretation of God and religion, according to Tolstoy, is Vivekananda's greatest contribution to India and the humanity at large. Tolstoy felt sad that 200 million Indians 'highly gifted in both spiritual and physical strength' were overruled by a handful of Europeans 'who are immeasurably lower than those whom they rule.' 'The reason thereof', said Tolstoy, 'as seen... from extremely interesting works of the Hindu writer Swami Vivekananda is the absence of a rational religious doctrine.' Vivekananda himself brought this rational religious doctrine. About Ramakrishna Tolstoy first came to know from the extracts from Max Muller's book on Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna's wisdom overwhelmed him. He wrote, 'His selection of the "sayings" is wonderful. Ramakrishna died fifty years ago(?). The most brilliant wise man!'²²

Tolstoy died before the *Complete Works of Vivekananda* and the full biography of Ramakrishna were available to him. Today's Soviet writers have the opportunity of studying Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in depth. 'Interest in the life and work of this remarkable patriot thinker and social leader (Vivekananda) has been growing from day to day all the world over including the Soviet Union', writes Prof. Danilchuk. Last year when someone asked Prof. Danilchuk in Hyderabad why the Soviet people were turning to the Neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda instead of Christianity, the Professor at once gave a detailed idea about how the true base of Russian

language and culture had always been Indo-Aryan, and not Judeo-Semetic. A large number of the Russian words have pure sanskrit base. The religion of a Father in heaven was a later introduction, he said, while the 'inner aspect of religion', the religion of the undying spirit in man, was embedded deep in the Russian soil.

Dr. E. P. Chelisev sees in Vivekananda a 'socialist', an 'anti imperialist', and a 'humanist'. He writes, 'The humanistic ideal of Vivekananda is to certain extent ideal with Gorkay's 'May with a capital letter.' Vivekananda's new humanism, according to Chelisev, 'played an important part in the general upsurge of national consciousness and the struggle of the Indian people for independence.'²³

While Chelisev cannot agree with the 'idealistic basis of Vivekananda's humanism' and calls Vivekananda's socialism 'Utopian Socialism', he can, nevertheless, not deny the power he exerted for the rejuvenation of masses in India. V. S. Kostyuchenko, Reader in philosophy makes a bolder statement, 'Through the haze of romantic illusions and utopian desires Vivekananda was nonetheless able to discern the contours of the future with adequate clarity—and, at times, even simply with striking precision.'²⁴ This 'precise' and clear vision about the global rise of the masses strikes the Russian thinkers with a genuine reverence for the prophetic dimensions in Vivekananda's ideas.

Chelisev finds that Vivekananda stressed the 'inner aspect of religion'²⁵ instead of rituals. It is with the ritualistic or the 'secondary details' of religion, as Vivekananda defined, that all differences and conflicts between religions have arisen throughout the history. He finds in

21. Ibid., p. 171.

22. Ibid., p. 164.

23. Ibid., pp. 209-11.

24. Ibid., p. 289.

25. Ibid., p. 32.

Vivekananda's stress on the moral-spiritual aspects of religion rather than on rituals, a strong similarity with the present-day Russian thoughts. Chelisev writes that Vivekananda thought it 'possible to control the social-moral vices of contemporary Indian society with the help of 'spirituality' whose base, according to his views, was in the moral-religious principles of Vedanta. The moral progress, therefore, in Vivekananda's notion, as also for the Russian *narodniks* (populists), was wholly dependent on the efforts of 'theoretician-moralists'.²⁶ Chelisev also says that Vivekananda was the first to think that 'India must bring to the West the saving "spirituality"'.²⁷ 'Strength for Vivekananda is a complex formation, a peculiar identity of the inner and the outer, the spiritual and the physical', says Chelisev.²⁸ Obviously such rational ideas appeals to the present-day theoreticians of Russia.

V.S. Kostyuchenko finds three motifs in Vivekananda's works—*Reformation*, *Enlightenment* and *Restoration*. The motif of *Reformation* is 'universal religion, putting an end to religious discords, superstitions, fanaticism. The motif of *Enlightenment* is reason, science, education, shaking the stagnant forms of social existence. And lastly, the motif of *Restoration* is the humanist idea of 'free man on free earth'.²⁹

According to Komarav, a Sector Head in U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, Vivekananda is the first person in Indian history who realized the failure of 'feudalism' and the 'bourgeois culture' to bring an effective education of the masses. 'This conclusion', says Komarav, 'for the first time in India distinctly formulated by Vivekananda only, was a main attainment of the progressive

Indian social thought before the first world war.'³⁰

Dr. R. B. Rybakov, another scholar from the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, in his 144-page essay on the *Reformation of Hinduism* deals mainly with the uniqueness of Ramakrishna. He finds in Ramakrishna a fulfilment of Karl Marx's thoughts on religion. Karl Marx wrote about Martin Luther, '...religion was for him the *direct truth*, so to say *nature*.' Quoting this line, Rybakov writes, 'The words of Marx, said about Luther, are fully applicable to the former....For Ramakrishna, religion was the highest truth. For the rationalist Vivekananda, it is like science, with no place for any thing secret, mystical, and supernatural.'³¹ Yet Ramakrishna was neither anti-world nor anti-man. 'In the midst of Ramakrishna's God-absorption'; Rybakov writes, 'the thought of reality of the surrounding world is a substantial part of Ramakrishna's message,' which drove 'automatically' 'to the conclusion of desirability and need of active work'.³² In Ramakrishna Rybakov finds four dominant characteristics: 'the tendency to reconcile the contradictions of Hinduism, the attempt to create internally a logical system, and also to bring together the viewpoints of reformers and the orthodox, putting forward the idea of validity of every religion.'³³

Rybakov finds in anti-imperialist Vivekananda's sharp indictments of feudalistic exploitation and his clarion call to India for shaking off its century-old lethargy and diffidence, an enactment of Karl Marx's ideas: 'Shame is already a revolution of its own kind.... Shame is an anger of its own kind, only directed within. And if a

26. Ibid., p. 66.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 51.

29. Ibid., p. 221.

30. Ibid., p. 121.

31. Ibid., p. 398.

32. Ibid., p. 368.

33. Ibid., p. 397.

whole nation really were to have a sense of shame, it would be like a lion who contracts his whole self, getting prepared for the jump.³⁴ India did stand up like a springing lion at Vivekananda's words.

The book is, indeed, epoch-making, in the sense that it heralds the beginning of a new epoch of closer relation and deeper understanding between Russia and India, an understanding which goes deeper than understandings at mere political, diplomatic or even economic level. It is now a cultural and spiritual understanding between the two great nations. And the common base that slowly emerges is the religion of Vedanta as preached and practised by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna's love for God in all religions and God in all men and women, and Vivekananda's unfailing respect to the Divine, even in the low and the sinner, unites today man with man and nations with nations.

* * * *

Vedanta knew the utter unreality of a golden millennium in our external life. It is at a higher level of consciousness, as Vivekananda pointed out, that man sees the world 'deified'. 'An objective heaven or millennium therefore', wrote Vivekananda, 'has existence only in the fancy but a subjective one is already in existence. The musk-deer after vain search for the cause of the scent of the musk at last will have to find it in himself.'³⁵

Modern life, says William Faulkner, is 'a frantic steeplechase towards nothing'. Despite prosperity, materialistic societies today suffer from a nihilistic despair. President Nixon's statement about affluent America rings in our ears, 'Never has a nation seemed to have more and enjoyed

it less.'³⁶ *Civitas Dei*, the kingdom of God, slowly appears to modern man as something not available in any projected or promised future, but as the spiritual infinitude and innate divinity within us. 'So far as this *Civitas Dei* enters into time dimension at all', writes Toynbee, 'it is not a dream of the future, but a spiritual reality penetrating the present'.³⁷ Religion is *here and now*, said Vivekananda. The promised millennium is within us, in our innate divinity. And the function of religion is to manifest it.

Vivekananda's clarion call to Indians to embrace the *Practical Vedanta* and to assert their soul force, resulted in a sudden upsurge of individual and national faith. The democratic-socialistic pattern of thinking in post-independent India based on the *Practical Vedanta* of Vivekananda, did push to nothingness the feudal supremacy and the caste-privileges of the past, opening out thereby educational, cultural, religious and spiritual privileges to all Indians irrespective of caste, creed, and nationality. Vivekananda's call for 'renunciation and service' evoked tremendous response from many genuine souls belonging to the upper classes in India. On the sacrifice and service of these great national leaders, India has today emerged into a world power. 'Renunciation and Service' is not just a spiritual ideal. It proved an epoch-making power capable of creating new social order free from privileged classes. Before this power India bowed down twice, once when Ashoka embodied this ideal in his own life, and next when the ideal again became burning and embodied in the life and teachings of Vivekananda.

History is replete with stories of three kinds of saviours. Saviours with the pen,

34. Ibid., pp. 393-4.

35. *Letter of Swami Vivekananda*, dt. 1 Nov., 1896.

36. Alvin Toffler, *The Adaptive Corporation* p. 100.

37. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, op. cit., p. 529.

like Rousseau and others, have inspired humanity with visions of golden millenniums. Saviours with the sword, like Alexander, Chengiz Khan, Hitler and Napoleon, have sought to conquer nations and consolidate kingdoms. Humanity got bread, along with pools of blood and mountain of skulls. But like Adam and Eve expelled from Eden, it was yet to find its 'place of rest and providence'. It is time for Saviours as Son of God, like Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, to lead us today through the path of religious pluralism, and service to the Divine within all members of our human family, to a world of peace and harmony. Vivekananda's words uttered in the Chicago Parliament of Religions nearly a century ago ring like a prophecy for today's war-tormented world seeking peace:

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not

the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension'.³⁸

Soviet President Gorbachev's historic attempt to unite humanity through this International Forum is a great stride towards a global solidarity. At this significant moment when the Soviet Government, as a super-power, is making an all-out effort to ensure global peace, the rise of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda above the horizon of Russia promises a turning point and a boon to humanity as a whole.

38. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1977) Vol. 1, p. 24.

INDIRA GANDHI AWARD FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION FOR 1985

Acceptance Speech

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

1. *Intrductory*

I am thankful to the Advisory Committee of the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration for choosing me to receive the first Award instituted in the name, and in honour, of our late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, whose death happened due to her upholding of National Integration. According to our great ancient law-giver Manu, the seeker of spiritual values should run away from all honour

and praise (1.162): *Sammānāt brāhmaṇo nityam udvijeta*. But the name of Indira Gandhi, and its very noble purpose, influenced me to accept this Award. The Award refers to my work in the fields of national integration, and understanding and fellowship among religious groups. The Award money will be utilized to serve our weaker sections, our tribals in the Bastar District of Madhya Pradesh, through the Ramakrishna Mission.

My knowledge of India tells me that

there are many distinguished individuals and institutions in our country who are silently working in these important fields. If the members of the Committee have chosen me to be the first recipient of the Award, I accept it on behalf of all them; and let us hope that such persons and institutions will steadily multiply in the coming years; and they are there among all communities and sections of our vast population. That means that national awareness and patriotic loyalty is present in a good measure in our people; and this has been proved in times of national crisis in the recent past. What we have to do is to create political, economic, and social conditions and circumstances which will help achieve total national integration, which will make all our people experience the pride and privilege of being citizens of the democratic republic of India; and this democratic nation-building deriving sanction from all sections of the Indian people, is the challenge before the government and the people of India today.

