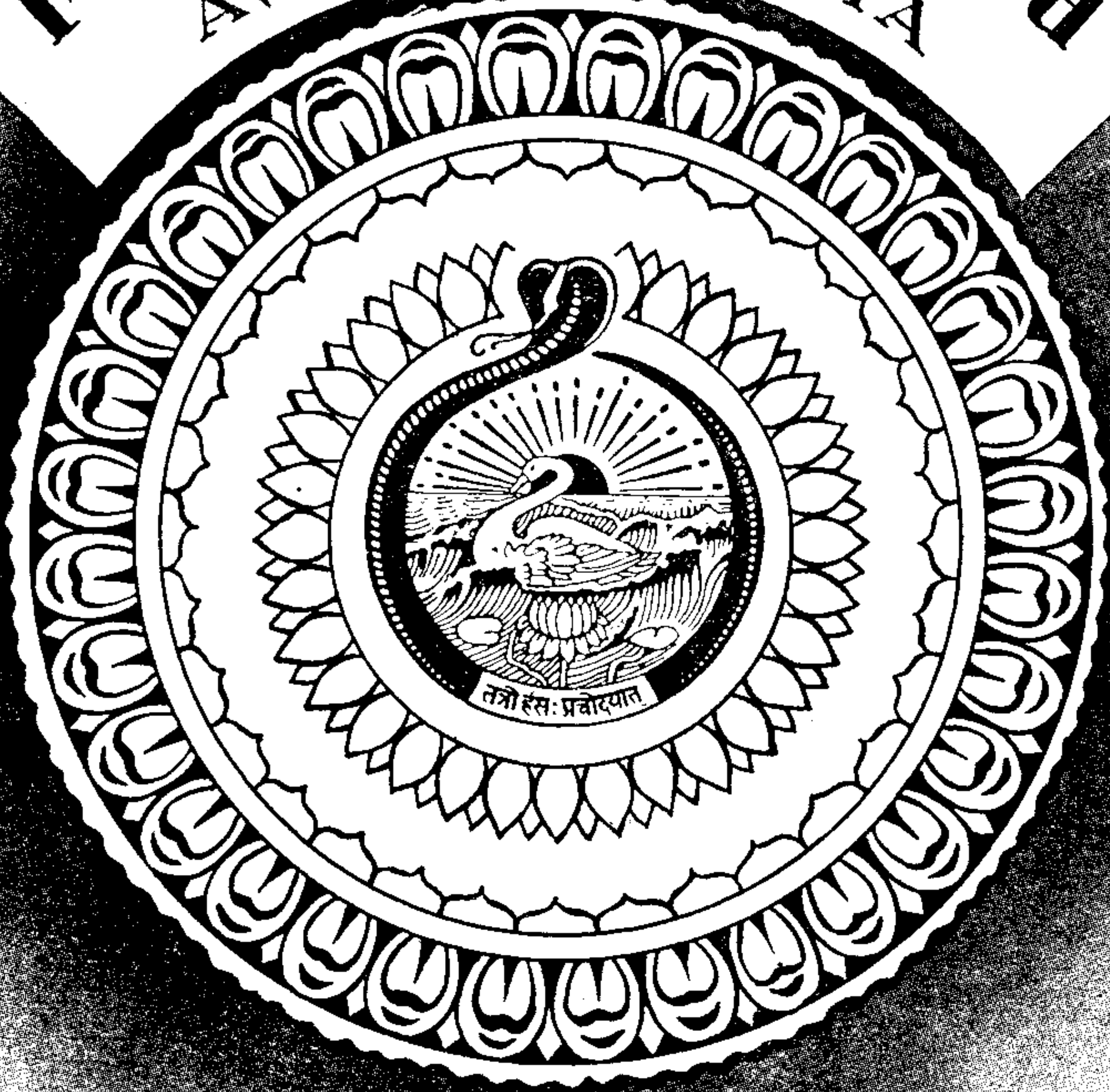


VOL. 92

AUGUST 1987

Prabuddha Bharata

OR
AWAKENED INDIA



Belur Math



Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

Editorial Office

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

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone: 29-0898



Rates of Subscription
(inclusive of postage)

	Annual	Life (30 years)
India, Nepal & Bangladesh	Rs. 20	Rs. 300
U.S.A. & Canada		
Surface Mail	\$ 14	\$ 200
Air Mail	\$ 28	\$ 450
Other Countries		
Surface Mail	£ 6	£ 60
Air Mail	£ 10	£ 150

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Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 8

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

ETERNAL VOICE OF INDIA

Vidyayā vindate amrtam

'Immortality is attained through Self-knowledge'

Among men famous may I become! Swāhā. Superior to the wealthiest may I be! Swāhā. Oh Lord, may I enter into Thee! Swāhā. May Thou, Oh Lord, enter into me! Swāhā. By Thee of thousand branches, Oh God, I cleanse myself. Swāhā.

Thou art the place of rest ; mayest Thou illumine me, mayest Thou absorb me in Thee.

Here in this space of the heart resides the Purusha who is endued with mind, immortal and of golden effulgence.

Om! The knower of Brahman attains the Supreme. In reference to that the following is said:

'The Real, the Conscious, the Infinite is Brahman. He who knows that Supreme Ākāsha as existing hidden in the heart realizes all his desires along with the Omniscient Brahman.'

(Brahman is that) Whence all speech turn back with the Manas without reaching ; he who knows the bliss of Brahman fears not at any time.

In the beginning was verily this non-existent. From that was generated the existent. That made Its self by Itself. Therefore it is called Self-made. That one who is the self-made is verily the joy. Having attained this joy, (man) becomes blessed. Who would have lived and breathed had not this sky of bliss existed! This verily It is that bestows bliss. When It finds in that invisible, unembodied, unpredicated, abodeless (Atman), the basis (of life) free from fear, then verily It transcends (all) fear. But when It makes (any) differentiation in It in the least degree, then for It, there is fear. For the unwise knower, indeed, It is fear.

He (the seeker) understood that bliss is Brahman, (because) from bliss these creatures are verily born ; having been born, by bliss they live ; and having departed, into bliss again they enter.

Taittirīya Upaniṣad
(1.4.3, 1.6.1, 2.1, 2.4, 2.7, 3.4)

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is based on a trip to Amarnath, made by the Jt. Editor of this journal.

WAY TO GOD REALIZATION is based on the talk given by Revered Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, the last President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, in the Mission's centre at Gauhati on 5 August 1975. The talk was originally delivered in Bengali by Revered Maharaj for the benefit of seekers of God. It was tape-recorded by Swami Ijyanandaji, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, Gauhati, and subsequently translated into English by Swami Bhagavatanandaji, now the head of the Mission's centre at Katihar. A rare piece of spiritual guidance, this talk answers many questions and offers very practical help for seekers who sincerely seek spiritual uplift in their own lives.

A NUCLEAR-FREE WORLD FOR THE SURVIVAL OF HUMANITY is the inaugural speech delivered by Srimat Swami Hiranmayanandaji Maharaj, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, at the religious group in the International Forum on the

same subject held in Moscow from 13 February to 16 February 1987.

HARDWAR KUMBHA MELA 1986 is written by Swami Nirgunananda of Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal. The author, an eye-witness of the entire holy festival, deals both with the mythological background and the present traditions of the Mela.

THE UNNUMBERED MILLIONS IN MALNUTRITION deals with the poverty of nutrition among the poorer classes in India. The author, Dr. Kamala Jaya Rao (M.B.B.S., M.D., Ph. D) was the Deputy Director of the Central Institute of Nutrition, Government of India, at Hyderabad.

A SACRED PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE is a very illuminating article by Swami Dhireshanandaji a senior and highly scholarly monk of the Ramakrishna Order. It was originally written in Bengali and published in the special souvenir (1986) of the Ramakrishna Math, Cossipur. The English translation has been made by Sri Nani Sarkar, Chartered Accountant, now staying at Puri.

AMAR NATH: IMMORTALITY THROUGH DEATH

(EDITORIAL)

On an August afternoon of 1986, through the deep, dark, and heavenly woods of Pahalgam, two pilgrims for Amarnath were winding through zig-zag mountain paths, the way to their first halt at Chandanwari. It was a small plain surrounded on all sides by the steep-rising, dark, and green mountains. Huge dark pines stood like last sentinels at this doorway to Mahadeva. The first night passed at

Chandanwari. All throughout the night they heard the stream rushing out of a glacier just below the tent. A short drizzle brought the temperature very much down.

Next morning in the half-light of the early dawn, they started on an almost impossible journey, 24 miles on horse back in a single day. Before the sunrise they were crossing the first glacier at Chandanwari. Morning smoke was rising from one

or two huts at the feet of dark pines. An icy river flowed over huge boulders on the road side. Only after two miles there was waiting for them a steep climb of one mile through a zig-zag stoney path, which reminds one of the spiral paths of Dante's purgatorio. On the high mountains a family of Gurjar nomads was grazing a flock of sheep and goats. It was nearly 8 O'clock when the pilgrims reached the top of this place known as 'Pissu Ghat'. There was the last tent of the Gurjar nomads. They had a glass of tea and started again on horseback. It was now absolutely silent and solitary. A golden sunlight lighted the few bushes on the road side. All throughout the road they only saw remnants of the broken tents where only nine days before thousands of pilgrims halted, but now it was all bare. Even the bridges across the small rivers had been removed and they had to cross them either on horseback or on foot. Vegetation seemed now fewer and fewer. The last human habitation they had already left behind at Chandanwari.

Trudging along a lonely long way of five miles, the pilgrims reached the lake of Sheshnag which looked mysteriously blue and beautiful. By this time the temperature had come down almost near zero degree. Despite the morning sunlight a fiercely cold wind was blowing, which shivered even the bones. For a while they rested on the solitary bank of this vast and mysterious lake surrounded by snow and ice. Molten glaciers were merging into it from mountains standing at its back. A few yellow grass flowers blossomed here and there in the stoney area. Absolutely lonely, this place is, indeed, the place of gods. People still claim they have seen the mysterious big serpent in this icy lake.

From Sheshnag after just a few sips of a strangely hilly tea, the real journey began in almost absolute loneliness. On one side

of the narrow stoney path stood the steep mountain with huge boulders, and on the other, the frozen glaciers or steep gorges reaching far, far below. The two pilgrims and their muslim horseman were the only living souls in the vast panorama. Now they were climbing up to the terrible height of 14, 800 feet known as Mahagunas pass. In Kashmiri language Mahagunas means the most deadly serpent. Indeed this is a terrible pass where oxygen is less and climbing sometimes becomes very difficult. When they arrived at the pass it was high noon. Nature suddenly appeared in a strange and a frightening form. Vast grey stone mountains reared their hands on both sides. On their surface was clinging heavy snow, most of which did not melt during the last few centuries. All green was gone. Before Sheshnag they left the last trees behind. Now it was all rock. Silence was all-engulfing and almost ominous. The entire panorama seemed to be meditating. One could feel that to talk here was a sacrilege. Nature does not allow any one to break the eternal silence of Shiva's meditation.

Now both the pilgrims left their horses and started walking along the steep path down to the river bed of an ice cold stream. This place is known as 'Pushpa Patri'. Maybe that in ancient times some Rishis must have collected flowers, the last grass flowers that bloom in this low-lying valley. As they proceeded, on both sides lay the dead bodies of horses, not less than a dozen, who only slipped to death just seven days before.¹ Many of these took their riders also along with them to the house of death. It is in fact, an act of surrender, to take

1. This trip was after the yatra season. During the yatra season, the Jammu & Kashmir Govt. makes elaborate arrangements for the safety and all kinds of help, including postal and medical facilities, emergency help, and others, for all pilgrims.

this death-defying trip for the grace of Shiva.

After nearly two hours of tough horse riding they reached the vast valley of 'Panchtarani'. This was just like a vast field, encircled on all sides by towering mountains. Over this valley pass five small rivulets. This was the last halt before reaching Amarnath. They got down from the horses, took a little tea, hired a tent, and kept their luggage.

By 3 O'clock the pilgrims were again on horseback. Only four miles ahead was Amarnath. A sort of intoxication had already gripped them. Both of them were reciting Shiva Mahimna Stotra. The terrible pain due to nine hours' of horse riding was forgotten in a sort of throbbing expectation. Shiva was waiting for the devotees! Generally people take the trip from Pahelgam to Panchtarani in two days, and from Panchtarani to Amarnath cave next day. But they took it all on a single day. By 4 O'clock they were at the top of the last pass. This journey was really a fierce trekking and the horse, due to disbalance, shook one of them severely. He slipped down from its back, but fortunately fell on the right side. If it would have been on the left, not a single piece of bone could be found by any one. The gorge plunges straight down to a depth of nearly 2,000 feet, below where a river flows with a terrible sound.

In the fading glow of afternoon, the horseman showed them the colossal face of the cave of Amarnath from a distance. It was like a dream coming true. The few last pilgrims had left the area nearly half an hour before and a dark cloud was covering the entire valley, with the ominous prospect of an imminent snowfall. A few drops of rain began to drizzle in. It seemed that it was the last journey of their life, as if they were going to Death in this lonely evening. Exhausted, but strangely inspired,

they reached the steps of the Amarnath cave. One could listen to the excitement in their hearts. The entire place was awfully lonely. Just two or three last tents of the Gurjar nomads were still there. Keeping the small bundle of flowers and sweets for Shiva with the horseman, they went to the icy river of 'Amar Ganga'. There was no water. The river was frozen. They went a little up from where the absolutely white ice water trickles down. Both of them took a very hasty bath. Instantly the whole body began to freeze. Temperature must be running much less than zero degree, and a severe gust of icy wind was blowing. It was 5 p.m. The whole valley looked dark and ominous. Suddenly (and it was a real moment of theophany) from the western side came a golden sunlight through the clouds. The mouth of the cave was at once lit, as it were, with all the sunlight in the universe. Every stone began to radiate. As they started climbing up the long flight of stairs, they saw the auspicious pigeon chirping at the very entrance of the cave. Virtually fasting from the morning, they were exhausted to the limit. The horseman stretched his helping hands, but clutching the iron railings, they finally entered the cave. There was absolutely no person anywhere. Only three priests, huddling in terrible winter in a corner were preparing for the coming night. Both the pilgrims went straight to ice lingam which had now become shorter in height. Exhausted but intensely thrilled one of them literally fell and lay down on the body of the ice lingam for sometime. The priests did not protest. On the contrary they came forward and helped to offer the ritualistic worship to Shiva. But rituals seemed unnecessary. The ice became living and prayers began to pour out for the welfare of many souls who sought this prayer. Nearly 50 minutes passed. Then the mind

suddenly expanded to infinity, and the lips began to pray for all living beings on the earth. Are not all living beings looking forward to His Grace? Ah! Who else but Shiva could lift them up from the regions of death, to immortality! A strange assurance and calmness filled and lifted the heart.

