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

THE DIVINE MESSAGE

Chant the Name of the Lord and His Glory unceasingly
That the mirror of the heart may be wiped clean
And quenched that mighty forest fire,
Worldly lust, raging furiously within.
Oh Name, stream down in moonlight on the lotus-heart,
Opening its cup to knowledge of Thyself.
Oh self, drown deep in the waves of His bliss,
Chanting His Name continually,
Tasting His nectar at every step,
Bathing in His Name, that bath for weary souls.

Various are Thy Names, Oh Lord,
In each and every Name Thy power resides.
No times are set, no rites are needful, for chanting of Thy Name,
So vast is Thy mercy.
How huge, then, is my wretchedness
Who find, in this empty life and heart,
No devotion to Thy Name :

Oh, my mind,
Be humbler than a blade of grass,
Be patient and forbearing like the tree,
Take no honour to thyself,
Give honour to all,
Chant unceasingly the Name of the Lord.

Śrī Caitanya, 'Śikṣāṣṭakam', translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood
in *Vedanta for the Western World*, 1943, p. 225.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is on Sri Ramakrishna's universal message. It discusses briefly the great contribution of Sri Ramakrishna in the evolution of modern thought.

AN ACTIVE LIFE AND GOD-REALIZATION is based on a talk delivered by Swami Mukhyananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, West Bengal. The revered Swami spoke convincingly on the theme that pursuing one's spiritual goal while living an active life is not an impossibility. It is a necessity in modern times, and is sanctioned by the holy scriptures.

Sri T. R. Rajagopalan has given a descriptive account of how a pilgrim visits the holy cities of Varanasi and Gaya and Prayag Sangam, places venerated by Hindus since ancient times.

Professor (Sm.) Santwana Dasgupta has given her illuminating thoughts on VIVEKANANDA AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN INDIA. Sm. Dasgupta was formerly the head of the Economics Department at Bethune College, Calcutta. She is currently occupied with research work at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN is by Ann Myren, former lecturer, Alameda College, California, U.S.A. This is the concluding part of her series of touching articles that have appeared in previous issues of Prabuddha Bharata. The articles reflect the author's meticulous research, depth of insight and understanding of the Master's extraordinary relationship with his women devotees.

UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

(EDITORIAL)

A devotee who frequently used to visit a well-known Ramakrishna Ashrama centre in South India, was once requested by a friend to be taken to the āśrama. Agreeing to the request, the devotee, accompanied by his friend, came to attend the evening prayer and *ārati*, regular evening worship. That day happened to be the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight (*ekādaśī*) so the worship of Sri Ramachandra would also be conducted with the singing of '*Rāmnām*'. A picture of Sri Rama was kept near the altar of Sri Ramakrishna, just below it on a special throne decorated with flowers. The sonorous music of the *ārati* to Sri Ramakrishna, and the singing of the name of Rama created a nice atmosphere. After the

service, the devotee and his friend started their way home. The devotee asked his friend, 'How did you enjoy the serene atmosphere of the āśrama?' The friend answered, 'Oh, everything was quite good, but one thing I thought rather peculiar, rather, not proper!' The startled devotee asked him, 'What was that?' He replied, 'Why, it was the keeping of the photograph of Lord Rama, an Incarnation of God, below the picture of Sri Ramakrishna.' Becoming a little agitated, he added, 'The arrangement was nothing short of blasphemous. God Himself was belittled!'

To the Hindu mind, the word *avatāra* (incarnation of God) usually evokes a rich

image of a supernatural Being, surrounded by royal splendour, complete with diadem, throne, diamond studded ornaments, precious jewellery and minor gods and goddesses standing in attendance on him. Nothing is impossible for this celestial person. The weal and woe of common mortals do not touch him. Demons and demonesses, cruel and powerful kings are only worms before the superhuman strength of an avatāra. Oftentimes, other than the rich mythical imagery of this King of kings, nothing appeals to the mind of the common man.

In his own time, the King in disguise, Sri Ramakrishna was recognized by hardly anyone. That he was the Personification of Divinity, dawned on the minds of only a very few. Many of his closest devotees suffered from doubts, and even Vivekananda, who was much beloved by the Master, was not yet fully convinced :

A couple of days before the Master's passing away, when Narendra and a few others were standing by his bed at night, a curious thought flashed across Naren's mind : 'The Master has said many a time that he is an incarnation of God. If he *now* says in the midst of the throes of death, in this terrible moment of human anguish and physical pain, "I am God incarnate", then I will believe.' No sooner had Naren thought this than the Master turned towards him and summoning all his energy, said, 'O my Naren, are you not yet convinced ? He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, He Himself is now Ramakrishna in this body : not in your Vedantic sense (*according to which each soul is potentially divine*), but actually so.'¹

1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Vol. I, p. 183,

On another day also, when the Master was suffering from the fatal throat illness at Kasipur, he suddenly addressed Girish Ghosh :

Girish, I find you say to one and all everywhere so many things about 'this' (that I am an incarnation of God); what have you seen and understood (about me) to make you do so ? Girish remained completely unmoved, and kneeling down on the ground near the Master's feet, said in a choked voice with his hands folded and face upturned, 'What more can I say of Him, whose greatness Vyāsa and Vālmīki could not find words to express ?'²

Vivekananda paid his homage to the Master one day, composing a verse which is now widely accepted as a *praṇāma* mantra to Sri Ramakrishna :

Om ! Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna, Establisher of *dharma* (righteousness), Greatest of *avatāras*, Embodiment of all religions.

In the above melodious Saṅskṛt verse we find three propositions which we shall discuss in the following paragraphs. They are *one*, that Sri Ramakrishna is the Establisher of *dharma*; *two*, that He is the greatest of *God-men*; and *three*, that in Sri Ramakrishna we find the Embodiment of all religious truth.

I

Revivifier of Truth enshrined in the ancient scriptures

The ancient scriptures declared that *Reality is one ; sages call it variously*. This

2. *The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984) Vol. II, p. 1023.

statement from the oldest of the Vedas, the *R̥g* (1.164.46), was only hypothetical for modern man. It would have remained a flight of poetic imagination, a grandiose dream that we could never have understood, had it not been for the irrefutable testimony given by the life of Sri Ramakrishna. By storming the citadel of God with unbelievable rapidity, he garnered spiritual treasures and lay them scattered for posterity. There was no vanquishing of mythological demons and demonesses in Sri Ramakrishna's life. He came to the world in a gentle form for the rescue of modern man ; who, forgetting his inherent divinity in this modern age has become demoniac, and is destroying not only his natural environment, but his fellow beings as well. Transforming human wickedness, and softening the savage in the breast of man by the power of *sattwa*, the quality of superhuman *love*, has been the work of this *avatāra*.

By means of unprecedented austerities and spiritual discipline in his life, Sri Ramakrishna has shown the world by his own example, the practicability of the ancient Vedic wisdom : *ekam sat, viprā bahudhā vadanti* ; that Truth is one ; sages call it by various names. So Sri Ramakrishna was the re-discoverer of ancient Truth. As with any discovery, its bequethal belongs to the whole of humanity :

The waves of religious thought rise and fall, and on the topmost one stands the prophet of the period. Ramakrishna came to teach the religion of today, constructive, not destructive. He had to go afresh to nature to ask for facts, and he got scientific religion which never says 'believe', but 'see'. 'I see and you too, can see.'³—said Vivekananda.

3. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. VII, p. 24.

