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

THE DIVINE MESSAGE

Question: Is this world unreal ?

Answer: It is unreal so long as you know not God. For you do not yet see Him in everything but fasten yourself to the world with the tie of 'me and mine'. Being thus deluded by ignorance, you become attached to sense-objects and go deeper into the abyss of Maya. Maya makes men so utterly blind that they cannot get out of her meshes even when the way lies open. You yourself can see how unreal this sense-life is. Think a little of the very house that we are in. How many men have been born and have died in it! So things of the world appear before us at one moment, and vanish away at the next. Those whom you know to be your 'own', will cease to exist for you, the moment you close your eyes in death. How strong is the hold of attachment upon a worldly man! There is none in the family who requires his attention, yet for the sake of a grandson he cannot go to Kashi (Varanasi) to practise devotion. 'What will become of my Haru', is a sufficient thought to keep him bound to the world. In a trap for catching fish the way out is always open, yet the fish do not leave it. The caterpillar

shuts itself up in its own saliva and perishes. In the same way, this incarnation is undoubtedly unreal, evanescent.

* * * *

Knowingly or unknowingly, in whatever state we utter God's name, we acquire the merit of such an utterance. As a man who voluntarily goes to a river and bathes therein gets the benefit of the bath, so does he too, who has been pushed into the water by another, or who, when sleeping soundly, has water thrown upon him.

* * * *

Question: What are we to do when we are placed in this world ?

Answer: Give up everything to Him, resign yourself to Him, and your troubles and sorrows will be at an end. Then you will come to know that everything is done by His will alone.

(Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna,
pp. 202-03, 221, 233)

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is on Sri Ramakrishna. On the 27th February his 155th birthday will be celebrated all over the world. His life-giving message has all the more relevance in the strife-torn world of today.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HUMAN EXCELLENCE is the concluding part of the stimulating speech delivered by Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, Vice-president, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in the Emerson Hall of Harvard University. The speaker, in his own inimitable way, stresses the immediate need for the confluence of two types of excellence—manliness and spiritual freedom, in every individual. It is the only balanced ideal worthy of pursuit for mankind as a whole.

KATHAMRITA AS A NARRATIVE is a learned article by Dr. M. Shivaramakrishnan, Professor, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad. The author describes the ingenuity of 'M', the chronicler of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in presenting graphically the *Ramakrishna Leela* that was enacted on the banks of the Ganga.

NIVEDITA IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HER MASTER, VIVEKANANDA is a comparative study of the World Teacher and his wonderful

disciple, Sister Nivedita. The author, Sri Sumitora Noma quoting extensively from the writings of Sister Nivedita, shows how deeply she loved and worshipped India and everything that was Indian.

NATIONAL DRINKING WATER MISSION—A GOAL is by Sri M. M. Datta. The writer is one of the prominent scientists actively associated with this Mission. The drinking water problem has reached alarming dimensions recently. The Government of India has fully realized the gravity of the situation and has undertaken necessary measures on a war-footing to provide drinking water to thousands of villages.

UNDERSTANDING SOUL OR CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE AND SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE is by Dr. (Miss) Chetna Mandavia, Assistant Professor, Plant Physiology, Gujarat Agricultural University, Junagad, Gujarat. It is a brilliantly written paper which shows how twentieth century science has come near to Vedanta.

THE SEER IN THE GITA, is a short article by Swami Ramanujananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Centre, Bombay. The writer briefly discusses the profound meaning of the word *seer*, which has been defined extensively in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA—BRIDGE BETWEEN DIVINITY AND HUMANITY

(EDITORIAL)

The English translation of the biography of Sri Ramakrishna by Romain Rolland was first serialised in *Asia*, a monthly journal published from New York. While introducing the book in its October 1929 issue,

Asia commented: 'In it the distinguished French man of letters offers a message to the peoples of the West. It is one of human realization—not new nor limited by race and national boundaries—not unshared by us all,

but so clear and full in this Hindu saint that it can be passed on for the universal enrichment of man's spirit.¹

This glowing tribute was paid in 1929, sixty years ago when the life and teachings of this Hindu saint were slowly taking hold of the minds of people. Today he is looked upon with reverence in every corner of the globe. The account of his unbelievably wide range of spiritual practices, his visions of different Hindu gods and goddesses, and prophets of other religions, in this scientific age, may appear to many as staggering and incredible. To us who are caught in the four dimensions of matter and time, the real appears as incredible and the unreal appears as plausible.

The story of Sri Ramakrishna is a stupendous spiritual saga. The world has never witnessed before such an unearthly splendour, such mighty divine consciousness which engulfed humankind in an amazingly short span of time. Neither our mental frontiers, nor any of our systems of thought can hold this spiritual colossus within their narrow compass. He breaks down all our barriers. Limitless, timeless Consciousness was his home and play-ground. It is an exercise in futility to draw a demarcating line over his teachings, to measure with our puny intellect that immeasurable impersonal personality. Any particular philosophical or religious net is too narrow to catch him. Any dogmatic approach to his transcendental teachings amounts to nothing but blasphemy. All worldly categories and classifications, however far-reaching, finally fail to grasp the unique personality of Sri Ramakrishna. His vastness and depth are staggering, awe-inspiring. Though his teachings are simple, in their sweep, they are universal. From naive persons to great intellectuals, from the penniless to the opulent, from

simple believers to sharp agnostics, from the deeply entrenched householders to homeless mendicants, from lowly women to aristocratic ladies, from the bigoted to the enlightened, from worms to angels, and to all the myriad other types, Sri Ramakrishna's compassion brings solace and succour. None was turned away while he lived. As his personality and teaching were not bound by time, even now everyone finds a place within the luminous orbit of his love and kindness. Spiritual earnestness is the only criterion to draw his grace.

This great messenger of divinity had only one blazing purpose in life—to lift up the afflicted and weeping and help them to realize their divine nature. Sri Ramakrishna knew of nothing and spoke of nothing except God. As he saw only God in the animate as well as the inanimate, in all things great and small, there was nothing which was trivial to him. Everything and person had their place. His life was one unbroken stream of God-consciousness. Spiritual seekers whose consciousness were awakened in his presence were astonished to find full manifestation of Supreme Reality in him. He appeared to be infinite like the Divine Mother he continually spoke of.

Sri Ramakrishna could not hide his spiritual splendour behind the camouflage of exterior stainless simplicity and guileless behaviour. His conscious efforts to efface himself to anonymity proved futile when in unself-conscious moments the dazzling divinity revealed itself:

'He was a wonderful mixture of God and man. In his ordinary state he would talk of himself as the servant of all men and women. He looked upon them all as God. He himself would never be addressed as *Guru*, (*master*), or teacher. Never would he claim for himself any high position. He would touch the ground reverently where his disciples had trodden. But every now and then strange fits of God-consciousness came upon him. He then became changed into a different being altogether. He then spoke of himself as

1. *Asia Magazine*, (New York, Vol. XXIX, Oct. 1929), No. 10, p. 761.

being able to do and know everything. He spoke as if he had the power of giving anything to anybody.²

Such unguarded brief spells always made him shrink in shyness and feel uncomfortable before others. In general he behaved carefully, as if he was one amongst others, a beloved child of the Divine Mother. Jesus also said, 'Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'³ Anything extraordinary, or supernatural that occasionally manifested in him was attributed by him to the Universal Mother. Placing the Mother always on the high pedestal, keeping Her always in the forefront, Sri Ramakrishna worked in this world incognito—'Do you know my attitude? As for myself, I eat, drink and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows.'⁴ It was impossible for him to forget even for a fraction of a second the Universal Mother. Metaphorically, he used to say that he was nothing but a pillow-case filled with the Divine Mother—'Every now and then I think that body is a mere pillow-case. The only real substance is the Indivisible Saccidānanda.'⁵ Sri Ramakrishna never referred to himself as 'I', even by mistake. He always had a detached way of referring to himself as 'This place'. He once said to Girish Ghosh: 'Everything happens by the will of God. If your spiritual consciousness has been awakened at *this place*, know that I am only an instrument.'⁶

2. F. Max Mueller, *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings*, (Calcutta: S. Gupta & Bros., 1978), p. 27.

3. *Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 19:34.

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985) p. 141.

5. *Ibid.* p. 847.

6. *Ibid.* p. 699.

Sri Ramakrishna's total effacement did serve two purposes. Devotees rich and poor, unlearned ones and pundits, the nameless and the famous, flocked freely around this world teacher. None felt the slightest inhibition to approach this unimposing saint of Dakshineswar and lay before him the contents of his heart, either spiritual or mundane. His presence did not belittle anyone; on the contrary, it lifted everyone unconsciously to sublime heights. Devotees and admirers felt that he belonged to them and that they belonged to him as well. His sparkling wit and humour, vibrant nature, bewitching smile and his pure love penetrated even an ego as hard as steel armour. Even argumentative and skeptical minds fell silent before that purifying humility of the child of the Divine Mother. Realizing his guileless nature, famished crowds devoured him day and night. His body was worn out by his constant gift of himself to the flood of seekers which never stopped till his last breath. Perhaps that was the purpose of his advent. He expressed poignantly—'Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if I can be of help to a single soul.' Again he said, 'I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man.' Jesus said: 'They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'⁷

The second purpose was to show to the world that unless the ego, or 'me' and 'mine' is obliterated totally, the realization of God is impossible. This egoism which separates man from God is the biggest hurdle. When it occupies the mind, the thought of God cannot enter. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The feeling of "I" and "mine" has covered the Reality. Because of this we do not see

7. *Gospel according to St. Luke*, 6:31-32.

Truth.’⁸ Through his exemplary life he could demonstrate to the world, by effacing the strong sense of ‘I’ness, how one could invite the flood of bliss and benediction. In other words the burden of individuality, the feeling of one’s self-importance—‘I am this,’ and ‘I am that’ must go. In his own inimitable words he says,

The ‘I’ which makes a man worldly, and attached to lust and wealth, is mischievous. The individual and the universal are separated owing to this ‘I’ coming between them. If a stick be thrown, a sheet of water will appear to be divided into two. This stick is the ego. Take it away and the water is again a single undivided mass.⁹

And again:

When shall I be free? When that ‘I’ has
vanished.

‘I’ and ‘mine’ is ignorance, ‘Thou’ and
‘Thine’ is knowledge.

The saint would say, ‘Thou, O Lord, art
the Doer.’¹⁰

Though Sri Ramakrishna remained in the undifferentiated Consciousness, he kept some identity with his personality. This identity, or the state of *Bhāvamukha* enabled him to work on the plane of duality so as to kindle the spark of spirituality in every heart. This trace of identification with his physical personality also reminded him of human nature and its limitations. The natural tendency of his mind was to remain absorbed in the state of Oneness and not to be conscious of the world. With much difficulty he brought down his mind. When he thus functioned on the human plane, he was intensely human, with all the marked characteristics of ordinary men of flesh and blood of this world. He tried to hide the signs of his being uncommon or superhuman. In

his words: ‘It is a thin ego that personages like the Incarnations possess. Through this ego, God is always visible.’¹¹ In another place he says, ‘As the elephant has two sets of teeth, the external tusks and the inner grinders, so the God-men, like Sri Krishna, act and behave to all appearance as common men, while their heart and soul are absorbed in the Highest, far beyond the region of karma.’¹² Sri Aurobindo echoes the same idea in his *Essays on the Gita*:

The Avatar is always a dual phenomenon of divinity and humanity; the Divine takes upon Himself the human nature with all its outward limitations and makes them the circumstances, means, instruments of the divine consciousness and the divine power, a vessel of the divine birth and the divine works. But so surely it must be, since otherwise the object of the Avatar’s descent is not fulfilled; for that object is precisely to show that the human birth with all its limitations can be made such a means and instrument of the divine birth and divine works, precisely to show that the human type of consciousness can be compatible with the divine essence of consciousness made manifest, can be converted into its vessel, drawn into nearer conformity with it by a change of its mould and a heightening of its powers of light and love and strength and purity; and to show also how it can be done. If the Avatar were to act in an entirely supernormal fashion, this object would not be fulfilled. A merely supernormal or miraculous Avatar would be a meaningless absurdity... The Avatar does not come as a thaumaturgic magician, but as the divine leader of humanity and the exemplar of a divine humanity.¹³

Did Sri Ramakrishna merely re-interpret and re-state the truths enshrined in our traditional Dharma? Was his precious life confined only to the few thousands who saw and talked with him? Were his lofty teachings meant only for the contemporary world and not beyond it? One thing should

8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, loc. cit. p. 308.

9. *The Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975) p. 22.

10. Ibid. p. 23.

11. Ibid. p. 47.

12. Ibid. p. 50.

13. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1986) p. 155, and 156.

be borne in mind. It is that Sri Ramakrishna was not an ordinary saint who strove for his personal salvation. His spiritual struggles, his ecstasies, his realizations, and his stupendous achievements were not for his glorification, but they were for the benefit of mankind. A saint after much struggle realizes one or two aspects of God, and his influence is localized, and it lasts as long as his human form lasts. Once he physically disappears, his teachings also fade. Another weakness of a saint is that he usually glorifies the particular path or method, by following which he has realized the Truth. He extols it to the skies at the expense of other paths of approach to Reality. On his part he may have meant well, but the repeated emphasis on a particular aspect of the Divine always divides humanity. Mankind is often blind; it repeats mechanically what it has been taught. Therefore many religious reformers and saints have unwittingly made the mistake of placing before society their ideals clothed in forceful language. The result has more often than not been seen in divisiveness and hatred for others. Natural cohesiveness of humanity is eroded. Only a global mind can bring transformation in human hearts.