The only way to immortality is through death. Throughout the entire journey, right from Sheshnag to Amarnath they saw only death, silence, loneliness and the fierce aspects of nature. It was the face of Divine Mother in terrible grey and death-dealing white. Is it not the face of 'Dhumavati'—a face of Divine Mother, which the Rishis have seen during their death-defying sadhana? Dhumavati sits resting on a rock, like an old dying woman with eyes in sockets, her white hair flowing, and her grey skin showing signs of imminent extinction. From Mother Dhumavati to Shiva as Mahakala is only one step. Beyond Mahakala, the all-destroying time, stands the immutable face of Shiva, the immortal Amarnath. Nachiketa must have had a similar experience before reaching immortality.

Evening darkness began to descend. The pilgrims got again on horseback. A sort of unwillingness to leave Shiva was haunting them. As the horses started moving, they looked again and again back at the vast mouth of the lonely cave. Shiva stands there with a world of love and blessings! But now He was within them. It was as if they heard His voice. 'I am Shiva—the Great Lord. I am within you, within all living beings. I am the Chit-Ananda-Shiva within you, of whom you sing so often. I am the immortal Soul, the Atman. Atman alone abides. I am also the Brahman, the Ultimate all-pervading Reality. I am the Self hiding within your heart. All your life, all your actions and struggles, all your achievements are nothing compared to the

majesty of the Self. The Self within is infinitely greater than all its manifestations'. A great joy and assurance lifted the mind and filled the heart. A deep peace reigned inside and outside. The dark icy valley of Panchtarani, the rushing streams, all seemed to be blessing the devotees of Shiva. Death was over. The bliss of Divine Grace had already descended. The darkness and drizzling outside on the lonely path, seemed to be suddenly illumined with a strange joy and assurance welling up in the soul.

* * * *

Since the earliest periods of human civilization the Himalayas has inspired lofty emotions. The Indo-Aryans of the Vedic times felt the pervasive power of these mountains in many ways. The *Rg-Veda* (10.121) extols Hiranyagarbha, the Personal God behind this universe. 'To him of right belong by his own power the snow-clad mountains, the world streams and the sea.' The Bhumi-sukta of the *Atharva-Veda* (12.1) speaks again: 'Your hills, O Earth, your snow-clad mountain peaks, your forests, may they show us kindness'. *Rg-Veda* (1.154) again refers to the 'Bull who resides upon the mountains'. The music of the Himalayan streams brought divine feelings to the seers of *Rg-Veda* (10.94): 'O rocks, O mountains, swiftly clashing, you bring to God's ears your rhythmic din.' The rhythmic din of *Hara Hara Vyom Vyom*, the Himalayan pilgrims will always hear when the rushing streams fall like thunder with the sound of *Vyom, Vyom* on the rocks, and then flow out in frightening speed with the sound *Hara, Hara*.

The northern mountains according to *Satapatha Brahmana* (1,8,1,1-10) is the place of 'Manu's descent' after the great deluge. It is at the foot of these mountains that Manu, the primal father of Hindu

mythology, took to austerities and worship, and thus created the Manavas—the human dynasty. The Himalayas is indeed the first and the sublimest symbol of divinity. ‘Of the mountains I am the Himalayas’ says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita. The Himalayas inspired the first and the highest human conception of God. Shiva is the primal God, the Great God—the Adi Deva, Mahadeva. From this first concept of God, all the other concepts of divinity have subsequently grown in India, where millions of gods and goddesses are worshipped in millions of ways. ‘Why have we got so many gods and goddesses?’ Someone asked Vivekananda in the South. ‘Because we have the Himalayas’, he answered.

The Himalayas has in fact been the source of human civilization which flourished during the Vedic period on the banks of the various rivers that flowed from it. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.8) Yajnavalkya reminds Gargi, ‘O Gargi... the rivers flow, some in the East, others in the West from the white mountains.’ The Himalayas inspired contemplative mood. ‘The mountains, as it were contemplates’ says *Chandogya Upaniṣad* (7.6.1). The Himalayas stands as the symbol of the eternally unmoving and the immutable. ‘The firmest mountains’ (*Rg-Veda* 7.79) reminds us of the unmoving, steady, eternally calm, and meditative Shiva in the Himalayas. The unmelting snow on these mountains must have inspired the Indian concept of Shiva as the ‘mountain of silver’ (Rajatagiriniva). In fact saints, throughout the ages, had had visions of all-white Shiva. Shankara, inspired by the all-white peaks of the Himalayas, wrote of Shiva: ‘Oh, Shiva, Thy body is white, white is Thy smile, the human skull in Thy hand is white. Thy axe, Thy bull, Thy earrings, all are white. The Ganga flowing out in foams from your matted locks, is white. The crescent moon on Thy brow is white. O,

all-white Shiva, give us the boon of complete sinlessness in our lives.’²

But along with the feeling of lofty sublimity, the Himalayas also inspired awe, and perhaps a reverential fear. Its inaccessible heights, where nature of any kind ceases to exist, inspired the thoughts that it is virtually a vast cremation ground of no-life, and the puny mortals thriving far below on the warm plains must know that the Himalayas is the valley of death. The Himalayan ascent is described in the Vedic and Puranic tradition as the way of final departure from this life, the pathway to the Mahaprasthanā. In *Rg-Veda* (10.58) two priests pray to the dead soul of their brother Subandhu to return from the mountains where his departed spirit now has gone:

Your spirit which has gone afar
to the highest mountains
may return to you again
that it may live and dwell here.

Death has always haunted humanity since the earliest days. And immortality has been a spiritual passion with men. In the Upanishads this struggle to escape death and embrace immortality has been dealt with in detail. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.2.7) we find that even the Hiranyagarbha, the primal Personal God behind this phenomenal universe, because of Its desire for creating a world of duality, was threatened with death. It is through Self-knowledge that it had to overcome death, when death became one with the Self of the Hiranyagarbha, the undying all-pervading Reality. ‘He who knows thus triumphs over death, death does not overcome *him*, because Death becomes the Self.’ Death stalks over us so long as we are condemned to live in a world of duality,

2. Shankaracharya, *Shivaparadha kshamapaṇa stotra*.

the world of I and Thou, this and that, here and there, now and then. In the realization of our Oneness with the universe, our little individuality ceases to exist; so also death.

'One day a drop of water fell into the vast ocean', Vivekananda answered in a parable when someone in the west had protested against the loss of so-called individuality, 'When it found itself there, it began to weep and complain just as you are doing. The great ocean laughed at the drop of water. "Why do you weep?" it asked, "I do not understand. When you join me, you join all your brothers and sisters, the other drops of water of which I am made. You become the ocean itself. If you wish to leave me, you have only to rise up on a sunbeam into the clouds. From there you can descend again, a little drop of water, a blessing and a benediction to the thirsty earth.'³ Elsewhere in the West Vivekananda harped on the same theme, 'Let us realize that we are the infinite power. Who put a limit to the power of the mind? Let us realize we are all mind. Every drop has the whole ocean in it.'⁴

We remember the oft-quoted mantra of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.3.28) 'Take me from evil to good; Take me from darkness to light; Take me from death to immortality.' When the mantra says 'Take me from evil to good', verily evil is death, and good is immortality. So it only says, 'Take me from death to immortality, that is, make me immortal.' In the mantra 'Take me from darkness to light', verily darkness means death, and light is

immortality. So it only says 'Take me from death to immortality.'

What is the way to immortality? The answer is: Knowledge of the Self. How to attain that knowledge of Self? By Strength—physical, intellectual and above all spiritual. *Nāyamatmā balahinena labhyaḥ*, 'The Self cannot be attained by a man bereft of strength', says the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.25) says *abhayaṃ vai Brahman* 'Brahman is indeed fearlessness. He who knows the Self as above becomes fearless Brahman.' Probably this concept of realizing the Self through the avenue of death experience was most beautifully illustrated by the story of the boy Nachiketa of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. For the sake of Truth, the boy went undaunted to the house of death, and there stood in superhuman courage, face to face with death. Death had to reveal its secret and confer immortality to such a fearless soul embracing death for the sake of immortality. In Indian tradition Nachiketa stands as a symbol of human struggle for attaining Truth in the face of the most terrible struggles and obstacles in life.

The concept of attaining immortality through death is also reflected in the Christian idea of Palingenesis which means rebirth, after the severest of sacrifices in life, into a transfigured life of higher spiritual dimensions. This is what Jesus meant when he spoke to Nicodemus: 'Except a man be born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of God'. This is the idea which is expressed in the lines describing the Pauline transfiguration, a rebirth of Saul into Paul after a theophany of Christ, 'It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory... It is sown a natural body, it is raised in spiritual body... The first man is of the earth, earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven.' (1, Corinthians, *The New Testament* 42-44).

3. Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1961) P. 267-68.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972) Vol. 1, p. 509.

It is on the death of the old self with all its burning desires for a sense-world, that the spiritual body is born. 'The old cat must die', as the proverb goes. 'This little puny self must be sacrificed. This is the truth symbolized by baptism into a new life, the death of the old man, the birth of the new—the perishing of the false self, the realization of the Atman, the one Self of the universe', Vivekananda says.⁵

What are the spiritual dimensions of this new transfigured Self, our Shiva nature? Here all ego is silenced for ever, and an all-encompassing love grows. 'The highest men are calm, silent and unknown,' says Vivekananda.⁶ They are like Shiva Himself. 'Power to help mankind is with the silent ones who live and love and withdraw their own personality entirely. They never say 'me' or 'mine'. They are only blessed in being the instruments to help others. They are wholly identified with God.... They are the true Jivanmuktas—the absolutely selfless...'⁷ says Vivekananda. He reminds us that the way is struggle in the face of death, 'If there is any road to Heaven it is through hell...when the soul has wrestled with circumstance and has met death, a thousand times death on the way, but nothing daunted, has struggled forward again and again, and yet again—then the soul comes out as a giant and laughs at the ideal he has been struggling for, because he realizes how much greater is he than the ideal'.⁸

The annual pilgrimage to Amarnath always glows with this great promise for the thousands of pilgrims, a promise of

rebirth into a higher life. Certainly this one pilgrimage sheds many of our past karmas. No pilgrimage in India is as difficult as this, and no pilgrimage brings us 'nearer to God' than the one to Amarnath. This pilgrimage reminds us that Shiva, the God of immortality, presides over the valley of death. He, the eternal life, the immortality, the Existence Absolute, has to be approached through an austere self-denying journey to God. Shiva sits in the midst of human skulls, and the ashes of the burnt realities of the world. This cremation ground, the favourite seat of Mahadeva, is the symbol of that pure heart where all desires have been burnt. Immortality is gained, death is overcome only when the extinction of all desires of the relative world is assured.

* * * *

Eighty-nine years ago in the same month of August, Vivekananda, came to this holy Amarnath and stood face to face with the Lord. He came for pilgrimage not to any temple, but to the living presence of Shiva Himself, in this almost inaccessible heights of the Himalayas. For the last few days during this great journey he was all full of Shiva. With all humility he became one with the rest of pilgrims who were walking all the way in those days from Srinagar to the Amarnath cave. He was 'living mostly on one meal a day and seeking no company much, save that of sadhus'.⁹ In the evenings he was sitting along with the naked swamis round the *dhuni* fire by the side of the rushing river Ledar at Pahalgaoon and again at the first glacier at Chandanwari. They were plying him with 'volley of questions. With him was going his daughter-disciple, Nivedita. Her master was

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1964) Vol. 8, p. 24.

6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1972) Vol. 1, p. 106.

7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1964) Vol. 8, p. 31.

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1973) Vol. 5, p. 252.

9. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1967) Vol. 1, p. 348.

going 'to dedicate'¹⁰ her to the Lord Shiva: 'for the good of the many, for the welfare of the many.'

In the West he was playing the role of Nataraja, Shiva dancing and destroying what was putrid and dark, and creating what was effulgent and divine. The words of all-renouncing monk sounded like Shiva's drum. 'It is for the sannyasins, Siva's demons, to rend the skies with their shouts of "Hara! Hara! Shambho!"', he wrote from the West, to inspire the drooping spirit of his brother-disciples.¹¹

But today Vivekananda was coming to Holy Amarnath as one of the old orthodox pilgrims of India, taking bath in all the places prescribed by the tradition, observing fasts and counting beads. He was virtually alone 'contriving to elude the observation completely'¹² even from the nearest and dearest. Finally he took the bath in Amarganga, and entered the cave in a loin cloth, a Suka, a Shiva, in human form. Like Moses he entered the 'burning bush', the grotto with the Great God waiting for him. 'With a smile he knelt first at one end of the semi-circle, then at the other.'¹³ A great emotion of the living presence of Shiva overwhelmed him. He just evaded a collapse. His feelings since his childhood that he would meet death in a Shiva temple in the mountains, became true.

When he left the vast mountain caves 'the heavens had opened'. 'I thought the ice *linga* was Shiva Himself. It was all worship. I never enjoyed any religious place so much he said.'¹⁴ His fast broken, he took his meal

on a rock below by the ice-stream along with a naked swami. Still he was in an exuberance of emotion. He was all full of, as Nivedita saw, "Shiva and the cave and the great verge of vision." He talked of the ice *linga*, the radiant symbol of Shiva and how it was first discovered. With his unflinching vision he saw that it was a blessed party of shepherds, the Gurjar nomads who, in search of their flocks, one summer day entered inadvertently in the colossal cave, and was awed by the presence of the Lord Himself in the unmelting ice-pillar radiating in the virgin cave of this high Himalayas, a spot till then untrammelled by the touch of human feet.

The worship of the *linga*, according to Vivekananda, was originated from the famous hymn in the *Atharva-Veda Samhita* sung in praise of the *yūpa-stambha* which represented the 'Eternal Brahman'. 'The fire, the smoke, the ashes, flames, the blackwood and the ox connected with this Vedic sacrifice gave place to the conceptions of brightness of Shiva's body, His tawny matted-hair, His blue throat, and the riding on the bull of Shiva and so on—just so the *yūpa-stambha* gave place in time to the Shiva-Linga, and was deified as the high Devahood of Sri Shankara.... In the *Linga-Purāna*, the same hymn is expanded in the stories meant to establish the glory of the great *stambha* and the superiority of Mahadeva.'¹⁵

Vivekananda's life itself was the biggest sacrifice made at the feet of Shiva. To someone well-known to him he expressed this feeling through a few lines of *Yajur-Veda Samhita*: 'In this world in search of wealth, Thou art O Lord, the greatest jewel I have found. I sacrifice myself unto Thee.... In search of someone to love, Thou art the One Beloved I have found. I sacrifice

10. Shankari prasad Basu (Ed.) *Letters of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982) Vol. 1, p. 18.

11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1972) Vol. 6, p. 356.

12. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (1967) Vol. 1, p. 350.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1978) Vol. 4, p. 424.

myself unto Thee'.¹⁶ And this sacrifice made his heart, a cremation ground of white ashes, bereft of everything except an intense love for God and an equally intense compassion for suffering humanity. Vivekananda himself became radiant like Shiva with the white of sattva—the intense white colour of love—as he used to say. Like Shiva, he, too, drank the poison of human suffering. For him Shiva was the highest conception of Personal God—'the totality of all souls, not of human alone.'¹⁷ 'Shiva is the sublime aspect of God', he would say.¹⁸ He would talk of Uma and Shiva—Immanent Mother and Transcendent Shiva—the two aspects of the One inseparable Reality. This idea fascinated him always. 'It beats all mythology hollow' he would say.¹⁹ To him Shiva was the ideal husband 'whose life was in Uma'.²⁰ To the Indians he held up the all-renouncing Shankara, the husband of Uma as the eternal object of worship. Shiva is the very soul of Indian life. 'Here in India the old Shiva will always be playing on his damaru',²¹ he said in order to uphold the basic spirituality of Indian life.

At Amarnath the dear God Shiva stood there for the blessed monk with the boon of immortality. He felt the 'grace' of the Lord. He revealed with a feeling of great assurance how the Great God had granted him the boon, 'not to die, until he himself

should give consent'.²² To the blessed western disciple who witnessed with awe and reverence this great moment of theophany, the master reminded that the pilgrimage to Amarnath never goes without bringing a grace of divinity in the pilgrim's life, 'You do not understand. But you have made the pilgrimage, and it will go on working. Causes must bring their effect. You will understand better afterwards. The effect will come.'²³

Probably this vision of the radiant Shiva at Amarnath was reflected in Vivekananda's own composition on Shiva:

For whom all gloom and darkness have dispersed
That radiant light, white, beautiful
As bloom of lotus white is beautiful,
Whose laughter loud sheds Knowledge luminous.²⁴

It was Shiva who guided him all throughout. The invitation from Pramadadas Mitra, to visit Varanasi was to him 'the call of Vishvesvara'.²⁵ Shiva was his power in days of unbearable stress. During the days of extreme uncertainty and helplessness in the West he confided this trust in Shiva, to a western mother:

Lord! how hard it is for man to believe in Thee and Thy mercies! Shiva! Shiva! Where is the right kind and where is the bad, mother? It is all *He!* In the tiger and in the lamb, in the saint and sinner all *He!* In Him I have taken my refuge—body, soul and Atman. Will He leave me now after carrying me in His arms all my life? Not a drop will be in the ocean, not a twig in the deepest forest, not a crumb in the house of the god of wealth, if the Lord is not merciful. Streams will be in the desert and the beggar will have plenty if He wills it. He

16. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) p. 194.

17. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1971) Vol. 8, p. 266.

18. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1972) Vol. 6, p. 116.

19. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 226.

20. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1972) Vol. 6, p. 373.

21. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1973) Vol. 5, p. 445.

22. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (1967) Vol. 1, p. 351.

23. Ibid.

24. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (1978) Vol. 4, p. 503.

25. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1972) Vol. 6, p. 204.

seeth the sparrow's fall. Are these but words, mother, or literal, actual life?

Thou art my right, Thou my wrong, my Shiva. Lord, since a child I have taken refuge in Thee. Thou wilt be with me in the tropics or at the poles, on the tops of mountains or in the depth of oceans. My stay—my guide in life—my refuge—my friend—my teacher—my God—my real Self. Thou wilt never leave me, *never*. I know it for sure.²⁶

During this trying period, he wrote to a brother disciple, 'Does a companion of Shiva die so quickly?'²⁷ His trust in Shiva never faltered. He knew he was always with Shiva, his own SELF. Even in the West this Shiva-mood never left him. In the quiet of Ridgely Manor, U.S.A. he reminded his disciple 'The Guru was always Shiva, and was always to be worshipped as Shiva—because he sat under the tree to teach and destroy ignorance.'²⁸ The longing to go to the Himalayas, to be lost in those deep forests,

^{26.} *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Op. cit., p. 219-20.

^{27.} *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1971) Vol. 8, p. 402.

^{28.} *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 218.

ravines, and glaciers, and most of all, to die in the eternally white cremation ground of Shiva, the icy mountains, was a sort of passion with Vivekananda. A year after the pilgrimage to Amarnath, in the West he was buried in this dream, and words came out like a strange soliloquy:

'This body is going any way. I shall go with the hard tapasya—I will say 1,000 Om a day and with fasting. Alone, alone, by the Ganges—in the Himalayas—saying Hara, Hara. The Freed One, the Freed One. I will change my name once more and this time none shall know...and I will never come back to any one again.'²⁹

In his immortal letter of 18 April 1900, ringing with the tune of final departure, he sang, like the blind Shiva devotee of Varanasi: 'Shiva, O Shiva, carry my boat to the other shore'. The great departure, the Mahaprasthan, of the Living Shiva of the age was also in the way of Shiva. Vivekananda, as assured by Amarnath, left his body voluntarily in the majesty and bliss of the final meditation. Death was already conquered for him and immortality attained in the fullness of Self-realization.

^{29.} *Ibid.*, p. 228.

WAY TO GOD REALIZATION

SRIMAT SWAMI VIRESWARANANDAJI MAHARAJ

Bhagavan Shankaracharya in the beginning of his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* wrote a few sentences that nobody, uptill now, could change or refute. He said, 'First of all the Self and the non-self, the spirit and matter, both are of opposite nature. None of these is similar with the other. In what way are they contradictory? *Tamah prakāśavat viruddhāh*—these are opposite

like light and darkness. Like the day and night they are contradictory to each other. In the same way, the Self and the non-self, sentient and insentient are of different nature. Therefore, it is impossible that we can combine or mix-up these two. But such is the play of Mahamaya that we mix-up these two contradictory things and say 'I am in this room. I am a Ksatriya, I

am a Brahmana, I am fair, I am dark, I am happy, I am unhappy, my family, my son, my husband, my house, my estate, my business etc'. We say all these.

Now, in the light of what was said in the beginning, how can I be here, in this room? How can the all-pervading Atman be in this room, sitting here? Identifying the Self with the body I say that I am sitting here. But the body is insentient (inert), and the Self is sentient, and I mix-up the two. In the same way I say, 'I am a Ksatriya, I am a Brahmana, etc.'

Next, ascribing the functions of the mind to the Atman I say 'I am happy, I am unhappy' and all such things. Again, I superimpose the external things on the Atman and say 'my family, my husband, my son' and speak of material things—'My house, my estate etc.' It is impossible to mix-up these two because they are contradictory to each other. In spite of this, these two are getting mixed up. What is the cause of it? Ignorance is the cause. This ignorance is also Maya, which is without beginning. This ignorance causes us to combine the two. This knot between the sentient and insentient is the cause of our bondage. If we can separate the two—sentient Atman from the insentient matter, and if we can realize we are that Atman, we have no connection whatsoever with the matter, we shall get liberation. Those who have realized God are able to cut this knot of matter and spirit; they alone will be free from all doubts; their accumulated karma being destroyed, they will attain liberation.

One seer has said, 'I have seen that great Being who is beyond darkness, beyond Maya. Without knowing that Being, there is no freedom from the hands of death.' Therefore to realize God is the only way for us by which we can be free from misery, and destroy the ignorance. This ignorance is veiling our knowledge,

and so we can't see the sentient Atman. What is this ignorance? It is the feeling of me and mine. 'This is ours'—it is the ignorance. 'Me and mine,'—is the ignorance, and 'You and yours' is the knowledge. 'Me and mine is ignorance,'—the meaning of this is that I am selfish. I am only satisfying my little 'I'. This is selfishness. If we can be totally unselfish then we shall realize God. Swami Vivekananda said that absolute unselfishness is equal to pure love, equal to God. When we are entirely unselfish, then we shall attain pure Love. And God is of the nature of pure love. Thus one may get the vision of God.

Now, how can the ignorance which is there, will be destroyed? What is the way by which this feeling of me and mine, will be destroyed? We are only practising the vows, going on pilgrimage, giving money in charity—all these will not be of any use. Shankaracharya said that all these will be of no avail. Till we do not get the knowledge, we will not have liberation. All these are only secondary things. You give away in charity, or go on pilgrimage, or perform ritualistic worship, or visit temples and offer money there, or whatever vows you undertake—all these are ordinary things. Moreover in practice religion has become today a mere social custom. Whatever practices or local customs on which the pundits have put their own stamps, these alone have become our religion (the religion of the masses). We do not consider anything else to be religious. We obey only these local customs. Moreover those who do not observe those local customs, are considered by us as irreligious. We think ourselves to be religious because we follow the local custom. This is a narrow understanding that is growing in us. But those whom we call irreligious, may be sincerely following the truth or a righteous path. But still we call them irreligious. This happens because of the narrow

understanding. 'Whatever I do is the only religion. Anything outside it cannot be religion.'

When humanity suffers from this wrong understanding then the Lord comes. He gives us the right understanding of the Dharma. Now the same thing happened in this world again. Sri Ramakrishna came and showed us what true religion is. Religion is the realization of God. This is the aim of life. Swamiji also said that religion is realization. He also said that the true religion is to awaken the sleeping Atman in us by controlling external and internal nature. This is the aim of religion. How can we do that? By following any one of the yogas—Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Raja-yoga. If not by one method, by combining all we can manifest Atman or Brahman within. When the Atman is manifested then alone can we be liberated. This is religion. The temples, scriptures, rituals, vows, and all are secondary things. But what we do is that we make secondary things primary, and then lose sight of the primary one.

Now, the first proof of religion is renunciation. Without renunciation there can be no religion. If there is no dispassion towards 'me and mine' and other enjoyments of the world, nothing in the world can give me peace. Without this understanding nobody can be religious. 'Let me be entangled in this world; when I get blows, then only shall I try to understand'—this way is not correct. We must try to enquire if there is any other way. When one gets this thought, then one thinks: 'whatever there is in the world is in the jaws of death; everything will be destroyed in course of time; birth and death, disease and old age are the characteristics of this world'. Buddha had experienced in this way when he went on a visit to the city. He saw that human beings suffer from birth, death, old age and disease, and these

are the characteristics of the world. He renounced the world in order to find a way out of this misery. So, there cannot be peace in the world. Troubles there will be in the world. So, Sri Krishna said, 'If you want peace, then come to Me, adore Me and worship Me.' For that reason we have also to follow any one of the four methods of Yoga and progress towards God.

Among the four Yogas, the Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge) teaches us,—'I am not the body, nor the mind, nor the intelligence nor the ego'—in this way I am separating the Atman from all other things and reach myself to the Atman. When I shall be established in that thought, that meditation, then Self-knowledge will dawn on me. In the same way the Karma Yoga means not to think about oneself but to think about others. When I work for others I shall entirely forget about myself. I shall always remember others, and in the end I shall be one with the whole world. Then only shall I be able to serve the world. That itself is the realization of God. 'Me and mine' will be entirely effaced. In the same way, in the path of Bhakti, whatever I do is for the Lord. I shall thus lose myself in the thought of God. That itself is the realization of God. The same thing happens in the path of Raja Yoga also. When 'I and mine' is given up and mind is concentrated on God, all other thought-waves die out and only the thought of God remains. When mind becomes absorbed in the thought of God, it will be still like the candle-flame in a windless place. Then you will have the vision of God. Then there will be no other thought in the mind. In any way we should forget our little 'I', and remember the big 'I', that is, God, and be absorbed in Him. Out of these four Yogas we have to practise fruitfully any one, or two, or all in our lives.

The path of Bhakti is the easiest. Those who have intense dispassion can undertake the path of knowledge. Generally, for most of the people, the path of Bhakti is suitable. The practices of Raja Yoga are very difficult, but the path of Bhakti is easy. Generally, people are attached to the world and also have the love of God. The number of such people are more in the world. So, for such people, Sri Ramakrishna says, the path of Bhakti prescribed by Narada, is good. We generally follow the path of Bhakti. We begin this path of Bhakti as a dualist. I am separate and the Lord is separate. I have to attain the vision of God. In this way we start. Finally, through His grace we realize the non-dual or the formless aspect of God. Through the grace of God alone we shall realize the formless aspect of God. Just as Sri Ramakrishna had the vision of Mother Kali first, and then the realization of the attributeless Brahman, in the same manner, even if we start with the duality, we shall have the vision of God or of the chosen deity. Then it will not take much time to realize the formless God or the attributeless Brahman. Whatever chosen deity or God you are worshipping, through the grace of that God, you will realize quickly the formless aspect of God.

But to realize first this God with form or the chosen deity is an uphill task. For that you have to start with the external rituals, then japa, and then meditation. The external ritual is the most inferior. Then comes japa. When the mind will be ready as a result of performing the external worship, then japa should be performed. The japa will make the mind ready for meditation. One must get absorbed in meditation. Meditation is the best of all. Most of us who want to practise religion, lay stress on the external only. They do not stress upon japa and meditation. They go to the shrine and busy themselves in offering

water or flowers to all the gods and goddesses, and thus spend away their time. They don't have time to perform japa, and meditation is a far cry. Such people, again say 'My mind doesn't become steady.' How can the mind be steady? It cannot be steady without practising japa and meditation. Many think that if they get initiated, then the mind will be steady. This is a different matter. One has to practise for years together. Holy Mother tells us, 'My dear, what the saints and sages could not attain in many lives (they could attain God only after hard spiritual practices), do you wish to get that realization in an easy way?' After this, she says, 'But now Sri Ramakrishna has come and made everything easy. One will get illumination if one practises a little.' But one has to practise that 'little'. If that 'little' we do not practise, then how shall we attain it? Generally I have seen those who perform japa—I am not talking about all—spend their time in the external worship only, and perform japa for 100 times. That is all they do. They don't understand the necessity to perform the japa more than 108 times. The more japa you practise the more quickly you progress towards God.