II

Philosophy of Service, a way to God-realization

The old tradition said unequivocally that personal liberation or salvation is the *summum bonum* of life and stressed categorically the renunciation of the unreal world, both mentally and physically. In his so-called 'spiritual quest' man became self-centred, and the sufferings of his fellow-beings did not touch his heart. The doctrines of *Maya*, *karma* and *fate*, in the hands of the lazy and foolish assumed a hideous form. Effecting a rescue of the eternal dhrama, Sri Ramakrishna was born to strike altogether a new note of neo-Vedanta. He witnessed the world and humanity in a new dimension, as suffused and permeated by the Pure Spirit or Brahman. To him, service of man assumed the same importance as that of worship of God in the temple. This modern sage brought Advaita from its ivory tower and made it practical in the everyday life of man. Applied Vedanta, or the worship of God in man, found its fullest expression and fulfilment in Sri Ramakrishna. To quote his own luminous words : 'I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man.' In the history of civilization, it introduces a new philosophy of service, and mode of spiritual practice. Though other religions and prophets have long taught the efficacy of doing good to others or serving others, hardly ever is it found held up as a path leading to God-vision or Knowledge of Ultimate Reality.

III

Rapprochement between religion and science

In Europe, in the middle of the 18th century, developments in science began to pick up momentum. Youthful science flexed

its growing powerful muscles and challenged the supremacy of religion. There started then a continuing conflict between orthodox Christianity and new science. The force of reason, logic and the blinding glare of scientific discoveries silenced for a time the theologians of the Church. Newton contended that God was necessary to establish motion of the planets and the original structure of the solar system. But other scientists put forth the argument that since the universe is an automatic machine; it needs no supernatural cause at all. Matter is eternal, and therefore there is no need for a creator. The famous reply of the French astronomer, Pierre-Simon Laplace, when Napoleon asked him about the place of God in his *Celestial Mechanics*, was: 'Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis.' In 1869, it was the famous biologist, Thomas Huxley, who coined the word 'agnosticism'. It was he who advanced the theory that individual consciousness was a side product of the functioning of bodily organs, and itself had no power or influence on the body's machinery. In the 18th and 19th centuries, science became more expressly agnostic and aloof from religion and humanistic studies. Physicist Eugene Wigner recently was quoted :

Until not many years ago, the existence of a mind or soul would have been passionately denied by most physical scientists. The brilliant success of mechanistic and, more generally, macroscopic physics, and of chemistry, overshadowed the obvious fact that thoughts, desires, and emotions are not made of matter and it was nearly universally accepted among physical scientists that there is nothing besides matter.⁴

4. Robert M. Augros & George N. Stanciu, *The New Story of Science* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1986) p. 7.

Foremost scientists still boasted that they could solve all the mysteries of the universe and problems of man. The dictum of the day was that 'nothing beyond science exists'.

New generation savants remained arrogant and intoxicated, contemplating their new discoveries and know-how. To them, mind and consciousness remained part of the physical brain, and brain was matter. Naturally, after destruction of brain, mind would also disappear. Their mood was perhaps typified by W. K. Clifford, a nineteenth century mathematician, when he said, 'If anyone says that the will influences matter, the statement is not untrue, it is nonsense.'⁵ Youthful, powerful rationalism, brazen and puffed up though it was, had a tremendous impact on intellectual Europe. Its repercussions were felt on Indian shores too. Perhaps to meet the challenge of such vigorous and demoniac thought, a divine personality had to be born.

To Sri Ramakrishna, religion was not merely a pastime of pundits, or a matter for conjecture, or a simple construct by theologians, it was an avenue of discipline by following which one could discover truth. Ultimate Truth was the only thing worthy of a living man to strive for, the one aim of all human endeavour. Religion and philosophy, like all sciences, have for their aim, only Truth. The sincere and determined Ramakrishna, however, was more rigorous than all others. With characteristic boldness he was prepared to make truth both his *method* as well as his *goal* of research. With his whole life centered in religion, he had no other motive, neither to provide himself with enjoyment of name and fame in the company of scholastics, nor to increase comfort in his simple way of life at the Dakshineswar temple garden. The quest for experience of Reality or Truth in its most simple form, bereft of all considerations was the

5. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

important and consuming occupation of his life.

Sri Ramakrishna, having experienced what *truth* is, came down to the level of the world to give the facts. After descending from that high level of blissful absorption, most of the comings-and-goings of the world appeared to him insipid. But one thing more he conceived in that high plane of existence, was compassion for man struggling in this sea of life searching for mental peace and happiness. He proved to the agnostic community of scientists, to the believers of religious dogmas, and to those who only indulged in dead peripheral forms of religion, that actual spirituality is not only rational and verifiable, but that it is also *not esoteric*, confined to a few individuals, but is open to all. But he did say that one has to dive deep into one's self and become a sincere seeker. Truth, or God, unfailingly becomes revealed to such enquirers. Sri Ramakrishna rediscovered all of the ancient principles of quite *living* religion, found in them the bases of all modern creeds, and declared forthrightly:

He is born to no purpose, who, having the rare privilege of being born a man, is unable to realize God in this life.⁶

He came to the conclusion that religion is not only unopposed to all other paths to truth, but that religion itself can be turned into a most effective science.

IV

Reconciling conflicting viewpoints within religion

It is astonishing to arm-chair historians that at a period while such a profoundly

6. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) Vol. I, p. 150; Vol. II, p. 844.

serene, blissful and towering personality as Sri Ramakrishna lived, the rest of India was a conglomeration of conflicting, feuding, warring ideologies and factions. Yet such was the case. Following centuries of action and reaction against foreign invasion, dominance, exploitation, cultural oppression and political machinations, India was nearing a state of desperate circumstances, even in religion. It was not that India lacked leadership; Indian society had produced a galaxy of saints and prophets who were yet very powerful, but evidently the day of narrow exclusive sectarianism was over. The time had come for one to appear who would be catholic enough to encompass in his loving embrace all of them—a truly *Pan-Indian* leader, a great synthesizer and peace-maker. Sri Ramakrishna did appear, religious genius par excellence, and steered India's eternal dharma out of the tumultuous waves of worldly strife to a safe shore.

Hinduism had been riddled with too much philosophical wrangling over non-essentials. There were the perennial quarrels between the believers in a personal God and the believers in the impersonal Absolute; between bhakti and jñāna; between karma and yoga; and between dvaita, viśiṣṭādvaita and advaita, and between religion and science. Was there no one to bow his head to the simplicity of Adi-Saṅkarācārya?—

vadanti śāstrāṇi yajantu devān
kurvantu karmāṇi bhajantu devatāḥ
ātmaikyabodhena vināpi muktiḥ
na sidhyati brahmaśatāntare'pi

Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the gods, let them perform rituals and worship the deities, but there is no liberation without realization of one's identity with the *ātman* not even in the lifetime of a hundred Brahmā-s (creator god) put together.⁷

7. *Ṭivekacūṇāmaṇi*, 6.

With regard to the personal and impersonal God, Sri Ramakrishna said:

There is no distinction between Impersonal God (*Brahman*) on the one hand and Personal God (*Śakti*) on the other. When the Supreme Being is thought of as inactive, He is styled God the Absolute (*Śuddha Brahman*); and when He is thought of as active—creating, sustaining, and destroying—He is styled *Śakti* or Personal God.⁸

He never asked anyone to shun work and run away from the world. If the old philosophy said 'Neti', 'Neti'—'not this', 'not this', stressing the world's unreality; this new philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna said 'Iti', 'Iti'—'It is this!', 'It is this'—stressing: See the manifestation of God in everything. Verily everything is He. Therefore he advised everyone to work in the world without attachment as the maid servant works in the house of a rich family, taking care of all her duties, yet knowing in her heart of hearts that nothing really belongs to her. And stressing the importance of meditation and discrimination, he would say:

If you desire to live in the world unattached, you should first practise devotion to God in solitude for some time—say a year or six months, or a month, or at least twelve days. During this period of retirement, you should meditate constantly upon God, and pray to Him for Divine Love; you should resolve in your mind that there is nothing in the world that you may call your own—that those whom you think your own will pass away in no time. Only God is really your own. He is your All in All. How to obtain Him should be your sole concern.⁹

8. *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975) p. 4.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

In reconciling Dvaita (dualism), Visistadvaita (qualified-non-dualism), and Advaita (monism), the Master used to give the example of a bilva fruit. The hard outer shell, the small seeds and the kernel are separate things, in other words, the world (*jagat*), the soul (*jīva*) and the Absolute (*Brahman*) are all separate—thus says Dvaita. The shell (world) and the seeds (beings) and the kernel are all parts of the whole fruit, is the Viśiṣṭādvaita view. In the next stage a deeper understanding develops and one understands that the juicy pulp, the seeds and the shell are all evolved out of one substance. This is Advaita. The greatness of this world teacher is that everything about him was positive. He accepted everything and rejected nothing except fanaticism and egotism which, he held, separate man from his brother man and from God. His all-inclusive and all-embracing philosophy has rejuvenated and revitalized not only Hinduism, but has strengthened other faiths of the world as well.