In our age this divine Power of God has been revealed in full measure by Sri Ramakrishna. In him everything is universal. His unique message possesses the timeless quality of freshness. It explodes all mind-made myths and barriers. Therefore, his words quickly leaped across mountains and seas and reached the far ends of the globe. He not only re-interpreted the ancient principles of religion, but also revitalized them and pointed out the necessity of renunciation and prayer. And his life and message are impregnated with a tremendous freshness and power for which the world has been waiting with baited breath. It is only after Sri Krishna that the world has seen such a

spiritual giant. Sri Krishna, delivering the message of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (the Divine Song) was strikingly original, and so now is Sri Ramakrishna. Therefore, his message in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, has captured innumerable hearts in such an astoundingly short time. It has an irresistible universal appeal which even a confirmed skeptic does not like to brush aside lightly. His words, even once casually glanced at will burn their way into the receptive heart. To quote the Master's words:

A perfected soul, (siddha-puruṣa) is like an archaeologist who discovers an ancient well covered with the soil and accumulation of ages. The Incarnation or Avatara, on the other hand, is like a great engineer who sinks a new well in a place where there was none before. Great men can lead to salvation only those who have already the springs of piety and goodness in themselves, but the Saviour saves him also whose heart is as dry as the desert and who is devoid of all love.¹⁴

Therefore, like a great engineer, Sri Ramakrishna has sunk a new inexhaustible spiritual reservoir which has been assuaging the thirst of innumerable world-weary people.

The Master's foremost disciple, the warrior prophet, Swami Vivekananda pays a fitting tribute to his guru in a Sanskrit couplet he composed extemporaneously on one occasion. The occasion is worth recalling:

Babu Navagopal Ghosh of Ramakrishnapore, Howrah, a householder devotee of the Master, had invited Swamiji to perform the installation ceremony of Sri Ramakrishna's image, to be worshipped in his home. Swamiji agreed to come there, and did so, along with other monks. It was 6 February 1898, a full moon day. Many devotees were also in attendance to participate in the festive occasion. The party of

14. *The Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, loc cit, p. 52.

sannyasins and devotees was received with enthusiasm and gaiety. After sometime Swamiji entered the worship-room with its beautifully designed marble floor and the new porcelain image of Sri Ramakrishna occupying the altar throne. The devotional atmosphere and the cleanliness of the shrine elicited the Swami's whole-hearted admiration. With great humility Navagopal's wife became bashful and said to Swamiji that they were poor and unworthy to serve the Lord. To that, Swamiji replied graciously with a touch of his characteristic good humour, 'Dear Mother, our Lord never in his life lived in such a marble-floored room. Born in a rustic, thatched cottage, he passed his days in Dakshineswar in the simplest way. If he does not live here, served by such sincere hearts, I do not know where else he will stay'.

Covering himself with ashes, Swamiji then worshipped Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine and invoked his presence. At the end of the worship, in a state of ecstasy, he composed the now well-known Sanskrit verse:

*Om! Sthāpakāya ca dharmasya
Sarva dharma svarūpiṇe
Avatāra variṣṭhāya
Rāmakṛṣṇāya te namaḥ*

'Om! Salutations unto Thee, Establisher
of righteousness!
O Best of avatars, Embodiment of all
religions.'

Shri Ramakrishna has thus been hailed as the greatest among the God-men who preceded him.

Sri Ramakrishna was like a *Homā* bird which, soon after its birth, flies skyward without touching the earth. He plunged into the ocean of *Saccidānanda* (God-consciousness) from his childhood, discarding the things of this world. With regard to formal education he replied to his elder brother,

Ramkumar, 'I have no need for that education which will fetch only a little rice and bunch of bananas.' The Upaniṣads also say that spiritual realization is the greatest prize, and it is called *parā vidyā* (Supreme Knowledge). He wanted this *parā vidyā* first; realization of Truth was the urgent goal of his life. Jesus of Nazareth also said, 'But rather seek ye the kingdom of God first, and all these things are added unto you.' And: 'Seek not ye what shall ye eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.'¹⁵ Similarly this *Homā* bird did not touch the world, but soared high to have a glimpse of the great beyond.

It is intriguing that Swami Vivekananda should have called Sri Ramakrishna best among all the Incarnations of God. We find that the lives of previous Incarnations are shrouded in mystery; the mystery of obscurity imposed by the lapse of long ages, and the mysteries which have been laid on by poets and authors of purāṇas—those arising from their emphasis on miraculous events and legendary deeds. But with the life of Sri Ramakrishna, as Aldous Huxley said, '(The complier), M has produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell. Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity.'¹⁶ Sri Ramakrishna's life is an event of our own recent times and is a blazing example which reflects to and for modern people, the irresistible spiritual urge and earnestness by which man can attain to God. He has left a model for humanity and his realizations are for us only.

15. *St. Luke*, 12:29.

16. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, loc. cit. Foreword, p. v.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HUMAN EXCELLENCE*

(Continued from the previous issue)

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

7. Vivekananda's Message of Man's Spiritual Depth Dimension

The two distinct cultural approaches of the West and the East may also be characterized, using the language of biology—as that of the West's placing stress on *environment*, and that of the East's placing stress on the *organism*. From Greco-Roman times, the West has been specializing in the manipulation of the physical and social environments of man for human development. The whole gamut of ideas and processes arising from this approach is conveyed to us by the rich modern words *positivism* and *humanism*, the second of which, in the wake of modern technical advances, is often qualified by the word 'scientific'. There is, in this, a sense of fight with an external enemy, the qualities required for that fight helping to develop the excellence that I have earlier referred to in the words of Vivekananda, as *manliness*.

But, comparatively speaking, this approach neglects the other component, the organism, man in depth, the mystery of his inner life. What the Greco-Romans neglected became the field of specialization for the East, especially India. It was the search, conducted with scientific precision, for man's spiritual depth dimension. Results were presented to humanity as a set of verified and verifiable truths. It is the approach

of religion in its higher mystical aspect. Every major religion of the world has received impetus from those eternal principles discovered first in the East. Those ancient truths have become now a part of total human or world culture. It is a culture that asks man to strengthen his *within* and *bear with* environmental forces which are beyond his power to control. It instills the virtues of patience and endurance; as opposed to struggle and fight into the external world. Nurtured by this culture, a man's capacity for renunciation and his power to suffer and endure is enhanced over his power of action and sense pleasure. He is able to carry the fight inward against another enemy, the enemy called worldliness and ego-centredness. This approach gives man 'intimations of immortality', in the idiom of the English poet, Wordsworth, and brings him into communion with a timeless order of existence, brings him to the ever-present Divinity in every being, and to the dimension of the true freedom of the spirit of man. All other freedoms, namely political, economic, social and intellectual, are essentially values meant to lead man to experience this value of all values, the spiritual freedom of man, and to sense his spiritual equality and oneness with all other beings. This is the other excellence, which referred to earlier, Vivekananda calls spirituality and presents as the birthright of every man or woman. Man's *intrinsic value* and dignity is proclaimed in this second excellence, over and above his *positional value for society* proclaimed by that first excellence we noted, *manliness*. Vivekananda both taught and exemplified in his life that the confluence of these two types

* Based on the Video-taped record of the lecture by Swami Ranganathananda, organized by the Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Vedanta Societies in the Emerson Hall of the Harvard University on 28 May 1985.

of excellence constitutes true human excellence and total human fulfilment. Realizing the complementary nature of these two excellences, the power to *act* and the power to be, the power to reason and the power to worship, Vivekananda treats *manliness* as an essential requisite of spiritual life. He has given a brief exposition of what is meant by acquiring these two excellences and what religion is concerned with in (*The Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 124):

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal (of life) is to manifest this divine within by controlling nature, external (by science, technology, and socio-political processes) and internal (by ethics, art, and inward penetration).

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

In his speeches at the 1893 Chicago World Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda had conveyed this Indian message of man's innate divinity to the modern West, as it had long ago percolated to Socrates and Plato in ancient Greece, as claimed by E. J. Urwick, the author of *The Message of Plato* referred to earlier. Referring to this second dimension of human excellence, Vivekananda said in his speech at the Parliament (*The Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 11):

Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions—a powerless, helpless wreck, in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect?... The heart sinks at the idea, yet this is the law of nature. Is there no hope? Is there no escape?—was the cry that went up from the bottom of the heart of despair. It reached the throne of mercy and words of hope and consolation came down and inspired a Vedic sage (*Svetasvatara Upaniṣad*, 2.5 and 3.8), and he stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings:

'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.'

'Children of immortal bliss'—what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep. You are souls immortal, spirits free, blest, and eternal. Ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.

The distinctiveness of a culture is revealed in the type of man in whom that culture finds its own highest excellence embodied. In the words of the late Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who became President of the Indian Republic after several decades of university teaching and administration in India and England (*Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, pp. 381-82):

The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the valiant knight of medieval Europe, but the free man of the spirit, who has attained insight into the universe by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues; who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India's pride that she has clung fast to this ideal and produced, in every generation and in every part of the country, from the time of the *rṣis* of the Upaniṣads and Buddha to Ramakrishna and Gandhi, men who strove successfully to realize this ideal.

8. *Vivekananda Educates India to Achieve Total Human Excellence*

India had cultivated positivistic thought and techniques earlier. But later, drawn by the lure of the Divine within, she comparatively neglected the world without and the character-excellence coming out of action and struggle in that outer world of nature and society. This neglect became cruel in the last one thousand years, and it is the

greatest single cause behind almost all the maladies afflicting modern Indian society, not only its poverty and illiteracy, but also its piety-fringed worldliness and sham religiosity bereft of the humanist impulse.

The experiences of ancient Greece and the modern West on the one side, and India, on the other, revealed to Vivekananda not only the strength and weakness of all specializations in the field of culture, but also their complementary nature. And he strove to educate modern India to develop that first excellence of manliness. His definition of education for India breathes this spirit. Here are a few passages from the small book: *Education*, giving his ideas on the subject. The book carries this brief foreword by Mahatma Gandhi.

'Surely, Swami Vivekananda's writings need no introduction from anybody. They make their own irresistible appeal.' (pp. 1-8) Vivekananda's words follow:

Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. ... Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life.... We must have life-building, man-making, character-building assimilation of ideas. ... The education that does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion—is it worth the name?...

The end of all education, all training, should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The training, by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful, is called education. What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. It is man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want.

The letter that Vivekananda wrote from Chicago to a disciple in Madras on 24 January 1894 conveys to and infuses into the Indian spiritual heritage something of the Greeco-Roman promethean spirit (*Letters of Vivekananda*, pp. 83-84, fourth edition):

My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our forefathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then decide. We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will be done by nature according to her laws. Work hard, be steady, and have faith in the Lord. Set to work. I am coming sooner or later. Keep the motto before you: 'Elevation of the masses without injuring their religion'. ... Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work, and energy and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and *we will do it*. You are all *born to do it*. Have faith in yourselves; great convictions are the mothers of great deeds. Onward for ever! Sympathy for the poor, the down-trodden, even unto death—this is our motto. Onward, brave lads.

Here you can see the fusion of the *Bhagīratha* spirit of ancient India and the *Prometheus* spirit of ancient Greece in the programme of human development in modern India. In his lecture, delivered in Madras in February 1897 on *The Work Before Us*, Vivekananda exhorted modern India to be a harmony of the two character-excellences of ancient India and ancient Greece, in order to overcome the limitations of regional cultural types, and to pioneer the creation of a human culture and a new human excellence in the modern age. (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 271):

Today, the ancient Greek is meeting the ancient Hindu on the soil of India. Thus slowly and silently the leaven has come; the broaden-

ing, the life-giving, and the revivalist movement that we see all around us has been worked out by these forces together. A broader and more generous conception of life is before us; and although at first we have been deluded a little and wanted to narrow things down, we are finding out today that these generous impulses which are at work, these broader conceptions of life, are the logical interpretation of what is in our ancient books. *They are the carrying out, to the rigorously logical effect, of the primary conceptions of our own ancestors.* To become broad, to go out, to amalgamate, to universalize, is the end of our aims. And all the time, we have been making ourselves smaller and smaller, and dissociating ourselves, contrary to the plans laid down in our scriptures.

While speaking on *Vivekananda and Human Excellence*, it is relevant to refer to the high tributes to Vivekananda's global character-excellence paid by distinguished thinkers in East and West. I have already mentioned the tribute of Romain Rolland of France, at the beginning of my lecture: 'He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy'. I now refer to poet Rabindranath Tagore from India and to Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) of England, among many others from East and West. Says Rabindranath Tagore (*Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. XIII, p. 55):

The great soul whose death occurred a few years ago in Bengal, that Vivekananda also rose keeping the East to his right and the West to his left and himself standing in between. The purpose of his life was not to contract India for all time to narrow thought-moulds of excluding the West from Indian history. To accept, to mingle, to create, was, verily, his genius. He sacrificed his life to open up a communication line by which the achievements of India may be given to the West and the achievements of the West may be accepted in India.

At the back of Vivekananda's message of a comprehensive philosophy of life, uniting the two character-excellences of manliness and spirituality, was his Advaita (non-dualistic) vision and experience. Referring

to this vision and its impact on human life, Sister Nivedita says (*Introduction to Vol. I of The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. xv-xvi):

It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing Jñāna and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. 'Art, science, and religion', he said once, 'are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita.'