What is japa? What is *mantra*? Mind will be withdrawn from the external world and concentrated on the lotus feet of the God. This is *mantra*. And the seed (*bijamantra*) is that by the help of which you will have the awakening of the spiritual power within you, the power that will take you towards the Lord. Therefore, to perform japa is the main spiritual practice. When you repeat *mantra*, all power dwells in that. Without repetition that power will not be awakened. Therefore, merely repeating the *mantra* 108 times will not do. How will you progress? Therefore, you have to repeat the *mantra* as many times as possible. If you are doing it, it's good. But there are many who are

not at home most of the time. For them it is said that they should repeat the *mantra* mentally, while doing their work, just as Sri Krishna advised Arjuna, 'Therefore remember me in all your duties and fight'. These two things go together. While you remember the Lord, the fight should not stop. You are commander-in-chief of the Pandavas. If you remain inactive for even a short time, then what course the battle will take? Therefore you have always to be on your toes, and also remember Me constantly. These two things are to be done simultaneously. Similarly for us along with the work in the world, the name of the Lord should be on the lips. We should remember Him in the mind. If we can do this then in a short time we can make it up. Therefore one should always try to remember Him in the mind. One must have the clear understanding that repeating the *mantra* only for 108 times is not sufficient. Getting initiation and repeating the *mantra* only for 108 times—that is not the real significance of the initiation. You have to repeat His name at all times. Holy Mother said: 'Repeat the Mantra 10/15 thousand times and let me see whether the mind becomes steady or not.' You can perform a little less than that but not merely 108 times. What will you get by merely repeating for 108 times? Therefore put more stress on japa. If one repeats the *mantra* and thinks about one's chosen deity then mind gets automatically absorbed in meditation. You will not be aware but your repetition of *mantra*, and counting the number will naturally stop when mind goes into meditation. Therefore you have to give more stress on japa.

One thing more: however much we may practise, if we have an attachment with the world, then we will not be able to progress much. This very thing Sri Ramakrishna says, 'The boat that is tied to a tree on the bank, will not cross the river however

much we may row. The boat will remain where it is.' In the same way we have to cultivate the spirit of dispassion. For cultivating dispassion the first thing we need is discrimination. Through discrimination we see that there is nothing permanent in the world, everything is ephemeral. So we have to get that which is permanent. And God is the only permanent thing. When this thought takes root in the mind, then it is helpful for the practice of religion.

Three things are difficult to get in this world. These three are—human birth, desire to realize God, and an association with a great soul. Now we all are born as human beings, and also have the desire to realize God. Those who stay far away and are unable to associate with a great soul, or can not come in close contact with him, they also will get the association of the holy ones, if they read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* with sincerity and steadfastness. While reading the conversation of Sri Ramakrishna on any day, they will have to meditate on it, and imagine themselves as if they are at Dakshineswar with Sri Ramakrishna and also listening to his words with rapt attention, in the group of other devotees. You have to imagine and think in this way. If you can do in this way then that itself becomes the association with the holy men. Raja Maharaj told us 'I am giving you the religious knowledge in one word'. Then he told us, 'Read the Gospel everyday. If you read the Gospel everyday your mind will be always and completely free from the troubles of the world, from the worldly attachment. Troubles and attachment etc. will go away gradually from the mind. Then there will be an intense desire to realize God.'

The Vedantins say, 'Who is the competent person for Vedanta?' The answer is those who are endowed with four-fold disciplines (*sādhana catuṣṭaya*). Who are

these people? They are those who discriminate between the real and the unreal, who discriminate between what is permanent and what is impermanent, those who renounce the desire to enjoy in this world and in the heaven, those who are desirous of attaining liberation; and those who are endowed with self-control etc. that is, practise the ethical qualities of a pure life. If one is endowed with all these then he is competent to study the scriptures. Without these disciplines one will not be able to understand the meaning of scriptural statements. They understand in the reverse way. Indra and Virochana went to their preceptor to study scriptures. The Guru instructed them but Virochana understood the Guru's words in one way, and Indra in some other way. Virochana thought that the meaning of Guru's instruction is that the body is Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. Thinking in this way he became a materialist. But Indra had a finer intellect, and a little discrimination. He thought how can this body be the Brahman? The body is not permanent. Thinking in this way he returned to his Guru to clarify his doubts. In this way, after repeated visits, his doubts were dispelled, and he attained the true knowledge of Brahman. In the same way if we do not have discrimination, if our mind is not prepared for the realization of God, then we shall not be able to understand the scriptures in the right way. In order to understand the scriptures rightly, mind should be able to grasp the subtle things. The mind should be pure and holy. For that purpose these four-fold disciplines are prescribed. Those who are endowed with these four-fold disciplines, their mind will be pure. If they receive proper instructions in the Vedanta, they will understand them rightly. If he, whose mind is prepared with these four-fold disciplines, is instructed by a Guru once—the great maxim 'Thou art that, O Sveta-

ketu', then immediately he will have the knowledge of Brahman illumined in him. Therefore we must inculcate the spirit of dispassion and renunciation. Religion cannot be practised without renunciation. Sri Ramakrishna said that renunciation is the only way. What is there in the Gita? Only words of renunciation, and nothing other than that.

Swami Shivananda said, 'Everyone quotes the words of Sri Ramakrishna and says "He showed the harmony among all religions". Sri Ramakrishna wanted to know what happens if we practise spiritual disciplines of all religions. He had a little curiosity about it. But he did not practise these disciplines with a specific purpose of showing the harmony in all religions. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna renunciation is the main teaching. This kind of renunciation was never seen in any of the incarnations.' What we now observe in the world is the lack of this spirit of renunciation. Selfishness has filled up everything, everywhere—either at the national level or international level or social level or family level. Anywhere you go, this selfishness has become the main trait. We have to remember this specifically that the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna's life is renunciation. If we can hold on to this ideal of renunciation, then everything will be alright.

Many among us say that there is no time to practise spiritual disciplines in the world. I have already told how to utilize the time that we get in the world by doing japa and meditation. And I tell this again that those who think they don't get time in the world are not speaking the truth. They get time to do all other things in the world, but when it comes to spiritual practice they don't find time. This cannot be. All activities of the institutions go on smoothly, but when it comes to keep accounts, they don't get time. Accounts are not regularly maintained or closed.

The things that cannot be postponed, we have the tendency to postpone. To say that we do not get time is not proper.

If you sit on the sea-shore and want to take bath in the sea, you sometimes cannot get into the sea for the fear of waves. If you think 'I will have my bath only when all the waves are subsided', you will never have your bath. Ocean can never be without waves. If you get into the sea in the midst of one or two waves and take a dip, then only you can finish your bath, not otherwise. Same is the case in the world. Troubles are always there. If you can snatch time in and through those troubles, and repeat the name of God, then only will you be able to practise spiritual discipline. 'I shall repeat the name of God when I am free from all troubles'—with this attitude you won't be able to do anything. However adverse may be the circumstances, why should you not try?

One thing more. We do everything for the body. We take great care to keep the body healthy. We have balanced diet, vitamins, expert medical advice and all that. But what shall we do if we fall ill? The body will contract diseases, will become infirm, then we will not be able to do any work: no energy for any work, no more capacity for taking care of the worldly affairs. Now we are alert in everything. But we don't have any idea about our mind. We have to keep the mind also healthy. If we do not keep the mind healthy we have no escape. This understanding we do not have. We think that the present state of our mind is natural and healthy. But it is not true. In our present state, the mind is diseased. If things do not happen as we wish them, we feel bad. If someone speaks harshly to you, you feel bad for the whole day. If some unhappy incident occurs, your mind is affected. Mind is to be kept calm and steady. It will be unruffled in misery or

unhappy incident. Even in intense sorrow, it will not be unsteady, but will remain calm. This is the healthy state of mind. In order to get this state of mind, we need the practice of spiritual disciplines. Moreover, I also remind you that when we will depart from this life, when we leave this body, we will have to be reborn. At the time of rebirth, we will get the strong, healthy body but not the healthy mind.

We will be reborn with this mind. Why? I have left the gross body, but the subtle body continues and gets another gross body. One of the constituents of the subtle body is mind. Mind, intellect, ego these are also in the subtle body. When we have the same subtle body, the old mind is, and will be there in the new gross body also. Therefore this time in this birth, at the time of departing from this body, if my mind is not healthy but diseased, then I have to be reborn with the present diseased mind. And if at the time of death I leave the body with virtuous tendencies then I shall start from that point in the next birth. Sri Krishna explains this thing to Arjuna, 'You will be born again in a good family; wherever you have left the practice of spiritual disciplines, from that point you will start in the next birth.' This will continue till you attain the realization of God. Therefore, we should be careful about our mind. But we are doing just the opposite. We care more for the body, and not for the mind. When you want to be careful about your mind you have to practise japa, meditation and all this. And then only will the mind be healthy.

I shall tell one thing more. Holy Mother said: 'All say that they have learnt that they cannot do anything without the grace of God.' This is speaking something just like a parrot. When I went to Cherrapunji I saw a mayna bird there. It repeated the name of the God—'Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna....' But it also has a danger. If a

cat comes near it, then 'Ramakrishna' will run away. Then it will repeat its natural sound. Similarly we also say that we have left everything to Sri Ramakrishna, left everything to God. We have no power to do anything. This is deceiving oneself. Holy Mother said, 'Everybody says "grace, grace". What will the grace do? Grace returns without doing anything. Why? The person upon whom we shower the grace is not able to receive it; he cannot receive it. Therefore the grace returns.' So, we have to practise spiritual disciplines, otherwise we will not have the grace. In our spiritual path—complete surrender to the Lord is a part of spiritual discipline; we have to take refuge at the feet of the Lord. If we can do that, then it is alright. After this, we can have the vision of God through His grace. There is a verse in one of the Upanishads, which is interpreted in two ways. One meaning is,—'those upon whom the Atman showers grace, will have the realization of the Self.' The other meaning is—'One who loves the Atman, gets the Self.' Shankaracharya interprets in one way, and Ramanujacharya interprets in another way. Now, the fact is that one who is blessed by the Lord, will have the realization. Sri Ramakrishna also said, 'We cannot do anything without the grace of God.' It is also there in one of the devotional songs. 'O Mother, unless you let us know, how can we know You?' This is alright. But who is the Lord, how do we understand Him? We have not tried to practise spiritual disciplines to know all this. And still we say the Lord is the goal of our life—this will not do. We should practise spiritual disciplines according to our capacity and then be at His door. Then alone shall we have His vision, His grace.

There is a parable in the Bible. Some brides were waiting for the bridegroom with the lighted lamps. But some of them

fell asleep. When the bridegroom came then also some of them were sleeping. Everyone could not know about the arrival of the bridegroom. Similarly if we do not practise spiritual disciplines we will not have His grace. This we have to bear in mind. When we practise, we should fully utilize the power given to us by the Lord. When we do that we will have His grace, and also more power from Him. Moreover, we on our part should not neglect spiritual practices. Therefore, forget about the grace of God. What is wanted in the beginning is our own grace. If we practise spiritual disciplines sincerely, and force our demands on Him, then His grace will come, otherwise not. This fact is to be remembered by all spiritual aspirants.

A spiritual aspirant should never feel despondent. Despondency will not allow us to progress onward. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna about the Yoga-abhyasa (practise of Yoga) in the Gita. How is this practice (*abhyāsa*) to be done? Gita says: *yuktavyo yogo anirvinṇacetasā* 'This yoga should be practised with perseverance, undisturbed by depression of heart'. This is very correct. If you are at it, then there will be *yogābhyāsa*. In this way only, can you progress onward. If you are despondent, if you think, 'I am not getting anything. What has happened to me? What shall be my fate etc.' then these negative thoughts will not help you at all. As Sri Ramakrishna said: 'What? I have repeated the name of God, I have taken refuge at His feet. Why should not I realize Him? I shall certainly have His vision'. You should have a positive attitude like this. Then only will you be successful.

Everyone is trying in his own way to realize God. Our spiritual practices depend only on us. This has to be remembered. If we practise spiritual disciplines at the

end of life, they will not help us much in realizing God. God has not given us a bond that, if, we repeat His name for hundred thousand times or meditate for so many hours, He will appear before us. It is not like that. He will come to us by His own sweet will. It is also not true that He may not be pleased even if we do not do all these. Both are true. We should always remember this. We should never deceive ourselves in thinking that we have left everything to Him. 'Without His grace we shall not be able to do anything', we should not say like this. These thoughts must not have any place in our lives, in our religious lives.



A NUCLEAR-FREE WORLD FOR THE SURVIVAL OF HUMANITY

SWAMI HIRANMAYANANDA

[Our readers are referred to the 'Editorial' of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, of July 1987 wherein we mentioned about the International Forum for 'Nuclear-free-World for the Survival of Humanity' which was held in Moscow in February this year. This Forum was a unique one in the history of both Russia and the world. The Forum was organized in different groups representing religion, culture, medicine, politics etc. Nearly 1,000 eminent persons from different countries representing different fields of activities attended the Forum. Swami Hiranmayananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission who was invited to attend this Forum, delivered extempore the inaugural speech at the religious group of the meeting. He has written down the speech on the basis of the original speech he delivered and kindly sent it to *Prabuddha Bharata*. We are glad to publish here the text of the speech.—Ed., P.B.]

*Venerable Chairman of the Conference,
brothers and sisters,*

I have been asked to speak on the subject 'A Nuclear-free World for the survival of Humanity'. I speak on behalf of Hinduism. Hinduism, you may be aware, is the oldest religion in the world. There is a continuity in Hindu religion right from seven thousand B.C., although there have been changes from time to time. But when we speak of ourselves as Hindus, you should know that in ancient times this religion was not known as Hinduism. It was known as Aryan religion, Sanatana Dharma or Vedic religion. When Muslims conquered our country they started addressing us as Hindus and, afterwards,

we ourselves accepted that word as denoting our religion.

We have been asked to create a non-nuclear world. But that is impossible. When fire was first discovered, it was used as a power of promoting the welfare of humanity. But even in that age, it was found to have a great destructive quality. However, this destructive quality did not make us give up fire altogether. We had to take care to use it for the wellbeing of humanity. Similarly, nuclear power is a tremendous power, and it can be used as a vast amount of energy under the control of humanity, for the progress and development of human society and life. But it has also the terrible power of destruction which may obliterate human life completely.

So the question is, how to control this destructive nature of nuclear power, and use it for peaceful purposes so as to bring about a new social order and human relationship.

This cannot be done by politicians and diplomats, because they want to use this power for controlling other nations and other people. But the difficulty is that if America produces an atom bomb, the Soviet Union cannot sit quiet. If Pakistan produces atom bomb, India also will have to produce atom bomb in order to defend the integrity and solidarity of her national life. So it is not possible for a few politicians and diplomats to bring about the elimination of the destructive use of nuclear power.