V

All religions are true

The saga of Sri Ramakrishna's life and his divine raptures extend also to other religions. He felt a desire to become familiar with the paths of Islam and Christianity, followed their disciplines under the guidance of qualified adherents, and realized God by their help. He found there was one God Who is the goal of all paths. He held in high esteem also the paths of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. There is a certain extraordinary quality in the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. Because he was a master of so many spiritual traditions and because he had imbibed the Truth of the Universal Divine Being, sincere seekers of all sects, cults, religions, philosophies and persuasions found him as one of their own, always an affectionate guide whose help was unfailing

and whose presence was reassuring. Even in the present times, after becoming acquainted with his life and reading his *Gospel*, one cannot cherish any hatred for other religions. On the contrary, our respect and understanding gets immeasurably broadened. Sri 'M' and Romain Rolland have pointed out that even in the Master's own lifetime both Indian and European Christians recognized in him a full manifestation of the Christ and joyously kept his company. Some of them experienced ecstasy in deep meditation.¹⁰ The reverend Father Harihar Sanyal, Dr. Coates, Prabhu Dayal Mishra and one Mr. Williams are some of the names which come to us. Perhaps this religion lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna will have to have a new name, for it was a religion without frontiers. Between man and man, and man and his God, no social, or cultural, linguistic or racial barriers existed.

Sri Ramakrishna is the greatest of the God-men because he held aloft the entire spiritual heritage of mankind. This universalism, this cosmic sympathy was not born out of broadminded tolerance nor ecumenical planning, but sprang from the depths of Ramakrishna's experience. Therefore Rabindranath Tagore paid his glowing tribute to the Master in these lines:

Bahu sādaker bahu sādhanār dhāra
Dhyāne tomār milita hoyeche tāra ...

Diverse courses of worship
from varied springs of fulfilment
have mingled in your meditation.
The manifold revelation of the joy of the
Infinite
has given form to a shrine of unity
in your life
Where from far and near arrive salutations
to which I join my own.¹¹

10. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970) p. 77.

11. *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. XLI, (February 1936) p. 53.

VI

*Purifying religion, emphasizing
God-realization*

Another great accomplishment of Sri Ramakrishna's was that he simplified religion. He cleansed it of all dross and bewildering intricacy. The monumental work, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, recording the daily life and direct words of the Master, may well become the Veda of the future, a scripture for mankind. It was said once of the *Mahābhārata* that 'what is not in it cannot be found anywhere.' It was so multifaceted and all-inclusive of human experience. Today, people are finding the same thing is true of the Master's life as revealed in those two books: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, by 'M'¹² and *The Great Master*, by Swami Saradananda.¹³ It is in the form of Sri Ramakrishna that the Divine has enacted Its *līlā* on the banks of the Gaṅgā in our age. Never before has the Lord spoken in such simple terms, touching so directly the life of modern man.

Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful spiritual insight into the nature of the devotees. Therefore, he understood their limitations and propensities, and was able to guide them gently. His technique of training varied according to the capacity and the need of the aspirants. He never thrust his ideas forcibly on anyone. He always remained a child of the Divine Mother, and even never thought of himself in the elevated position of a teacher. It was the Mother who did everything through him. To householders, who struggled with heavy responsibilities with many cares and concerns, he seemed

12. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985, latest edition, Vol. I & II).

13. Swami Saradananda, *The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1978, latest edition, Vol. I & II).

a guiding light. Because Ramakrishna had also married, and throughout his life showed respect and affection to his wife and relatives, he seemed very near to them. Therefore his advice to householders was to renounce everything mentally. Mental renunciation was enough for them. He was equally at home when he dealt with orthodox followers of religion too, and with the youth of his time who were attracted by new ideas of the West and rebelling against all traditions. All thought of him as their own. He was a holy fount to slake the spiritual thirst of the world.

VII

Awakening of Śakti (Mother Power)

Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of the Divine Power of God as Mother. With his coming, not only in India, but all over the world, there has been an awakening of Mother-power, the Cosmic Energy. He saw the Divine Mother, the Primordial Śakti, in his wife, mother, maid servants, maidens and in the prostitutes of the street. All women were respected by him as veritable manifestations of the *ādi-śakti*, the power of Brahman. His own personality was indistinguishable from that of the Divine Mother whom he worshipped as Kālī in the temple at Dakshineswar. Writes Swami Saradananda: 'The identification was so intimate and natural that whoever saw him felt that the Mother was the Son and the Son, the Mother; both were the Embodiment of Pure Consciousness.'¹⁴ In Sri Ramakrishna were found the moods of man and woman co-existing. Women devotees who approached him never felt bashful, but on the contrary, thought that he belonged to them. He too, held them in high regard. Those who came in touch with his tremendous

spiritual power felt they were lifted to a higher plane of consciousness and were totally transformed. With meticulous care and motherly affection he helped them to overcome their spiritual problems, and corrected their misconceptions about life being only for the purpose of domestic happiness. Under his guidance many women disciples dwelt on a high plane of spirituality.

We see in society today a perceptible change. This change is due to the rousing of dormant spiritual energy in women, which was suppressed or willfully neglected for a long time. A tidal wave will sweep the world and it will be irresistible. Though her newly gained freedom has thrown her out of equipoise, it is because she has left her traditional role and cannot go back to it, nor can she choose her right path in the midst of conflicting ideologies and incompatible goals that are presented to her. It is a temporary phase. The moment she realizes that the spiritual unfoldment is the real fulfilment of life, she will emerge with new splendour and renewed strength. On that hope alone rests the fate of new generations.

It is interesting to note that in the field of religion, in the West, women have raised their voice of protest against male dominated Roman Catholic Church organization. In her article, with such attractive caption, 'The Saviour as Woman', Nancy Klenk Hill writes:

The Church was determined that its very existence depends upon maintaining the male hierarchy it established in the fourth century, supposedly in imitation of Christ and his apostles.¹⁵

She further adds in the same article:

Feminist theologians such as Carol

14. *Ibid.*, p. 399.

15. *Cross Currents*, a quarterly review, New York: (XXXIX, Spring 1989) p. 8.