2. *My Philosophic and Spiritual Background*

If the Award recognizes in me the precious values of national integration and religious harmony, it will be a rewarding study, for our nation, to understand the formative forces that led me up to it, to be acquainted with my philosophic and spiritual background. Even though brought up in a caste-ridden and feudal social environment, I broke all caste distinctions even from my boyhood and intimately befriended, for example, an old Pariah couple tenant of my family; they wept when I left my village to join the Ramakrishna Order in 1926. I also established intimate and happy relations with my Christian fellow-students in our school at Allur, near Trichur, in Kerala. Long after, in Karachi in Pakistan, my one old Pathan

watchman, and two Sindhi Muslim youths working as cook and house keeper, wept, when I took final leave of them, in 1948, to take charge of our Delhi centre. It is a great experience to give love to, and receive love from, men and women and children of all communities and races.

After reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and the *Life and Works of Swami Vivekananda*, from my 14th year onwards, the universal attitudes and the humanist passion generated from such study overcame any lingering communal and caste distinctions from my mind. Thousands of our patriots have been so transformed by the study of Vivekananda literature; and they fought for freedom and achieved it in 1947. During a visit to the Belur Math, the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, on 6 February 1921, Mahatma Gandhi had said (quoted in *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, p. 44):

I have come here to pay my homage and respect to the revered memory of Swami Vivekananda, whose birthday is being celebrated today. I have gone through his Works very thoroughly and, after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became a thousand-fold. I ask you, young men, not to go away empty-handed without imbibing something of the spirit of the place where Swami Vivekananda lived and died.

When I was in Gulmarg in Kashmir in 1946, I one day walked into the adjacent house where I learnt that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was staying, along with Mrs. Indira Gandhi and children, Sheikh Abdullah, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mr. Asaf Ali, and Mr. Iftikharuddin of Lahore. Panditji, who was then busy with the INA trials, received me and we had a forty-minute discussion during which, when I said: Panditji, you have dismissed Swami Vivekananda in your autobiography in one sentence, that 'Vivekananda and others... gave us a measure of self-respect again,

and roused up our dormant pride in our past', he asked: Have I said so? But now I have changed my estimate of him and of several other teachers like Śankarācārya; you will find my new estimate in my book, now in the press: *The Discovery of India*. After tea with Sheikh Abdullah and others, I took leave. On returning to Karachi, I read his new book and found insightful studies of the Indian cultural heritage, with about 5 pages devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. About Vivekananda, he writes (p. 400):

Rooted in the past, and full of pride in India's heritage, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems, and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present.

Later, speaking in Delhi a few years later, he said (*Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, 1960, pp. 4-13):

I do not know how many of the younger generation read the speeches and the writings of Swami Vivekananda. But I can tell you that many of my generation were very powerfully influenced by him, and I think that it will do a great deal of good to the present generation if they also went through Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches...

If you read Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches, the curious thing you will find is that they are not old. It was told 56 years ago, and they are fresh today because, what he wrote, or spoke about, dealt with fundamental matters and aspects of our problems, or the world's problems. Therefore, they do not become old; they are fresh even though you read them now...

So what Swamiji has written and said is of interest, and must interest us, and is likely to influence us, for a long time to come. He was no politician in the ordinary sense of the word and yet he was, I think, one of the great founders—if you like, you may use any other word—of the national modern movement of India; and a great number of people who took more or less an active part in that movement, in a later date, drew their inspiration from

Swami Vivekananda. Directly or indirectly, he has powerfully influenced the India of today. And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit, of fire, that flows through Swami Vivekananda....

Men like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa men like Swami Vivekananda, and men like Mahatma Gandhi, are great unifying forces, great constructive geniuses of the world, not only in regard to particular teachings that they taught, but their approach to the world and their conscious and unconscious influence on it is of the most vital importance to us.

3. *The Pure Message of Love and Service*

What is the type of influence that radiates from Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and the Holy Mother Sarada Devi? A pure message of love and service. They realized man as the 'child of the Immortal', *amṛtasya putraḥ*, as the *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad* proclaimed it thousands of years ago in this blessed land of India. During his various spiritual experiments in the temple garden of Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna practically experimented, along with his twelve years of scientific experiments and experiences in the great world religions, with the rooting out of caste pride in a unique way, which holds vital lessons to the feudal caste-ridden section of our population, who still oppress our scheduled castes and tribes. He a *brāhmaṇa* himself, used to stealthily enter a nearby untouchable's house, at dead of night, and clean his toilet and wipe it with his flowing hair, praying to the Divine Mother all the time: 'O Mother, please remove the least trace of caste superiority from my mind; make me a servant of all!' The Holy Mother Sarada Devi fed the Muslim labourer Amjad and removed the leaf and cleaned the place with a universal mother-heart which embraced, in its pure love, Christians, Muslims, and Hindus of all castes. During his *parivrājaka*, or wandering monk, period

of life in all parts of India, Vivekananda lived in the houses of princes, peasants, untouchables, Muslims, and others, and was deeply pained to see the poverty, illiteracy and suffering of our weaker sections of all communities, and the heartlessness and exploitation of these weaker sections by our upper classes. Deploring the low level to which man had reduced man in his country, he later wrote from America to his disciples in India (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 16):

They (our upper classes) little dream of the ages of tyranny—mental, moral, and physical—that has reduced the image of God (that is man) to a mere beast of burden, the emblem of the Divine Mother (that is woman) to a slave to bear children, and life itself a curse!

It is these experiences that made him preach to our people the message of a Practical Vedānta, of a spiritual humanism, consisting of a love of God flowing into a love and service of man, irrespective of caste or sex or communal differences, and tender that service in a spirit of reverence and friendliness, seeing the same divinity in all of them. He summoned our upper classes to go down to their weaker sections and bring them up. He proclaimed that 'the national ideals of India are renunciation and service; intensify her in those channels, the rest will take care of themselves.' In his famous lecture on *Vedānta* in Lahore in 1897, he referred to casteism and untouchability as sin and summoned the nation to 'wipe off this blot' (*ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 429-31):

Young men of Lahore, understand this, therefore, this great sin, hereditary and national, is on our shoulders. There is no hope for us. You may make thousands of societies, twenty-thousand political assemblages, fifty-thousand institutions. These will be of no use until there is that sympathy, that love, that heart, that thinks for all; until Buddha's heart comes once more into India: until the words of the Lord

Krishna are brought to their practical use, there is no hope for us....

Therefore, young men of Lahore, raise once more that mighty banner of Advaita (philosophy and spirituality of nonseparateness); for on no other ground can you have that wonderful love, until you see that the same Lord is present everywhere. Unfurl that banner of love! 'Arise, Awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.' Arise, arise once more, for nothing can be done without renunciation. If you want to help others, your little self must go. In the words of the Christians—you cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time.... Throw away everything, even your own salvation, and go and help others.... The nation is sinking; the curse of un-numbered millions is on our heads—those to whom we have been giving ditch-water to drink, when they have been dying of thirst, and while the perennial river of water was flowing past; the un-numbered millions whom we have allowed to starve in sight of plenty; the un-numbered millions to whom we have talked of Advaita and whom we have hated with all our strength.... *Wipe off this blot!* 'Arise and awake.' What matters it if this little life goes? Everyone has to die, the saint or the sinner, the rich or the poor. The body never remains for anyone. Arise and awake and be perfectly sincere. *Our insincerity in India is awful!* What we want is character, that steadiness and character that make a man cling on to a thing like grim death.

Speaking in Madras in the same year on *The Future of India*, he said (*ibid.*, p. 297):

The duty of every aristocracy is to dig its own grave; and the sooner it does so, the better. The more it delays, the more it will fester, and the worse death it will die.

Writing from Japan on 10 July 1893 to his Indian disciples, Vivekananda thundered (*ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 10):

'Come, be men! Kick out the priests who are always against progress, because they would never mend; their hearts would never become big. They are the offspring of centuries of superstition and tyranny. Root out priest-craft first. Come, be men.... Do you love man? Do you love your country? Then come, let us

struggle for higher and better things. Look not back, but forward! India wants the sacrifice of at least a thousand of her young men—men, mind, not brutes, ... to struggle unto life and death to bring about a new state of things—sympathy for the poor, and bread to their hungry mouths, enlightenment to the people at large—and struggle unto death to make men of them, who have been brought to the level of beasts by the tyranny of your forefathers!

And, earlier in the same year, landing on the soil of India from Sri Lanka, at Ramnad, in response to a tumultuous national welcome which no king, emperor, or military conqueror, of any country, had ever received, he visualized the awakening of modern India, and the unfolding of the most glorious chapter of her long and impressive history, in his very opening words (*ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 145-46):

The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awaking, ... the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the preverted will not see, that she is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep, long, sleep. None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet!

The words and the sentiment that Vivekananda conveyed through his letter from America to the then Maharaja of Mysore in 1894, and which produced a bumper harvest of *living* people, a harvest of patriots and servants of the nation, in pre-freedom India, must now be burnt into the souls of our people of post-freedom India, so that they also may become *living* people by making service, not exploitation, the normal form of interpersonal and inter-group relationship throughout our nation (*ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 363):

This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive!

Dealing with the impact on India of these and many other similar utterances of Vivekananda, Romain Rolland says in his critical and insightful book, *Life of Vivekananda* (pp. 124-25):

Imagine the thunderous reverberations of these words! ... The storm passed; it scattered its cataracts of water and fire over the plain, and its formidable appeal to the Force of the Soul, to the God sleeping in man and His illimitable possibilities! I can see the Mage erect, his arm raised, like Jesus above the tomb of Lazarus in Rembrandt's engraving: with energy flowing from his gesture of command to raise the dead and bring him to life.

Did the dead arise? Did India, thrilling to the sound of his words, reply to the hope of her herald? ... The Master's rough scourge made her turn for the first time in her sleep, and for the first time, the heroic trumpet sounded, in the midst of her dream, the Forward March of India, conscious of her God. She never forgot it. From that day, the awakening of the torpid Colossus began. If the generation that followed, saw, three years after Vivekananda's death, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi, if India today (in the 1920's) has definitely taken part in the collective action of organized masses, it is due to the initial shock, to the mighty, "Lazarus, come forth!" of the Message from Madras.

And, referring to the character and impact of Vivekananda's words, Romain Rolland says (*ibid.*, p. 162):

His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports, must have been produced when, in burning words, they issued from the lips of the hero!

It is the deep study of this strengthening, purifying, and unifying literature by me, and by hundreds of other youths like me, belonging to various sections of the Indian society and of many countries abroad, that

impelled me and them to join the Rama-krishna-Vivekananda movement, either as monks, or as nuns, or as dedicated lay workers, inspired by the vision and the ideal given to it by Swami Vivekananda: *Ātmano moksārtham jagat hitāya ca*—‘for the spiritual liberation of oneself and for the welfare of the world’. This ideal unifies the spiritual heights of mysticism and the man-ward flow of humanism; it unifies the sacred and the secular, man’s inner life and man’s outer life.

Vivekananda’s philosophy and spirituality of service cuts across all communal, caste, and other differences, and shines as a universal spiritual religion or philosophy of life, acceptable not only to all believers but to all atheists and agnostics as well. This universality arises from its stress on character, on the humanist passion, and on lived spiritual experience, and not on mere belief and dogma. The *Mahābhārata* conveys this message in a verse giving the teaching of a merchant by name Tulādhāra to a Brahmin ascetic by name Jājali (12.254.9):

*Sarveṣāṁ yaḥ suhṛnnityam
sarveṣāṁ ca hite rataḥ;
Karmaṇā manasā vācā
sa dharmam veda jājale—*

‘That person knows *dharmā*, O Jājali, who is always the friend of all people, and who is engaged in ensuring the welfare of all people through action, thought, and speech.’