9. *Vivekananda on India's Scientific Approach to Religion and Its Sweet Fruits*

Advaitic vision and the character-excellence it produced in the Indian people imparted a spirit of universality to Indian culture. This universality found expression in two unique values, namely, a consistent policy of peace and nonaggression with respect to other nations and cultures, and a uniform attitude of tolerance and acceptance of all other religions and cultures. The great sages of the Upaniṣads, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, and Śaṅkarācārya, in the past, and Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, in the modern age, represent the highest expression of this universality of vision and

sympathy. The first note in the music of harmony of religions was struck in the earliest period of Indian culture in the famous *mantra* of the *R̥g-Veda* (1.164.46): *Ekam sat, viprā bahudhā vadanti*—'Truth is one; sages call it by various names.'

Vivekananda has referred ecstatically to the highly beneficial impact of this *mantra* on Indian culture and life, and the uninterrupted stress on its wisdom down the millennia of Indian history, up to Sri Ramakrishna in our own time, in his *First Public Lecture in the East* at Colombo in 1897 (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, pp. 112-114):

And above all, what India has to give to the world is this: If we watch the growth and development of religions in different races, we shall always find this that each tribe, at the beginning, has a god of its own. If the tribes are allied to each other, these gods will have a generic name, as for example, all the Babylonian gods had. When the Babylonians were divided into many races, they had the generic name of Baal, just as the Jewish races had different gods with the common name of Moloch; and at the same time you will find that one of these tribes becomes superior to the rest, and lays claim to its own king as the king over all. Therefrom, it naturally follows that it also wants to preserve its own god as the god of all the races. Baal-Merodach, said the Babylonians, was the greatest god; all the others were inferior. Moloch-Yahveh was the superior over all other Molochs. And these questions had to be decided by the fortunes of battle.

The same struggle was here also. In India, the same competing gods had been struggling with each other for supremacy; but the great good fortune of this country, and of the world, was that there came out, in the midst of the din and confusion, a voice which declared: *Ekam sat, viprā bahudhā vadanti*—'That which exists is One; sages call it by various names.'...

The whole history of India you may read in these few words. The whole history has been a repetition, in massive language, with tremendous power, of that one central doctrine. It was repeated in the land, till it had entered into the blood of the nation, till it began to tingle with every drop of blood that flowed in its veins, till it be-

came one with the life, part and parcel of the material of which it was composed; and thus the land was transmuted into the most wonderful land of toleration, giving the right to welcome the various religions, as well as sects, into the old mother-country.

And herein is the explanation of the most remarkable phenomenon that is only witnessed here—all the various sects, apparently hopelessly contradictory, yet living in such harmony. You may be a dualist, and I may be a monist. You may believe that you are the eternal servant of God, and I may declare that I am one with God Himself; yet both of us are good Hindus. How is that possible? Read then: *Ekam sat, viprā bahudhā vadanti*. Above all others, my countrymen, this is the one grand truth that we have to teach the world.

Even the most educated people of the other countries turn up their noses at an angle of forty-five degrees and call our religion idolatry. I have seen that; and they never stopped to think what a mass of superstition there was in their own heads. It is still so everywhere, this tremendous sectarianism, the low narrowness of the mind...

There is tremendous religious persecution yet in every country in which I have been and the same old objections are raised against learning anything new. The little toleration that is in the world, the little sympathy that is yet in the world for religious thought, is practically here, in the land of the Aryas, and nowhere else. It is here that Indians build temples for Mohammedans and Christians; nowhere else. If you go to other countries and ask Mohammedans, or people of other religions, to build a temple for you, see how they will help. They will instead try to break down your temple and you too if they can. The one great lesson, therefore, that the world wants most, that the world has yet to learn from India, is the idea not only of toleration, but of sympathy. Well has it been said in the *Mahimnastotra*: 'As the different rivers, taking their start from different mountains, running straight or crooked, at last come unto the ocean, so, O Śiva, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead unto Thee.' ...

Therefore we have again to learn the one central truth that was preached only here in our motherland, and that once more has to be preached from India. Why? Because not only is it in our books, but it runs through every phase of our national literature and is in the national

life. Here and here alone is it practised every day, and any man whose eyes are open can see that it is practised here and here alone. Thus we have to teach religion. There are other and higher lessons that India can teach, but they are only for the learned. The lessons of mildness, gentleness, forbearance, toleration, sympathy, and brotherhood, everyone may learn, whether man, woman, or child, learned or unlearned, without respect of race, caste, or creed. 'They call Thee by various names; Thou art One.'

This excellence of character was demonstrated in the life of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka in the third century B.C.—'Samavāya eva sādhuḥ', he proclaimed in one of his edicts—in the domain of religion): 'Concord alone is right.' And in our own time, Sri Ramakrishna re-authenticated this wisdom of Indian culture by following the tenets laid down in Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity and realizing the basic harmony underlying all of them. He expressed it in a brief utterance: *yata mat, tata path*—'as many religions, so many pathways to God.'

This is one of the two aspects of human excellence arising from India's scientific approach to religion which stressed spiritual experience and spiritual growth in place of mere belief in creed or dogma or conformity. The second aspect is a combination of fearlessness and gentleness. Much of religion today, bereft of this stress on spiritual growth, has become, in the words of Vivekananda, 'lifeless mockery; what we want is character.' Ramakrishna came to stimulate that idea of religion as spiritual growth. Vivekananda spread that message throughout the world. In the words of Romain Rolland (*Life of Vivekananda and Universal Gospel*, pp. 42-43):

Each time he repeated with new arguments but with the same force of conviction his thesis of a universal religion, without limit of time or space, uniting the whole *credo* of the human spirit, from the enslaved fetishism of the savage to the most liberal creative affirmations of modern science. He harmonized them into a magnificent

synthesis, which, far from extinguishing the hope of a single one, helped all hopes to grow and flourish according to their own proper nature. There was to be no other dogma but the divinity inherent in man and his capacity for indefinite evolution.

Vivekananda saw in the West that faith in religion was always accompanied by intolerance, fanaticism, violence, and war; the more the faith, the more the intolerance and fanaticism. It is only when the intensity of that faith declines, that tolerance and breadth of outlook come to a person or a nation. This is the opposite of what has become the characteristic feature of Indian culture for thousands of years, due to her scientific approach to the subject of religion. Religion in India, accordingly, tolerated not only other religions but even the atheists and agnostics as well. In the West, there were only two choices before man: be religious and intolerant, or be an atheist or agnostic, and remain broadminded and tolerant. Now, in the spirit of the wisdom of Indian culture, Vivekananda asks man: Can you not combine these two—deep religious faith and broad tolerance and respect for other religions? Vivekananda says that the highest human excellences come when one can combine what he calls 'the intensity of the fanatic with the extensity of the materialist.' We have to be 'deep as the ocean and broad as the skies', says he. It is a wonderful language that he has used. This combination is the great contribution of Vedanta and has been India's experience throughout the ages. The people of India have been deeply religious, and out of the depth of their religious faith (till Christianity and Islam came to India as conquerors with their semitic exclusive-mindedness and intolerance) the people of India respected all religions and lived in greater harmony. This harmony inspired also the various political states, big or small, that history threw up from time to time. These states often

patronized more than one religion and received with respect and understanding all religions that came to India from outside during the last two thousand years. Swami Vivekananda conveyed to the West the substance of Sri Ramakrishna's message on this subject in his lecture on *My Master* in New York in 1896 (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 187):

This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world: 'Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realization. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.' ...

To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names; but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed, because he had realized that, in reality, they are all part and parcel of the one eternal religion.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan defines the Indian concept of toleration in a beautiful sentence in his remarkable book (*Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 317):

Toleration is the homage that the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the infinite.

The only way to worship an infinite God is not to take a copyright on Him after your experience of Him through your religion, but to accept and respect the spiritual experiences of other religions also, in the knowledge that the infinite is inexhaustible. That attitude alone can make you not only tolerate other religions but also to accept

them with reverence. This is mature Indian wisdom which alone can help to transform religions from mutually weakening colliding units into mutually co-operating dynamic units working for human betterment and world peace.

What must be the high level of character-excellence of the man in whom you have this all-enveloping universal attitude, sympathy and understanding! Sri Ramakrishna himself was one such embodiment of this universality. To him went not only believing men and women of all sects, but also persons with agnostic and scientific attitudes. Sri Ramakrishna welcomed all of them with love and respect. In his life one may see one of the highest types of human excellence.

The last note that Vivekananda struck in the inspiring music of his Parliament of Religions speeches from 11th to 27th September 1893, was the world-wide proclamation of this very age-old wisdom (*The Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 24):

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possession of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance, 'Help and not fight,' 'Assimilation and not destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'

Today we are able to see the fall-out of that note in the increasing phenomenon, though often halting and hesitant—the dialogues between religions. The Vatican of the Roman Catholic Church has a department for it. A big change is coming in the world of religion, which in spite of occasional set-backs, is moving in the direction of inter-religious harmony, as preached by the sages

of India, ancient and modern. Religion, which is so profound an experience of man, should not become poisoned at its very source through exclusiveness and intolerance. Then only will it be in a position to rescue modern man from the current evils of materialism, mad consumerism and, to quote Bertrand Russell, 'slavery to the lower part of himself.' Here, Vivekananda stresses a character-excellence as an important constituent of total human excellence.

The second aspect of human excellence is the combination of strength and fearlessness, on the one side, and gentleness and peace, on the other. This is a very rare combination in one character. It is the fruit of very high spiritual development. When one is fearless and strong, he or she may become fearful to others. Nietzsche's *super-man* comes on the social scene in violence of deed and demeanour. On the other hand, when one is gentle, he or she may be weak and experience fear of others. This is the normal choice for average humanity: Be gentle like a sheep or cow, and frightened by every thing around, or be strong and ferocious like the lion or tiger, and frightening to all other creatures in the forest. These are the two types of human personality that we see everywhere. But human society also contains some men and women who combine, in varying degrees, strength with gentleness. The highest development in this line constitutes another manifestation of human excellence taught and exemplified by Vivekananda. Mahatma Gandhi belonged to this category. This beautiful combination is expounded in the *Gītā* in one of its verses describing the best devotee of God (12.15):

*Yasmāt nodvijate loko
lokānnodvijate ca yah—*

'From whom the world is not agitated, and whom the world also cannot agitate.'

Many of you in this country have seen this character-excellence when you witnessed Attenborough's *Gandhi* film recently. There you saw Mahatma Gandhi, both gentle and non-violent like a cow and strong and fearless like a lion. And Mahatma Gandhi himself emphasized that true non-violence is the non-violence of the brave. From Vedic times, through Buddha, and rulers like Aśoka, India was imbued with this character-excellence which resulted not only in producing a gentle and hospitable people, but in softening the effects of violence during wars fought within the nation. And, of course, wars were completely abolished in foreign relations. Internal battles were softened by the many humanistic rules, including total protection of the civil population. Instances of farmers cultivating their fields unharmed while a battle was raging nearby are not rare in Indian history.

11. Conclusion

These are wonderful ideas coming out of that 'personification of the harmony of all human energy' which Vivekananda was. The subject is fascinating from several points of view. Due to time limitations we cannot expand further on it. However, the eight volumes of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* are available to everyone who wishes to read further. It is a literature of strength and fearlessness, love and compassion. There are also the six volumes on Vivekananda in America and Europe by Mrs. Marie Louise Burke of San Francisco. *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries*. Romain Rolland eulogizes the volumes of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in the following way (*Life of Vivekananda, and the Universal Gospel*, p. 162):

His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like march of Handel Choruses. I cannot touch these sayings

of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports, must have been produced when, in burning words, they issued from the lips of the hero!

Vivekananda's *Works* stress the need to educate modern man to combine productive efficiency in his outer life with spiritual efficiency in his inner life. It is education that lifts man from one-sidedness to all-sidedness in character, often stressed by Sri Ramakrishna; it is the combination of *learning to be* with *learning to do*, as urged by the UNESCO Education Commission Report referred to earlier.

Here is Vivekananda bringing to the modern West this Vedantic message of a profound and deep humanism based upon the divine spark in every human being, and presenting man's education and his life and work as the field to unfold that divine possibility. That is Vivekananda's message of human excellence for all children everywhere. It will take time for humanity to be influenced by these ideas; but they are bound to produce their effect, like delayed action bombs, for they are rational and human. It was said of Athens that Athens was the school of all Hellas, all Greek peoples. Today, thinkers like Romain Rolland have begun to recognize Vivekananda as the education for the whole world. This century may be considered, so far as this message is concerned, as the seed-time, while the next century can be expected to be the harvest time.

It will be interesting to you to know about

the impact of Vivekananda on India. He powerfully influenced India's Independence struggle and many progressive social reform movements, like the one for removal of untouchability, and others for the uplift of women and the weaker sections. His influence is deepening decade after decade. And something very significant has happened in a very humble way recently. The Government of India has presented Vivekananda before the youth of India, by its recent circular D.O. No. F. 6/1/84, dated 17 October 1984: 'that the birthday of Swami Vivekananda is to be observed as National Youth Day every year from 1985 onwards as it was felt that the philosophy of Swamiji, and the ideals for which he lived and worked, could be a great source of inspiration for the Indian youth.'

The President of India and the Prime Minister of India both addressed the youth on this year's January 12th Observance. It was a significant step toward educating youth in human excellence.

I cannot conclude this speech better than by sharing with you a famous passage from Swamiji's lecture on 'The Mission of the Vedanta' in which he sends out to everyone the following encouragement and instruction. (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III p. 193):

Teach yourselves, teach everyone, his real nature; call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

(Concluded)

KATHAMRITA AS A NARRATIVE

Dr. M. SHIVARAMAKRISHNA

I

When a spiritual phenomenon of the nature of Sri Ramakrishna plunges into the shores of human consciousness in a temporally and spatially recognizable form, it revitalises almost all its layers. Religious/mystical experience remains its core, its invariable. Its implications, however, have wide-ranging significance for family, society, art and literature. Indeed, the cluster of values which inform a culture is imbued with potentiality for redefinitions, mutations and recoveries in tune with a changing ethos. New paradigms emerge and need extensions and adaptations.

Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita, in these terms, illumines the nature, generically, of narrative, and specifically, of religious narrative. Obviously it is rooted in the basics of Hindu religious narrative; yet it reflects a generic transfiguration rich in its multiple significance. The aim of the present note is to contemplate some facets of this significance.

II

Narrativizing metaphysical, ethical perceptions was a remarkable feature of the classical Indian mind. *Mokṣa śāstra*, transcending its abstract, axiomatic, simplicity, got transfigured into enthralling fables, extended allegories and long cycles of stories as well as, above all, intricately structures, highly wrought epics. Blending prose and verse — prose for narrative text and verse for ethical/metaphysical subtexts — these stories are extraordinary in their setting and background, range of characters, complexity of themes. Taken out of their narrative contexts, these became live issues in religion, poetics and

philosophy as well as socio-political ethos. Moreover, since the concept of history itself transcended mere fact, the tendency was to imbue the immediacy and flux of experience with the higher dimensions of imaginative truth. Thus, if the intricately “intellectual” texts are shot through with narrative insets, even such an advanced manual of uncompromising Advaita, *The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, makes what can only be described as an amazing use of narrative. With its narratives, these are irresistible as stories.

Whether they are resisted or not as narratives is the point which is the most crucial. For the classical mind, narratives “crack, strain, perish” if the truth behind all narratives is understood. This truth is the truth of our being *beyond but subsuming* the temporal and the spatial. In effect, to mistake the narrative as ‘true’ is to be caught in the net of maya, of guṇa/karma complex — like narratives, this net has beginnings and endings in an endless cycle. But to jump away from the narrative is to know the nature of the net. In this sense, narratives are both barriers to understanding if construed as “fictions” but modes of liberation if perceived as semiotic referents. As Sri Ramakrishna would say, narratives *are* thorns, they prick us with history, temporality, finitude but they have their uses. With them we can remove another thorn: submission and seduction to relativity, temporality as the total truth.

III

When we come to *The Gospel* we have curious extensions of these implications. Like all classical *religious* texts, it is well within the pervasive tradition of narrativization of religious exposition. Obviously the

sādhaka's interest is on *what* the Master says, not *where* he says it, to whom he says it. Yet a narrative frames these teachings and 'M' meticulously records the date, the persons, the locale, and above all the exact words of the Master. Indeed, its authenticity is stenographic in its accuracy.

Yet it is a curious fact that 'M' does not give us the teachings badly — as some others have done — but carefully recreates the entire context of the teaching. Here is the great significance of *The Gospel*. In recreating 'M' did an extraordinary thing, the implications of which we have to very carefully identify.

He calls the narrative *Kathāmrita* and not *caritāmrita*. The question is why does he call it *Kathā* — a story — and not *carita*, a history? One obvious reason we can dismiss: to distinguish it from Chaitanya's which is also called *caritāmrita*. The other more important reason is, it seems to me, to suggest the generic category to which the book belongs: the category which distills nectar *amrita* from the churning of a narrative, *Kathā*. In this category narrative elements are important but more important is the life-giving, immortalising nectar for which the narrative is a refracting medium. In other words, in Sri Ramakrishna's *Kathāmrita* we have a real paradox.

In the earlier narratives of this type narrative and history are so blended that it is difficult to separate the one from the other — though the desirability of such a separation is itself questioned by Hindu ideas of narratives. In the case of the *Gospel*, 'M' was a witness to history, a *sākṣī* to validate several otherwise polemical transcendent experiences. But this history is, in the process of being recorded, subject to one important risk: the risk of biased retrospective narration. And retrospective narratives owe their continuity, coherence, order to the author. In effect, for 'M' the problem was

to record the history of what he has seen and heard and believed but at the same time to highlight the life and message of one who was himself the embodiment of the continuum of cosmic consciousness which transcends history. How to provide, in short, a text that has a context which is true but the whole truth which is not the context only.

IV

'M', we know, was not unfamiliar with literary, specially scriptural texts. He was, as a student of literature, aware that classical Indian literary texts were oriented to the heightening of interior sensibility, to the refining of emotions. In effect, literary frames were indispensable to give currency, continuity and credibility to religious truths. Thus the literary text and the religious truths it enshrined blended in an intricate intertextuality. But this intertextuality is not the post modernist one which uses previous texts or extant literary frames ironically as either deviant or confirmative points of reference. (Or rather there is an irony — in the sense if it is mistaken for mere literature). Thus, if epics like *The Mahābhārata* makes use of the Vedic texts within their own context, even *kāvya*s such as those by Kālidāsa depend for both themes and fables on precedent material.

In these terms, 'M' must have realized that in the Master's life he was witnessing the dynamic enactment of the truths of perennial philosophy embodied not only in scriptural texts but also extended in earlier enactments by incarnations such as Chaitanya. Therefore, he knew that if the Master assigned him the role of the scribe, he had a dual task: first, he had to be loyal to the uniqueness of his direct participation in the Ramakrishna *leela*. Second, simultaneously, he had to consciously retain and transmit his own awareness that this *leela* was the latest in an unending spiral of divine des-

cents that Sri Ramakrishna was the peer of Rama and Krishna. In literary and cultural frames, this is easily identifiable — but not wholly similar to — the tradition/individual talent equation. The intertextuality of these twin levels is a necessary corrective to the imbalances implicit in both if they are pathologically split : tradition becomes a terrible vacuous burden if it is not illumined by an incarnation as the periodic exemplar of its truths. Similarly, an incarnation becomes aberrant if he does not have the overall contours of tradition to make his actions/experiences significant (cf : even with this tradition, how the Master's ecstasy was regarded by many — even by those like Śivanāth Śāstri who *ought* to know — as pathological and how the Brāhmaṇī used precedent logistics of incarnation to establish the Master's own).

V

Obviously, the structure of *The Gospel* is implicitly a reflector of all these. To begin with, it is *not* a didactic manual of moral and metaphysical maxims reeled off with pontifical unconcern. It is an exquisitely crafted, inherently dramatic narrative with an amazing range of emotions from the intensely human to the transcendent divine intractable to description. For instance, we have the Master's anxiety over an injured arm which matches his anguish over not seeing Narendra frequently. We have also a strange sense of humour irrupting unpredictably but almost incessantly. Above all, the *Gospel* dramatizes the continuous practice of the presence of God as the only concern of human life. This is, in a sense, the *unique* feature of *The Gospel* : unlike other incarnations the Master does not talk so much about or reflect *dharma* and its establishment as about *mokṣa* and the *sādhana* necessary for its establishment. Moreover, the Master's every act, every word is instinct

with this pragmatic strategy of *sādhana* and its graded growth.

'M' also realized that within the text of the Master's discourse there were other subtexts. These ranged from citations from the epics, the Purānas, the scriptures, to the vast repertory of engrossing tales and parables and enchanting songs which he himself sang enthralingly and made his disciples sing. But since these subtexts functioned in the presence of the Master their truths were validated as experiential contours. In effect, if a song for instance, by Ramprasad, arose originally from his own experience and took later the structure of a verbal text, the Master's own life in which it figured rescued it from its purely language level by enacting its truths.

All these put together explain why *The Kathāmrita* (in Bengali) begins with not only a brief life of the Master but also an elaborate *sthalapurāna* : an extraordinarily vivid description of the locale, the physical setting and background in which we find the Sri Ramakrishna *leela* unrolling itself. We have descriptions of the temples, the theatre hall, the guest house, the steward and the Office Rooms, the Concert Room, the Kuṭir etc. and, of course, the Master's Chamber. Not only these, 'M' also gives us an extraordinarily minute *visual text* of the Mother whose presence, if it threw the Master into ecstasy, becomes live for the reader through 'M's' description. Look at the following :

In the southern temple is the beautiful image of the Divine Mother.... She is apparelled in a gorgeous Benares *sari* and Her person is decorated with jewels of many kinds. On her lotus feet are, amongst others, the tinkling anklets called *nūpur* and the scarlet *jabā* with fresh leaves of the *bael* tree fragrant with sandal paste. One of these anklets is the *pāñjeb* used by our upcountry women. (p. 13).

But 'M' has an equally acute concern for fact. Continuing the description he says :

This ornament was procured by Mathoor, son-in-law of the foundress Rani Rasmani, at the special desire of Sri Ramakrishna. (Ibid)

This blending of accurate description with historical detail as foregrounding is a peculiar quality of 'M's sensibility as evident in *The Gospel*. While he clearly notes the date, day and time of the visit, the persons present or the journey undertaken, the details of the landscape on the way, he does not allow the reader to forget the *timeless* nature of the enactment. Hence, the "cunning" insets of intertext which prefaces 'M's first vision of the Master.

The inset is from the *Bhāgavata* and in translation reads :

The nectar of Thy excellences revives the scorched spirit of man. It purifies the sinner while holy men live on it. To hear it is itself auspicious and peace-generating. They are the real gift-makers who spread Thy name far and wide. O Lord, tarry not to come before our vision.

Another translation reads :

Munificent are those men who extensively recite on earth Your nectar-like story which is life-giving to the afflicted, has been celebrated by the wise and eradicates (all) sins, which is auspicious to hear and is most soothing, too.

What an extraordinary intertext ! It links, first, temporally the *Kathāmrita* of Sri Ramakrishna with the *Kathāmrita* of Krishna viz. *The Bhāgavata*. Here is another *leela*, a counterpart of the earlier one. If this is the overall significance, another is one which stems from the immediate context. This verse is from Book X ("Gopī Gītā") in which the Gopīs "gather on the banks of the Yamunā where they had their meeting with Krishna earlier, and began to sing in choruses the excellences of Krishna, eagerly expecting the reappearance."

If we take transpositional structure as the key to understand the appearance of both the avatāra and the text of that avatāra's

leela, the *bhagavān* and *bhāgavata*, to them Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance (rather reappearance) to assuage the spiritual thirst of countless gopis/gopas. Like Krishna enacting the most entrancing of episodes on the banks of Yamunā, here is the Master on the banks of an equally holy river, the Gaṅgā enacting the most significant period of his life when his words were to get transcription from vāk to *akṣara*. Moreover, the Gopī/Śuka narrative matrix of the original text is suggested by 'M' himself in the very opening lines. Pointing out that the devotees look on his benign and smiling face and drink the nectar of the living words that fall from his hallowed lips, he gives his own response :

'M' looks in and stands speechless ; 'M' wonders if It is Śukadeva before him that talks of the Lord ? (p. 25).

But then, he realizes the further timeless dimensions of the phenomenon he was witnessing and records the quantum leap in consciousness which is a necessary precondition to realize this truth fully :

'M' feels as if he were standing on a spot to which have come together the various holy places of pilgrimage to hear the Divine Preacher that is seated before him. It might have been the Lord Gouranga Deva (Chaitanya) seated before him with Rāmānanda, Swarūp and other beloved disciples in the Holy Land of Puri, singing forth the sacred name of the Beloved Lord and His glorious works. (pp. 25-26).

Though this is an effective translation done by 'M' himself one should note that in the original he says the Master appeared *not as it were* but as Śukadeva himself *sākṣāt Śukadeva bhāgavatkathā kahitechēn*. Similarly he uses another important description of the Master's locale appeared as *sarvatīrtha samāgama*. Added to this work *tīrtha*, he uses another, *kṣetra* to lift the reader straight from contemporaneity to a continuum.

Once this continuum is provided, it is no

surprise that throughout the text of *The Kathāmrita* we have inner texts drawn from *The Gītā*, the Upaniṣads etc. (not to speak of the parables drawn from Master's own

observation but from the purāṇic lore). 'M' knew that once the clue is given to the reader, he can be sure to 'place' the Master, the message and the medium.

NIVEDITA IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HER MASTER, VIVEKANANDA

SUMITORA NOMA

In reading the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita I have often been struck by the similarities between the two. It was because Sister Nivedita was the "Child of his (Swamiji's) spirit," his spiritual daughter, she earnestly prayed:

"God grant me to speak brave true words in my guru's name before I die, words with his life flowing through them, untainted, unimpaired—that I may feel, passing into Eternity, that I have not disappointed him!"¹

Yet, it is very revealing to find how alike they were in their views when it came to basic issues.

Both upheld Indian Culture and Religion: Vivekananda wanted religion to come to everyone's door.

"Religion is the greatest motive power for realising that infinite energy which is the birthright and nature of every man. In building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others and peace to one's own self, religion is the highest motive power and, therefore, ought to be studied from that standpoint."²

"Religion for a long time has come to be static in India. What we want is to make it dynamic. I want it to be brought into the life

of everybody. Religion, as it always has been in the past, must enter the palaces of kings as well as the homes of the poorest peasants in the land. Religion, the common inheritance, the universal birthright of the race, must be brought free to the door of everybody. Religion in India must be made as free and as easy of access as is God's air."³

Swamiji dedicated Nivedita at the feet of Mother India—Bhārata Mātā. India became indeed her God, and entered into her bones. That is why she could write in the spirit of her master,

"India lives and develops still, responds still to all the living influences of the world about her, and sees before her, as the individual unit that her development has made her, a long vista of growth and perfection to be achieved... We can hardly dig so deep into the past as to come upon the time when in Egypt, or Greece, or Crete, or Babylon, the name of India had not already a definite sound and association. At the very dawn of history in Europe, her thought and scholarship were already held in that respect which is akin to awe. His old tutor in the fourth century before Christ begs Alexander to bring him an Indian scholar! ... India, alone of all the nations of antiquity, is still young, still reverently striving to weave her future out of the past."⁴

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Mayavati Memorial Edition, June 1963, 10th Edition), Vol. II, p. 67.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, (6th Edition, 1948), p. 383.