In this august assembly we meet as religious people. It is we who can educate a vast number of the world population. If we teach the masses in all countries about the danger of nuclear weapons, this will produce a salutary effect on the politicians who cannot go against the will of the people at large. So, we are the people of religion, and we must undertake to help the whole of humanity by preventing its destruction. But the real difficulty is that religions themselves go on fighting amongst themselves. So they cannot form a common platform to fight the evil forces of politics and diplomacy. This is because religious people do not lead the life shown by their prophets. Once when Swami Vivekananda was addressing a gathering in America where the audiences were Christians, he asked them whether they were leading a truly christian life and pointed out that 'Jesus had said, "The birds have nests, the foxes have holes but the son of man has no place to lay down his head". Then Swami Vivekananda asked, "where is your Christianity in this society? Go back to Christ." Do not all religions preach goodness and morality? But are these

virtues followed by the adherents of those religions? Swami Vivekananda, our leader, wrote in a letter, "I hate this world, this dream, this horrible nightmare, with its churches and chicaneries, its books and blackguardisms, its fair faces and false hearts, its howling righteousness on the surface and utter hollowness beneath, and, above all, its sanctified shopkeeping". Are we, who belong to different religions, not doing 'sanctified shopkeeping'? So we shall have to give that up and live the life preached by the prophets of different religions, and lead an ideal life of purity and poverty. If we do this, then our words will be invincible and they will transform the hearts of the followers of all religions.

Sri Ramakrishna, the founder of our organization, has laid down the path for bringing together all the religions of the world. He was born in 1836, and recently we celebrated the 150th anniversary of that event. He did not preach only doctrines, dogmas and rituals. He practised in his life the teachings of different sects of Hinduism as well as those of Islam and Christianity, taking them up one after another. And he found that all religions led to the same goal. Not only he had this realization in his own life, but he also taught it to Swami Vivekananda, the propagator of his thoughts, and also to his other disciples. Religion is like a science whose truth depends on its verifiability: this is the message of Sri Ramakrishna. Arnold Toynbee, one of the greatest historians of this century, said that Sri Ramakrishna took up one after another all religions. He practised them, and realized the goal of every religion. At last he came to the conclusion that all religions lead to the same goal. This, Toynbee said, was something unique in the history of religion.

India has been living for millennia, and throughout her history she has been invaded

by the Greeks, Huns, Sakas, Pathans, Mughals and the British. But the eternal religion of India is still living on. The Hindu never tried to convert anybody. Hinduism, however, has the power of assimilation, and so this religion conquered its conquerers.

Our organization, the Ramakrishna Mission, was founded by Sri Ramakrishna, and had Swami Vivekananda as its leader. In this organization we never convert but we accept all religions. Followers of all religions join our organization as monks as well as lay devotees. They have not to give up their own religions, only they have to understand the message of Sri Ramakrishna as propounded and declared by the great Swami Vivekananda. If every religion follows this method of acceptance, then there will be no quarrel amongst the different religions.

In order to achieve this goal, we shall have to understand another great teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. He taught us that in every creature there is the dormant divinity and when we serve humanity we are not serving material things or mortal beings but the essential divinity in man. In this way, we come nearer to a sort of socialism. Marxism-Leninism depends on matter as the ultimate reality. But the socialism preached by Swami Vivekananda is based on the spirit as the ultimate constituent of the universe. It holds that service to

humanity is the way by which real socialism can be achieved. Swami Vivekananda did not believe in any kind of privilege, neither physical, nor intellectual, nor economic, nor spiritual. He said that nobody who believed that man was essentially divine, could expect any privilege. Even the spiritual men should serve the lowest of humanity seeing this divinity in him. Swami Vivekananda also said that there should be equitable distribution of the objects of enjoyment. This Marxism-Leninism also preaches, but its angle of view about the world, and about man, is different. Swami Vivekananda taught that it was not through class war, but through service to humanity, irrespective of social position, creed, or religion, that real classless society would come. Swami Vivekananda got this idea from his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, who had taught him that mere compassion cannot be a sufficiently strong motive. What is needed is the worship of man as God, and serving him as God. So we, the Ramakrishna Mission, are trying to preach this gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda all over the world. We hope humanity will ultimately understand the futility of grabbing wealth and suppressing human beings in every field of life. Then will come the true socialism spoken of by Swami Vivekananda whose philosophy is based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

Thank you.

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.

Swami Vivekananda

HARDWAR KUMBHA MELA 1986

SWAMI NIRGUNANANDA

The Kumbha mela at Hardwar, 1986 is a proof of the intensity of the cultural and spiritual heritage of India. The same tradition is still going on uninterruptedly from ancient times. Lakhs and lakhs of people of different places, and saints and yogis of different sects, came and virtually flooded Hardwar, Kankhal, and its surrounding areas. They came from mountains, caves, cities, villages, from all over India, and even abroad, enduring all types of pains and troubles. Their only desire was to take a holy dip at Brahmakunda at this auspicious moment, a rare conjunction of stars, occurring after twelve years. A deep brotherly feeling, heartfelt love, and sympathy among the millions of pilgrims could be felt everywhere. The *Rig-Veda* (10.1912.2,4) says: 'Let your resolves be equal and your hearts be also equal.' One could feel it palpably during this Kumbha mela.

The Kumbha congregation of 1986 was one of the greatest so far recorded. From unofficial sources it is estimated that seventy lakhs of people including seven lakhs of sadhu-mahatmas came for bath in this kumbha.

Origin of Kumbha

According to *Skanda Purana* and *Matsya Purana*, at the time of creation a certain great saint cursed the gods. As a result they became weak. In order to regain strength they went to Brahma, the primal creator, who asked them to drink nectar, churning it out of the sea. Accordingly, they started to churn the sea; but they took the help of demons as they themselves were weak. The churning rod was the Mandara mountain, and the rope was the

enormously big snake Vasuki. This ocean is called Kshiroda Sagara which was situated, according to the Hindu mythology, on the northern side of the Himalaya mountains. Finally thirteen precious objects came out of this churning, such as poison, Pushpak chariot, Airavata-elephant, Parijata-tree (the tree of ever-fresh flowers) Rambha, (the celestial woman), Kaustubha jewel, moon of second tithi, Kundal, Saranga bow, five God's daughter, the celebrated horse Uchchaishrava, Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth), and Viswakarma (the god of construction). When the fourteenth precious object, the golden Kumbha (vessel) of nectar in all its blissful-luminosity in the hands of a god Dhanwantari came out, gods and demons became mad with joy for having it. All of them had heard that one could be immortal by drinking nectar. In the meantime, with the instruction of Indra, king of gods, his son Jayanta, taking the nectar Kumbha, fled away. Sukracharya, the preceptor of the demons, having come to know of it, asked the demons to go to the east and capture the Kumbha. Accordingly, the demons pursued Jayanta. In the meantime the gods also reached there. A fight ensued for 12 days between the gods and demons. These twelve days are equal to twelve years for man. During this period for the safety of this Kumbha, it was kept in twelve places—eight places were in heaven, and four places were on the earth. According to the tradition these four places were Hardwar, Prayag, Nasik and Ujjayini—all situated in India. Drops of nectar were said to have fallen in these four places in India. At this time the preceptor of the gods, namely, Brihaspati, and Sun, Moon, and Saturn helped Jayanta for its defence.

According to *Vishnu Purana*; 'Moon protected the nectar from falling, Sun from melting, Brihaspati from the demons, and Saturn saved it from Jayanta himself who might have otherwise drunk it.' That is why whenever in any one of these four places, these four planets meet, (this is known as Kumbha Union), the holy festival of Kumbha is held there itself.

The Vedic origin of the Kumbha Mela is given in the following lines of the *Atharva-Veda* (4.34.7): 'I have installed four Kumbhas filled with thickened milk, etc. in four places in this world.'

According to Mythology it is said that when in every twelve years these four planets meet at an auspicious time, then it is called Kumbha Mela, a time of union and the assemblage of sadhus and mahatmas, and all lay people, for taking bath at this time. When Brihaspati stays in Kumbha-Zodiac and Sun enters Mesha-Zodiac, it produces Kumbha, the auspicious union.

Astrological explanations of Kumbha are also offered. When Brihaspati, the life-augmenting chief of all planets, enters Kumbha-Zodiac, and Sun enters Mesha-Zodiac, an atmosphere of new life and bliss is created in Hardwar. At the same time, the influence of life-terminating Mars and Saturn, ends there. This atmosphere of renewed life exerts influence quickly on the subtle minds of all creatures, and creates an impression of joy everywhere. That is why virtuous people and the monks take more baths, practise more japa-meditation, puja, yaga-yajna, scriptural study, and charity etc. during this period.

Kumbha—its glory and greatness

Vishnu-Yaga thus describes its glory: 'Those who will take bath at this auspicious time being present at the place of Kumbha, will be freed from worldly bondage. Gods

bend down to such persons, as the poors bend down to rich men.' 'One Kumbha bath gives result equal to a thousand baths in Kartika-month, hundred baths in Magha-month, and one crore baths in Vaisakh-month in Narmada river.' (*Vishnu Purana*). 'It is also described that one bath in Kumbha-union gives the equally divine result of thousands of Ashwamedha, and hundreds of Vajapeya yajnas, and also the merit of going on pilgrimage a lakh times around the world.' (*Vishnu-Purana*).

The greatness of Gangadwara (Hardwar) and Brahmakunda

In Hardwar, generally this holy bath takes place in Brahmakunda, a spot where Ganga enters the plains. The greatness of this place is described in the Hindu scriptures in various ways: 1. Countless drops of nectar had fallen in this Kunda. 2. (a) According to one opinion, Lord Narayana in the form of Ganga melted with the praise sung by Narada. Brahma poured that melted water of the Ganga into his own bowl and said to Ganga, 'You are tired, take rest and then go.' (b) According to Tripura Rahasya (22,45) 'At the time of Vamana-incarnation, the surface of the universe was pierced by the toe-nail of the uplifted foot of Vishnu. Through that cracked opening, Ganga, full of nectar, descended from that foot of Vishnu, and Brahma took her with him, pouring her into his bowl (Kamandalu)'. In either case it is said that at the call of Bhagiratha, Ganga first descended on the matted hair of Shiva, and then on to the Himalayas. Coming from there, the Ganga, after embracing the famous Brahmakunda, enters India. 3. In *Dwapara yuga*, Kurukshetra was the only Tirtha, and in Kali Yuga Ganga is the special Tirtha. Bath in the Ganga, puja, and living specially on the Ganga of Hardwar are particularly

considered more virtuous deeds. 4. Traditional belief is that Bhagavan Vishnu did tapasya, Brahma himself did yajna and tapasya, and Sri Ramachandra did Shraddha and tirtha, here. 5. Besides, at neighbouring places of this Kunda, the sacred Bhagavata was related by Shukadeva to Parikshit, by Dattatreya to Vidura, and by Sapta Rishi to Narada. Sapta Rishis did also practise austerities (tapasya) here. Near the Kunda, there are a few deities like Durga, Manasa, Chandi, Ganga-Mata, Pataleswar Shiva etc.

During the Kumbha, elaborate preparations for bath are taken. Readings from the Vedas, Sama-songs, recitation of hymns of gods and goddesses, songs and music create a vibrant spiritual atmosphere in the entire region of Hardwar, Kankhal and its surrounding areas.

During the Kumbha of 1986 also the same spiritual atmosphere was created. Devotional songs also had been broadcasted from a long distance through loudspeakers fitted on the lamp-posts on both sides of the Ganga.

The Mela Superintendent (adhikari) fixes the times for bath separately for pilgrims, monks, and ascetics. The arrangement helps the millions to see the bathing procession of sadhu-saints, and to take bath in the same water after the bath of all-renouncing monks. While going for and coming back after the bath, the devotees sing in congregation different bhajans, dancing with joy and devotion, and also songs, such as 'Govinda Jaya, Jaya ; Gopala Jaya Jaya etc.' This time Bathing went on during the whole day and night.

Lakhs of sadhus and saints from all over the country rushed this time for bath to the Brahmakunda at Hardwar. Some of them came on foot visiting holy places on the way, some came by bus, or railway, and some came in procession with decorated elephants, horses, camels, and chariots.

Some took a few months of walking before arrival. Tradition has it that Kumbha bath is not effectual unless it starts with the bath of monks.

Residence arrangements

There are many Akhadas (monastery), Ashramas, Mission, and sacred places (Pitha Sthanas) here. Among the monasteries the chief ones are Niranjani, Nirvani, Juna, Ananda, Avahan, Pancha-Agni, Atal, Udasi, Vairagi, Nirmal, and the Ramakrishna Mission. They arrange for the bath-procession and also arrange special tents, camps, etc. for the stay of their own sadhu-saints. Akhadas or Ashramas, having no branch here, come earlier in order to make tents, camps etc. for their own accommodation. Vairagi Akhadas make camps at their allotted places separately. In every camp there are: one office, movable images of deities, small tents, stage for lectures, decorated gate with the pictures of gods and goddesses or saints or auspicious symbols, and also their own religious symbols. It would seem that a new township of camps has been created in the surrounding areas of Hardwar and Kankhal.

Camp Entrance

There is a ceremonial procedure for camp entrance. This entrance takes place with a colourful procession on a particular day accepted by both Mela Adhikari and Akhada Parishad. On that day at first two large flag-posts (Dharma-dhwaja) are inaugurated in the camp in the presence of invited sadhus and ascetics. Then a colourful procession is taken out from a particular place. After going round, it enters into the camp. In this procession there are decorated thrones with umbrellas carried on the back of decorated elephants,

horses and camels. Young boys and girls dressed as Hara Parvati, Lakshmi Narayana, Rama Sita, Radha Krishna, Ganga on crocodile, Mahavira, ride these thrones. Mahamandaleswaras and Mahants are placed on many of these thrones. Moreover, monks of every monastery (Akhada) or Ashrama join in this royal procession, accompanied with banners and flags. Some of them chant stotras, sing, and dance along with music. Being decorated with different red-ochre coloured dresses, long silver rods and big fans on their shoulders, they move on. It is indeed a multifarious congregation. This royal procession comes in front of every Akhada or camp. There one sadhu holds some coins over the head of the guest sadhu, in his honour. The leader of the band-party collects these coins, dancing all the while along with devotional songs. Besides, certain Akhadas or Ashramas convey their greetings by garlanding with marigold flowers. They also offer sugar-candy sharbat and aniseed to sadhus for their refreshment, and one sadhu garlands another out of mutual respect.