4. Swami Akhandananda: The Pioneer of Service

The pioneer who implemented Vivekananda’s philosophy of service was Swami Akhandananda, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. After rendering much service to the weaker sections in Rajasthan

in 1893-94, this monk, possessed of a Buddha’s heart, was on a pilgrimage in North Bengal and reached a village called Dadpur, whence began his blazing of a trail of service of the poor and the suffering people, which soon became one of the important characteristics of the Rama-krishna-Vivekananda movement. To narrate this small beginning of a big service programme, it is best to quote Swami Akhandananda’s own words from his book (*From Holy Wanderings to SERVICE OF GOOD IN MAN*, p. 157):

‘Early in the morning, I washed my hands and face in the Gangā and was coming towards the bazaar, when I found a Muslim girl of about fourteen, clad in dirty rags, weeping bitterly. She held on her waist an earthen jar, the bottom of which had given away. On seeing me, she said: ‘Father, there is famine, we have nothing at home to eat. We had in our home only this earthen jar and two earthen pans. There is no second vessel at home to hold water. For fear lest mother beat me, I am crying. I took her with me and bought her an earthen jar worth two pice and some fried rice of the same value. Hardly had the shopkeeper paid me back the small change of three annas, when there gathered at the shop some twelve boys and girls of the neighbouring village Maradighi and piteously appealed for help, saying, that they had nothing to eat. I at once asked the vendor to distribute among them fried rice worth three annas.

The sight of such famine-stricken people, in village after village, made him give up his pilgrimage programme and conduct efficient famine relief services, which earned the love of the people and high praise from the local British Government officers, and finally consummated itself in the founding of a permanent orphanage in Sargachi near Murshidabad.

5. Our Educated Need a Re-education

There is no doubt that we can end all caste conflicts in India—and they are a

blot on our democracy and weaken it— if our educated people become *re-educated* in national and humanistic attitudes, by the Vivekananda literature. They need that re-education. It is rare to see anyone who has caught the inspiration of Vivekananda indulging in caste conflicts. A touch of his Practical Vedānta will make such people ashamed of their erstwhile feudalistic and anti-human attitudes and activities and turn to the service and uplift of, what they will then realize as, their weaker fellow-citizens. The widespread diffusion of Vivekananda's ideas will generate a current of ethical and humanistic impulses, which will sweep over the nation and 'wipe off the blot' on our society. It will make our people realize their democratic responsibilities and discharge them in a humanistic spirit, and thus less and less prone to corruption and other social malpractices.

When such a change will come over our people, they will themselves initiate social amelioration measures, without depending entirely on the state. When I was taken through the sprawling Dharavi slum in Bombay recently, this very idea crossed my mind. Much of the wealth of India is concentrated in Bombay. If a dedicated group of Bombay industrialists and businessmen join together and raise a hundred crore fund from the city, and attack the Dharavi slum problem, taking the help of the government to overcome technical difficulties, the present dismal Dharavi will be transformed into a healthy, clean, and fully equipped colony, with many 2 or 3 storey apartments, schools, playgrounds, and parks, brightening the lives of the thousands of its families. What an environmental revolution it will mean for Bombay! And what healthy repercussions such an achievement, through public initiative, will have on other urban areas in India! This is the type of awakening that our people will have from the

widespread study of, and imbibing the inspiration from, Vivekananda literature. All these are part and parcel of a fully conceived and implemented national integration revolution, where man in India realizes himself or herself as a dynamic citizen of democratic India and not its passive subject or cynical critic!

6. *Root Nourishment of Our Secular Democracy*

I had said at the beginning of this talk that we have to create conditions and circumstances conducive to the achievement of total national integration. I have so far discussed the citizen's part in this vital field, and dealt with only the vicious caste problem. But the Government also has a vital part to play in this field, and in the equally vicious communal problem. The talk of national integration has been going on for a few years now ; there is also the national integration council, which meets whenever serious communal troubles take place. Some of its suggestions, for achieving integration, like government functions abstaining from lighting lamps at inaugural ceremonies, sound cheap and meaningless ; if breaking a coconut on a ship to launch it is bad, is India to adopt the Western method of smashing a wine bottle on the ship! There are certain cultural practices in countries which are their age-old inheritance ; practices like lighting a lamp are simple and harmless and universal, since the human heart yearns to move from darkness to light.

No, the nation must strengthen secularism, in order to achieve total national integration, through more fundamental political approaches. The first truth that our democratic state must realize is that *a secular state and communal political parties can never go together*. A secular state should have only secular political

parties *at all levels*. This is the first step to be taken. Such a step alone will help to throw up national leaders from all communities; in the present set-up, national-minded leaders have no chance to rise and to lead, but only communal-minded ones. In a truly secular democracy, any member elected to a legislature must represent the interests of the members of all communities of his or her electorate. Why should not a Muslim member of Parliament or Assembly or Panchayat represent the political and economic interests of non-Muslims as much as of Muslims? Why not a Christian represent the interests of non-Christians, and a Hindu those of non-Hindus? Until political conditions are created for secular-minded members of all religious communities to represent the political, economic, and social interests of each other, and the same applies to the government servants also, our democratic state will not be truly secular, and national integration will remain a far-away dream.

Our experience so far has been: three feet forward and four feet backward! Conditions must be created, by appropriate government policies, for members of all religious communities in India to feel that, in the secular sphere of life, they are primarily citizens of the free democratic state of India, and that all others are their fellow-citizens whom it is their privilege to serve; and in all non-secular spheres of life, their own religious community will claim their special loyalty and service; and the Constitution and the State will encourage the same.

A second step to be taken is the fulfilment of the Constitutional provision of a Common National Civil Code, which will consummate the national integration process. If political wisdom demands that this should wait till a wide diffusion of education creates a

demand for it from sections that are not now ready for it, let it be so. In a democracy, legislation must be preceded and backed by public education.

The above are the only means to avoid the current evils of communalism. Communalism, in the Indian context, is religion subordinated to politics, making both religion and politics narrow, sectarian, and divisive. The words community and communal, which are rich and meaningful terms in sociology, have become frightful and dismal in the Indian context, in which communal religion and politics mean often nationally disintegrating attitudes and communal conflicts. Everyone in our country today must feel sad and ashamed at the recurring communal violence and conflicts, when citizens kill fellow-citizens, mostly innocent and poor ones. With all our national integration councils and law and order measures, we are not seeing any reduction in these ugly and shameful social phenomena, but only increase in range and turbulence. People of different communities, who lived for ages in friendly attitudes in the same locality, are now forced to carve out separate localities for themselves. The remedies applied so far, it is evident, are only cosmetic; they are like watering the twigs and leaves of a tree. The whole tree is nourished only when its root-system is watered. We need a root nourishment of our secular democracy. It is this root-nourishment of secularism and national integration that will be provided to our infant democratic state, *when the nation's political processes are de-linked from all communal-religious affiliations*. Once this is achieved, by mutual discussions between all political parties, and with suitable constitutional amendments, I have no doubt that communal conflicts will decrease day by day and, eventually, totally disappear, and national integration will become an accomplished fact.

7. True Secularism Will Release the Spirituality of Our Religions

In such a political development, the gains of the various religions of our country will be equally tremendous. It will help to release the spiritual energies of love and human concern of our various religions. Instead of remaining subordinate to a sectarian politics and losing its own soul, all our religions will develop into dynamic and creative spiritual forces, imparting that breadth of outlook and character-energy to their followers, which we miss coming out of our various religions today. Swami Vivekananda reminded us that, so far as India is concerned, 'national union in India is the union of her scattered spiritual forces'. It is only character-energy, coming out of the spirituality of religion, that can accelerate human development in our nation. How many evils on the other hand, are being done in the name of an *ethnic* concept of religion! Anyone can be wicked and religious at the same time. Did the teachers of any world religions intend this to happen? *We have to realize the primacy of the spiritual dimension of religion over its ethnic.* The ethnic dimension of religion is that in which you were born; you had no say in the matter; but the scientific and spiritual dimension is what you freely choose and inquire and grow into. No one is born into a science; it is choosing that makes one a scientist. Writing to an American friend in March 1895, Swami Vivekananda said (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 303, sixth edition):

My Master (Sri Ramakrishna) used to say that these names as Hindu, Christian, etc. stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their good powers, and now stand only as baneful influences, under whose black magic, even the best of us behave

like demons. Well, we will have to work hard and must succeed... Those that want to help mankind must take their own pleasure and pain, name and fame, and all sorts of interests, and make a bundle of them, and throw them into the sea, and then come to the Lord. This is what all the masters said *and did*.

Writing later to Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) in London in June 1896, he said (*ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 489):

My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life. This world is in chains of superstition. I pity the oppressed, whether man or woman, and I pity more the oppressors. One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by *ignorance* and nothing else. Who will give the world light? Sacrifice, in the past, has been the Law; it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of the many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity.

'Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.'

Such words, as given above, can be found in the utterances of the world's mystics who represent the scientific and spiritual dimension of religion— Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim Sufi, Sikh, or Jewish. The famous Persian sufi and poet, Jalalud-Din Rumi exclaims:

In each human spirit is a Christ concealed,
To be helped or hindered, to be hurt
or healed;
If from any human soul you lift the veil,
You will find a Christ there hidden
without fail.

India has been, throughout the ages, and is destined to be in the modern period also, the land of religious harmony and toleration. The people of India respect all saints, to

whatever religion he or she may belong. And all mystics and saints have been universal and human, and many of the lovable ones among them have suffered persecution, and even death, from the ethnical communalistic dimension of their own religion. Sri Ramakrishna's contribution to the modern world is to strengthen this broad, spiritual, and humanistic dimensions of all religions. The Indian atmosphere is most suited to release the spiritual energies of all religions, making for work-efficiency, character-energy, and social harmony. In his beautiful song on Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali, the revolutionary Muslim poet of Bengal, the late Kazi Nazrul Islam, says:

*Satya-yuger puṇya-smṛti kalite ānile tumi
tāpas ;
Mandire, masjidē, girjāy, pūjile
brahme sama-śraddhāy ;
Tava nām-mākha prem-niketane
bhariyache tāi tri-samsār—*

'You brought the memory of Satya-yuga, golden age, in this Kali-yuga, iron age, O saintly one: you worshipped the One God, with equal fervour, in the Hindu temple, in the Muslim mosque, and in the Christian church; it is for this that the whole world is filled with the reservoir of Love that your name embodies.'

8. *Samavāya eva sādhuḥ*

From the Vedic times, up to Sri Ramakrishna in our own age, there has been a continuous succession of sages and saints, whose vision of the One behind the Many had initiated and sustained a cultural and religious experiment in our country, of Unity in Diversity, instead of a dull, dead uniformity. One product of this vision was toleration understood as *universal acceptance*, which made India the land of

many religions, cultures, languages, and customs, living side by side in harmony, and held together by that subtle silken thread of fundamental spiritual unity. This constitutes the most important constituent of India's ancient and continuing wisdom. This vision did not remain merely with the sages and seers, but soon influenced the political and social policy of big empires as well as small states. The most famous example of this is the Mauryan empire of Aśoka of the third century before Christ. His XII Rock Edict, as well as his own personality as pointed out by H.G. Wells in his first work on world history, has no parallel in the history of any country:

King Priyadarsin, the beloved of the gods, reverences persons of all-sects, ascetics, and householders, by gifts and various forms of reverence.