4. Sister Nivedita, *Footfalls of Indian History*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, New Edition, 1956), pp. 18 to 21,

1. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girl's School, October 1961), p. 287.

And in the line of her master she would dream of India's religion to go out and teach the world. In her book *Religion and Dharma*, She wrote:

"Our religion is fully compatible with any of the higher forms of civilisation. But it will never die out of the land of its birth. ... Do we know that with the passing of characteristic faiths comes the death of nations? ... India shall not do this! Rather shall she go out into all the world, and see the inadequacy of more children faiths met out of her own brimming store. Rather shall she become the Guru and instructor of all others, and learn to measure the greatness of her own thinkers by the littleness and shallowness of those who oppose them."

Vivekananda felt that a true and unbiased account of Indian history was yet to be written. He himself started writing a book on *India's Message to the World*. But his early death interrupted the scheme. Nivedita felt this need of re-writing India's history from a national perspective. In her book *Aggressive Hinduism*, she expressed this idea,

"We must create a history of India in living terms. ... The history of India has yet to be written for the first time. It has to be humanised, emotionalised, made the trumpet-voice and evangel of the races that inhabit India. And to do this, it must be reconnected with *place*. ... There is no evangel without worship. Throw yourselves, children of India, into the worship of. ... your whole past. Strive passionately for *knowledge*. Yours are the spades and mattocks of this excavation. For with you and not with the foreigner, are the thought and language that will make it easy to unearth the old significance. India's whole hope lies in a deeper research, a more rigid investigation of facts. With her, encouragement and not despair, is on the side of truth!"⁵

Nivedita echoed the same sentiments again in her well-known book *Civic and National Ideals*,

5. Sister Nivedita, *Aggressive Hinduism*, (3rd Edition, 1950, Calcutta Udbodhan Office), pp. 21 to 23,

"In the making of history, it is the guiding ideas which are more important than the massing of correct detail. We shall become great historians, great singers of the song of a people's evolution, not merely in proportion as we are competent to adjudicate correctly the date of king or battle, but rather as we are able to reveal the essential features of the past and gather from them the prophesy of the future."

Swamiji knew that for a total rejuvenation of India, a revival of the arts is a must; but this must be a revival of Indian art, not a slavish imitation of Western painting. Nivedita in whom the spirit of Celtic imagination was spontaneous, caught her master's spirit. She wrote,

"Art must be reborn. Not the miserable travesty of would-be Europeanism that we at present know. There is no voice like that of art to reach the people. ... And art *will* be reborn, for she has found a new subject—India herself."⁶

Nivedita followed the line of her master. It is at her incentive that for the first time a section for Indian art was opened in the Govt. Art College, Calcutta. It was in those days when European paintings by Western masters, and Europeanised paintings by Ravi Varma would decorate the walls of Indian elite. Nivedita brought a rebirth of Indian art. She took Asit Halder and others to the caves of Ajanta, in order to copy those great masterpieces of Indian art. When Abanindranath Tagore or Nandalal Bose began to paint in the mystic and spiritual traditions of Indian art, Nivedita began to write powerfully defending and glorifying their paintings, in appreciations of the masterpieces like Nandalal Bose's *Sati* or *Shiva drinking poison*. To her eyes Indian painting must bring revelations of noble thoughts,

"An Indian painting, if it is to be really Indian and really great, must appeal to the Indian heart in an Indian way, must convey some feeling or

6. *Ibid.*, p. 23-24.

idea that is either familiar or immediately comprehensible; and must further, to be of the very highest mark, arouse in the spectator a certain sense of a revelation for which he is the nobler. But to do this, it is clear that it must be made up of elements which in themselves are already approved of by the communal taste. Thus an Indian man who has studied the carved stone doorways of Orissa, or the beaten silver of Southern temples has already possessed himself of a great language of the beautiful, and when he speaks in that language, in India, he will be understood by all, and outside India by those who are sufficiently trained, or sufficiently gifted. Now this language he will speak to perfection, because he himself will understand every line and curve of it."⁷

Vivekananda felt that the new system of Indian education should be in tune with the characteristics and spirit of the Indian genius while, at the same time, combining the scientific temper of the times:

"We must have a hold on the spiritual and secular education of the nation. Do you understand that? ... The education that you are getting now has some good points, but it has a tremendous disadvantage which is so great that the good things are all weighed down. In the first place it is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education or any training that is based on negation, is worse than death."⁸

As the disciple of Swamiji, Nivedita's most prominent role in the first decade of this century was to educate the masses and the women. She is the historic beginner of Indian education for India's women. After Swamiji's passing away, she travelled all over India. In those pre-independence days when India's educational policy was being dictated by foreign rulers, she spoke of the need of Indianisation of India's education to the leaders, students and teachers. The prevalent education system did not encourage

original thinking among students. Nivedita openly declared,

"We have had a Universities Commission lately, which has done its very best to kill all education, and especially all science education.

This is *the* point in India's wrongs that fires me, the right of India to be India, the right of India to think for herself, the right of India to *knowledge*. Were this not the great grievance I might be fired by her right to bread, to justice, to other things, but this outweighs all.

... The educational policy which is now being followed gives anything but University education. The Indian Universities Bill attempts to narrow the sphere of education in this country. ... I am ceaselessly thinking on the educational problem."

Sometimes her voice becomes strong and leonine like her master and she exhorts Indians to stand on their own feet and build up their own system of education,

"The educational problem is one of national life, and so one ignorant of your national life cannot contribute in any way to your wants. A foreigner can do so only when he acts with a correct ideal of national life and adjusts his deeds to the influences of the times. A foreigner cannot help you, and you must help yourselves. ...

It is for you to do and you should not crouch before the Government like monkeys to get done by the Government what you ought to do for yourself. ..."⁹

To Vivekananda India was always the holy land. In Calcutta he said,

"I was asked by an English friend on the eve of my departure (for India), 'Swami, how do you like now your motherland after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?' I could only answer, 'India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha.'¹⁰

This spirit became literally true in Nivedita's life. She became India personified. Her life and figure inspired the famous paintings of Bhārat-mātā by Abanindranath

7. Sister Nivedita, *Civic and National Ideals*, (4th Edition, 1948), pp. 68-69.

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (6th Edition, 1948), Vol. III, pp. 301-302.

Tagore. One could see in her the reincarnation of the mother of India. She called India 'the holy land of Buddha' and Vivekananda. The spirit of a renascent India got an articulate voice in her inspiring words,

"We have failed. The country has not been roused from its slumber; it has not come back to life. We have been able to do almost nothing. The true spirit of India,—what once made India the glory of the world and the heart of Asia, has not been revived. When will the nation be conscious of its glorious heritage, and the distinct place it once occupied in the growth of human thought and human civilisation? When will that life, that spirit, return?"¹¹

"Let me plough my furrow across India just as deep, deep, to the very centre of things, as it will go India is the starting point, and the goal, as far as I am concerned. Let *her* look after the West if she wishes."¹²

Vivekananda inspired her to dedicate her life and work untiringly for the education of Indian women. To her he gave his final testament, "Remember. ...the women and the masses." Vivekananda wanted not men but women to lead the great work of women-regeneration,

"...Our right of interference (with women) is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world."

"...They have many and grave problems, but none that are not to be solved by that magic word 'education.'"

"...I look upon religion as the innermost core of education. Mind, I do not mean my own, or any one else's opinion about religion. I think the teacher should take the pupil's starting-point in this, as in other respects, and enable her to develop along her own line of least resistance."¹³

9. *Sister Nivedita*, (October 1961), pp. 174-175.

10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (6th Edition, 1948), Vol. III, p. 309.

11. *Sister Nivedita*, pp. 170-171.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 170 to 180.

13. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (6th Edition, Vol. V), pp. 229 to 232.

"How can there be any progress of the country without the spread of education, the dawning of knowledge? Even no real effort or exertion in the cause is visible among the few in our country who are the promise of the future, you who have received the blessings of education. But know for certain that absolutely nothing can be done to improve the state of things, unless there is spread of education first among the women and the masses. ... It is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born. And you have reduced women to something like manufacturing machines; alas, for heaven's sake, is this the outcome of your education? The uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses, must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country, for India."¹⁴

And Nivedita echoed her master's ideas in her own writings. Breaking the orthodoxy of the so-called upper classes, and standing the neglect and sneer of the Europeanised Indians, she first brought Indian education for Indian women,

There can never be any sound education of the Indian woman, which does not begin and end in exaltation of the national ideals of womanhood, as embodied in her own history and heroic literature.

"...By the education of women we mean today her civilisation. The problem of the age, for India, as we have constantly insisted, is to supersede the family, as a motive, and even as a form of consciousness, by the *civitas*, the civic and national unity. This cannot be done by men as men alone. It is still more necessary that it should be done by women."¹⁵

In fact, I think we can truly say that after Swamiji's departure out of this world, Sister Nivedita became his "Voice", his spokeswoman, to take up the "Crusade" from where he had left. Swamiji had blessed her saying:

"The Mother's heart, the hero's will,
The sweetness of the Southern breeze,

14. *Ibid.*, (5th Edition, Vol. VI), pp. 444-445.

15. *Sister Nivedita*, (October, 1961) pp. 255 to 257.

The sacred charm and strength that dwell,
On Aryan Altars, flaming, free ;
All these be yours, and many more
No ancient soul could dream before—
Be thou to India's future son
The mistress, servant, friend in One."¹⁶

And how faithfully and to the letter Sister Nivedita lived up to his expectations is now history.

Swami Vivekananda, with his prophetic eye, had foreseen the great part Nivedita was to play on the national scene, when he wrote to her :

"...Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman ; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially.

"India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted..."¹⁷

And how this prophesy was verily fulfilled is also a part of history. Her master saw in her the immense possibility of a "world-mover". His most inspiring words to her is contained in a letter :

"Who will give the world light ? Sacrifice in the past has been the Law, it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity.

"...What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.

"...You have the making in you of a world-mover, and others will also come. Bold words and bolder deeds are what we want. Awake, awake, great one ! The world is burning with

misery. Can you sleep ? Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the god within answers to the call. What more is in life ? What greater work ?..."¹⁸

Nivedita proved herself equal to the task and worthy of her master's great trust by her subsequent life and work. Swami Vivekananda conferred on her the name Nivedita or the Consecrated One, because her whole life was dedicated to the service of her adopted country.

The more we read of Sister Nivedita, the more the conviction grows in us that, just like her Master, she exerted tremendous influence on Indians and was, in fact, truly one of the great Makers of Modern India. By her powerful and inspired writings and speeches Sister Nivedita brought manhood to Indian people and awakened their national consciousness.

It was the youth of India especially who were inspired and roused to action by her powerful writings and speeches. Sister Nivedita herself once said :

"...I believe now that I have something to do for grown-up India and for Indian men..."¹⁹ The list of her followers must be in hundreds, known and unknown "soldiers", so suffice to mention just a few names ; Sir Jadunath Sarker, Radhakumud Mukherjee, Nandalal Bose, Surendranath Ganguly, Asit Kumar Halder, and Abanindranath Tagore. Times have changed, however, and now Indian women are in the forefront in all walks of life, along with their male counterpart. With this welcome change, Sister Nivedita's powerful writings should prove to be a great and continuing source of strength and inspiration to them as well.

16. Swami Vivekananda's Poem, written to Sister Nivedita on September 22, 1900, quoted in "Sister Nivedita"—In Paris, p. 115.

17. Ibid., pp. 28-29.

18. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: 2nd Visit*, p. 17.

19. Pravrajika Atmaprana, "Sister Nivedita", pp. 127-128.

All of this, however, is *not* to say that the then leaders of India were slow in recognising her great contributions to national life. The tributes and homages that were showered upon Sister Nivedita on her demise by the great leaders of India like Dr. Rashbehari Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore and

G.K. Gokhale and others, are ample evidence of how very highly they regarded her.

The speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita should be widely popularised. This will be for the good of India.

NATIONAL DRINKING WATER MISSION (NDWM)—A GOAL

M. M. DATTA

The Government of India is making a determined effort to raise the standard of living of the people, especially of those living in rural areas and the economically weaker sections. The Government of India, in its statement to the Lok Sabha on 27th February, 1986, had declared: 'We are setting up a number of scientific missions and thrust areas to see that funding, proper scientific management and all the resources that are required in these areas are available. ... One of the areas we have chosen is drinking water.'

The National Drinking Water Mission was launched in October, 1986. Prior to Independence India's progress in the field of Rural Water Supply was very slow and sporadic. A recent analysis has revealed that plan outlay on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation has been stepped up from 0.18% of the total Public Sector Plan Outlay during the First Plan (1951-56) to 1.97% during the Seventh Plan (1985-90). 0.27% of the GDP on an average (at current market prices) has been spent on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in the current decade (1980-81 to 1989-90).

Currently Rural Water Supply Programme is implemented under :

(a) State Sector — Minimum Needs Programme (MNP)

(b) Central Sector — Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) — National Drinking Water Mission (NDWM)

At the beginning of the Seventh Plan, 1,61,722 problem villages (out of 5,83,003 villages in the country) and about 211.90 million rural population (40%) remained uncovered with safe drinking water facilities.