Christ, have wearied of womens' exclusion and have begun to develop an alternative theology outside the Bible.¹⁶

This deepening crisis in the Church has led women to set up a foundation called 'Mary's Pence', to gather funds and dispense them in grants and loans to promote the ministries of women *to women*, especially to poor women and their children. In another essay in the same issue, Rosemary Ruether writes:

The Vatican has reaffirmed the normative status of the male celibate priesthood and rejected any discussion of the ordination of women. ... In this era of conservative reaction, progressive Catholics have two choices—either to give up hope for the time being, or else to invent new forms of church life at the base, independent of hierarchical control. Catholic feminists, especially, are taking the route of inventing autonomous communities and ministries which are culturally and socially part of the Catholic community but not under hierarchical control.¹⁷

Though the oppression of woman has not

16. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

totally ended, still the lion in her has been roused. She is leaving her mark in every field of human activity. Her voice is heard with due respect. It was the firm conviction of Swami Vivekananda that great men are born only in the homes of educated and pious mothers. He articulated the deep feelings of his Master in these ringing words:

At the present time God should be worshipped as 'Mother', the Infinite Energy. ... The new cycle must see the masses living Vedanta, and this will have to come through women.¹⁸

Sri Ramakrishna's spirituality is unfathomable. There is no possibility of plumbing the depths of that limitless ocean. We are reminded of the words of Sri Śaṅkara's salutations to the Guru:

Repeated salutations to Thee, O noble teacher, who art devoid of attachment, the best among the good souls and the embodiment of the essence of Eternal Bliss, the One without a second—who art infinite and ever the boundless ocean of mercy.¹⁹

18. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit., Vol. VII, p. 95.

19. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 486.

AN ACTIVE LIFE AND GOD-REALIZATION

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

1. Introduction:

God-realization is held up as the goal of life by some of the great saints and sages, prophets and incarnations, all over the world from ancient times. But it is also seen that most of them generally withdrew from

an active life in society and concentrated their mind and efforts in seclusion to realize God, or the Supreme Reality. Their teachings too are to renounce all social life and activities for attaining God-realization. On the other hand, some of those religious prophets who stressed on an active life in

society did not think in terms of God-realization, but of attaining heaven and avoiding hell after death by submission to the will of a Personal God as conceived by them.

However, the present age, dominated by the tremendous advance of scientific knowledge and technological explosion with a materialistic outlook, is characterized by intense activity with a fast tempo of life in the outside world with all its complexities, competitions, and conflicts. The mind is externalized and man is lost in a maze of bewildering multiplicities of the world and vastness of space and time. He is caught up on restless activities and groping movement. Man is, as it were, cut off from his moorings and set adrift on the sea of life, and one begins to doubt seriously if God-realization is compatible at all with such a hectic life with demanding circumstances crowding round him. Of course, the problem of finding any reasonable solution can be discussed only in relation to those who believe in God and God-realization. We cannot enter here into the matter of convincing each and all that God is a reality, the ultimate source of the whole universe with all its beings, and God-realization is the highest goal of life. Man with his egoistic psycho-somatic individualism is, as it were, self-alienated from his own true being in God, the Universal Reality.

2. Activity vis-a-vis God-realization:

Different great religious teachers have presented their own methods of attunement with God according to their understanding as well as the necessities of the times, the prevailing psycho-social environment, and the capacity and nature of the spiritual aspirants. But we have to consider here if an active social life, which is the necessity of the present age, is *ipso facto* contradictory to or incompatible with God-realization. Why should activity in itself be contrary to

God-realization? Does God hate or disapprove activity? If it were so, He would not have given rise to the universe nor given the propensity and power to act in different ways to human beings at all. In fact, this whole universe depends on constant activity, and the functioning of the universe would be impossible without natural activity. According to Indian spiritual thought, this world itself is designated as *karma-bhūmi*—the field of activity for mankind, and the powers of *Knowledge-Will-Action* (*jñāna-icchā-kriyā śakti*) are the very characteristics of God (*īśvara*), His creation, and souls (*jīvas*) in different measures.

We may, however, be sure of one thing—that a mere lazy life is neither the means of God-realization, nor even conducive to worldly prosperity. As the saying goes: 'Indolence is the great enemy of man residing within his body, and there is no friend equal unto industriousness.' Śri Krishna also says in the *Gītā*, exhorting Arjuna to be up and doing: 'Do thou perform obligatory duty, for action is superior to inaction; even the eking out of your livelihood will be impossible without activity.'¹ Indolence and activity are opposed to each other, but not knowledge of, or devotion to God, and activity. It is ignorant selfish activity which is contrary to true knowledge and devotion. Knowledge is opposed to ignorance and not to activity; rather one can do one's activities in the best manner with perfect knowledge. Hence, if we conduct our activities in the light of true knowledge, why should it be opposed to the Knowledge or Realization of God?

When Ācārya Śaṅkara says that *karma* and *jñāna* (work and knowledge of Self or *ātman*) are opposed to each other like light and darkness, it is the selfish *karma* based on ignorance of one's real nature as *ātman*, and claiming agency and results of work for

1. *Bhagavad Gītā*, III. 8.

oneself as a person that is meant. It is the *ignorance* part of *karma* that is opposed to *jñāna* and not *karma per se*. Śrī Śaṅkara has repeatedly declared that *karma* done in a dedicated spirit to God leads to the purification of mind (*citta-śuddhi*), steadfastness in Self-knowledge (*jñāna-niṣṭhā*), and becomes a means of Self-realization or God-realization. The Bible also says, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Who indeed was a greater worker than Śrī Śaṅkara for the good of humanity?

Bhagavān Śrī Krishna, the Incarnate Divine, Himself says in the *Gītā*: 'I have no duty whatsoever, O Arjuna, in the three worlds; and there is nothing that I lack or have to gain. Yet I am constantly engaged in action. ... If I do not act, people will always follow in my wake.'²

Generally, in this respect, the difficulty arises because of improper or wrong understanding of the concepts of God and God-realization, and the wrong motivation of activity. We must make a clear distinction between life in the world, and worldly life. A selfish, aggrandizing worldly life is certainly opposed to God-realization, but not a life in which one conducts one's activities in a spirit of dedication to the Lord and as a service unto humanity (*loka-saṁgraha*). The *Gītā* points out that Janaka and others reached perfection (*saṁ-siddhi*) through work itself, and exhorts one to do one's work as *loka-saṁgraha*.³ The point is, if one is intent on God-realization, one must not make the body and its cravings the centre of one's activities, but look after it properly like a very useful and valuable instrument, and use it in the service of the Divine in and through other embodied beings, i.e. members of the family and society, and other creatures. In the *Bhāgavata*, the Lord says:

2. *Ibid.*, III. 22-23.

3. *Ibid.*, III. 20: *loka-saṁgraham evāpi sampasyan kartum arhasi*.

'I, who have made my abode in all beings must, therefore, be served in and through all beings, with gifts made with due respect, and services rendered in a spirit of worship and love, looking on them as non-different from Me.'⁴ At another place the *Bhāgavata* declares: 'Herein lies the fulfilment of life for embodied beings, that they should engage themselves constantly in working for the good of all other living beings through wealth, speech, intellect, and other activities of life.'

For orienting our activities in the right manner and direction, a true conception of man, God, and the universe is essential. Man is primarily the divine Self living in the body, and not the body itself; and the universe too, is pervaded by the Divine, through and through (*ota-prota*). The *Īśa Upaniṣad*, therefore, instructs man: 'Whatever—the least that moves in this world is pervaded by *Īśvara* (God). Hence, seeing God in everyone, give up all greed for the wealth of others and be content to live by honest work, removing all selfishness from the mind. Thus thou shalt desire to live a hundred years always doing beneficent work with the above attitude; and then thou shalt not be tainted by the evil results of work.... In the due course you will realize all beings in yourself and yourself in all beings; and thus you will be free from all ill will for others and go beyond all delusion and sorrow.'⁵

What is to be given up, therefore, is not work, but greed and selfishness in the light of true Self-knowledge. In fact, the *Manu-smṛti* declares that none bereft of Self-knowledge can really attain the beneficent result of work.⁶

4. *Bhāgavata*, III. 29.27.

5. *Īśa Upaniṣad*, 1,2,6,7.

6. *Manu-smṛti*, VI, 82: *nahi anādhyātmaṁ vit kascit kriyāphalam upasnute*.