But the beloved of the gods does not value either gifts or reverential offerings, so much as that of an increase of spiritual strength of the followers of all religions... One who reverences one's own religion, and disparages that of another, from devotion to one's own religion and to glorify it over all other religions, does, by so doing, injure one's own religion more certainly.

It is, verily, *Concord Among Religions* that is right and proper, as persons of other ways of thinking may thereby hear the *Dharma* and serve its cause.

The original text in Sanskrit is high wisdom couched in the fewest words: *Samavāya eva sādhuḥ*. *Samavāya*, concord, *eva*, alone, *sādhuḥ*, is right and proper.

9. *March of Integration from the National to the International*

My education in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda philosophy and spirituality, through the Ramakrishna Order, did not stop with work for national integration and inter-religious harmony within India. It reached out to the international and human.

While expounding Indian culture and philosophy in America for four years, when an English friend wrote to Vivekananda so as to say: How long will you be there? Please return to your Mother India where plenty of work is awaiting you. Vivekananda sent a reply dated 9 August 1895, which breathes his international interests and sympathies as well as his universal spiritual humanism (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 8, pp. 349-50, 1959 edition):

Doubtless, I do love India. But every day, my sight grows clearer. What is India or England or America to us? We are the servants of that God who, by the ignorant, is called *man*. He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree?

There is but one basis of well-being—social, political, or spiritual—to know that I and my brother are *one*. This is true for all countries and all people. And Westerners, let me say, will realize it more quickly than Orientals who have almost exhausted themselves in formulating the idea and producing a few cases of individual realization.

It is a very hopeful sign that steps have been initiated by India and by all the six other governments of South Asia to establish happy international relations with each other through the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation. I am sure that this process, in tune with the aspirations of the people concerned and with current international trends, will progress steadily. We should all work hard to see that our long border with Pakistan, particularly, will be demarcated with rose and jasmine plants, and not with military works! We must have the conviction that, in this space age, when impossibles are becoming possibles, in physical science, and when a man-made Voyager is flying out to outer space beyond the solar system, international peace and understanding, as much as national integration, belong to the realm of

the possible and the practical in the science of human possibilities. And Vivekananda expounded India's perennial philosophy, the Vedānta, exactly as *the science of human possibilities*, just as physical science deals with the *science of external nature's possibilities*.

10. Conclusion

The universal humanist vision and passion of the Vedic tradition finds expression in two famous verses, out of many, which have inspired humanity here for ages, which goes straight to the heart of humanity abroad today, and with which I conclude this acceptance speech:

*Sarve bhavantu sukhinah
sa've santu nirāmayāḥ
Sarve bhadraṇi paśyantū
mā kaścit dukkhabhāḥ bhavet—*

'May all people (everywhere) be happy, may all people be free from ailments (physical and mental); may all people experience what is good and auspicious, may none be a victim of sorrow and suffering.'

*Durjanaḥ sajjano bhūyāt
sajjanaḥ śāntimāpnuyāt ;
Śānto mucyeta bandhebhya
muktaścānyān vimocayet—*

'May the wicked people become good people; and may the good people attain peace; may the peaceful people be freed from all bondages, and may the freed ones help to free other people also.'

Many friends have conveyed to me their good wishes for this occasion; since it is difficult to reply individually to all of them, I take this opportunity to convey my love and namaskars to all of them.

My love and good wishes and thanks to all of you present here.

150th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA PRIME MINISTER'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

(at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi)

RAJIV GANDHI

TODAY we celebrate two important anniversaries, two anniversaries that represent to a great extent the rebirth of India—the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna and the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Order. Sri Ramakrishna was born during the subjugation of India by the British. In his life-span of fifty years, he lit the flame of India's renaissance. The Ramakrishna Order was founded at Baranagar in Calcutta in 1886, the year of his Mahasamadhi. It was a great national endeavour, combining inspiration and idealism with compassion and action in the form of religious service for the common man, Daridra Nārāyaṇa Sevā. The Ramakrishna Order used symbols of religious philosophy to draw a code of duty and related it to the immediate needs of the society. It taught a philosophy of Jnana, Bhakti, Yoga, and Karma—Knowledge, Devotion, Yoga and Work—which could be related to the social problems of education and health, women's uplift, relief in natural or man-made disasters. This was achieved by linking the Ramakrishna Math, the spiritual brotherhood of the monks, with the Ramakrishna Mission, the social service wing which admits lay followers as well. Swami Budhananda has said that the Math gave the Order spiritual stability; the Mission, humanitarian dynamism. The Ramakrishna schools and colleges are amongst the best and are spread to the distant corners of our country. I have myself visited one at Along in Arunachal Pradesh.

Panditji in his autobiography said that Vivekananda and others gave us a measure

of self-respect again and roused up our dormant pride in our past. The Ramakrishna Order roused the pride in our past and also recognized and combated the evils that we had inherited from the past, like the oppression of women, untouchability, discrimination based on caste and religion. Alas, in most of the communities, higher spiritual truths were not of prime importance. This distortion gave rise to bigotry and sectarianism. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa separated the spiritual essence from the social aspect. He practised and experienced the truth of all religions, he bequeathed the universal truth to all humanity. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I have practised all religions: Hindu, Islam, Christianity, and have also followed the paths of different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are moving, though along different paths.' Such profound perceptions gave a sense of duty and common purpose to the struggle for Indian independence. Similar perceptions are needed today to build a modern India, perhaps even more important, to build a new order in the world. We should now project the teachings of Ramakrishna as a truth, as one truth, for all humanity. This is the only way to bring about a unity of the human race, this is the only way to ensure peace and progress on earth.

Sri Ramakrishna's teachings in the timeless tradition of Indian civilization have gone deep into our ethos, but in spite of that strength, today we see fanatic fundamentalism and fringe cultures coming up to the surface. They don't go down to

the heart or essence of religion but prefer to remain at the superficial and ritual level. It is this that we must face and counter today. Religion is much deeper than an assortment of superficial dogmas and rituals, as it is presented to be by many today. To meet the fundamentalist's challenge is not to deny religion, but to assert our secularism as defined by *Sarva-dharma-samabhāva*, an acceptance of all religions, an acceptance of a higher truth, shown to us by Sri Ramakrishna. It is time for us to counter the narrow-mindedness of some religious views by mobilizing our whole society to the deeper values of our civilization, the values that have grown from absorption and assimilation of all the religions that we have on our soil. Fundamentalism cannot be countered by another narrow fundamentalism. It can only be countered by a greater, broader perspective, by the pursuit of a higher truth.

The spiritual links that bind us to our heritage, to our traditions, must not be broken in the name of progress, prosperity and modernization. Our development, our stepping into the next century, will only be of value to us if that is done by maintaining our values, by maintaining all that is good in our heritage, by maintaining our culture. If we lose our spirituality the process of modernizing, we cannot call that progress and we cannot say we have developed into a better country. Our development must include the development of the spirit, the development of the inner core of our personality, if it is to be a total development. It is spirituality which has made our culture strong. It is this inner spirituality which has characterized all our traditions, religions, our whole civilization.

It has taught us to look beyond our self to selflessness, beyond fear to fearlessness, beyond knowledge to wisdom. If we are to build India into a great international power, if we are to banish poverty, if prosperity is to prevail and modern sciences are to flourish, it will be of no avail if we lose that spiritual thread which binds us to our roots, which runs continuously through our moments of greatness, through our moments of travail, through our moments of degradation.

Swami Vivekananda has said, 'Up India and conquer the world with your spirituality.' These words aroused the national consciousness during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century; they are equally needed in the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda distinguished themselves by thinking anew without losing the moorings of the past. Their freshness of thought imparted a new vigour to the legacy they had built upon. Such mental dynamism is needed to propel India into the twenty-first century just as it was needed to bring India into the twentieth century. So I thank and felicitate the Ramakrishna Order and the Ramakrishna Mission for the century of service that has been given to the nation and its people. You will blaze many a trail, show a true religion of compassion for all beings, respect for all religions, service to the deprived and the oppressed, meditation and action, purification of the self and of society, faithful to Swami Vivekananda's precept, 'Let man manifest the divinity that is within himself, and let him make the world reflect the spiritual oneness of the universe.'

MEMOIRS OF FOREIGN TRIPS

SWAMI HIRANMAYANANDA

[Srimat Swami Hiranmayanandaji Maharaj, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan in December 1986, and Moscow in February 1987. During his stay in those countries he visited various places of interest, addressed public meetings and had informal talks with academicians, individuals in public life and devotees. On his return to India, in an informal conversation with the representative of *Prabuddha Bharata*, Revered Swamiji recounted some of his experiences. We are glad to reproduce below excerpts from the conversation—Ed., P.B.]

Representative: Maharaj, recently you visited Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and Moscow. We are interested to know about some of your experiences in those countries as also the impact of Ramakrishna-Vive-ananda ideas there. Please tell us first about your experience at Singapore.

Maharaj: I was invited from Singapore by Swami Shiveswarananda, the head of our local centre there (a branch of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission) to inaugurate the first phase of the celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. He had arranged for my travel in Singapore Airlines. When I arrived at Singapore I was really surprised to see that country. It is a small country which was invaded twice, first by Japan and then by the British. After the war the whole country was a mass of ruins. But now I found the country had been rebuilt splendidly. Singapore is a beautiful country now. The roads were clean and tidy. They are very broad and their surface is so smooth that when our car moved at a very high speed we did not feel any jolt. All the houses looked like new houses. I did not see any slum. There may be a few inside the city. But they are making arrangements to remove all the slums. Government is taking speedy and effective steps. Singapore had no industries earlier. They depended on the import-export business. But now

they are fast building up industries and the country is very prosperous.

We had a branch of our Mission at Singapore even before the war. You know our late Swami Bhaswaranandaji. He was there during the war, and we had then two centres. At one place there was a hostel and the Ashrama at the other, where Swami Bhaswaranandaji lived. At that time Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose used to visit the Ashrama regularly in the evenings. He would sit quietly in the temple shrine, and meditate there. But he used to come all alone without any escort. I was told that one day Netaji was in difficulty. The car while going back broke down. He was helpless. Then another car came, picked him up, and took him to his headquarters. Later on, they used to send somebody to escort him. Netaji was very much devoted to Sri Ramakrishna. It is said that he used to read the *Chandi* everyday. One day he lost his copy of the *Chandi*. So he sent word to the Swami if he could help him by sending a copy of the *Chandi*. The Swami had none except his own. He sent that copy to Netaji. After Singapore fell into the hands of the Britishers, they arrested the Swami and kept him in jail for one day. These are known to the people there. Today, however, Netaji is not much remembered, nor is there any statue for him. There are Indians including

Bengalis. Perhaps they will do something in the days to come.

As I said earlier, we had two centres there. Because we had difficulty of manpower, our first centre at Morris Road was sold away. There was another in Berkely street, and there we have the centre now. There is a temple, an office building, a Students' Home, and also a few other buildings. The Ashrama owns a car of its own. In the Ashrama they had arranged for my lecture during the celebrations. In Singapore there is some restriction imposed by government about giving lectures. Prior approval of the script by the government is necessary before one is allowed to speak. I gave the Ashrama the freedom to choose any subject and send necessary points. They used to give me the points and I used to speak on them. On the first day, I think, a retired justice of a high court took the chair. I was the chief guest and I talked on Sri Ramakrishna. There were, of course, the prayers and invocations etc. The hall could accommodate about 250 people. It was full. I talked extempore for nearly 45 minutes. I told them that there was nothing in my talk which was political or which would be any criticism of Singapore government. Rather I was very much impressed by Singapore. I discussed the impact of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings on the modern world.