Spiritual Great Yajna

Sadhus enter most of the camps before the day fixed for Shiva-worship. On this day they take a ceremonial bath. During the intervening periods, homa-sacrifices are performed in pomp and grandeur in all these Akhadas, Ashramas and camps. Day and night, through loud-speakers the Veda-recital, Sama-songs, devotional songs, and stotra chantings are blurted out. Discourses on the Upanishads, complete reading of the Gita, Ram-Charit Manasa and the Bhagavatam with commentary, Vishnu sahasranama, Shivamahimnastotra, Guru stotra, and Ganga stotra go on in different places. Rasalila or Ramlila, singing the praise of a deity, Arati-Bhajan, etc. also

continue in many places. Simultaneously, Hathayoga practices such as control of breath, Harijan Puja, and various difficult ascetic practices like placing on one's head coconut fire, practising Pancha tapa, ascetics standing on one leg, and lifting up one hand, etc. are also seen.

On invitation learned Mahamandaleswaras, Mahants, Acharyas or learned saints give lectures or talks reciprocally in Akhadas, Ashramas or camps. Images and pictures of Rama, Krishna, Mahavira, Vishnu, Shiva, preceptors, and tutelary deities are taken round. Besides, daily worship, fire-sacrifices, and the worship of ten Mahavidyas are also performed.

During the Kumbha of 1986, an image of Adi Shankaracharya was inaugurated. Moreover, a few monks were crowned as Mahamandaleswaras ceremonially in the presence of invited sadhu mahatmas. Some Brahmacharins were given Sannyasa by the authorities of the Akhadas. Such religious Convention (Sammelan) was introduced by Adi Shankaracharya among the Sannyasins and devotees.

Bhandara (Sadhu Seva and Feast)

As a token of love and exchange of brotherhood feasts are offered to monks in many places. This is given by the Akhada or camp authority, alone or along with devotees. The feasts or Bhandaras are of two types, one where only a small number is invited (*vyashti*), and the other where a large number is invited (*samashti*). In some places a few thousand sadhus are invited. A fixed time is given for Bhandara. Before that time sacramental cooked food (*bhoga*) is kept ready. All Mahamandaleswaras with their sevaks gradually arrive at the site and sit in a place from where lectures are delivered by a few Mahamandaleswaras and Acharya Mahatmas. The Mahant, the Kothari

(Manager), the Asanadhari (leader), and other Sadhus coming earlier take their seats and listen to the lectures. The authorities also direct them for taking their respective seats. When lectures are over, the Mahamandaleswaras are worshipped with camphor, chanting of stotras, putting chandan on foreheads, garlanding with marigold flowers, and other offerings. Then bugles are played, and 'Om namah parvati pataye Hara Hara Mahadeva' is chanted by all the sadhu-mahatmas. At the same time, fifteenth chapter of Gita is chanted. Then all monks are worshipped with flower, chandan, and offerings (some-time including cloth or blanket) by the host sadhus. Two of them do puja, and two disburse offerings. Other two move with long silver rods on shoulder, and red turban on their heads. These last two sadhus are called kotwals or security officials. When the serving of food is completed, the authority gives signal for playing the bugle. On hearing it the invited sadhu-mahatmas chant again, 'Om namah Parvatipataye Hara Hara Mahadeva!', and start to take the prasad. Prasad is the same for all. It is generally made of wheat products, different types of sweets, rice with ghee, curd, porridge, vegetables etc. During the meal the monks chant shlokas from scriptures. At times devotees also sing devotional songs and chant religious verses. The authorities take care to see that food is properly served everywhere. Meal completed, the bugle is played once again and the guests also get up chanting 'Om namah Parvatipataye Hara Hara Mahadeva'.

During this Kumbha, the Kankhal branch of the Ramakrishna Math and the Mission also came forward with an elaborate programme. Accordingly a camp for eleven days accommodating over 2,000 devotees and sadhus was opened, and along with it there was a regular spiritual pro-

gramme also for that period. Discourses were given by Mahamandaleswaras, Acharyas, Mahants and learned monks on the Advaita-Vedanta, the Upanishads, the Gita, the Ramacharit-Manasa, the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. Besides, there was a daily arrangement for treatment of sick sadhu-sants and devotees in the Mission Hospital, and also through a Mobile Dispensary van in the Mela area during the celebration days.

Auspicious bath

The various monasteries and scholars after examining the scriptures and old traditions, ascertained the lunar days (tithis) for eight baths in holy Brahmakunda at Hardwar. Among these baths, the last one was most important. The first bath or the first shahi (royal procession) bath fell on Mahashivaratri, 9th March 1986 for the Dashanami (Ten named) sannyasins. The second Shahi bath was on Chaitra-Krishna-Amavasya on 9th April, 1986 for Sadhus of all schools. The third Shahi bath was on Chaitra Shukla Panchami—Mesha Sankranti—14 April 1986 (at Rohini star in Nectar Union—*amrita loga*), for all monks.

According to the traditional rule about the succession of the order of akhadas or monastic groups for baths at Hardwar Kumbha, the first to go are the Naga Sannyasins (or the naked monks of the north). Following these Naga Sannyasins, other Sadhus come for bath riding on decorated horses, camels and different types of chariots with thrones, umbrellas and flags. Some come on palanquins, chairs etc. drawn by cars and trollies. In this bath-procession the predominance of chariots is more, and the entire congregation looks like the field of chariots in Kurukshetra war. With each of the decorated chariots there are two decorated monks fanning

the sitting head monk, and two kotwals with long silver rods, turbans and red scarfs.

In all processions most of the Mahamandaleswaras and Mahants wear garland of marigold flowers, use ashes, and red sandal paste. Other monks are also decorated in various ways, including garland of marigold flowers. Many carry their own flags and banners. Some of them wear turbans and scarfs, and carry long silver rods or big fans on shoulders. Some carry auspicious pots with holy water on their heads. Some move on reciting the Vedas and Sama-songs. Some go on dancing, and singing bhajans with music. Besides, there are band-parties with loud-speakers.

Millions of virtuous people feel happy to have the holy darshana of this biggest congregation of monks in India. Some of the devotees serve them with cold drinking water, sharbat etc. Some devotees shower flowers, and again some of them become blessed touching the ground with forehead, and taking the dust of the road touched with the holy feet of sadhus. Some of them go to have darshana of their holy baths, and feel blessed after taking bath in that holy water. The monks also convey their blessings to the vast assembled crowd by raising their hands and throwing flowers on the crowd of devotees. Again and again the joyous shout, 'Bharat ka Santsamaj ki jai', rend the skies, bringing a rare thrill in the minds of millions assembled for the holy occasion.

THE UNNUMBERED MILLIONS IN MALNUTRITION

DR. KAMALA S. JAYA RAO

Culturally and historically an ancient country, India is, population-wise, a very young country. Forty percent of the six hundred and odd million Indians are children under 15 years of age, and nearly half of them are under 5 years of age. This is a great human potential which, if developed and exploited properly, can carry on its shoulders the stupendous task of nation-building. Realizing this Swami Vivekananda said: 'My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers.'¹ His heart cried out, seeking a few hundred young men and women with vigour in the blood, strength

in the nerves, iron muscles and nerves of steel². Very few filled that expectation. Even today, eight decades after his sojourn on earth and four decades of political independence, the motherland is unable to fulfil her offering to fulfil the dream of her glorious son.

Nearly forty percent of India's population lives below the poverty line, unable to obtain the basic necessities of life. There is widespread malnutrition in the country. A good yardstick to measure the extent of malnutrition, is the nutritional status of children under five years of age. More than eighty percent of the under-five children suffer from different degrees of malnutrition.

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol. 5, p. 223. (Hereafter referred to as *Complete Works*).

2. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 3, p. 278.

Until about two decades ago, nutritionists thought that Indian diets were low in protein. It is now established beyond doubt that it is not so. A simple rice and dal (pulses) or roti and dal diet, can provide enough protein if taken in necessary amounts. What the people, be it children or adults, are lacking in, is food energy. To put it simply, they need more food. It is bread that suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats³. There is, therefore, no need to manufacture exotic protein foods, or to cultivate crops like soya bean which are alien to our soil. Give the children the simple food which they are used to—rice, wheat or any other cereal grain, with some dal, and if possible some milk, but in amounts needed to promote good growth and sustain good health, and a sizeable portion of the malnutrition problem will be solved. In the absence of adequate food energy, whatever protein is present in the diet will also be burnt away by the body, like the proverbial tribal woman who uses sandalwood as fuel for cooking⁴. Similarly, in the absence of adequate food, vitamins and 'tonics' will also be wasted. Use of proteins and vitamins in the absence of adequate food, will only serve to fill the pockets of multinational drug companies, and the coffers of the developed nations.

The country boasts, and rightly too, of its successful green revolution. We feel happy about our food reserves. Yet we have this paradox of 'the unnumbered millions whom we have allowed to starve in sight of plenty'⁵. The poor have no money to purchase food. In spite of the white revolution, or Operation Food, as

it is now called, a child in rural India hardly gets opportunity to taste milk, once it is off its mother's breast. Why was this situation of starvation amidst plenty allowed to develop? It is mostly due to misdirected economic policies, half hearted implementation of welfare and development programmes, and lack of political foresight and will. Swami Vivekananda asked his disciple, Sharat Chandra Chakravarti, 'A nation that cannot provide for its simple food and clothing, which always depends on others for its subsistence—what is there for it to vaunt about?'⁶. The principle of self-reliance and encouraging cottage industries is being given the go by. We neglect the admonition: 'Remember that the nation lives in the cottage'⁷. There is an undue fascination for importing sophisticated technology. Swamiji knew we are a nation of born slaves and chided, 'People of foreign countries are turning out such golden results and you, like asses of burden, are only carrying their load. The result of such policies will be a further reduction in the purchasing power of the poor, and little likelihood of ameliorating malnutrition.

Population growth and malnutrition:

Many believe or are made to believe that people are malnourished because they have many children and large families to support. This is at the most, a partial truth. It is wishful thinking that only reduction in population will automatically solve our nutrition problems. A reduction in population growth is no doubt necessary, for man does not live by bread alone. There will be demand for more water, more living space and more air—commodities which cannot be expanded. However, it is

3. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 1, p. 20.

4. मलये भिल्लपुरन्धी चन्दनतरुकाष्ठं इन्धनं
कुरुते ।

5. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 3, p. 431.

6. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 7, p. 145.

7. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 5, p. 29.

equally naïve to believe that the maladies afflicting the nation can be solved merely by limiting the size of the families. The remarks that procreation is their only recreation or that they do not accept advice due to ignorance and superstitions, is very uncharitable towards our rural brothers and sisters. We need to understand the socio-economic and health factors operating in the rural areas.

Consequences of malnutrition:

Malnutrition is one of the biggest child killers. India has high infant mortality and a very high death rate for under-five children. About 40 percent of the total deaths in India are in the under-five age group, compared to a figure of 4 percent in the developed nations. The published rates are averages for the whole country, and therefore underestimate the rates for rural areas. With nearly 80 percent of the population living in the villages, the actual number of children dying before they celebrate their sixth birthday, would be staggering. This is a colossal waste of precious human resources.

Through experience, people have come to realize not to put much trust in a child's life till it is 8 or 10 years old. Therefore, a woman conceives repeatedly to ensure the survival of at least three children. For socio-cultural reasons the family wants at least one male child. The mother, undernourished and weak even to begin with, suffers further deterioration in health. Added to this is the poor availability and in many places non-availability, of good health services. The mother therefore cannot successfully carry through all her pregnancies. As mentioned earlier, those babies that are born may die in the first year of life, or during their toddler stage. It is estimated that an average Indian woman goes through about eight pregnancies, to be left ultimately with

3 or 4 living children. Moreover, in a family which lives on minimum subsistence, even a 10-12 year old child can add to the family income by going out to work. A slightly younger child will act as a surrogate-mother to his or her younger siblings, relieving the mother to go out to work.

Malnourished children are grossly underweight and short statured because one of the most important pre-requisites for growth, namely, food is lacking. The children are also listless, apathetic, show no interest in their surroundings and lack power of concentration. The last may be, inter alia, an important reason for the high school drop-out rates, in the villages. Swamiji therefore put food before education, 'Man is first to be saved, he must be given food, education and spirituality'⁸.

The functioning of almost all physiological systems in the body is adversely affected. The immune system, the defence against infectious diseases, also suffers. As a consequence, resistance to infectious diseases is poor in a malnourished child. The child suffers repeatedly from infections. Each attack of illness leads to further deterioration of the nutritional state. A disease which may pass off as a minor episode in a healthy, normal child, becomes a serious condition in a malnourished child. Superimposition of an infection on an already weak body sounds the death knell, and this is how a large number of young children die.

The two most common diseases are diarrhoea and infections of the respiratory tract. Organisms causing diarrhoea are waterborne and most villages in India do not have safe and potable water. Swamiji's statement that to the poor 'we have been giving ditch water to drink'⁹ is literally true.

8. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 6, p. 451.

9. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 3, p. 431.

The only period when an Indian child leads a healthy and happy life, is during the first four to six months after its birth. A lean, listless mother carrying a chubby cheeked, bright eyed baby with a cherubic smile, is not an uncommon sight. This is made possible by the sacrifice the mother's body makes, by providing adequate amounts of milk to the baby. Mother's milk also has the property to resist infections. 'Of all feminine types in India, the mother is pre-eminent. The mother stands by her child through everything'¹⁰. But the mother's health suffers badly. The repeated burden of pregnancy, and nursing the child, made necessary by the high child mortality rate, in an undernourished woman, is one of the main reasons why, unlike in developed countries where women outnumber men, the reverse holds good in India.

For the reasons mentioned above, under-five children, pregnant women and nursing mothers are referred to in nutritional parlance as the vulnerable groups. This does not, however, mean that the older children and adult men are healthy and well-nourished. The undernourished child grows up into a short, underweight, young adult with weak muscles and poor vigour. 'Freedom is the only condition of growth, take that off, the result is degeneration'¹¹, said Swami Vivekananda. A society which fails to provide the pre-requisites for free growth and development of its children, can only be saddled with such men and women. The reason for the apparent laziness of Indian villagers—an oft-heard and an undeserving remark—can be understood only against this background.

This was the dismal state of India which Swami Vivekananda saw during his

parivrajaka days. Nine decades later, the portrait is not very much different. The progress that independent India shows off, is confined to few select parts of urban India. But Swamiji warned, 'A few thousand graduates do not make a nation, a few rich men do not make a nation'¹².