3. *Spiritual activity and environment:*

One may protest that the environment in modern times has completely changed. How can all these ideas be put into practice in these days of hectic life, of stress and strain? But, in fact, the bigger the material structure, the deeper and more firm must be the spiritual foundations. The need for spiritually oriented life and realization of the all-pervading Divine Spirit or God is all the more necessary in these days to achieve steadiness of life, integration of personality, and peace and happiness of mind. After his historic visit to the West, imbued with a perceptive understanding of Western life and mind, Swami Vivekananda declared in his lectures in India in 1897: 'Europe is restless, does not know where to turn. ...The whole of Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation. ...Slowly they are finding out that what they want is spirituality to preserve them as nations.'⁷

We must not forget that whatever the changes in the outer environment, in spiritual life and God-realization, we have to tackle the inner environment wherein lie all the obstacles to the peace and happiness of oneself and the world. The inner environment has always been the same in all times, and it is the imbalance in the inner environment that leads to the imbalance and conflict in the external world. It is the inner enemies of man which work havoc in the outer world. The inner enemies, the products of our unregenerate nature, are lust, anger, greed, delusive attachment, pride, and jealousy (*kāma, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, mātsarya*), which are nourished by our egoistic individualism. It is only through the knowledge of one's higher Divine Self

7. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989). Vol. III, p. 159.

(*ātman*) or God-realization, the perception of the underlying spiritual unity of all things, of all existence, that one can overcome these and attain peace and happiness individually and collectively, and not through the mere manipulation of external environment.⁸

4. *Scope of activity:*

An active life is not inconsistent with God-realization, either as a means to it or as a result of it, is clearly shown by the *Gītā*. There have been two traditions in spiritual life—the one of withdrawal into oneself to realize the trans-personal Self or Reality within, and the other, of manifesting in life the Divinity within by controlling nature, internal and external. The Yoga-system of Patanjali and the Jaina and Bauddha traditions have been mostly of this former type; and that is what has given the impression that an active life is incompatible with God, or Self-realization. The active tradition has been represented by the Vedas, King Janaka, Śri Rāma, Śri Krishna, Śri Śaṅkarācārya, and Samartha Rāmdas in days of yore, and by Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi in our own days, who saw the totality of manifested reality as Brahman Itself—'All this manifested universe is verily Brahman' (*sarvam khalu idaṁ brahma*). Śri Śaṅkara, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Gītā*, says: 'The Vedic *dharma* is two-fold—of the nature of advancement into the world of action (*pravṛtti-lakṣaṇa*), and turning round into the world of Spirit (*nivṛtti-lakṣaṇa*), both of which are the necessary means and counterparts to the maintenance of the world (*jagataḥ sthiti-kāraṇam*), leading directly to the attainment of secular welfare and attainments (*abhyudaya*) and the highest Spiritual Good—the summum bonum (*niḥśreyasa*) of

8. *Isa Upaniṣad*, 6,7.

all living beings (*prāṇinām sākṣāt abhyudaya-niḥśreyasa hetuḥ*).

However, we must never forget that *activity is a way of life*, and not the *goal of life*. Activity is a means, and God, or Self-realization is the goal, where activity finds its fulfilment. 'All work culminates, or finds its fulfilment in Knowledge,' says the *Gītā*.⁹ Then activity may drop of itself, or continue for the good of the world. (Cf. *Gītā* III, 17). A man of realization becomes a blessing to humanity by his very presence. He is a living witness to the reality of the Eternal Divine and is *liberated-while-living* (*jīvan-mukta*). That is, he has his being in the Divine, while living in the body.

The universe is an ever-changing process without beginning and end. As such, it cannot be the Ultimate Reality, or goal of life where one can abide free from restlessness in peace and bliss. Life of man on this earth too is temporary and fleeting, and everyone has to depart, casting off the body sooner or later. God-realization is the goal of man because Divinity is our true eternal nature, immortal, beyond birth and death, and the abode of peace and bliss (*satyātmā prāṇarāmam mana-ānandam śānti samṛddham-amṛtam*),¹⁰ while our temporal association with the body is afflicted with limitations and the pairs of opposites (*dvandva-s*), such as pleasure and pain, life and death, health and disease, beauty and ugliness, youth and old age, etc. We must also not forget, that in trying to do good to the world to perfect it, with our activities done in the proper spirit, we perfect ourselves, just as a person in trying to paint a beautiful picture, himself becomes a great artist. It is primarily we who stand in need of perfection and not the world, which is only an external reflection of ourselves.

Hence all our activities must be performed in such a manner that they will lead to God-realization—or Self-realization, which means ultimately the same thing, as God is the higher Self in all. Śri Krishna says in the *Gītā*: 'I am the *ātman* residing in the heart of all beings.'¹¹ 'Know Me as the experimenter (*kṣetrajña*) in all beings and entities, which are the fields of knowledge (*kṣetra-s*).'¹²

5. Nature of God and God-realization:

We must have a clear idea of God and God-realization. Very often people think of God as an almighty person, who sitting in some heavenly abode, rules the universe. We have to please Him with our good deeds, obedience to His will, etc., and be in His good books. This may be all right as a beginning in religious life; as long as we are body-conscious, we can think of God as a Person with all blessed qualities only. But God has His trans-personal aspect too, as the All-Pervading Spirit hidden in the heart of all beings and entities, whom we can discover in ourselves by properly oriented efforts. Sri Ramakrishna, who used to have vivid visions of several Divine forms, went beyond all forms also. Even the *gopīs*, who were inebriated with divine love for Śri Krishna as a Person, knew that He was really the Eternal Witness in the heart of all embodied beings as their inmost Self (*akhila dehīnām antarātmā-dṛk*), (*Bhāgavata, Gopī-Gītā*). They sang of Him as the Supreme Truth: 'We take refuge in Thee who art the embodiment of Truth, vowed to Truth, and who holds Truth as the highest; in Thee who art the Truth of all the three times (past, present, future), who art the Source of Truth (phenomenal), and art hidden in Truth (the manifested world); in Thee who art the Truth of (the phenomenal) Truth, and of whom Truth and Right (cosmic order)

9. *Bhagavad Gītā*, IV. 33: *sarvam karmā-khīlam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate.*

10. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, I. 6.2.

11. *Bhagavad Gītā*, X. 20.

12. *Ibid.*, XVIII. 61.

form, as it were, the two eyes.¹³ Śrī Krishna Himself says in the *Gītā*: 'To them, ever steadfast and serving Me with love, I give that yoga of true understanding (*buddhi-yoga*), by which they come to Me. Solely out of compassion for them, I, dwelling in their hearts, dispell with the shining lamp of wisdom, their darkness, born of ignorance.'¹⁴

In the light of the above, we have to advance from the Personal and the defined, to the Trans-Personal and the Universal, and understand the true import of God-realization as indicated in the truly spiritual scriptures (*sat-śāstra-s*) and the lives of the realized saints.

The Upaniṣads again and again declare that God is the infinite spiritual Reality, which is of the nature of absolute existence-consciousness-bliss (*ananta-sat-cit-ānanda brahman*), and It is in the heart of all beings as the ever-present intimate inner Self or *ātman*. The whole universe, too, is nothing but a manifestation of the all-pervading Supreme Brahman.¹⁵ As such, it is not necessary to go anywhere in search of God, who is equidistant to all everywhere, i.e. He is the nearest of the near, as our very inmost Self. We have to look within and order our external life in terms of our own inner higher nature. Every type of activity we are engaged in can be transformed into a means of God-realization, or manifestation of our divinity within, if we do it in a spirit of dedication and worship. 'By worshipping Him from whom all beings proceed and by whom the whole universe is pervaded—by worshipping Him *through the performance of duty* does a man attain perfection.'¹⁶ It does not put any restriction on the type of work one should perform, nor does it stipu-

late that a person professing a particular religion alone will attain perfection, but *man* as such. Its message is universal, to mankind as a whole, irrespective of time or place.