Representative: Maharaj, what is the future of the Ramakrishna movement at Singapore in your opinion?

Maharaj: I think we have not done much yet for the Singapore people as such. Although we have been working there for such a long time, few among the Chinese population who form the largest majority, are visiting us. On the first day I found two Chinese people in the audience. Others were mostly Tamilians and Bengalis. Perhaps the whole community in Singapore

will be drawn to our Vedantic religion in the days to come. But we must take interest in all sections of the Singapore public.

Representative: Maharaj, other than our Ashrama at Singapore, what other places did you visit?

Maharaj: I happened to visit one of the hospitals in Singapore. I could not see the whole of it, because I went at night. I could see only the orthopaedic department, the head of which was well known to me. It was clean. I wanted to see the operation theatre. The doctor said: 'Let me enquire if it is possible'. He consulted the nurse-in-charge and we were allowed to go only after putting on the theatre dress. Even the head and professor of orthopaedics had to obey the nurse-in-charge. They are so disciplined. I found that the operation theatre was well-equipped with the most modern instruments. I was very much impressed as I had the previous experience of running 3 hospitals of our organization.

Once I went to see a bird's sanctuary. We saw various types of birds like parrots, flamingoes and others. They have made a beautiful arrangement for entertaining visitors to Singapore. Some bird-trainers were there. It was morning. One bird-trainer came and called a bird's name. 2 or 3 minutes later a bird came flying, sat on the shoulders of that man, and took some food from his hand, kissed the man, and then flew away. Most wonderful of all was that it was a day time; the trainer called three owls. They too came and sat on his shoulders and took food. Many of the visitors were surprised. Thus they have made it a place where Singapore draws visitors and earns money.

On one occasion we travelled by a monorail. But this monorail is unlike that of Japan. It was running on one rail placed on the ground. The journey was

quite comfortable and people enjoy a ride by monorail. We also had a short journey by steamer.

Representative: Maharaj, what was the occasion of your visit to Malaysia?

Maharaj: It was the Singapore Ashrama which had arranged for my visit to Malaysia. After the second day of the celebration I went to Malaysia, where I visited Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Seremban. First I went to Penang. At Penang there is an Ashrama run by the local devotees. According to the constitution of that Ashrama, they have a President, a Vice-President, and an Assistant President. The Vice-President, one Mr. Pillai is a rich man. My accommodation had been arranged in his house. They took me to the Ashrama there. It was a private Ashrama (not affiliated to Ramakrishna Math and Mission). On one side of the Ashrama they have a hostel for the girls and a hostel for the boys on the other. There were teachers to look after them—male teachers for the boys and female for the girls. They have a school and a little open hall for Kalyanams (marriage ceremonies for the public). And through that they collect a fund every year. When they raised the question of affiliation of this Ashrama to our Mission, I told them that we could not affiliate this sort of Ashrama with a women's institution. If it is to be done by us, it has to be done in a different way. That means the boys' institution would be a separate one from the girls'. They said: 'We don't want anything. Just send us one Swami'. Then I explained that the atmosphere for sending a Swami was not there as there is no room for Kalyanams in our affiliated institutions. Even then they kept on requesting: 'Please send us a Swami.'

After a short while the chief minister of Penang came. He was informed of our arrival by somebody there. He was a nice man and could talk English fluently.

He said that he had known Swami Bhaswaranandaji in Singapore, and that he was very friendly with him. Later, he even came to see the Swami at Benaras, but unfortunately, by then the Swami had passed away. He also said that he had visited our Hollywood centre in the United States. Then he talked on Sri Ramakrishna. In his talk he appreciated the various activities of our organization and expressed regard for Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. My host also talked for a long time. I could not follow him because he was talking only in Malaysian language. And then after my talk we left that place. Next day we reached Kuala Lumpur.

Representative: So you stayed in Penang just for a day?

Maharaj: Yes, for a day only. Next morning we left Penang and reached Kuala Lumpur. They have an Ashrama at Kuala Lumpur which is open to everybody, like any other small Ashrama. It was clean. They have one room for the visiting monks to stay. But we did not stay in this Ashrama. Our accommodation had been arranged elsewhere by a devotee, Mrs. Uma Shanmugam. Then from there we left for Seremban in the afternoon.

At Seremban we stayed in the house of our devotee Mr. Ramachandran and Kasturi Ramachandran. There was a local Ashrama. We visited that also. From there we started in the afternoon by car for Singapore. The journey was nearly for six hours through deep forests and beautiful places on the hillside where we saw canyon like areas.

On the next day I was to talk on the 'Early Indian civilization' at the Singapore Ashrama. In the course of the talk I dwelt on the Egyptian civilization, the Roman, and Greek civilizations, and why all these civilizations died while the Indian civilization has been very much alive. Next day they had a whole-day spiritual retreat

in the Ashrama. I had to talk twice, once on Swamiji and once on Holy Mother. The small hall was over-crowded. About 300 people had come. Most of the retreat participants were Indians. I expected people from various communities to participate in such sessions. Probably in future our Ashrama will have larger number of devotees from all sections of Singapore. On the whole the Ashrama celebrations were quite successful.

Representative: Maharaj, what was your next trip?

Maharaj: From Singapore I left for Japan. I flew by the same Singapore Airlines. At the airport I was received by Swami Siddharthananda, the head of our Japan centre, and one Mr. Rao and his wife. They escorted me to our Ashrama there. Ours is a small Ashrama in the suburb of Tokyo with a cottage-type building. They have a shrine where the Japanese devotees come and meditate everyday. They keep everything clean. The Swami used to occupy one room which was given to me. There was another room in front of it to which the Swami moved during my stay. Arrangements for board and lodging were quite good. The Ashrama is functioning well. But for better functioning we want to introduce a new constitution.

We have about 50 initiated devotees in Japan. But half of them cannot keep regular contact with Ashrama as they live far away. Some 15-20 devotees regularly come to our Ashrama. They are under the guidance of Siddharthananda. If the Ashrama were in the city proper instead in suburb area perhaps there would have been many more devotees. I told Siddharthananda that some day he has to sell away this Ashrama in the suburb and move to the city proper. But in Tokyo city everything is very costly, land, buildings etc. Naturally it is very difficult for us at

this moment to do it. So he has to continue for sometime more in that place.

About half a mile away from our Ashrama there lives a Japanese lady-devotee who knows English. She has already translated some of our books from English to Japanese, and they publish a journal also. I think it is a monthly journal. This devotee is 79-year old. Every morning she used to come and help us in many ways.

There are some Japanese young men who are devoted to the Ashrama. But they hardly talk English. They converse with Siddharthananda in Japanese. That much Japanese he knows. He has to memorize some 2,500 words in order to learn the language. By now, after staying there for two years, he has memorized only 250 words. Thus he can somehow carry on the talk amongst a small group of devotees. One of the ardent boy devotees took leave from his office and stayed all these days at the Ashrama, because he had to prepare food for me. He could prepare Indian dishes like *Puri* and *curries*. The Japanese take rice and raw fish with some thing like sauce. They eat with chopstick. The Japanese devotees impressed me very much. They are indeed nice people. There was another strange boy devotee. He works in an office. One day when we went to the sea shore there he was waiting for us. I could not talk to him, he could not talk to me either; yet he came and waited there. Another day when we went to see some parts of the city, there again he was present.

I noticed that Japanese have a different mode of salutation. They bend at the waist and nod their head thrice. But our Japanese devotees, however, used to kneel down and touch the feet in the Indian fashion. They used to take me out to see many things around. One evening Siddharthananda came and said: 'Our

college boys and girls want to accompany you during your walk.' I said: 'What good will it do? I cannot talk to them.' Then he said: 'No. They are very much looking forward to it. You must go.' Then I had to go.

However, I could not go out much as my stay was short. I didn't visit Tokyo even. But I could see from distance the huge buildings of Tokyo. I went by car only thrice in order to see certain places. Our visit to Yokohama was very interesting. You know Swamiji visited Yokohama and wrote a beautiful letter from there to his Madras disciples. I wonder how he managed, because Swamiji did not know Japanese. He knew English and the Japanese usually do not learn any other language. On the day I went to Yokohama, they told me: 'Now we shall take you by monorail'. So we went to a station and when the train came we got into it. It was not touching the ground at all. It was hanging on an overhead wire and going over the houses and the residential areas. In the city there were multi-storeyed buildings but less so in the suburbs. There they have smaller buildings, cottage-type, mostly made of wood and paper. I liked these smaller cottages. So the journey in the monorail was a nice experience. It runs at a very high speed. I heard that it runs nearly 500 miles per hour. After a few stations we got down at a place where our car was waiting.

Once I was taken to a place where the famous image of Japanese Buddha was there. It was nearly 49 ft. high. They said there used to be a temple over the image, but it was washed away by a tidal bore.

Representative: Maharaj, did you meet any Zen Buddhist? We read that Zen is very popular there.

Maharaj: Yes. I asked one Zen Buddhist about their meditation. He said: 'I

meditate on nothingness.' I said, 'What do you mean by meditating on nothingness? How can you meditate on nothingness?' He said: 'No, I try to meditate on nothingness. I try to feel there is nothing.' This kind of meditation has some following there. But it seemed to me that religion is not their primary concern. The most striking aspect of the Japanese life is that they are very industrious. They don't waste any time. They have neither much time for religion. You know how the Japanese industry is leading the world market today.

Representative: Maharaj, kindly tell us something about your recent visit to Moscow.

Maharaj: Recently in Soviet Union there was an 'International Forum for a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World for the Survival of Humanity' sponsored by the Soviet Government. The entire Forum was held in various sections, one for the Religious leaders, another for scientists, and another for famous artists and writers. I was invited to speak in the Religious Section of this International Forum. It was the first Secretary of the Moscow Writers' Union who, through Soviet Government, impressed upon me the need of my presence there as the representative of Indian religions, especially of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. The Religious Section of the Forum led by the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of Moscow, sent a 4-page telegram requesting me to attend the Forum. I was not keeping well. I thought it would be difficult for me to stay at Moscow where temperature comes down very low, even to—12°. I was hesitating. But they phoned again in order to have me at Moscow. Finally I had to yield. On going there I found many distinguished personalities from different fields of science, literature and religion, from all over the world. There were nearly 1000 participants. From India,

artists like Mrinal Sen and writers like Amrita Pritam were also there. I spoke at the inaugural session of the Religious Section.

We were given the best hospitality by the Soviet Government. We were placed in an excellent hotel in Moscow. There was an open courtyard in that big hotel. The roof of the courtyard was covered with glass and it was internally heated. There were raised platforms where we could sit down and talk with friends. It was a beautiful setting. There was one 3-storeyed tall column. On the four sides of the column there were clocks, but on the top of it there was a metallic cock. During breakfast, dinner, lunch and tea time we could see this cock spreading its metallic wings, stretch its long neck as the cocks do. Swami Lokeswarananda had asked me to take some dry fruits with me, in case I need them. But we could get rice and all sorts of vegetables nicely cooked. As I said, it was a huge hotel and all the religious leaders were placed there. I could see the Christian Fathers wearing black dress with golden cross or a pearl cross or even a diamond cross. They were invited to the conference from all over the world. The Archbishop of Delhi was also there.