The main objectives of the NDWM are :

- (a) Scientific Source Finding and Development
- (b) Water Harvesting and Conservation of Water
- (c) New Rigs and Equipment for Water Prospecting
- (d) New Dimensions by Application of Science and Technology Inputs in an Integrated Manner

(e) Provision of safe drinking water to prevent a host of water-borne diseases and reduce the burden on those who traditionally fetch water : women and children.

The target of the project is to :

(i) Cover 98,746 residual problem villages by March, 1990 (62,008 hard core uncovered problem villages and 36,738 villages partial to full).

(ii) Supply 40 litres per capita per day in all areas for human beings and in addition 30 litres per capita per day in desert areas for cattle.

(iii) Evolve cost effective technology.

(iv) Take conservation measures for sustained supply of water.

(v) Improve the performance and cost effectiveness of the on-going programmes.

The methodologies so far devised by the NDWM are :

(i) Scientific source finding and development

(ii) Improvement of traditional methods

(iii) Purification of water

(iv) Improvement of materials and design

(v) Improvement of maintenance methods

(vi) Computerized management information system

(vii) Continuous monitoring and evaluation

(viii) Community involvement — village panchayat, voluntary agencies

(ix) Awareness campaign.

The NDWM has identified five problem areas of immediate concern and five Sub-Missions have been set up. Some operational targets of the Sub-Missions include :

(i) Conservation of water and recharging of aquifers by providing Remote Sensing Technique followed by Hydrogeological and Geophysical survey with the participation of SAC/SCIR, CGWB, SGWB, SGWD, etc. in areas where no sustained water source is available.

(ii) Eradication of guinea worm (8,811 villages) with the participation of NICD and NEERI by 1990.

(iii) Control of fluorosis (8,700 villages) by application of appropriate technological input like Nalgonda technique by 1990 with the participation of NEERI and AIIMS.

(iv) Control of brackishness (17,500 villages) by reduction to tolerable limits by application of appropriate technological inputs like reverse osmosis, electro dialysis, solar stills with the participation of CSIR and BHEL by 1990.

(v) Removal of excess iron (2,900 villages) to tolerable limits by application of

appropriate technological inputs with the participation of NEERI by 1990.

The problems of supplying drinking water in the villages are many and vary from region to region. Based on the problems associated with the supply of drinking water 55 Mini Mission Project areas have been taken in 25 States and three Union Territories.

Achievements of the NDWM can be stated thus :

(a) Potable water is now available to about 75% of the rural population (3936.17 lakhs out of 5254.57 lakhs as per 1981 census) as on 1.4.88.

(b) Only 22,000 villages of the target 98,746 residual problem villages remain to be covered as on 1.4.89.

(c) Water sources for 7779 problem villages have been located through scientific source finding where earlier efforts have failed.

(d) Science and technology inputs have increased the success rate of drilling from 60% to 90% in certain areas.

(e) In April 1988 there were only 3,111 villages affected with guinea worm, down from 8,811 in 1985.

(f) Computerized Rig Monitoring system as developed by UNICEF has been extended to 18 States and one U.T. Administration in the country.

(g) Water Quality Assessment has been given its due importance, 2 Nos. mobile water testing laboratories have been developed (one each by ITRC and NEERI):

100 Nos. water testing laboratories (85 Nos. stationary and 15 Nos. mobile) are being established during 1989-90. Laboratory Manuals on Water Analysis have been prepared as a part of the Mission activity.

For areas that have no water to desalt and cannot import water, application of new technology of an old method of water harvesting has been advocated. It is being used not only in India but also in Australia,

Israel, USA and some of the arid regions. It consists of collecting and storing water from sloping land rendered impervious. The catchment can be of any size.

A Council for Social Audit of the Six National Technology Missions including National Drinking Water Mission is a people's forum composed of socially committed citizens. It has been set up to :

- (i) Independently evaluate official claims
- (ii) Provide reliable feedback on the quality of services
- (iii) Respond to citizen concerned.

We hope the Drinking Water Mission will remove the long-standing difficulties of drinking water in different parts of our country.

Vedanta and Modern World

UNDERSTANDING SOUL OR CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE AND SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

DR. CHETNA MANDAVIA

The nature of consciousness is a fundamental existential question that has fascinated men and women throughout the ages and has reemerged as a topic of intensive discussions among experts from various disciplines of science and representatives of mystical tradition. The renewed interest is because of the fact that man is also *Homo Spiritualis* as Heinz Pagels notes.¹ He wants to know the spirit behind the matter. Whatever knowledge we have regarding the nature of consciousness, is the result of the basic spiritual urge of man.

Consciousness in the light of Science

All animals have awareness of the outer world, but only man has awareness of the inner world. This was proved by the great evolutionary scientist Teilhard de Chardin. His key concept is the "Law of complexity-consciousness" which states that complexity

of evolution is accompanied by a corresponding rise of consciousness. According to him, the universe has not merely a *without* but also a *within*.² In man, nature has disclosed a 'within' view of itself.

Twentieth century biology presents us psycho-social evolution which is evolution rising from organic to spiritual level. At spiritual level, man can lift his consciousness from lower to higher level.

The great physiologist Sir J. C. Bose recognised the One Soul with changing manifestations pervading in plants and animals. He proved that plants are living, breathing, communicating creatures with consciousness as the fundamental reality. Laszlo's (1972)³ new concept of 'Systems biology' says that consciousness is a mani-

1. Heinz Pagels, *Perfect Symmetry* (U.S.A. Bantam Edition, 1986), pp. 386-387.

2. Quoted in, Swami Ranganathananda; *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*, Vol. I, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1987), p. 316.

3. Quoted in Fritjof Capra; *The Turning Point*; (Fleming, 1984), p. 286.

festation of living systems of a certain complexity.

Psychologists have a direct access to understanding consciousness through their various spheres of study. Indian psychology is essentially a spiritual tradition in the sense that it aims to know the inner essence of human personality to enable man to realise his soul. Yoga, the science of spiritual psychology, differs from Western psychology in the fact that the latter considers mind as the centre of consciousness whereas Indian system considers soul as the seat of human consciousness. The Science of Rāja Yoga which is based on Sāṃkhya Philosophy on which we shall ponder over later on, tells that the whole existence is one spectrum of mind which is consisted of three distinct states—unconsciousness, consciousness and superconsciousness. Man is at the middle of the spectrum. He can perceive the Reality, Pure consciousness, of which his consciousness (Soul) is a fragment, when the mind makes a quantum jump from conscious state (relative frame of reference) to superconscious state (absolute frame of reference). The Self-awareness in Rāja Yoga is the condition when the Self, the Ātman, is associated with *buddhi*, the determinative faculty of mind, which brings about the transformation of consciousness.

The Western psychology began a new era through the study of dreams initiated by Freud and his school. But his theory of the unconscious, shot with sex and love of power driving the whole human existence, presented human beings in the darkest of colours. But, Carl Jung gave a wholesome treatment to the unconscious and accepted the presence of Spirit or Soul. Culture and personality enrichment, according to him, is an inward penetration of one's own soul.⁴ Thus, soul is now accepted by Western

psychologists as the source of inspiration for inner and outer fulfilment of man's life.

Recently Ken Wilber⁵ has proposed a spectrum of human consciousness which unifies Eastern and Western approaches. He distinguishes five different bands in the spectrum of consciousness—ego level, biological level, existential level, transpersonal level and mind level. Mind level is the highest state at which one gets identified with cosmic consciousness.

Till now, Physiologists and Neurologists considered brain as the seat of consciousness, the view which now they find difficult to hold. As, Dr. D. S. Kothari explains, they are also unable to work out relationship between mind and brain.⁶ Neurologists like Wilder Penfield still believe that the higher brain stem together with cortex is the seat of consciousness.⁷

Quantum physics has contributed a lot in understanding consciousness which began with Heisenberg's uncertainty principle which declared that the common division of the world into subject and object, body and soul, is no longer adequate.⁸ Schrodinger's wave equation suggested the world as of 'multidimensional reality'. Following this line, Everett and his co-workers created 'Everette wheeler's interpretation'. Reality, according to this, is 'observer-created reality'. We create our own world. Wolfgang Pauli elaborated this—'from an inner centre the psyche seems to move outward'.⁹ These two concepts lend clarity in understanding consciousness. Schrodinger asserted that cons-

5. Wilber, Ken (Ed). *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Illionois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1982).

6. *Prabuddha Bharata* (Calcutta), June '88, p. 205.

7. Quoted in, Swami Ranganathananda, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 434.

8. Wilber, Ken (Ed), *Loc. Cit.*, p. 39.

9. *Prabuddha Bharata* (Calcutta), Feb. '87, p. 47.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 400-401.

consciousness is a singular entity which is the real substratum of all matter. The plurality of consciousness is *māyā*. It is only a confirmation of the well-known statement of Max Planck, 'consciousness I regard as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness'.¹⁰

M. Delbruck speaks of consciousness not as something derived from brain and nerve but as a factor independent of body. Eminent physiologist Alexis Carrel echoed a similar idea. Famous astronomer Dr. Gustaf Stromberg regards consciousness as a domain of mental world which derives energy from a Universal Mind.¹¹

David Bohm in 1972 verified Bell's theorem and offered the idea of the universe of 'unbroken wholeness', of an 'implicate order' where everything is pervaded by a 'super-determinate power'.¹² Stuart and Freedman showed that 'Superluminal communication (faster than the speed at which light travels) exists between two particles'.¹³ Zukav writes that this implicate order is made up of "that which is" (a pure consciousness), which is beyond space and time, and manifests everything in the universe—Being or non-being or the 'emptiness' between them; and this can be experienced in the enlightened state of consciousness.¹⁴

Eddington said that our consciousness is deriving its power from a greater power.¹⁵ We cannot separate our consciousness from the world of which it is a part.¹⁶

Recently, Dr. Rupert Sheldrake has formulated a concept of Morphogenetic Field

which shapes living organisms.¹⁷ He accepts a superior consciousness transcending space-time as the primal factor behind all organic reactions.¹⁸

Consciousness in the light of spiritual knowledge

The two main schools of Western spiritual tradition show sharp contrast in their consideration of soul or self. Judeo-Christian view does not allow a positive affirmation of the soul. In Greco-Roman tradition Plato first brought the concept of the one Reality. Stoicism gave the concept of Logos—the soul as a part of cosmic intelligence. Plotinus said that the 'Supreme Plenum' or Supreme Soul is immaterial and immortal.

From Indian spiritual tradition, the most rational study of consciousness in depth was done by the sages 4000 years ago, and their wisdom is preserved in the Upaniṣads. To give the experimental basis, each human being's consciousness was given the name '*Jīvātmā*' and the Universal consciousness was called '*Paramātmā*'. But philosophically they are ONE, there is no difference between the two. The whole world—human being, matter and energy—is envisaged as pure consciousness, the Supreme Power, the Brahman. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* declares: 'Brahman is infinite. Infinite cannot be more than one. That is only one and only pure consciousness. This is the subtle substratum of the universe, the Reality behind all this. That is True. That is Ātman. O Svetaketu, "thou art That" (Ch. 6 and 7).'

Some of the greatest utterances of the Upaniṣads convey Brahman as pure consciousness (*Aitareya Upaniṣad*: 5.3.); Brahman is Truth, consciousness and infinity (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*: 2.1.).

10. Ibid., June '88, p. 205.

11. Ibid., p. 206.

12. Gary Zukav. *The Dancing Wuli Masters.*, (U.S.A. Bantam Books, 1980), p. 300.

13. Ibid., p. 288.

14. Ibid., p. 308.

15. A.D. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1929), pp. 327-328.

16. Ibid., p. 330.

17. Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1985), p. 218.

18. Ibid., p. 210.

Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad beautifully describes four states of consciousness as waking, dream, deep sleep and the 'turīya'—or the transcendental state. The fourth state is described as the one which transcends the other three states. This state is peaceful, all blissful and non-dual. That is the soul or Ātman or consciousness. (*Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad-7*).

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, who was himself the embodiment of the Vedantic Truth, "Pure mind, pure reason and pure self are the same Reality". A pure mind is pure consciousness. The subject sees itself and everything else as pure consciousness. This is Advaita. *Dr̥g Dr̥śya Viveka* (verse no-1) writes, "All the scenes before us are projections of our intellect (activated by the presence of our consciousness)".

The dualistic philosophy of Hinduism holds soul as having various qualities. God or the Cosmic Soul is eternally separate from the human soul.

Sāṃkhya philosophy gives the name 'Puruṣa' to the Cosmic Soul and holds that individual souls are fragments of the Puruṣa. The mind is the instrument in the hands of the soul.¹⁹

In the Śakti doctrine, Śiva is *Cit* and Śakti is *Cidrūpiṇī* denoting static and dynamic consciousness respectively. They are really one. Through the three gunas (*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*) Śakti manifests itself as Prakṛti and the universe is the manifestation of Śakti.

Buddhism dominated Indian philosophy after the Upaniṣadic age. Although Buddha denied the very existence of a permanent soul, the Nirvāna of Buddhism and Brahma-Nirvāna of Vedanta connote the same idea of pure consciousness. The pure conscious-

ness is itself the Supreme Tao of Chinese Taoist.

Appraising various views on consciousness in the light of scientific and mystical tradition, one striking point emerges out; that science has now stepped into mysticism. It is the Absolute Consciousness which peeps through the relativistic world of today's science. Swami Vivekananda, the modern expounder of Vedanta, a century before referred to the 'high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes'. After nearly 100 years we are witness to the fact that these echoes are growing more and more distinct and nearer to the original. Swamiji considered Vedantic concept of Pure Consciousness as the basis of morality. He said that there is no separation, "if you go below the surface, you find that Unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals."²⁰ You cannot help but be good.