The *Gītā*, which emerged in the midst of life's intense activity, is a perennial guide for us to live in God and conduct our activities of life with poise and equanimity, whatever be the circumstances of life and environment. Gandhiji, who was intensely active in public life, always relied on the *Gītā* for guidance.

What is God-realization or attaining perfection according to the *Gītā*? Is it a vision of some divine form and going to a heavenly place after death? The vision of a divine form may be there if one's inclination and *sādhana* is in that direction, or as in the case of the *viśvarūpa-darśana* (the vision of the universal form of God) by Arjuna, it may be conferred on a *sādhaka*. It is not that the Infinite Divine, which manifests all the universe and its beings with names and forms, cannot appear in a particular Divine form meditated upon by the devotee. Even water, though formless, can take the form of any container when poured into it. Several great saints had visions of divine forms, and Śrī Ramakrishna, in our own times, had those visions. But the genuineness of a divine vision is attested only if it transforms the life and character of the person. He then sees the same God in all, and his mind is broadened to include all beings in its love. He develops an equanimous attitude under all circumstances. If, even after the divine vision, a person remains subject to attachments and aversions (*rāga-dveṣa*), his vision cannot have been a genuine divine vision, but only one conjured up by his heated imagination. In fact, without one's being established in spiritual virtues, and in tranquillity of mind, divine visions, or the manifestation of Divinity within, will not be

13. 'Gopī-Gītā,' *Bhāgavata*, X. 2.26.

14. *Bhagavad Gītā*, X. 10.11.

15. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads*, II. 2.11: *brama eva idam visvamidam varistham*.

16. *Bhagavad Gītā*, XVIII. 46.

possible at all. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* says: 'One who has not ceased from evil conduct, whose senses are not under control, who is not self-possessed, whose mind is not peaceful, cannot attain this Self by mere intellectual knowledge.'¹⁷ According to the *Gītā*, the perfection of character, the acquirement of poise and equanimity in the midst of all the dualities (*dvandva-s*) of life, and working steadily without attachment, and facing all the painful circumstances, are characteristics of a man of realization. It declares: 'That calm man who remains unchanged in pain and pleasure, whom these cannot disturb, alone is able, O Arjuna, greatest of men, to attain immortality.'¹⁸

The *Gītā* advocated working with detachment in the external world with equanimity, attuning the mind inwardly on one's higher nature, the Divine Self, in a spirit of yoga (*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi ...*), unmoved by success or failure, for sameness of mind under all circumstances is Yoga (*samatvam yoga ucyate*).¹⁹ And working in such a way in a spirit of yoga, without selfish attachments to results, one is not tainted by activity and its outward success or failure. He rests in the Self or God, even though his body and mind are intensely engaged in outward activity. He is not upset or perturbed, and performs all his activities with great efficiency. The *Gītā* says yoga is dexterity in action (*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*)²⁰: This dexterity in action relates both to its external and its internal aspects—externally the action is efficient, adopting every care as to the means for its successful accomplishment; and internally, he remains calm, resting in the Self, untainted by the effects of the activities, since he is not attached to the results, which are dependent on factors not in his

control. (cf. XVIII. 14). In verses (II. 64-65), it points out that a person who works steadily, moving amidst all the objects of the senses, with a controlled mind, and with self-possession, free from all attachments and aversions, attains peace and goes beyond all sorrow, and his mind gets attuned to the Reality soon.

6. Characteristics of realization:

When we go through the *Gītā*, we find that the characteristics of the realized persons, whether be it through *karma-yoga* (the *sthītaprajña* in chapter II); or *bhakti-yoga* (the supreme bhakta in chapter XII); or *jñāna-yoga* (the *jñānī* in chapter XIII); or the *guṇātīta* (in chapter XIV, etc.), are practically the same—equanimity, sameness of vision towards all beings, unaffectedness by the pairs of opposites, freedom from ego, and 'I' and 'mine', and love towards all beings, and doing good to them (*sarva-bhūta hite ratāḥ*). A divine character is the sign of God-realization. In his commentary on the *Gītā*, in the second chapter, referring to the characteristics of a *sthīta-prajña*, Śrī Śamkara says that 'In spiritual science, everywhere, whatever are the characteristics of a man of realization (*kṛtārtha-lakṣaṇāni*), the same are the means (*sādhanā-s*) for the attainment of the state of realization, for such characteristics are possible of attainment through effort (*yatna-sādhyatvāt*).'²¹

God-realization is not filling in something from outside, or envisioning a divine Being that is somewhere outside, but it is the manifestation of Divinity within oneself. Swami Vivekananda declared that 'Religion is the manifestation of Divinity already in man', and 'Education is the manifestation of Perfection already in man'. His famous definition of religion in his *Raja Yoga* is worth recalling:

17. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, I. 2.24.

18. *Bhagavad Gītā*, VI. 22: *yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate*.

19. *Ibid.*, II. 48.

20. *Ibid.*, II. 50.

21. *Ibid.*, II. 15.

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest the Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. 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.

Freedom (*mukti*) is the goal of life, and one must become as free as the God within, free from the thralldom to the egoistic personality, free from the internal enemies to God-realization. The *Gītā* says: 'He who is able to withstand the force of lust and anger even here before he quits the body—he is a yogi, he is a happy man.'²²

7. *Dharma—the means to freedom (mokṣa)*

Dharma is that which holds together an individual, society, and the universe. *Dharma* is from the Sanskrit root *dhṛ*, to uphold. It is the very essence of an entity which makes it what it is. *Dharma* is a very comprehensive word and has numerous facets of meaning in different contexts. Applied to mankind, *dharma* is defined in the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra-s* as 'yato abhyudaya niḥśreyasa siddhiḥ, sa dharmah'—that by means of which both *abhyudaya* (social attainments and prosperity) and *niḥśreyasa* (*the summum bonum*, spiritual fulfilment) are accomplished, that is *dharma*. The four ends or aspirations of man (*puruṣārtha-s*) comprise the *abhyudaya*, consisting of *dharma* (social and ethical virtue); *artha* (wealth); *kāma* (desires), and *niḥśreyasa* (*mokṣa* or *mukti*—spiritual liberation). Man, as a person, can legitimately work for the fulfilment of *artha* and *kāma* in the pursuit of life in the world, but their enjoyment should be based on *dharma* in the social context. He should follow moral and ethical values, conceding to all others the same right to pursue these ends. It is *dharma*, followed by everyone,

which maintains and regulates society, and helps all to fulfil their aspirations, both secular and spiritual. *Mokṣa* or *mukti* (spiritual freedom) is the highest end of man. It is trans-social and envisages the freedom from the imprisonment of personality through embodiment, for man is primarily a spark of the incorporeal Divine Spirit, functioning and manifesting in and through the psycho-somatic personality.

Dharma also regulates one's duties in the family and society in the different stages of life and according to one's abilities and aptitudes, but orienting all towards *puruṣārtha* of *mokṣa* through Self-realization or God realization. A life led in terms of *dharma* gives rise to discrimination, dispassion, and self-control and makes the mind fit for the attainment of *mokṣa*.

8. *Active life*

What is an active life? Is it merely worldly pursuits? If an active life means merely pursuit of *artha* and *kāma* or worldly desires and attainments, neglecting *dharma*, doting on the perishable psychosomatic personality, then certainly such a pursuit is incompatible with God-realization. But if these are pursued selflessly in fulfilment of duties to family and society and for the good of all, as a responsible and grateful member of society and humanity, then certainly they become steps leading to God-realization. We find men of realization did tremendous work for the good of mankind. Hence activity, in itself, cannot be incompatible with God-realization.