Representative: Maharaj, is it not strange that even some 30 years ago the Soviet Union was against religious leaders, and today the same Soviet Union is inviting them from all over the world?

Maharaj: This is because, I think, today's Russia needs the moral force of religion. Russian way of life, in spite of the iron curtain, is today beset with problems. Obviously, the government wants to find some solution. Probably this is one of the reasons why Russia is trying to liberalize things today. Perhaps some moral lessons may help solve their problems. That is why in an International Forum they gave importance to Religious Section also.

Gorbachev had invited one hundred and thirty five religious leaders from all over the world and all these people were taken very good care of.

Representative: Maharaj, what is the general attitude of Moscow people or Russian people towards Indians and Indian culture?

Maharaj: I think all of them recognize India as their friend. Soviet people today are very friendly to India and the Indian people. Some of the Soviet intellectuals who had come here earlier came to know that I had gone from the Ramakrishna Order. They came to see me. Of course, Dr. Kuznetsov, first secretary, Moscow Organ of the Writers' Union, himself used to come and talk to me for hours. We were making fun. I said: 'You are at the root of my coming to Russia.' He said: 'Yes'. He is about 52-54. He is also a member of the upper house of the Supreme Soviet. In fact he is a very important man. When I was due to come back to India he said: 'You have to come here again. I shall write to you. But I cannot keep you in a hotel like this. It is very costly.' I said, 'Any modest hotel will do for me.' Then he said: 'You have to be here for a fortnight. I will take you to Tashkent, Siberia and many other important places.' He is a very generous person.

This gentleman had come here earlier in mid-January of this year. He had come to participate in the two seminars organized by the Institute of Culture at Calcutta. One was on Peace and the other on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Along with him thirteen other distinguished Soviet academicians also participated in those two seminars. I happened to preside over one of the seminars. Swami Lokeswarananda, the Secretary of the Institute, introduced me in his welcome address. I took the chair. Dr. Kuznetsov

and the President of Soviet Academy of Sciences also sat along with me. They earlier knew Swami Lokeswarananda when he had been to Russia.

Swami Lokeswarananda asked me when they could go to Belur Math. I invited them to visit Belur Math on the next day at 100' clock, and to have lunch with us. They gladly agreed. They came, went round the Math, met the senior swamis and had lunch with us. They felt very happy in this serene atmosphere.

Representative: Maharaj, what is the future of the Vedantic thoughts in your opinion in Russia in the days to come?

Maharaj: You see, it is very difficult to say anything. Till the time of Gorbachev, life was a bit different there. Russia was virtually closed for the outsiders. It was difficult for us to go there. Swami Dayananda went to Russia and Swami Nityaswarupananda also went there. Then, Swami Ranganathananda went there at the invitation from the Indian ambassador there. He talked on Swamiji at the Moscow university. But when Swami Lokeswarananda went, people somehow came to know him personally. During his first visit, his stay there was just a stopover on his way from Bulgaria to India. Next time when he was invited by the Soviet Writers' Union for the centenary of Rabindranath Tagore, many academicians and scholars talked to him and came to know more of Sri Ramakrishna. Shri Nemai Sadhan Basu, Vice-chancellor of Viswa Bharati, also went. They all gave me an impression that people there very much liked to hear about India and Indian thoughts, and that the Russian academicians were making an intensive study of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. In Soviet Union academicians are the most highly respected persons.

Representative: Maharaj, what is the reason that they are now studying Sri

Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda?

Maharaj: I don't know exactly. None of us ever tried to know either. It seems they were first attracted by some writings of Tolstoy on Swamiji. These were mostly preserved in his diary and other places. Tolstoy's complimentary reference to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda might have drawn them to these great masters, and especially Swamiji. They started reading Swamiji. And you know if one reads Swamiji, initially one will be ewept off his feet. That is what has started happening now. Not that they have accepted all of Swamiji. But they are getting increasingly attracted to Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. The influence is growing so deep that when the Russian academicians spoke here on the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna at the Cultural Institute, one of them talked about Swamiji and on Sri Ramakrishna and then said: 'I am very much attracted to Holy Mother and to Lātu Maharaj.'

Representative: That is something incredible, a top Russian academician being drawn to the life and teachings of Holy Mother, and Swami Adbhutananda, the shepherd-saint among the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Maharaj: Then he said he would visit Jayarambati, the birthplace of Holy Mother. Next morning he went alone to Jayarambati, visited Mother's temple and came back. Unfortunately, I could not meet him there when I was in Moscow this time. I tried to contact him but could not succeed. I inquired about another aged Russian lady in Moscow. They said she had been sent to Pakistan on some assignment. Earlier when she had come to India along with the other Russian academicians she too visited Belur Math. When others were taken for lunch, she stayed back and said: 'I want to offer a flower to Sri Ramakrishna.' The main temple was closed then. So I

said: 'You can go to the old temple and offer flower there.' She went up and offered flower in the old shrine of our Math. She very much liked to visit Kamarpukur and Jayarambati. But being an interpreter she was very busy in meetings and she could not go. She had told me: 'If you come to Russia, I will be glad to meet you there.'

The other day Swami Lokeswarananda was telling me if there should be any future religion in Russia, that would be the religion of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Soviet people know our interests are purely spiritual and that we have no political programmes. So they are attracted more and more to the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. They are opening themselves to something spiritual or higher aspects of life. They have already translated Romain Rolland's books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Recently, a book has been published where Soviet writers wrote in depth on Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. It was published by Swami Lokeswarananda from our Institute of culture. I have written a foreword to this book. These are essays on Swamiji written by the Russian academicians. Most of them are translated from Russian into English. Many Russians are studying this book. One may not agree with all that is written. But all the articles are very incisive. They have given quotations from the books they have studied. They are continuing and intensifying these studies on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Kuznetsov told me they would publish two volumes of

Vivekananda's works. When they came to Belur Math I made a present of many books, including Swamiji's Complete Works and the Cultural Heritage of India. They are now showing genuine interest in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

When I was in Moscow a very interesting thing happened. One Russian gentleman and his wife, whom I earlier knew when they had visited India, wanted to meet me. So I went and was sitting with them in their courtyard. The wife could understand English, but could not speak. The gentleman was talking. He was asking me about how to control the mind. He said: 'We are controlling external nature but how to control the mind?' Then I discussed Yoga and other related topics. Instantly he got up, went inside, and brought one small album of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji. It was a black and white album. Swami Gitananda, who was with me, brought out one coloured new album which he had brought from India. He wanted to present it to them. The gentleman said: 'Please wait'. He went out, washed his hands, and came. Then he stretched out his hands and asked me to put the coloured album into his hands. So you see this is what is happening. After all, man is man. As I always say, man is incurably religious. Sometimes I quote Francis Thomson's 'The Hound of Heaven'. God, the Hound of Heaven, is always chasing us. I realized that the Soviet people would be attracted to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda more and more in the days to come.

RELIGIOUS RESOURCES FOR PEACE

SWAMI SIDDHINATHANANDA

This is the international year of peace, proclaimed by the United Nations. Evidently there is a lot of peacelessness around the globe. Peace by derivation means freedom from war. The U.N.O. being primarily a peace-keeping body in a warring world, has to declare war on war. Due to its efforts, an uneasy peace prevails at present in most parts of the world, though there are a few hot spots. It is mutual fear that disturbs the peace. It is a truce born of the fear of retribution.

Nearer home we have our own problems. There are various forces working to disturb the peace of mind of every thinking individual. Political, economic, religious and social forces contribute their own share to break the truce. Common man experiences constant stress and strain which robs him of even the peace of a sound sleep. War of peace has to be fought on all fronts. We have to make our own contribution. At present I am required to suggest the Hindu religious resources for the cause of peace. Peace has no religious label. It is universal. Problems are personal for each and so each has to find his own solution. In this process each man's religion can be of great help.

Super powers keep peace through deterrent threats. Smaller nations suffer peace through mutual fear. In the national field there are the political parties who swear by peace and do their worst to shatter it. Politics is the game of power. It is fought with money-power and organized coercion. They thrive on strife. Success at the hustings is their sole aim. It depends on money and organization. It requires huge amounts. Through normal and legal channels it is impossible to collect such vast amounts. They resort to smugglers and black-marketeers. Extortion and

intimidation are their *modus operandi* to raise funds.

How can those who capture power with the backing of black money hope to close the dens of vices? Funds of political parties smell liquor and vice. How can those who come to power through organized gangsterism keep peace in the land? Strife is the very life of the politician. Election is the biggest breeder of corruption. No, politics cannot and will not foster peace; on the contrary, it is the overflow of politics to the educational, social, domestic and other fields that create all the disturbances. Physical power which is the politicians' goal cannot deliver the goods. Economic power too cannot do it as is evident from the experience of the people of rich countries.

Why do they fail? For, their approach is from the wrong end. They start to reform the society before reforming themselves. The religious man approaches the problem from the other end. He takes to heart the advice, 'physician, heal thyself.' Especially so with Hinduism which is not an organized religion. The primary unit is the individual. Peace and war are ultimately the creations of man. So the start must be made from that end.

The religious man's quest begins with man. Religion views man as spirit caught in a body. He is essentially a spirit. The spirit is the same in all beings. As such all are brothers in and through the spirit. Then our approach to our neighbour will be brotherly, for my neighbour and I are the children of the same father. Love is the language of the spirit. And it is the want of it that kills peace.

The spirit is ever blissful. But the tragedy is that man has forgotten his true

being. That is the original sin. When the spirit is forgotten, the animal in man rules the roost. Unlike the other animals, man has a very specialized tool called the intellect. Animals fight for food or mate. Once these are procured, they are satisfied and are at peace. Not so man. He lives more on the past and the future than in the present. And that renders him ever excited. The mind backed by intellect is in league with the senses to protect the human animal. But his greed forces him to fight his fellow creatures. His will to power constrains him to beat down his rivals. Lust of self and power drives man mad. Unbridled pursuit of pleasure and power is at the root of the loss of peace.

What is the remedy? Restrain them. How? Teach them. The boy at five years of age is taken to the house of the teacher. There he is in company with the boys of his own age group. He is taught personal hygiene, code of conduct, worship of God and devotional practices, besides courses in the Vedas and the various auxiliaries such as grammar, prosody etc. He has to spend at least twelve years in the study of the basic virtues and the wisdom contained in the Vedas. The rigorous life at the feet of the preceptor gives him a firm grounding in the ideals to be pursued, the duties to be performed, the debts to be discharged in order to make life smooth, rich, useful, and fruitful.

On the eve of his return home after graduation, the teacher tells him: *satyam vada dharman cara*, 'Speak the truth and do what is right'. Then follows a few hints as to what is right and how to decide what is right when in doubt. This exhortation contains the surest guidelines for a contented, and peaceful life.

Returning home, he takes up the domestic responsibilities, earns money in lawful ways, enjoys legitimate pleasures, discharges his debts to the gods, sages and

others, performs his duties to the society and the country, and thus leads a healthy and worthy life. Man has innumerable debts. Nothing in life is our own except perhaps our ego: that too, on deeper thought, will be found to be a gift of God. We are duty-bound to discharge these debts as far as possible. If duties are duly done, occasions of conflict will be nil. The very doing of duty will provide all our needs and there will be no need to fight for our rights. Our right is to do the duty.