So, what is consciousness? It is the ONE all-pervading consciousness or Brahman of Vedanta which Schrödinger arrived at by the logic of quantum physics. It is the ONE inner consciousness of human beings which lends reality to the outer world. It is the 'thing within' of Teilhard de Chardin. It is Supreme Tao of the Taoist; the Supreme Plenum of Plotinus. It is the 'all pervading unity', 'Superdeterminate Power' and the 'Implicate order' of David Bohm. It interconnects and interpenetrates all the layers of the matter as also all layers of our consciousness. It is the 'mind level' of Wilber, superconscious state of Rāja Yoga, Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya, *Cit* and *Cidrūpiṇī* of the Śāktas, and Nirvāna of Buddhism. It could be described through Upaniṣadic dictum, 'Ātman is Brahman, Brahman is Ātman'.

19. Quoted in *Selections from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1985), pp. 68-69.

20. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 153.

THE SEER IN THE GĪTĀ

SWAMI RAMANUJANANDA

Seeing is a function of the eye. One who is able to see is a seer. But, by usage, the word means a prophet, or a spiritual person who sees divine visions. So, it is very necessary that we should know who a real seer is, and what are his characteristics.

A blind man was walking at night with a lamp, when his neighbour wanted to know the utility of the lamp for the blind man. The blind man retorted that the lamp was meant for those people who cannot see even though they have eyes! Such is the state of ordinary mortals. Attached to the world we are blind to the spiritual light. When we free ourselves from the clutches of the senses and open our eyes and see the spiritual light then only can we be called seers. Otherwise, we too behave like blind men in spite of having normal vision.

The *Bhagavadgītā* is a treasure-house of spiritual gems. On perusal we find that hundreds of spiritual ideas are explained throughout the book. Meditation on the *Gītā* reveals new meanings and gives insights.

In the *Gītā* three types of vision are mentioned. When King Duryodhana approached his teacher Droṇa and spoke to him the following words: 'O teacher, please see this vast army of the sons of Pāṇdu, arrayed for battle by the son of Drupada, your intelligent disciple'¹ or again, when Krishna tells Arjuna: 'O Pārtha, see these assembled people of Kuru dynasty'² in both the *ślokas* seeing means seeing the objective world of names and forms.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra was a blind king. So, it was arranged that Sanjaya, who had extra-sensory vision, should narrate the happenings in the Kurukṣetra battlefield. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and

Sanjaya sat in the palace itself and Sanjaya went on narrating the incidents. Here it was a case of extra-sensory vision.

When Arjuna wanted to see the Divine Form of Sri Krishna, the Lord did grant him divine eyes (*divyam cakṣuh*) enabling him to behold the Cosmic Form. Even though Sanjaya had extra-sensory vision, he cannot be called a 'seer'. Then who is a seer? The *Bhagavadgītā* answers: 'The self-restrained man keeps awake in that which is night for all creatures. That in which all creatures keep awake, is night to the seeing sge.'³ So, it is stated that the most important characteristic of a seer is that he is a man of self-control. He does not run after sense pleasures because 'that man attains peace, who after rejecting all desires, moves about free from hankering, without the idea of "me" and "mine" and devoid of pride.'⁴

The seer is one who realizes the Divinity either by the path of knowledge or action. His aim is *ātmano mokṣārtham jagad-dhitāya ca* (for the liberation of the self and welfare of the world). He is not indifferent to the sufferings of his fellow beings. But his aim is identification with the Supreme Being. 'That State which one attains by *jñānayoga* is attained by *karmayoga* also. He who sees both *Sāṅkhya* and *yoga* as one, sees indeed.'⁵

Everything in this universe is made of three *guṇas*. Among them *sattva* leads to liberation, *rajas* binds and *tamas* destroys. So, the seer likes only *sāttvika* knowledge. 'Know that knowledge to be originating from *sattva*, through which one sees a single,

1. *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, I. 3.

2. *Ibid.*, I. 25.

3. *Ibid.*, II. 69.

4. *Ibid.*, II. 71.

5. *Ibid.*, V. 5.

undecaying, undivided Entity in all the diversified things.⁶ This is *sāttvika* knowledge. With *sāttvika* knowledge the seer is able to see unity in diversity. Afterwards he finds the unity of his own self and the universal Self. 'One who has his mind Self-absorbed through *yoga*, and who has the vision of sameness everywhere, sees his Self existing in everything, and everything in his Self.'⁷

The fruit of this realization is that he is not forsaken by the Lord. 'He who sees Me in all beings, and all beings in Me—to him I am never lost, nor he to Me.'⁸ The Lord praises such a seer that he is the best *yogi*. 'O Arjuna, in my view that *yogi* is the best who, out of a sense of identity with others on account of the perception of the same Ātman in all, feels their joy and suffering as his own.'⁹ And also such a seer is steadfast in his devotion. 'Even among all the *yogis*, he who adores Me with his mind fixed on Me and with faith, he is considered by Me to be the best of the *yogis*.'¹⁰

The Lord Himself prescribes various paths for different types of seekers. On hearing 'M's remarks that those who worship clay image as God should be taught that the image is not God, the Master rebuked him. 'Who are you to teach others? He who is the Lord of the universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created the universe; who has made the sun and the moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. ... He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.'¹¹

6. Ibid., XVIII. 20.

7. Ibid., VI. 29.

8. Ibid., VI. 30.

9. Ibid., VI. 32.

10. Ibid., VI. 47.

11. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 1974 edition, p. 4.

The Lord clearly states the characteristics of the seer: "He sees who sees the supreme Lord as existing equally in all beings, and as the Imperishable among the perishable."¹² Commenting on this *śloka* Sri Śankara says: 'He sees who thus sees the supreme Lord as described. Objection: Is it not that all people see? What is the need of specification? Reply: True, they see, but they see contrarily. Hence the Lord specifies, "He alone sees". As in comparison with one who, suffering from the eye disease called *Timira*, sees many moons, the person who sees one moon is distinguished by saying, "He alone sees", similarly, here as well, the man who sees the one undivided Self as described above is distinguished from those who contrarily see many and differentiating selves, by saying "He alone sees". Others, though seeing, do not see because they see contrarily like the person who sees many moons. This is the meaning.'

Such 'seeing' is realization. This is stated in the next *śloka*: 'Since by seeing equally God who is present alike everywhere he does not injure the Self by the Self, therefore he attains the Supreme Goal.'¹³ The Lord further adds: 'And who sees actions as being done in various ways by nature itself, and also the Self as the non-agent—he sees.'¹⁴

Thus the *Gītā* shows that a real seer is a man of self-control. He is full of compassion for others. He works for the welfare of all beings. For him *yoga* is seeing sameness in everything. And he finds identity of the self with the Supreme Self. Now the *Gītā* narrates the experience of such a seer. What exactly does he see? Says Arjuna: 'O God, I see in Your body all gods as also hosts of various classes of beings; Brahmā the

12. *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, XIII. 27.

13. Ibid., XIII. 28.

14. Ibid., XIII. 29.

ruler, sitting on a lotus seat and all the heavenly sages and serpents. I see You as possessed of numerous arms, bellies, mouths and eyes ; having infinite forms all around. O Lord of the universe, O cosmic person, I see not your limit nor the middle, nor again the beginning. I see You as wearing a diadem, wielding a mace, and holding a

disc ; a mass of brilliance glowing all around, difficult to look at from all sides, possessed of radiance of the blazing fire and sun, and immeasurable.¹⁵

Thus, Arjuna speaks about his vision of the Lord's cosmic form.

15. Ibid., XI. 15-17.

LIFE OF M. AND SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA

by Dharm Pal Gupta, Sri Ma Trust, 579,
Sector 18-B, Chandigarh, Rs. 150/-, Page 530.

(A REVIEW ARTICLE)

BY SWAMI JITATMANANDA

The voluminous book is the first successful attempt to bring out the life of M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta), the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, to the English-reading public. Sri Dharm Pal Gupta, the author of the book, has worked hard to compile facts and present the life. The basic materials for the book are collected mostly from the *Gospel* and M.'s own reminiscences recorded in the sixteen volumes of *Sri Ma Darshan* (Bengali) by Swami Nityatmananda, some of which have already been translated into English in several volumes. Some more materials about M.'s life have been available through the reminiscences of senior monks of the Ramakrishna order, who were inspired by the life of the ideal householder disciple and messenger of Sri Ramakrishna.

In the *Gospel* M. is mentioned as Sri Ma, Master Mahashaya or Master. Through the 530 pages of the book the figure of M. occasionally emerges as an individual teacher, headmaster, rector, devotee, a philosopher, a poet or a hagiographer, but mostly he is seen as a silent shadow, a quiet servant, an accepted apostle, and a dear son of Sri Ramakrishna.

As a child once Mahendra went to the temple of Dakshineswar and got lost in the crowd. Standing alone, the child began to cry for his mother. 'Someone then came out and caressed me and began to call out: "Whose child is this? Where has his mother gone?"' (p. 3) Later on when M. met Sri Ramakrishna he wondered if it was his master who came to console the forlorn child.

It was at a supremely critical period of life at the age of 28 that M., torn in conflict both in the internal and external life, came at the feet of his Master. From the moment he met Sri Ramakrishna, he breathed and survived primarily reminiscing on the Master deriving all the strength and sustenance of life from his words. Right from the beginning they were to him gospel, words charged with 'spirit and life', as Christ said of his own gospel. They were burning sparks from the fire of Everlasting Life—Ramakrishna. He lived on them, rejuvenating himself in the Master's divinity each time he looked at the notes he had taken in the direct presence of the Master. Once in later life when M. inadvertently lost one of such notebooks in a Calcutta tram at night, he

became virtually mad, and if it would not be recovered by his own desperate search from pillar to post, he could never have forgiven himself for the rest of his life. M.'s own words: 'Like the *cātak* bird I became impatient to hear a word, a single word, drop from his holy mouth. And when that *Kathāmṛta* was lost, oh, what a catastrophe.' "Bhakta-Bhāgavata-Bhagavān are one": this is his saying. His *Kathāmṛta*, his *Bhāgavata* had been lost. So very eager I had been for a single word of his, and this lost book contained so many of his words! For all these days I have been thinking of this *Bhāgavata*, which I worshipped, always kept with me and so very closely lived with. God exists also as *Śabda-Brahman*. So *Bhāgavata* and *Bhagavān* are one—*Bhāgavata* means his *Kathāmṛta*.' (p. 249).

In later life when someone asked him about the importance of Guru's words, M. replied: 'Somebody asked the Master, "What is the way to salvation?" The Master replied, "Faith in the words of the Guru is the only path to realization."' (p. 146).

Swami Shivananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, likened him to Vyāsa (p. 217). Yet M. was absolutely egoless, his ego buried in contemplation of the transcendent life of his Master. Throughout his life he only spoke of the Master and his gospel. That was his passion and spiritual practice. M. would say: 'I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean and keep with me a few pitchers of sea-water. When a visitor comes I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words?' (p. 224).

Both in the pages of the *Gospel* and in his own life M. completely hid himself. When young devotees sometimes would request him to speak on the *Gospel*, M. replied with a rare humility: "Well, do you want to hear His words or see them?" The boys did not understand how words could be

seen. M. said to them softly," Yes, my boys, His holy words have taken shape as human beings. Such beings live in the Baranagore Math. Will you care to see them? If you are keen, come on Sunday. I will take you to that place." (p. 226) Completely ignoring the power and divine grace that sustained his own life, he would look up to the monastic disciples of his Master who were conflagrating their lives with the fire of Sri Ramakrishna's spirit of renunciation.

Yet one knew with what a love and nearness Sri Ramakrishna had accepted this great householder disciple. '...the Master had said to M., "With these very eyes, I saw you among the singers of Sri Chaitanya's *saṅkīrtana*.... Hearing you read the *Chaitanya Bhāgavata* I recognised you ... You belong to the ever-perfected class ... You are my own, of the same substance as father and son ... You belong to my inner circle... You are one of those who trade in the jewellery of the Spirit ... You will have to do a little of Divine Mother's work, you will have to teach the *Bhāgavata* to people."' (p. 222).

M.'s life indeed became a conduit of 'a little of Divine Mother's work'. When Sri Ramakrishna left the world, M. would only dwell on his great words. 'And one should pray to God in solitude and secrecy, *nirjane gopane*. These two words he repeated several times and then quoted a passage from the Bible: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." (St. Matthew, 6:6)' (p. 144).

For him the places associated with Sri Ramakrishna were pilgrimages charged with a living presence of the Master. 'M. comes out of the gate. A little farther towards the south is Jadu Mullik's gate. M. touches the gate, salutes it with folded hands and says:

“Thākur often visited this place. His touch is here.” (p. 178).

A poet and a philosopher by temperament, M. was born with an innate love of sublimity manifested in nature. He used to spend hours in solitary contemplation. ‘The Master had once asked M., “I say, were you inspired by the feeling of God on seeing the Himalayas?” M. had been moved to tears at the sight of the Kanchenjunga from Darjeeling in North Bengal, though he did not remember the Lord’s word in the *Gītā*: “Among the immovables, I am the Himalaya.” ‘The same was M.’s state of mind on seeing the sea at Puri.’ (p. 155) M. himself said later on: ‘He who is a poet looks for beauty and the philosopher for truth. The goal of both is the same. He who is Truth is also Beauty and he who is Beauty is also Truth. A true poet and a true philosopher are one ... Except for God, there is nothing eternally beautiful or ever new.’ (p. 155).