Activities are of different sorts. He who works at the foundations, knowing the secret of work, does more work and brings about greater beneficent results than a man engaged in mere selfish work. It is the selfish activity which is an obstacle to God-realization. It binds one to the world with its joys and sorrows. The *Gītā* says, 'Work

22. *Ibid.*, V. 23.

(with selfish desire) is verily far inferior to that performed with the mind fixed in the higher Self and undisturbed by the thoughts of results (*buddhi-yoga*). O Arjuna, seek refuge in this evenness of mind; wretched are they who act for selfish results.²³ It also points out that merely self-centred activity leads to bondage, and not the activity done without attachment, in fulfilment of duties to family and society in a spirit of self-sacrifice and service (*yajñārthāt karmaṇo anyatra loko'yam karma-bandhanaḥ*) and advocates the performance of all activities diligently free from attachment (*mukta-saṅgaḥ samācara*).²⁴ The nature of activity is known by its results—whether it leads to inner bondage and sorrow, or to a sense of freedom and fulfilment (*kṛtārthatā* or *kṛtakṛtyatā*). One must do self-examination of one's motives of work. Activity combined with wisdom and Self-knowledge not only leads to freedom, but ensures great results as well in the social context. See how Śri Krishna worked intensely, and how Hanumana worked like a giant and earned the epithet 'mahāvīra' (great hero). Hanumana was a great *bhakta* of the Lord, but at the same time did tremendous activity in a spirit of dedicated service. His *bhakti* (devotion) was not mere emotion, but full of *śakti* (power). Hence the *Gītā* declares at the end of the discourse, that where the spirit of *yoga* (union) of Śri Krishna is combined with tremendous activity of Arjuna, there surely will be fortune, victory, prosperity, and right conduct. Such is my conviction.²⁵

The Vedic scriptures have advocated tremendous activity based on *dharma*, and they ask every one to be up and doing (*bhaga caraiva*), and point out that one's fortune, secular or spiritual, sleeps, sits, or walks and moves on, according to one's own personal

effort. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* exhorts, at the end of its first chapter, in a convocation address to the Vedic students: '*satyaṁ vada* (Speak the truth); *dharmam cāra* (Follow dharma); *svādhyāyan mā pramadaḥ* (Do not be negligent of higher study); *kuśalāt na pramaditavyaṁ* (One must not be negligent of one's welfare); *bhūtyai na pramaditavyaṁ* (One must not be negligent of prosperity); *mātr-devo bhava, pitr-devo bhava* (Let the mother and father be like unto gods to you); etc., as a firm basis for spiritual realization taught in its second and third chapters. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* calls upon everyone to 'Arise, awake, and stop not till you realize the Truth with the help of great ones, for the path is an extremely difficult one, like walking on the edge of a razor.'²⁶

A significant verse in religious lore declares: Those who have turned away from their work and duties and merely do lip service, uttering Krishna, Krishna (pretending great devotion to God), such deluded ones are in truth averse to the Lord, for the Lord Himself incarnated (as Śri Krishna) to establish *dharma*.' Another verse says: 'In some way or other, a wise man should bring joy to some living being or other; this indeed is the worship of God.'

Swami Vivekananda, a person of supreme realization, and a great seer, wrote to Sister Nivedita: 'My ideal indeed can be put into a few words, and that is—to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.'²⁷

Let us conclude this topic of 'An Active Life and God realization' with this famous summing of Vivekananda's life's message to mankind by Sister Nivedita, in her introduction to his *Complete Works*, which is very apt and relevant:

23. *Ibid.*, II. 49.

24. *Ibid.*, III. 9.

25. *Ibid.*, XVIII. 78.

26. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, I. 3.14.

27. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) p. 294.

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 are 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 realization. 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 realization which makes Viveka-

nanda 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.²⁸

28. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit. Vol. I, p. xv.

PILGRIMAGE TO VARANASI, GAYA AND PRAYAG SANGAM

T. R. RAJAGOPALAN

For all Hindus who are believers in religious ceremonies and customs, Vārāṇasi, Gayā and Prayāg are probably the most important places to visit in the latter part of their lives. Vārāṇasi, Kāśī, or Benares (in anglicized form) is the holiest city of India, famous for its Lord Viśvanātha (Śiva) temple, and for the common belief that to one who dies here, Lord Śiva Himself bestows immortality and final salvation. It is variously known as 'The Eternal City', 'The City of Temples', or 'The Eternal City of Śiva'. One naturally approaches Vārāṇasi with reverence and awe, since for ages a never-ending stream of pilgrims, particularly the old, approaching death, have come here cherishing the faith that within the boundaries of this holy city they will attain salvation through death.

Gayā, the age-old city of Lord Viṣṇu, is widely known for its Gadādhara, or Viṣṇu temple. It was here that Kṣudirām Chattopādhyāya got in a dream the blessing of Viṣṇu that Sri Ramakrishna would be born as his son. Gayā is holy from ancient times as the place where pilgrims come especially to offer prayers and *pūja-s* (worship) for the salvation or well-being of their ancestors,

Prayāg, known also in recent times as Allahabad, is the place of confluence of the three holy rivers, Yamunā, Gangā and Saraswatī. To bathe at the confluence (*saṅgam*) is considered to be a very blessed act. For this, millions of Hindus visit Prayāg, sometimes undergoing great hardship, from all parts of India. They may bathe at anytime, but according to the position of stars and planets during the Kumbhamela, once every twelve years, is most auspicious.

A pilgrim to Vārāṇasi first begins his pilgrimage reciting a short *dhyāna sloka* (meditation hymn), propitiating the various important deities who dwell in the holy city.

...visvesam mādham doṇḍim
daṇḍapāṇim ca bhairavam
vande kāsīm gūhām gangām
bhavāṇīm manikarnikām

To Śiva, Viṣṇu, Dondi, Dandapani, Bhairava (guardian deity of Kāśī), Gangā, Bhavani (the Divine Mother) and Manikarnikā, Salutations to all the gods and goddesses of sacred Kāśī.

The name Vārāṇasi is itself derived from the names of two small streams, Varuṇa and Asi, which flow into Gangā from either side of the city. The Gaṅgā, which flows from west to east, takes a turn from south to north at this sacred place, so that in the

township of Vārāṇasi all the temples, ashramas and ghats (stairway approaches to the river) are on the western bank of the river. People taking their baths in the morning can have a pleasant view of the rising sun on the opposite bank.

There are many brahmin priests who have their establishments here and they undertake to perform all the religious rites for pilgrims coming to Vārāṇasi. Brahmin priests of South India mostly have settled down at Hanumāna and Kedār ghats. They arrange for the accommodation of pilgrims in their own houses. But for people who want better conveniences, there are guest houses and *dharmaśālās* (rest houses specially for pilgrims).

Pilgrims who go to Vārāṇasi for offering worship in the name of their ancestors generally perform *navagraha homa sarva prāyaścitta*, *godāna* and bathing in Cakra-tīrtha, and at Maṅikarnikā Ghat. These are different forms of worship to different gods and observances to expiate one's sins of the past. Bathing is part of the purifying ceremonies and all this forms the beginning of what is called *yātrā*, or peregrination to many holy spots.