When the son is back home after study, hand over all the responsibilities and liabilities to him and gracefully withdraw to a quiet corner at some sacred place. So long you have been giving the devil his due; henceforth, give your Soul what is overdue. This will avoid the problems of generation gap. This was the arrangement in ancient India and is called *vanaprastha ashrama*. The problems the old face in the advanced countries will make us aware how wise and necessary such an arrangement is. We are short term tenants in this body. Messengers of time will serve us notice without fail. Ailments, wrinkles and grey hair are reminders that our time is running short. We have to prepare for the final pilgrimage. The lighter the load, the easier the journey. Retire in time. Henceforth one is to devote oneself solely to spiritual practices such as meditation, scriptural study, etc. Long and deep meditation on the meaning of life will convince one that the whole thing is a play of the Divine. It is all spirit within and spirit without. The soul alone is. No more conflict, no more vexation. Then one is at peace with oneself and with one and all, and that is the peace that passeth all understanding.

The question may be asked: It may be all right for a fortunate few to attain peace in this manner; but what about the common man? The answer is: the path is open

to all. Try as much as possible and to the extent you try, you will enjoy peace. The more the number of such persons in a society the more peaceful will the society be. They are the salts of the earth. Just think of a world devoid of Buddha or Kṛṣṇa or Christ. How horrible it would be!

Positive peace is a spiritual quality, and that can be realized only by realizing man's spiritual dimension. Peace is usually defined negatively as absence of strife. That is because man is looked upon not as spirit but as flesh. It is the law of the flesh to feed on flesh, and the peace that can be expected at that level is only a respite from strife. Man must be taught his real nature and the animal in him must be held in leash. Only religion can do this. But the forces ranged against his learning this are many and well-organized. Modern science has reduced man to a talking monkey. Economics have made him a mindless machine made to mint money. The politician has made him a pawn in his power game. The net result: worry, hurry, corruption, madness and hell. What is the remedy they offer? Pills, pricks, liquor, hashish, LSD and what not? That is the gateway to hell.

We have had nearly forty years of secularism. Secularism has no use for God. Its gods are self, power and pleasure. And where do we stand? Corruption to the core and from the core. Indiscipline everywhere: in services, schools, colleges and even at home. Teachers are afraid of their wards. Many parents curse their fate. Politician has no religion, but he exploits religion to feather his own nest. To add insult to injury, he puts all the blame on religion. No, it is the politician playing his game with the religious senti-

ment of the common man that is at the root of most of the society's ills. Some who take to religion not out of any vocation but as a career also play into the hands of the politician. Politics thrives on discontent. Peace spells its doom. No, it cannot bring peace to man.

So, we have to come to the grim conclusion that the search for peace in a divided world is a never-ending process. Man's greed has no end. As long as he is not able to keep it within limits, confrontations are inevitable. Is the search then futile? No, it teaches the seeker wisdom. He learns he was on the wrong track. The prodigal can never be at peace until he retraces his steps. Struggle and strife are the law of the brute. Love and cooperation are the law on the human level.

Love is a divine quality. Love thy neighbour as thyself. Why? For thou and thy neighbour are one. Love God for His own sake and thy neighbour in and through God. That is the only way to peace. All other struggles are meant to make us aware of the futility of looking for peace in a transient and miserable world. It is a vanity of vanities, all a vanity. When we learn that, we turn Godward. The religious resources for peace are the realization of God and the means of attaining Him. God is within us. Love Him with all thy soul and thy neighbour in and through Him. Seek and ye will find. That is peace eternal.

The Vedic Ṛṣi declared: *tam ātmastham ye anupaśyanti dhīrāḥ, teṣāṃ śāntiḥ śāśvatī netareṣāṃ* 'Those wise ones who realize the soul within alone attain to peace eternal and none else.' Seek, knock and wait, and ye shall find.

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Seminar on Sri Ramakrishna at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture

On 19, 20, and 21 January 1987 a three-day Seminar on 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Universal Message' was held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. This was a part of the 150th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna held at the Institute. The speakers at the seminar were Russian and Indian scholars of eminence. The subject-matter for the first day was 'Global Aspects of the Ramakrishna Movement'; on the second day, it was 'Religion as interpreted by Sri Ramakrishna'. The concluding session was on 'Message of Sri Ramakrishna to the Modern World'.

The seminar began with an opening song by Swami Balabhadrananda. The song was an invocation to Sri Ramakrishna, the Supreme Incarnation of God born to lead humanity towards godliness. Swami Lokeshwarananda, Secretary of the Institute, gave the welcome address and said that this seminar where Russian and Indian scholars were going to speak for the first time from the same platform, was a significant event and a powerful stride in the growth of spiritual solidarity of the world. Swami Hiranmayananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, who presided over the opening session said that the unique feature of the Ramakrishna movement was that here one could attain self realization by progressing from dualistic worship of gods and goddesses, to qualified monism, and then finally to monism, the realization of the undying divinity dwelling within and enveloping the world without.

Swami Atmasthananda, Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, who presided over the second session

spoke about the love of Sri Ramakrishna and how the world today revolves round this all-engulfing love which unites humanity irrespective of caste, creed, and religion.

Prof. Amallesh Tripathi who presided over the concluding session spoke about the harmony between the truths mentioned in our scriptures and the various spiritual realizations in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. The speakers from Russia were Dr. F. Kuznetsov, Dr. Rybakov, Prof. Kariakin, Dr. Adamovich, Mira Salganik, Prof. Mokulsky, Dr. Sergei Seribriani. The Indian speakers were Dr. Panduranga Rao, Dr. Rabindra Kumar Das Gupta, Dr. Raja Ramanna, Mr. Amiya Kumar Mazumdar, Prof. Hossenur Rahman, Dr. Arindam Chakravarty, and Dr. Govinda Gopal Mukherjee.

What impressed the audience was that these Russian scholars who belonged to the Academy of Sciences and the Moscow Union of Writers, the two prominent institutions in Russia, were not just deep scholars but great admirers of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. The Russian scholars' speech indicated two broad reasons for their admiration, and perhaps adoration of Sri Ramakrishna. One was the historical background of Russia. Through struggles Russia became free from foreign rulers in the middle ages, and then again in this century Russian Revolution gave their countrymen freedom from tyranny and exploitation of a failing Czardom. Great men were leaders on both the occasions. The emphasis was on the right kind of leader, and the Russian scholars interpreted Sri Ramakrishna as the Divine Leader who brought revolution in our understanding of human life, its meaning and final goal. The other reason given by the Russian scholars was the experience of horrors and

atrocities of the second world war. This made them think what man can make of man. The death of millions brought about by a devastating war, filled them with a dissatisfaction with a purely material civilization. Russian thinkers today are in quest of peace and human understanding. Swamiji's centenary celebrations gave them an opportunity to know of Sri Ramakrishna's life as the beacon light to humanity.

Over the years many Russians in different walks of life who are reading, thinking and pondering on modern life, are finding that completeness of human life lies not only in physical, economic or material but also in spiritual fulfilment. They found that the essence of the Ramakrishna Movement lay in its constant endeavour to help man manifest their higher spiritual nature and realize the oneness of humanity. The Indian scholars emphasized that the Cosmic Self binds the entire humanity like a thread on a string of pearls, and this is also the message of Sri Ramakrishna.

It was indeed remarkable to hear the Russian scholars say that Sri Ramakrishna, for the first time in the history of mankind, found by his own historic spiritual experiences that all religions lead to the same goal. This idea is expressed in the well-known saying of Sri Ramakrishna 'As many faiths so many paths'. Indian scholars spoke about this unity of religions which was based on Sri Ramakrishna's experience. All scholars finally ended on the theme that Religion is one, while religions are many.

At the concluding session all the scholars dwelt on the theme that Sri

Ramakrishna's message of unity of mankind is based on his experience of the presence of One Divine Reality in everyone. For the Indians, it was quite an experience to hear the Russian scholars speak not only about Sri Ramakrishna but also about the Holy Mother as the Divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, the ideal of purity and womanhood, and a combination of the old and the new world. Through the speeches of the various speakers it was evident that Sri Ramakrishna's message is slowly ushering in a new age of spirituality with the widest breadth, the highest catholicity, and the deepest intensity. The speakers concluded on the note, as Swamiji said, that the history of the world is the history of a few men who have faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within us. Sri Ramakrishna is the universal Soul, Holy Mother is the universal Mother and Swamiji is the universal Teacher who asked us to believe first in ourselves, and then to strive sufficiently to manifest the infinite power immanent in us.

Sri A. N. Ray, ex-chief justice of India, while giving vote of thanks at the concluding session, said that the Holy Mother had heard from Sri Ramakrishna that people from other parts of the world would one day come to India. This seminar is a fulfilment of that vision. Nearly a century ago Swamiji went abroad to interpret the universal message of India to the western world. Today world's great scholars are coming to India to pay their respects to Sri Ramakrishna. The world indeed gets united today by Sri Ramakrishna's all-engulfing Love for humanity.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

BENGALI

DHARMA O AJKER JIJNASHA: By SWAMI SOMESWARANANDA. Published by Dey's publishers, 36/5 Beniatola Lane, Calcutta 700 009. 1986. p. 175. Rs. 18.

Here is a widely-read and widely-travelled young Swami of the Ramakrishna Order, meeting and answering hundreds of questions from sceptics, radical revolutionaries, trade-union leaders, writers, hedonists, scientists, scholars, fundamentalists, advocates of permissive societies, depressed mothers, frustrated fathers, bewildered socialists, and misguided or ill-guided students of colleges and universities. Sympathetic answers, sometime like sharp repartees, come out like tongues of fire in very cordial and common accents of day-to-day life. Each answer strikes the reader with a force, a deep conviction, and a deeper understanding behind the words. With each answer a particular facet of the thousand-faceted jewel, the Vedanta, shines when the searchlight of interrogation is thrown on it. Vivekananda dreamt of a day when his followers would live and interpret Vedanta so that even a child could grasp it. This small volume is a daring attempt to fulfil that dream. The questioners here are not children, but intellectuals holding high university degrees. But many of them are child-like seekers, bewildered about the basic questions of a happy and decent living in the midst of an increasingly politicized, materialistic, and permissive society.

The Swami's answers are born of a deep feeling for the sufferings of modern man, especially of the modern youth with whom he has been working for more than two decades. Here is for instance, a catechism:

Q: Swami, what if I can feel happy without any moral values in life?

A: Do you really mean to be happy in this

way? I do not think you really mean it. Would you feel happy to see your own brothers or sisters living abjectly immoral life? Would you feel happy if your parents separate (for God's sake let it be far from it) on flimsy grounds and marry once again? If not, neither can you feel happy in a life without moral values.

Probably too blunt and direct, but such answers do penetrate at once into the walls of arrogant and biased minds. Once again,

Q: We are non-conformists. Why should we accept your Vedanta?

A: No, you are not non-conformists. You conform to some or other thinkers like Berkley, Hume, Marx, Descartes etc. Ramakrishna, Christ, Buddha, Vivekananda—they were true non-conformists. They stood on the foundation of their own spiritual experiences rejecting all prevalent dogmas. Religion is realization, said Swamiji. Only a truly spiritual man is a non-conformist. He develops true independence—social, intellectual, economic or spiritual.

The book, as radical in its answers as the questions, is divided into four major sections: 1. Religion for today's life. 2. Religion for the anti-religionists. 3. Religion for personal day-to-day life. 4. Religion for young revolutionaries. From the beginning to end the inquisitive reader, as he turns the pages, will find his own knots and tangles getting slowly untied one after the other. The language is very modern, though backed by a wide range of knowledge from sciences, politics, Marxism, materialism, agnosticism, psychology, all culminating in the acceptance of Vedanta as interpreted by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as the panacea for the psycho-social problems of modern man.