This situation can be improved only when we realize that whatever be the material progress we make, the human resources should be strengthened first. 'We want men, not money. It is man that makes everything, what can money do?',¹³ wrote Swami Vivekananda to Swami Akhandananda. Computers and colour televisions cannot keep a dying nation alive. India has to recognize its true mission, and rededicate herself to it, 'each nation has a mission of its own and so long as that nation keeps to that ideal, that nation nothing can kill, but if that nation gives up its mission in life and goes after something else, its life becomes short, and it vanishes'¹⁴. In his first public lecture in the East, Swami Vivekananda categorically stated: 'Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race, it never was, and mark my words, it never will be'¹⁵. What then is India's mission? 'The national ideals of India are RENUNCIATION and SERVICE. Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself'¹⁶. Sacrifices are necessary to uphold our mission, 'You nourish your body by eating. What good is there in doing that if you do not hold it as a sacrifice to the well-being of others?'¹⁷ In a country where

10. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 8, p. 252.

11. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol 5, p. 23.

12. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 8, p. 330.

13. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 6, p. 406.

14. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 2, p. 371.

15. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 3, p. 108.

16. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 5, p. 228.

17. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 3, p. 446.

three-fourths of the population has neither money nor muscle to undertake this, the task has to be undertaken only by the privileged minority. 'Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and

ignorance', said Swamiji¹⁸. Such were the leaders who won for India its political freedom, and such need to be those who will win for the country its economic freedom. It is as much a necessity for the rich, as it is for the poor. For, no minority however rich and powerful, can hope to live forever at the expense of the impoverished masses—'No man is an island in itself, but a part of the main'.

18. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 5, p. 127.

A SACRED PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE

SWAMI DHIRESHANANDA

Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna Deva said, 'Know for certain that God is manifest in the place where many devotees perform austerities, japa, meditation and earnest prayers for years, with the noble intention to have the vision of the Lord. Divine thoughts get crystallized there, as it were, out of their devotion. Therefore it is quite natural that in these places the devotees easily become absorbed in meditation on God and enjoy His vision.'

Countless devotees, saints and realized souls, from time immemorial, have visited these holy places intending to see God. They renounced all their worldly desires, and came to these holy places to pray with all earnestness to the Lord. As a result, God, though He exists equally at all places, is particularly manifest at these holy places of pilgrimage. (Dakshineswar Kali temple, for instance, is such a place, although there are numerous Kali temples in the country.)

Temples remind us of God and divine inspiration grows within. For those who have devotion already, visits to holy places increase that devotion in them. But those

who are unfortunately devoid of devotion, how much can they attain there? The place where the devotees discourse on Him is charged with divinity. The Lord's presence can be palpably felt there, and all the places of pilgrimage congregate, as it were, in such places.

Visiting holy places and service to the Lord constitute an important aspect of spiritual practice. This is a means to calm down the turbulent mind. In his life of Sri Chaitanya Deva, Murari Gupta writes, 'So long as the turbulent mind does not become tranquil and pure, the spiritual aspirant should go on visiting holy places. Just as a traveller takes shelter in a favourable place, similarly a spiritual aspirant after his mind becomes calm, being freed from all the impurities, will go to Puri Dham or to any such holy place, and spend his days in meditation and reflections on God.'

In the beginning the aspirant goes to various places of pilgrimages, and later settles down at a place, and becomes engrossed in meditation. Bhagawan Sri

Ramakrishna Deva spoke about *bahudak* and *kutichak* monks. Some monks visit many places and drink water there. The Master referred to them as *bahudak*. And some after visiting many holy places, attain peace of mind, and build up a cottage and meditate there. They are referred to as a *kutichak*. The results of a pilgrimage can be directly felt. It is seen that many people struck by miseries, have attained peace after visiting holy places. In a place of pilgrimage seekers of truth assemble around the saints and sages in order to satisfy their queries, and there they worship the various gods and goddesses with devotion. Such a place must also be beautified with lakes and rivers. Monks assemble at such holy places; one can enjoy their holy company.

By their very nature monks do good to others. Even the blind walk along the right track on hearing from others. Seekers of Truth also find the clue to the right path on listening to the advices of the realized souls. A Saint shows the right path to God realization. The scriptures said, *uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata* that is, one must go and prostrate before the realized souls and with their guidance realize the Supreme Truth. The scriptures did not ask us only to 'know', but emphasized that we must 'realize', that is, listen attentively to the teacher, and stand on firm convictions about the Supreme Truth, beyond any doubt, with the help of systematic reasoning. Realization of Self is the only goal in a man's life. Because only Self-knowledge can totally uproot all worldly attachments.

A question may arise as to how to distinguish between the wise and the unwise. It is said that a son of unknown parentage does not bear any mark on his forehead, nor does the palm of a man of noble birth show a lotus mark, but the

words flowing out of their mouths disclose their family background. It is the same in case of the wise and the unwise. Words of a wise man give peace to the mind, his company gives joy, and God reflects in his heart without any special efforts. Even the simple desires of a wise man are free from all attachments. It is well known that the company of fools produces just the opposite results. A Hindi proverb goes, 'when a wise man seeking liberation from bondage meets others of his nature, he spends his time on discussions of spiritual matters only. But fools always quarrel among themselves and break up in broils after inflicting kicks and blows to one another.'

It is necessary to change our attitude to life. There is no need to wait for the dissolution of this world full of miseries. The good, bad, the ugly, and the outward love-hate relations will eternally continue in the same fashion in this world. But an aspirant for liberation should ignore them, and pay all attention to his inner self. If one wishes to travel to a remote place, he cannot physically move by a railway coach from one place to the other, but he has to reach his destination. Similarly, Vedanta teaches us to look inward, and turn away from the outward life. You may live in the family but don't belong to the family; never forget your real Self. Never wander around here and there, after knowing that the pleasures and miseries in this world are illusory. They do not exist in the real Self. We simply attribute them to ourselves by illusion. This is the teaching of Vedanta.

Human beings have three duties. Only three things are to be thought about in this fleeting phenomenal world—holy company, devotion to God and taking dip in the Ganga and other holy rivers. This is the first step to God-realization. And

these are the primary duties to be performed in a holy place.

There are two types of pilgrimages: the stationary and the moving. The saints and the realized souls represent moving pilgrim centres because they always hold in their hearts Lord Vishnu. Their presence invariably adds holiness even to the holy places. Company of such noble souls is greatly beneficial to the seekers of liberation from bondage. The stationary pilgrim centres such as Varanasi, Vrindaban etc emanate a spiritual wave at certain times of the day. This is felt by the devotees at a particular time of the day and night in a particular place, and this becomes very helpful to their meditation. Swami Brahmananda (Raja Maharaj) used to say, 'At Varanasi, the spiritual wave becomes more powerful from 3'0 clock in the morning. The same spiritual vibration blows around the same time at Belur Math and at Bhubaneswar Math. At Puri it blows in the evening. These hours are very helpful for meditation and japa. Even the departed souls live in subtle bodies at these holy places. This is known as faithfulness to the holy abode of God. During these auspicious hours even these departed souls also become helpful to the devotees in their meditation. Revered Raja Maharaj himself had this experience at the time of his performing austerities at Vrindaban, and recorded it. Similar visions and experiences he had at Varanasi.

What are the duties to be performed at a holy place? In this connection Sri Ramakrishna Deva said, 'Prostrations with devotion, japa, that is, repeating God's name, taking the water in which the feet of the venerable deity have been washed, chanting aloud various stotras, hymns, offering alms to the poor and the needy—these should be performed. While on a pilgrimage, a bound soul spends all his time in carrying and looking after the

small bundles of his wife. He remains busy in rolling his son on the temple courtyard and making him drink the water in which the feet of the venerable deity have been washed. As a result he does not find any time to sit quietly and meditate on God.' Sri M, the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* used to perform a lot of japa and meditation. He used to show as much devotion to the *prasada* that is, remnant of the offerings to God, as to the Lord Himself. Being fully immersed in devotion, he would take a tiny part of the *prasada* after touching it to his forehead. He would go to the Howrah railway station and beg from the travellers returning from Puri, the *atke prasada* (the dried rice offered to the Lord Jagannath). He would take only a very little part of it with respect and devotion, lest he should be greedy for *prasada*. He used to say, 'a divine communion takes place between the devotee and the particular deity on seeing, touching and taking His *prasada*.' Therefore, one should take a very small quantity of *prasada* with utmost devotion and respect. In course of a conversation Holy Mother once said at Jayarambati, 'Oh yes, I know the measure of devotion of the devotees. They look upon the Master only in the photoframe, eat the delicious food offerings after nominally showing these to Him. Had the Master taken the offerings himself, I know who would offer how much! They fixed up compulsory contributions to meet the expenses during the Master's illness at Co-sipore. One devotee fled away for fear of regular contribution.'

The Master used to say, water from the Ganga, dust from the holy land of Vrindaban, and Mahaprasada (*atke*) of the Lord Sri Jagannath Deva represent Brahman Itself. One can attain devotion in life on taking them regularly. What wonderful devotion the Master and his disciples had

towards the Ganga. Raja Maharaj would mention of five attributes of the Ganga water, before drinking it. It destroys all sins, it generates devotion to the *Ista*, it satisfies all desires, it bestows freedom, and it purifies the fallen and the down-trodden. At various times, during an eclipse, he would ask someone to dip his rosary in the Ganga.

The Master used to say, 'One should go on reminiscing after returning from a pilgrimage. As the cows fill up their stomachs slowly by eating straw, grass etc. and then go on chewing the cud, similarly a pilgrim should contemplate, meditate, and reflect on each spot in a holy place. That would render more lasting results. Whenever Sri M. would visit any place, he would observe most minutely each and every temple and all articles connected with it. The plants and creepers, even the dust from a holy place would appear to be illumined to him. With full mental absorption he would prostrate before the high and the low, even before the birds and the beasts, and embrace the plants and the creepers of a pilgrimage with love and affection. This is the right pilgrimage.

Those who visit holy places without the aforesaid attitude, that is, those who fail to observe the manifestation of God in everything in and around holy places, simply waste their time and energy. A pilgrimage does not imprint any long-lasting influence on them. Like the present day travellers they simply end up in moving around with camera, and being pushed and pulled by the crowd. They can only tell stories. There is a fine description about this kind of pilgrims in the *Shankara Digvijaya*:

'Here is a holy place, there is another ; yet quite far away there is located another place, I have visited all of them, but you have not. The pilgrimage that you have undertaken would give you little results,

but the holy places I have visited would give me infinite results'—those who rush from one holy place to another with such an attitude, are unwise and suffer from illusion. They are not true pilgrims, as they do not possess the right attitude of a pilgrim. They can never enjoy the essence of a holy pilgrimage. A dip in an assemblage of all-renouncing saints and holy place destroys sins. But it is the monks in a holy place, that really makes the place holy. The devotees there learn dispassion and worship God. That makes a pilgrimage successful. Those who know this, know the truth of pilgrimage.

Extraordinary eagerness to visit many holy places is also harmful. That is a type of eccentricity. Sri Ramakrishna Deva said: 'If you can attain devotion right here, where is the need to go on a pilgrimage? I went to Varanasi and noticed the same trees, the same tamarind leaves. The mango trees, the tamarind trees, the bamboo bushes are the same there as they are here.'

Service to Guru and worshipping God comprise the main aspects of meditation. Acharya Shankara warned his disciple Padmapada when the latter wanted to go on pilgrimage: (*Shankara Digvijaya* (14.2). 'Living in the company of the Guru is, in truth, living in a holy place, and water in which the feet of the Guru have been washed represents the right holy place. To realize the inner Self with the help of the instructions received from the Guru and the vision of the same Self in everything and everywhere is the broad road to spiritual life. It is the duty of a disciple to serve his Guru and to live in his holy company and not to go away from him. Reflection on the Self is disturbed by the weariness and drowsiness due to much travelling. A traveller on a pilgrimage who remains continually busy and worried in search of food and drinking water, a right

trekking route, a comfortable resting place, becomes disturbed and does not find peace in his mind. Moreover, he feels absolutely helpless if he is attacked with fever and diarrhoea. The pilgrim then can neither move forward nor get any opportunities to stay back there. Even his fellow-pilgrims leave him behind. Early morning bath, worship, cleanliness etc. which are essential for meditation cannot be performed, neither can he get any help from his friends. The hungry traveller does not even get the bare minimum food.'

In this manner Acharya Shankara described specifically about the endless difficulties of pilgrimage and also clearly emphasized what is really meant by staying at a holy place. It is said that Padmapada ignored his Guru's warnings and went on pilgrimage. But he returned to his Guru after a long time, after experiencing a lot of sufferings, both physical and mental. On his return he expressed his regret, and asked for forgiveness from his Guru for his own ignorance.

So, after visiting some holy places, meditating on them, and practising spiritual disciplines with a steadfast mind, are the means to get the right sort of result of a pilgrimage.

Swami Madhavananda, an erudite scholar and an all-renouncing ascetic who recently entered into Mahasamadhi, once told a nice story at Hardwar:

'I was then spending my days in meditation, building a small cottage in a

lonely place in Mathura, and living on begging for my food. One day there was a heavy crowd at Vishram Ghat on the bank of the river Yamuna, on account of a special festival. An evening vesper (*aratrika*) service to Sri Sri Yamuna Devi, during this special festival, was going on there. It was very much attractive. Hundreds of men and women assembled at the narrow ghat. Everybody wanted to go near the river, and watch the *aratrika*. The usual pushing and pulling in the crowd was going on. I also wanted to see the *aratrika* and got trapped in the jostling crowd. An old villager saw my predicament. He suddenly came near me, and pulled me out of the crowd, saying, 'Please come this way, holy Sir'. He touched my feet and said: 'Maharaj, we are householders, we cannot meditate or worship. We have to face conflicts all the time in our homes. We have come here also to be pushed around. Holy Sir, you have renounced your home and family, and have become a monk. Why have you come here to be pushed by others? Please return to your cottage and engross yourself in meditation.' Madhavanandaji added further, 'Listening to the old man, I realized the truth of his remarks, and at once returned to my cottage and began meditation. At times how effective advices like this flow from the lips of ordinary men'. **Do not** these words uttered by an illiterate inmate of Vrindaban, and so beautifully narrated by Madhavanandaji, echo the sayings of the Master, Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva?

“SATYAKAMA-SATYA-SAMPADAYA”

‘Truth—The Aspiration and the Tradition’

(A Play in four scenes depicting some vital aspects of the Eternal Religion and Educational Culture of India.)