As days passed by, M. emerged not as a poet or a philosopher but as an apostle transfigured by the Divine grace of Sri Ramakrishna. One of his students who saw him as the Rector of the Morton Institution many years after Sri Ramakrishna left the world, wrote: ‘He looked like Moses in pictures. His complexion was fair like molten gold; his big eyes betokened an inward peace and compassion. His voice was sweetly grave, full-throated yet gentle. When he spoke, he would speak slowly. Yet the whole place would be charged with the deep notes of his voice.’ (p. 126).

M., the ideal householder-devotee, would inspire devotees struggling in the mire of worldly life. ‘M., chanting night and day the glories of the Lord, exhorting his devotees to think of God with 75 per cent of their minds and attend to their worldly duties with the remaining 25 per cent. He assures

his visitors that while their worldly work will not suffer, they will be able to live in peace and joy in the burning cauldron of this world.’ (p. 508).

At the ripe age of 78 when M.’s illustrious life came to an end, many young men inspired by him entered the monastic life in order to realize God. Many were consoled. Many found new paths to peace. At the final moment, the last words he uttered were: ‘Master, O Holy Mother, take me up in your lap.’ (p. 215).

The twenty-three chapters in the book are primarily accounts of M. as the writer of the *Gospel*. But they also offer us a picture of the entire world of Sri Ramakrishna and his devotees, monks and householders, both men and women. Rightly has Revered Swami Tapasyanandaji said in the Foreword of the book, ‘... in this age of ours, when cart-loads of books are turned out by our commercialized publishing houses—books which entertain, bore or debase, but seldom instruct and much less inspire—the *Life of M. and Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmṛta* comes as a refreshing shower on a parched desert.’ (p. iii).

The author, Sri Dharm Pal Gupta, has put a labour of decades for bringing the silent, quiet M., always hidden from public gaze, to us who like to know about this great life more intimately. Guptaji deserves the gratitude and thanks from the lovers of Sri Ramakrishna. The author’s own words on M. are among the brightest lines in the book: ‘A star had risen which for fifty years shed light on the path of travellers trudging their weary way in life. And when it set, it left behind a trail of glory—the words and life of Sri Ramakrishna enshrined in his immortal *Kathāmṛta*—to lead the parched humanity to the Eternal Source of peace and joy.’ (p. 217).

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION RELIEF SERVICES, (1968-1988),

ISSUED BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY,
RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, BELUR MATH,
DIST: HOWRAH, WEST BENGAL.

The well-printed book *Ramakrishna Mission Relief Services*, 1968 to 1988 (along with its appendices) gives most of the statistics of the long ninety years' history of the Mission's relief work. The book of 128 pages, issued by the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, begins with an inspiring article by Swami Ashokananda on the spirit and genesis of the relief activities of the Mission.

The aim of this illustrated book-cum-report is to offer a comprehensive view of the mission's relief activities conducted for nearly a century. Six sketches on the first incidents of relief service by Shri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Swamiji and Sister Nivedita, help the reader to bring a visual image of those early days. The 229 photographs arranged in an impressive manner, give, as the publisher admits, only an over-all impression of the relief activities of the last twenty years. Pictures of countless other relief activities had never been taken.

Right from the first relief work by Swami Akhandanandaji at Murshidabad in 1896, up to 1988, the entire year-wise list of 700 relief activities has been presented in the historic appendices. From Lahore (plague in 1924-1925) and Kathiawar in the West, to Arakan and Amherst in Burma (1921-1922), from Batticola in Ceylon in Far South to Saurashtra in North West, and West Siang in Arunachal Pradesh, from Rameshwaram (1965-1966) to Rishikesh (1924), from Dharmashala (1897) and Nepal (1980-1981) in the North to Sagar Islands in South Bengal—hundreds of places covering 25 States in India and also other countries like Burma, Sri Lanka and today's Bangladesh, have been covered under this relief. The monks of the Order have conducted relief activities not just for a few days or weeks, but sometimes for months, and even years.

The book clearly points out that during the last twenty years, the relief activities of the Mission have been conducted much more extensively, and sometimes on war-footing, mobilising man-power, commodities, money, and involving common public, and finally initiating gigantic rehabilitation schemes with the help of various charitable institutions, business organisations, the State and the Central Governments. Mostly the funds have come from the spontaneous donations of the common public.

During the last twenty years, the relief expenditure amounted to Rs. 3, 71, 23, 375. 50, and rehabilitation expenditure amounts Rs. 3, 18, 20, 346. 50. Each penny is audited. Of the major rehabilitation programmes 5 belong to cyclone-affected areas, 17 to flood-affected areas, 2 to Tornado-affected areas, 4 to areas ravaged by fire, and one major economic rehabilitation at Bali-Dewanganj under the direct supervision of the Mission headquarters.

During the devastating flood in Diviseema (Andhara), and Morvi (Gujarat), the volunteers had to wade or even swim in flood-waters, removing rotting animal carcasses by their own hands. In Gujarat and Rajasthan draught relief, tons of green fodder were offered to the cattle dying on the roadside. Volunteers had to work, in fact, in the valley of countless dead bodies of cattle.

Gollapalem, a tiny village in Andhra, was totally devastated in 1978 flood. Monks and volunteers of the Mission rushed for relief. When they left after 15 months, Gollapalem, the unknown village, was transformed into a decent small town, Ramakrishnapuram of 229 pucca houses. The flooded village Uttagundam in Guntur Dist. was similarly changed into the little township of Saradapuram. Similarly, new townships like Narendrapuram and Vivekanandapuram and Paramahamsapuram and others have come up on Andhra coastal areas ravaged by flood.

Similar townships have been built in 26 places all over India, bringing ideas of a decent life to the poor villagers who for the first time saw pucca houses, sanitary latrines, school buildings, community halls, and a decently built temple dedicated to their local gods and goddesses. All these were built by the highly qualified engineer and technician monks of the Order.

One of the most memorable fronts in which the Mission worked on war-footing was the huge relief operation for nearly one lakh people who flooded the Indian border at Bongaon during the Bangladesh war. Huge camps were built, each accommodating 5 to 10 thousand people. Elaborate arrangements for medicines, nursing, sanitation, food, clothes, blankets and other necessary things were made for continuous supply for nearly one year.

When Bangladesh was liberated, the Mission went inside the new nation, at the express invitation of the new Government, and continued relief in different parts of Bangladesh for the next few years. Even now Bangladesh relief is conducted whenever required. During the period of 1975

to 1981, for Bangladesh relief, the Mission spent Rs. 1, 89, 78, 145. 57. Similarly in 1980-1981 relief in Nepal, the Mission spent Rs. 2, 73, 425. 04.

It is not relief of food, shelter and cloth alone that the Mission's relief activities brought to millions in the country. In most of the places, the Mission built beautiful school buildings for the local people. Even today when one visits Gujarat, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, one will suddenly find such beautiful school buildings in the midst of distant villages. The monks of the Mission brought to them the highest gift, the gift of knowledge.

The book-cum-report along with the appendices, offers a lot of information and statistics of different relief activities conducted during the last 20 years. Yet all the documents and the statistics

are only a modest presentation of the century-long sacrifice of the Order of Ramakrishna, for bringing relief to men and women in distress. Many major relief activities which entailed months of hard labour, have just been mentioned. Behind the excellent printing of the book, lie the rugged days of 85 years of relief by hundreds of monks, "the sapers and miners" of Vivekananda. History cannot forget the early days of Ramakrishna Mission's relief when Swami Sadananda with his band of fiery Vivekanandists, cleansed the privies of Calcutta houses in 1898, or when Swami Akhandananda just ate boiled grass roots for months offering the little cereals available to the orphan children hanging around him.

—Swami Jitatmananda

NEWS AND REPORTS

SYNOPSIS OF GOVERNING BODY REPORT FOR 1988-89

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
P. O. BELUR MATH, DIST. HOWRAH
WEST BENGAL 711 202

The 80th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday the 24th December, 1989 at 3-30 p.m. Swami Bhuteshananda, President of the Ramakrishna Mission was the chairman of the proceedings. A synopsis of the report of the Governing Body for 1988-89 placed before the members is as follows:

Amidst the important developments during the year the opening of a centre at Jaipur (Rajasthan) and the installation of computers at the Headquarters and some of the branches deserve special mention. The centre at Ranchi (Morabadi) launched a massive rural development project consisting of irrigation, low-cost housing and other schemes, mostly for tribal people.

Relief Work: In the year under report the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math did extensive relief and rehabilitation work spending a sum of Rs. 55.81 lakhs. Besides, relief articles worth Rs. 21.05 lakhs received as gift from philanthropic-minded

people, were distributed amongst the afflicted people.

Medical Service: The Mission did commendable work through its 8 hospitals and 78 dispensaries including mobile units. It served nearly 41 lakhs of patients spending a sum of about Rs. 5.54 crores.

Educational Activities: The academic results of our educational institutions were brilliant as usual. The Mission conducted 1,481 educational institutions which had a total students' strength of 1,49,567. The Mission spent a sum of Rs. 17.66 crores under this head.

Rural And Tribal Welfare Work: The Mission did extensive work in this regard in several rural and tribal areas of the country spending a sum of about Rs. 1.78 crores.

Foreign Work: Our overseas centres were mainly engaged in spiritual ministrations. A variety of educational, medical and cultural activities were also carried out on a modest scale.

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur, the Mission and Math had 77 and 73 branches respectively, in India and abroad.

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

It was 5.30 in the afternoon. Mahapurushji was seated in his room when a young devotee came. He saluted the Swami and took his seat on the floor. After asking him his name, Mahapurushji inquired, 'Did you have initiation from here (meaning himself)?'

Devotee: 'Yes, sir, I had my initiation last July.'

Swami: 'That's very good. Do you practise meditation regularly? Whether you had initiation from here or not, you should take His name. Then alone will you have peace. You should fervently pray to Him, saying: "O Lord! Give me devotion and faith. Let me not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching Maya!" Repeat His name and pray to Him with great sincerity for as long as possible.'

Devotee: 'Formerly I used to do that (meditate and pray) a great deal, but of late I have not been able to find the time. So I do it for just a little while.'

Swami: 'That is fine. But however little time you devote to meditation, do it with great earnestness and love. Even if you practise only five or ten minutes, do it with your whole heart and soul. God is *antaryāmin* (the Inner Controller) dwelling within. He judges by your heart. He sees how much devotion you have, not the amount of time you spend on meditation. Towards the end of the day, whenever you get the opportunity, call upon Him with great ardour, praying, "O Lord, let me not forget Thee in the whirlpool of this world!" The world is short-

lived; don't forget Him in this world of *Māyā*. You may attend to a hundred and one duties, or earn crores of rupees, but know in your heart of hearts that all these are impermanent and some day will have to be left behind. The one abiding reality is God. Do call upon Him and take refuge in Him. All your bondages will be destroyed, my child.'

Devotee: 'Please bless me. Then everything will be all right.'

Swami: 'Of course I bless you. I bless you very much. What do we have other than blessings? I am saying all these things because I bless you. Call upon the Master and take refuge in him. Our Master is living and is bound to respond if you pray to him earnestly. For the good of the many, God—the Universal Spirit—incarnated Himself in this age as Sri Ramakrishna. You have nothing to worry about, as you have come under the shelter of Sri Ramakrishna, the Incarnation of the age.'...

Devotee: 'I have the hope that everything will be all right so long as I have your blessings and am under the shelter of the Master.'

Swami: 'Above everything else, do not forget the ideal of life. Life is short and impermanent; it is not for enjoyment. Bear this in mind. Now go to the chapel for a little while. Salute the Master, meditate upon him and pray to him fervently. He will certainly give you peace!'

(For Seekers of God, pp. 63-64)

Arise! Awake! and stop not till the goal is reached! Katha Upanishad, I. iii. 14

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NANA KATHA

The Vivekananda Society of Vaniyambadi, Madras, is, as its name implies, an organization formed for the purpose of furthering the cause of India's progress. On the 20th of January the members of the Society dedicated a newly-erected hall to the Swami's cause under the presidency of Swami Ramakrishnananda who was invited to conduct the inauguration of it. The Swami delivered two lectures, one on the 20th and the other on the day following, before overcrowded audiences composed of Hindus, Musulmans as well as Christians, the subjects of his lectures being "What is Hinduism?" and "Unity of Religions". Intense enthusiasm prevailed and almost the whole city followed the Swami, on his departure, to the railway station to see him off.

The major portion of the cost of erecting the building was borne by Mr. Venkata Sami Naidu, the president of the Vivekananda Society.

* * * *

On the 24th September last, some parts of the Bhagulpore district were inundated by a terrible flood. Whole villages were swept away, entire families perished, cattle were drowned by thousands and many

people became quite destitute. Swami Akhandananda went to the stricken area and worked from the 15th October to the 20th December. With what money he could collect on the spot and other sums received from friends, he at once set about his work, visited 45 villages and distributed rice and small sums of money to those who had been suffering most. Besides, cholera broke out in several places and especially at pakki-sarai, where he had to nurse some helpless patients. Noticing that several destitute people, most of whom were women, had barely any clothes he represented the matter to Mr. Cumming, the District Magistrate and, at his suggestion, distributed, in 4 days, 527 tickets to those who badly wanted clothing. The tickets were honoured on the 17th December, at Ghoga, when 540 pieces of cloth were distributed to the poor sufferers. He also distributed *chura* and *gur*, the same day, to about 800 people. His receipts were Rs. 512-2-6, of which the Collector, on behalf of the Relief Committee, gave Rs. 235, and the Maharaja of Kasimbazar, Rs. 100. The Swami thanks the kind-hearted ladies and gentlemen who assisted him with funds and also the professors and students of the Bhagulpore College, who so readily assisted him in the distribution of the cloths.