Unfortunately the book is in Bengali. A good English translation would certainly come to immediate benefit of a wider public.

S.J.

NEWS AND REPORTS

CELEBRATIONS OF THE 150th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE CENTENARY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, BELUR MATH

The 150th Birth Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Dev and the centenary of the

Ramakrishna Sangha was celebrated in a befitting manner at the Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

On the evening of 24 December 1886 a few young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, inspired with the burning zeal of God realization, kept vigil around a fire (*dhuni*) at Antpur, a quiet village of Bengal. Their Master had passed away only a few months before. Sitting round

the fire in the deepening gloom of the winter night they felt the passion of the apostles of Christ who laid down their lives one by one to preach their Master's message and to build His church. The acts of the apostles became living. These young men felt a resurrection of the same passion in their veins. They vowed not to return home and lay down their lives like those apostles for the God who gave them all His love and responsibility of a global mission. When the night dawned they came to know that it was the Holy Christmas night.

Exactly after a century on the evening of 24 December 1986 two hundred monks of the Ramakrishna Order assembled at the same spot and reenacted the same occasion with their reverence and remembrance of the great apostles of Sri Ramakrishna. Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, led the ceremony. Monks of the Math spent the holy night there round the fire which they lit again on the historic spot after a century.

The long centenary programme conducted at the Math included *virajahoma* for the monks and *japayajna* by the monks and brahmacharins of the order. The 8-day long celebration began on 1 March 1987 under a huge pandal at the Math. Senior monks of the Order like Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Hiranmayanandaji, Atmasthanandaji and others spoke on various days.

Devotional songs by well-known artists were organized. The songs of Sri Sambhu Mukherji, the 3-day Jatra performance by the Sibpur dramatic organization, the Kalikirtan by Andul Kalikirtan Samiti and other programmes created a vibrant atmosphere of devotion in the Math. A special feature of the celebration was a huge colourful procession on 4 March. Nearly 7,000 persons including monks, devotees, teachers, students and the general public participated in the procession. It started from Dakshineswar Kali temple and ended at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

CELEBRATIONS at other centres of the Math and Mission.

Ramakrishna Math, Bhubaneswar: The celebrations, which were organized from 26 December 1986 to 14 February 1987 included a spiritual retreat for devotees, a drama by school students, a debate competition, a

number of public meetings where eminent speakers like Sri J. B. Patnaik, chief minister, Orissa, Sri Niranjana Patnaik, minister of industries, Sri Prasanna Kumar Das, speaker, legislative assembly, Sri Gangadhar Mohapatra, ex-minister, Swamis Rudratmanandaji, Bhagavanandaji, Dineshanandaji and others spoke on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

A special seminar in two sessions was organized on the topic 'Sri Ramakrishna and the present age'. Writers, educationists and thinkers of Orissa, like prof. Tattwakandar Misra, prof. Diwakar Tripathy and many others discussed the relevance of Sri Ramakrishna in the background of modern Indian literature.

The most important phase of the celebration was an extensive lecture trip to Orissa by Srimat Swami Vandananandaji Maharaj, a senior Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The Swami was received as the State guest of Orissa, and he spoke in many places on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna which included Jagatsinghpur and Cuttack city of Cuttack district, Birkampur and Nalconagar of Dhenkanal district, Sambalpur and Berhampur of Ganjam district, Jeypur, Ambaguda, Kotpad, Borigum of Koraput district, Bhadrak Engineering college and the Ramakrishna Seva Samiti of Balasore district. The Swami also spoke in different educational institutions of Bhubaneswar where intellectuals, students and university teachers listened to him with eagerness. Swami Vairagyanandaji and Swami Bhaktyanandaji accompanied the distinguished speaker whose interpretation of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideas deeply impressed and inspired thousands of Orissa people who remained grateful to the Swami for this kind service on his part.

Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad: The celebration which spread out for a period of one month was inaugurated on 1 February 1987 by Sri J. Vengal Rao, Hon'ble minister for industries, government of India. It ended on 1 March with a concert by Srimati M. S. Subbalakshmi. From 2 to 5 February Swami Ranganathanandaji delivered a five-day discourse on the Shantiparva portion of the Mahabharata. Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna and party staged the celebrated Shiva Tandava Nrityam on 1 February. Sri T. Navanita Rao, Vice-chancellor, Osmania University, Sri G. Venkataramana Reddy, I.A.S., prof. M. Shivaramakrishna, Osmania University, Sri K. R. Paramahansa, I.A.S., Sri Sadique Ali,

ex-governor of Tamil Nadu, Sri Shraavan Kumar, chief secretary of Andhra Pradesh, and Srimati Kumud Ben Joshi, Governor of Andhra Pradesh were among the prominent speakers on different days.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri: The celebrations which were organized from 14 to 24 December 1986 in various parts of the holy town of Puri, included religious discourses, procession with school students of Puri, and cultural programmes. Sri B. N. Pande, Hon'ble governor of Orissa, Major B. K. Mohanty, Vice-chancellor, Swami Smarananandaji, Swami Purananandaji and Swami Dineshanandaji were the speakers on different occasion.

Ramakrishna Math, Contai, Dist. Midnapore (W. B): A ten-day long celebration was organized from 22 February to 3 March 1987. Meetings were held in different parts of Midnapore like Ramnagar, Paniparul, Tekhali, Nikunjapur and other places. On 1 March a long procession went round the Contai town. Swami Aptakamanandaji, Swami Jitatmanandaji, Swami Medhasanandaji, Swami Divyanandaji, Swami Swatantranandaji, Swami Bhaveswaranandaji were among the principal speakers. Two T. V. films on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda (English), and two Jatra performances were organized in the Contai Ashrama on different days.

Ramakrishna Ashrama Bagerhat, Bangladesh: A three-day long celebration was organized from 27 February to 1 March 1987 with religious discourses, Bhajans and dramatic performances on the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Among the different speakers were the Buddhist monk Dhamma Rakhita Maha Thera, Janab Sahbuddin Mohammad, Janab Tuyibur Rahman, Dr. Bandita Bhattacharya and Swami Paradevananda.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Baranagore (W.B): The celebrations along with the Platinum Jubilee of the Ashrama were organized from 21 February to 27 February 1987. The programme which was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, included a prize-distribution ceremony, an educational

exhibition, inter-school competitions and religious discourses by various eminent speakers.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Gauhati (Assam): The celebration which ran for a few days included religious discourses, a one-day spiritual retreat with 400 devotees participating, and a long procession which traversed through the Gauhati town with nearly 3,500 participants. Swamis Bhagavatanandaji, Raghunathanandaji, Prof. Sujata Barthakur were principal speakers on different days.

Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Mylapore, Madras: The celebrations were conducted both in the Mylapore Students' Home and its new branch in the village Malliankarane. Students performed three plays, especially one play in Tamil on Sri Ramakrishna for 1,000 villagers of Malliankarane. They also organized a procession in the city. Inter-school competitions were held. Swamis Sarvajnanandaji, Uddhavanandaji Virupakshanandaji, Raghaveshanandaji, Kumaranandaji, Prof. S. Sundaram, Sm. G. K. Parvathi spoke on the life and teachings on Sri Ramakrishna on different days.

[Ramakrishna Seva Samithi Bapatala (A.P.)]

Started seventeen years ago by local devotees in a rented cottage this Samithi (not-affiliated to Ramakrishna Math and Mission) began spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna in this village area of Andhra Pradesh. Three years before they started with an initial sum of Rs. 5, an initiative to build a permanent temple-cum-Library and lecture hall for the Samithi. On 6 March 1987 along with the 150th Birth Centenary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna this temple was inaugurated in the presence of the Swamis Uddhavanandaji, Pitambaranandaji, Nandanandaji, and Swatmanandaji of the Ramakrishna Order. A three-day celebration followed with a number of programmes for youths, processions, and public meetings addressed by these Swamis and other local dignitaries. Sri B. S. R. Anjaneyalu, the ardent and inspired Ramakrishnite, who is the founder-secretary of the Samithi, expressed his joy and thankfulness to the kind-hearted Bapatala public for their spontaneous support for the fulfilment of this long-cherished dream.

'He who knows the Supreme attains the highest'.—Tait. Upa. II.1.

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Lord Buddha

(Some observations on—By Swami Vivekananda)

In the course of a lecture delivered in Detroit, U.S.A., the Swami Vivekananda made the following reference to Lord Buddha—

In every religion we find one type of manhood particularly developed. The type of working without motive is most highly developed in Buddhism. Do not mistake Buddhism and Brahminism. In this country you are very apt to do so. Buddhism is one of our sects. It was founded by a great man called Gautama, who became disgusted at the eternal metaphysical discussions of his day, and the cumbrous rituals. And more especially he was disgusted with the caste system. Some people say that we are born to a certain state, and therefore we are superior to others who are not thus born. He was also disgusted with the tremendous priestcraft. He preached a religion in which there was no motive power, and was perfectly agnostic about metaphysics or theories. He was often asked, 'Is there a God, Sir', and he answered, 'I do not know; I did not tell you that.' 'Then what shall I do?' He would reply, 'Do good and be good'. There came five Brahmins, they were discussing among themselves and they asked him to settle their discussion. One said, 'Sir, my book says that God is such and such, and that this is the way to come to God.' Another said, 'That is wrong, for my book says such and such, and this is the way to come to God', and so on. He listened to all of them calmly, and then asked them one by one, 'Does any one of your books say that God becomes angry, that He ever injures any one, that He is impure?' 'No Sir, they all teach that God is pure'. 'Then, my friends, why do you not become pure and good first, and then you will know what God is.' Of course I do not endorse all his philosophy. I want a good deal of metaphysics, for myself. I entirely differ in many respects, but, because we differ, is that any reason why we should not see the beauty of the man? That is the only man who was bereft of all motive powers. There were other great men,—Krishna, for instance, a great prophet—who all said they were the incarnations of God Himself, and 'if you believe in me you will go to heaven,' and what did this man (Buddha) say with his dying breath? 'None can help you; help yourself; work out your own salvation.' And he says about himself that what is meant by Buddha (Buddha is a state just as with Jesus, 'Jesus the Christ') is this—'Buddha is the name of infinite knowledge, infinite as the sky; I, Gautama, have reached that; so you will all reach; struggle for that.' Bereft of all motive power, he did not want to go to heaven, did not want money; he gave up money and his throne and everything and went about begging his bread through the streets of India, preaching for the good of men and animals and everything, with a heart as wide as the ocean. He was the only one who was ever ready to give up his life for animals, to stop a sacrifice. He once said to a king, 'If the sacrifice of a lamb helps you to go to heaven, so, sacrificing a man will help you better, so, sacrifice me.' The king was astonished, and yet this man was without any motive power. He stands as the perfection of the active type, and the very height to which he attained, shows that through the power of work we can also attain to the greatest height. But to many the path becomes easier if they believe in God. But he would not even have anything to do with God, with religion, or with metaphysics, showing that even the man who does not believe in anything—has no metaphysics, does not go to any church, or sect, or temple, is an openly confessed materialist can attain to the highest. We have no right to judge him. I wish I had one infinite part of Buddha's heart and work. He may or may not have believed in God; that does not matter to me. He reached the same state of perfection to which others will come by Bhakti—love of God, Yoga or Jnana. Perfection does not come from belief or faith. Talk does not count for anything. Parrots can do that.