SWAMI SASTRANANDA

Author's Note

[The Play ‘Satyakama-Satya-sampradaya’ or ‘Truth—the Aspiration and the Tradition,’ is an attempt to present in an attractive form some of the abstruse but glorious and vital truths gifted to humanity by the ‘Upanishads’, the core-books of Vedantic philosophy—something which Swami Vivekananda would like to be done. The basic material of the play is from the celebrated chapters of a most ancient Upanishad, ‘The Chandogya’; only the interweaving interpretation and dramatization are the work of the author. Even that has been done in the framework of our ancient religious, and educational culture, and their life-giving ideals, which have been revealed to us by great luminaries, from Vedic Rishis to their modern counterparts, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The ideas and ideals thus sought to be conveyed to, through this play are: truth and chastity, reverence for the teacher, mother and mother Nature, real education which is imparted only when the worthy teacher and the worthy disciple come together, faith in Truth, in the Guru and in oneself—and in and through all this the glory of the human soul, the Atman, whose real nature is Divine, essentially the same Divine which is the ground and goal of all creation.

The basic purpose of the play is to bring the deep truths of the Upanishads and their remarkable significance to a wider circle of people who are either not acquainted with them, or who have not got a chance to study them, and yet are prone to noble ideas and ideals, receptive to and enthusiastic about them, though apparently they may be untutored or ‘lay people’. However, it is not a ‘popular’ play, with a ‘mass-appeal’. In fact, it is a serious play, at times even ‘didactic’, with not much scope for action which conduces to ‘popularity’. Again, it is a play primarily meant to be ‘read’ and enacted in the mind of the reader. But it can also be successfully presented on stage, by intelligent and motivated groups, who are not too eager to entertain the audience, but keen to communicate the precious ideas and the theme.

For staging the play, the minimal equipment needed is very simple: Three curtains—(1) the front; (2) the middle and (3) the rear one. Curtains (2) and (3) may be of olive green and dark bottle shades. On the rear curtain, motif pieces—appropriate cut-outs, paintings or just outline sketches (bold, in golden colour) may be provided: an *Om* with radiating rays at the top centre, a lively reddish orange hued lively altar fire at bottom centre, one half of a large tree with spreading leafy branches extending to the centre of the stage at the extreme right and the front half, a white bull with large, intent, shining eyes at the extreme left. It would be preferable if the ‘bull’ piece can come in only at the appropriate time and context and then be withdrawn. Between curtains (2) and (3) an elevated platform (Stage II), may be provided some 35-40 cm. higher than Stage I. Organizers can also provide more elaborate and attractive settings, and stage-effects.

Those who are keen on staging the play may contact the author for more consultations. A Kannada version of the play also will be available for those who prefer that language.

A few words particularly to the reader of this play: The Vedic culture and wisdom, as coming down to us through the Vedas and Upanishads, is something which have been understood or appreciated by us, at best only very partially. Its real depth and dimension can be realized only by kindred spirits. It is salutary to remember that there are many dimensions of truth and life which are still unintelligible to us, which we should neither dismiss as childish fables, or misinterpret with our sullied minds and poor understanding. It is necessary to remember that in the world of Nature they lived, and with the qualities of intense and contemplative minds, they lived a life of reverent co-existence and communion with Nature—earth and sky, sun and moon, stars and fire, mountains and waters, plants and trees, birds and animals. Behind and beyond the apparent and visible world phenomena and its beings, they also seem to have sensed, felt, seen and communed with some corresponding and eventually transcending levels of Consciousness, which charged their life and words with meaning, purpose, strength, light and joy. Thus, in the play, when we see a Satyakama or Upakosala conversing with fire, bull or bird, it is not to be taken as a childish prattle or some outpourings of naive or unsettled minds which we may conveniently ignore. It is really a holy communion with the living, luminous, conscious, adorable Entity behind nature, the Divine, who deserves and demands our most reverent and receptive attention. Those who approach Vedic and Upanishadic lore with such an attitude will find it more than amply rewarding.]

THE CAST:

<i>Haridrumata Gautama</i> (Acharya)	: A celebrated Teacher and sage of Vedic times	Age: About 70 years
<i>Satyakama Jabala</i> (Student)	: Haridrumata's disciple	As Boy: 12 years As Youth: 17 years
<i>Bhargava</i>	: Satyakama's boyhood companion	Age: About 12 years
<i>Satyakama Jabala</i> (Acharya)	: Another celebrated Teacher and sage of Vedic times	Age: 40-45 years
<i>Upakosala Kamalayana</i>	: Satyakama's disciple	Age: About 20 years
<i>Samasrava</i>	: Assistant Teacher in the school (Gurukula) of Satyakama	Age: About 30 years

SCENE I

[Background Chant]:

*Om Purnamadah purnamidam purnat purnamudacyate purnasya
purnamadaya purnamevavasisyate Om Purnam... Purnam...
Purnam*

[Curtain I (front) parts revealing the outer precincts of Acharya Satyakama's Gurukula (residential Vedic school), a silent wooded area. Enter Upakosala with a cast-down countenance.]

Upakosala: (Soliloquy—in a raised voice) Purna, Purna—Full! Full! Yes, All

is 'full' and 'complete' except this one unfortunate Upakosala—except his sorrow-and-distress-laden heart... All is full! (lets out a deep, long sigh... Ha..a..a Ha..a..a!) Even though he has taken complete shelter at the feet of the celebrated Acharya Satyakama, reputed to be a perfected sage

and great teacher, yet incomplete, unfilled, remains this Upakosala.... Oh, hapless Upakosala!...

[Unknown to Upakosala, behind him has entered Samasrava, the assistant teacher at the Gurukula. He stands at a little distance away listening to his sighing words and then approaching him, speaks].

Samasrava: Upakosala! What is this? Why such words? Why, and how, are you unfortunate?

Upakosala: Of course unfortunate! What else? How many years have rolled by since I have entered this Gurukula! All the items of duties and service prescribed for the life of a brahmacharin have been faithfully discharged. All the required studies—even as the Acharya himself has directed have been duly completed. Service to the Guru, service to the Guru's wife, and service to the sacred fires—all have been carried out flawlessly. Yet... the grace of the Guru has not descended on this Upakosala. What else am I if not unfortunate?

Samasrava: Why do you speak in this strain, Upakosala? How agitated you are! I know myself how beloved a student you are of the Acharya—I know!

Upakosala: But it is not at all clear to me how I am such a beloved disciple! All the students who came and joined with me have completed their studies, been blessed with the 'Upadesha'—the final teaching, have received graduation and left for their own homes. Why only those who came with me? Even many more, who joined later on, also have graduated and gone back—fortunate souls! But... this Upakosala has stayed on here even as a pillar of stone, permanent and immovable! How many students—seniors, contemporaries and even juniors—have come and gone during

this long stay of mine here. It is difficult even to keep track of all their names!

What kind of special distinction has been bestowed on Upakosala! All of them came, they joined, they learnt, they completed the studies and left. But I, only I, just came here and joined—that is all. I am still learning—even now. (Excited) Is there never an end to this learning!

All the others became proficient, perfected and fulfilled—but I am left here eternally imperfect, unworthy and unfulfilled.... 'Unfortunate' indeed! No other word for it.

What should I say...? Whether it is my head that is just a lump of clay or whether it is the Guru's heart which is stony-hard...?

To the best of my knowledge, I have never shirked in my duties. All the work—whether it concerns the gurukula maintenance, or the service of the Guru, I have carried out with full faith and devotion. And as for the duty specially laid on me by the guru, viz., tending the sacred fires, that I have been discharging with special care. Still... with all this... I didn't know why he is so very indifferent to me!

Even Agni, the god of Fire has not been gracious unto me... How adverse my fate! What shall I say...except...that...unfortunate indeed am I!

Samasrava: It does not befit you to be so much cast down, to be so much sorrowing, Upakosala! We all know how much faithful, devoted and dedicated to service you are. As to that, the revered wife of the Guru herself has interceded on your behalf and spoken to the Acharya... I know that.

Upakosala: (With a mixture of hurt pride, half-doubt and curiosity) Can you kindly make clear to me what exactly you know?

(To be continued)

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA; BY SWAMI PRABHANANDA. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, 16 Ramakrishna Math Road, Mylapore, Madras 600 004, 1987. Pp. iv + 413. Rs. 23.

Here is a significant addition to the Ramakrishna literature. The book under review is the fruit of an accumulated labour of nearly one whole decade. From library to library, from door to door, the author Swami Prabhananda went, inspired by a rare passion, to collect heretofore unknown materials about how the compassion and the incarnation power of Ramakrishna came down on parching hearts, soothed, and transfigured men and women thirsting for God's love.

Magdalene and Paul reveal Christ as a saviour more than Matthew or Mark. The latter are the fortunate ones who came to the Lord early in life, while the former ones came after labyrinthine processes of karma and its consequential sufferings. They received the grace and love of the Lord at a time when they stood in total spiritual blindness. This book contains some touching accounts of these lost sheep for whom the Lord Himself comes again and again to this wilderness of life.

Manmohan Mitra, the rich educated young man was unearthing in the burial at dead night the just buried body of his seven month old daughter in order to get her back to life. The sceptic dramatist Girish was tormenting both in the inner and outer life for a Guru to lift him up from the morass of a debauch life. Shivanath, after being forced to reject his pure-souled first wife and marry again, was burning with a repentance and a wounded conscience. Yogindra Mohini, the rich young wife of a rich zamindar was out on the streets to be free from the unbearable tortures of her drunkard husband. Golap Sundari was burning in bereavement after the death of her only princess like young daughter. M. was out one night to put an end to his life beset with domestic problems too much intricate and unbearable for his sensitive soul.

To these lives who were crawling for survival amidst the dark night of the soul, Ramakrishna came with the tempestuous tide of God's love and God's grace transfiguring each by the irresistible power of a pure, and all-engulfing love.

Forty such lives have been portrayed, especially the moments of their first meetings

with Ramakrishna, the blessed moments of theophany—Revelation of God to man.

Some much less-known or virtually unknown facts unearthed by the author, brightens up the firmament of the Divine play of Sri Ramakrishna. We have read of Adhar Sen or Pratap Chandra Hazra. But how many of us know that Adhar was a brilliant scholar of the Presidency College who was awarded the rare Duff scholarship for English and who was already known as a poet, even before he met the Master? (p. 291). How many of us know that the cantankerous Hazra was blessed with the direct vision of Sri Ramakrishna before his death? His face was suddenly lit up and he said, 'Welcome! Most Welcome! Here comes Thakur! After such a long time Thakur has kindly remembered me!' (p. 122). How many of us know that one Mr Williams, a Christian from north-western India came to meet Sri Ramakrishna? This meeting broadened and deepened his ideas on Christ to such a degree, that in later years he used to salute the Siddheswari Kali of Thantania in Calcutta. Asked about this queer behaviour he used to answer, 'I saw Christ in the image. Obviously I do not hold my old views. Sri Ramakrishna crushed my prejudice and has given me a new vision, as it were.' (p. 169).

Heretofore unknown incidents and conversations have been added to the lives of those devotees of Ramakrishna of whom we have read in bare outlines in the already existing books. A storehouse of rare documents, personal reminiscences, exact dates and years regarding different incidents, this book reveals and illumines new dimensions in the life of the saviour-God Ramakrishna. Already many thinkers and authors are drawing heavily from the plethora of information gathered in these pages. Many more will have to do the same. Readers feel themselves nearer to Ramakrishna the saviour, the compassionate God of all, especially for common man and woman chained in the mire of worldly sufferings. The book obviously need to be translated in different languages so that common man and woman may feel more drawn towards their God—Ramakrishna, and adore Him with all their heart and life.

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras deserves our gratitude for a timely publication of this book when thoughts on Ramakrishna are again on the surface of human consciousness during the master's 150th Birth Anniversary.

S.J.

'He who knows the Supreme attains the highest.'—Tait. Upa II.1.1

Vol. II, No. 2

MADRAS, AUGUST 1897

Published Monthly

LIFE OF SAINT VAYILAR

Religions have their seasons as well as years have, and as in the spring time when the whole vegetable world rejoices, flowers shoot forth, not merely from trees and plants but even from the shrubs on the way side and fences in the garden, so in the great Sivite revival of Southern India in the days of the last of the Pandians, there arose saints in multitudes from every nook and corner of the Tamil land and not merely the high and cultured classes of the community, but even the lowest castes succeeded in bringing forth Bhaktas like Nanda, whose names a grateful posterity remembers with reverence and love. Saint Vayilar, whose life is our present theme, was one of the children of this great revival, and though he was not of the lower castes, he was not of the first three. He belonged to an agricultural class, known as the Velala, and was born in Mylapore, the native place of this journal. His life was eventless, except for the one occupation which, though it might appear dull to some, engaged him both day and night. It was the worship of God.

His way of worshipping was, however, peculiar. He did not find much pleasure in going to the local temple, for, the worship there did not come up to his ideal; therefore he built a very grand temple of his own, the grandest perhaps ever known, with numberless towers, all of gold, high and spacious halls provided with walls of silver and pillars of gold and decorated with the costliest diamonds and rubies. The whole temple was built on a beautiful plan with five square walls, one after another, made of different metals, the outermost being of iron and the innermost of gold. It was lit up not with ordinary lamps but with big diamonds as bright as the sun and of the size of mangoes. Numberless mirrors disposed in an artistic fashion set forth the beauty of the temple in tenfold richness. In the centre of the temple was the *sanctum sanctorum* which rivalled the Kailas (abode of Siva) in grandeur, and contained a beautiful Lingam the image of God, adorned with the costliest jewels and the most fragrant flowers. On each side of the image stood a Kalpa tree whose flowers spread their divine fragrance all through the temple. It was a very grand temple, and my tongue does poor justice to its unrivalled beauty and splendour.

Here it may be asked, 'How did he afford the money for building so magnificent a temple, and where did he build it?' The answer is, he did not build it with money but with his lively imagination which, of course, cost him nothing except the rarest of things, *viz.*, love to God and the splendid temple was all in his mind. He would constantly live with the God of that temple, make Puja to it day and night, and forget even meals and sleep in that occupation. He would seldom talk to anybody, for he was too busy, and he would go on making his Puja without caring whether it rained or thundered, whether it was night or day till he forgot even the temple and God, and himself alone remained. In course of time, the image also disappeared, and his own soul became God. Says his biographer: "His mind was his temple, wisdom the lamp that shone in it, bliss the water which he poured over his God and love the offering he made to that Deity." Tradition adds that the glory of his silent worship gradually became known to the world, and when he died he was canonised on earth, and in Heaven he became one with God.

Such is the glory of mental worship. Ah, how cheap is Heaven and yet how dear?

—A Recluse.