The one-mile long ghat descending to the Gaṅgā is studded with hundreds of temples, monasteries, and retreats for old people. The Maṅikarnikā ghat, considered most holy of the ghats, is where, according to tradition, Lord Mahāviṣṇu did *tapas* (austerities) and meditated on Lord Śiva. For the practice of his austerities, he excavated a tank, or pond, with one of his celestial weapons (*cakra*). Now, water does not naturally remain in that *Cakratīrtha*, but water is pumped into it from the Gaṅgā. After Viṣṇu completed digging the tank, and had sat inside it, entering into the deep absorption of meditation, Lord Śiva and goddess Pārvati came that way and were much pleased. Lord Śiva tilted his head in appre-

ciation of Lord Viṣṇu's meditation, when one of his large ear-pendants (*kuṇḍala-s*) fell down. Hearing the sound made by the falling *kuṇḍala*, Lord Viṣṇu was disturbed in his meditation and came back to consciousness of the physical world. It is due to the falling of Śiva's *kuṇḍala* that the place is called Manikarnikā (*maṇi*) jewel, (*karna*) ear. There is the temple of Lord Maṅikarṇikeśvara above the *tīrtha* (holy spot). The Lord's idol (symbol) is situated in a pit and there are steps to reach it. The place is being maintained by some sannyāsins who open it for any visitor who wants to visit the temple.

Some devotees perform *piṇḍa pradāna* and *tarpaṇa* (ceremonious offerings of food and prayers to departed ancestors) at five ghats in the Gaṅgā. This is called *pañca gaṅgā śrāddha*. The first is at Asi, the extreme end at south; the second at Daśaśvamedha Ghat; third at Trilocana Ghat; fourth at Pañca Gaṅgā, and fifth at Maṅikarnikā Ghat.

The Daśaśvamedha Ghat, which is the most well-known, next to Maṅikarnikā, is said to be the place where the god, Brahmā, the creator of the universe, performed an *aśvamedha yajña*, that is, a worship in which a horse was sacrificed. (As He offered up ten horses, the name has become *Daśaśvamedha*.) At Pañca Gaṅgā Ghat, one should visit Bindu Mādhava temple also. In all these places oblations are offered to one's ancestors, both on one's paternal and maternal sides, going back as far as one can recall their names. After that, one can offer oblations to the rest *en masse*, and even including friends, acquaintances, pet animals, birds and all others for whom one wishes god-speed and salvation in the after-life. When one follows the meanings of the various prayers and *mantra-s* (divine names) one feels a fulness of heart and new awareness of life.

Foremost of all the temples at Vārāṇasi is Viśveśvara Temple which is supposed to be at the centre of Vārāṇasi. The original temple was destroyed by Aurangzeb and at that place a mosque was built by him. The original foundation of the old temple and remnants of its entrance-way can be seen even now. The Liṅga (round stone column symbolic of Śiva) was thrown by him into a well. Later on this was brought out again by two brahmin priest families, and they re-installed the Deity at its present site. Hiuen Tsāng, the Chinese historian-pilgrim, recorded that he had seen a one-hundred foot tall *Śiva-liṅga* made of brass in Vārāṇasi. Probably this was destroyed by foreign invaders also. The present temple spire, the lintels and the symbolic water pots at the temple top were covered with gold by the late Mahārājā Ranjit Singh of Punjab in the eighteenth century.

The Nandi (the name of Śiva's bull) which was originally placed at the south of the entrance is, in the present temple, to the north. It is said that when Śri Śaṅkara came to Benares, he met Śri Vedavyāsa and narrated to him his exposition of the *Brahmasūtra-s* which was approved by Vyāsa. The place where they are believed to have sat can be seen even now. The Śivaliṅga was at the centre, but is now shifted to one side. There is an old story behind this: When the two brahmins who lifted the *liṅga* out from the well, wanted to install it again, some people objected, saying that the sanctity of the *liṅga* had been lost since it was touched and removed by Aurangzeb. But the brahmins installed it all the same, in spite of much protest. Traditional belief is that after a few days the *liṅga*, of its own accord, shifted from the centre to one side, thus proving to all that the *caitanya* (divine consciousness) residing in the stone had not been lost.

One should not miss seeing the Śivaliṅga

in the Annapūrṇeśvarī temple with Śri Cakra above it, worshipped by the great saint, Bhāskara Rāyar. Near this Viśveśvara temple are also the temples of Duṇḍi, Gaṇapati, Daṇḍapānī, and Annapūrṇeśvarī. Viśālākṣī is the śakti of Viśveśvara—*Vārāṇasyām Viśālākṣī*. Another spot to visit is the holy banyan tree—the *Vaṭavṛkṣa*. It is said that this is the middle portion of a single tree, the root being at *saṅgam*, at Allahabad, and the top being at Gayā. Tradition says that the Sun-god (Āditya) gave the *akṣaya-pātra* (a wonderful vessel which held the never-ending supply of food) to Yudhisṭhira, (the eldest of the five Pandava brothers) here. That place is seen near the *Vaṭavṛkṣa*. The next important place is that of Lord Kāla Bhairava, chief of Śiva's followers, who is said to be the guardian deity of the place. Devotees generally buy sacred thread from here. The priest places it on the image of the Deity, and ties it on the wrist of the pilgrim, uttering a *mantra* as he does so. This sacred thread, offered to Kāla Bhairava, is a symbol of protection offered by Bhairava.

The next place of interest is Vyāsa-Kāśī, situated on the opposite bank of the river. One can reach it either by boat or on foot, crossing a temporary bridge over the river. Near Vyāsa-Kāśī is the palace of Kāśī-Rājā: According to legend, Vyāsa wanted to offer his *pranām-s* (obeisance) to Lord Viśvanātha. When he reached the opposite bank of Gaṅgā, he found the entire place full of Śivaliṅga-s, and he feared that if he crossed the river to go to the temple he would have to tread on the *liṅga-s*. Unable to decide what to do, he prayed to Lord Viśveśvara. The Lord agreed to reveal His spirit form (*darśan*) to Vyāsa on the opposite bank. The place has therefore come to be called Vyāsa-Kāśī. Of the three *liṅga-s* here now, one is of Lord Viśveśvara and the other two are of Vyāsācārya and Śukācārya. The temple was built and maintained by

Kāśī-Rājā, whose palace adjoins it. The palace is now converted into a museum.

The next place to visit is the campus of Benaras Hindu University, built by the late Madan Mohan Malaviya in the early 1900's. The buildings and surroundings are beautiful. Within the campus compound a temple has been constructed for Lord Śiva (Viśveśvara) by the philanthropic Birla family. Its marble structure, and the cleanliness of the place are splendid. Next is the temple dedicated to Sri Rāmachandra and Hanumāna (Āñjaneya). On the way back one should not miss seeing the Tulasi Mānasa Mandir (temple) where there is Deity, Satyanārāyaṇa and the beautiful paintings from *The Rāmāyana*, written by Tulasidās. One more attraction here is the exhibition of mechanical dolls depicting Sri Rāmañlā and Sri Krishnañlā (*ñlā*, divine play).

The next place of interest is Sārnath, the place where Lord Buddha, after attaining enlightenment at Bodh-Gayā, went and began to preach his religion. The place is about twenty kilometers from Benares. Here one can see Buddhist pagodas of various countries, which are generally well-kept. One can also see the remains of the old monastery where Buddha and his disciples, and later-day monks stayed. The old structures are now widely excavated, and the ruins can be seen.

From Vārāṇasi to reach Gayā, one has to cover a distance of about 270 kilometers by road. At Gayā the pilgrim offers oblations for the well-being of his forbearers on the bank of the river Phālgunī, once a substantial tributary of the Gaṅgā but its surface flow has ceased. One sees no water in its broad, 200 to 300 meters, bed. However, three to four inches below the surface of the sandy bed, one gets plenty of water. Now its 'flow' is said to be underground! By removing a few handfuls of sand the pilgrims collect enough water to perform their pres-

cribed rituals. The ritualistic offerings are done at the Śri Rāma temple just above the river. Here again oblations are offered. In addition, a special offering and worship are performed for one's mother (but only if she is deceased!) as *prāyaścitta* (expiation of sins) for all trouble one had given to one's mother during the time one was carried in the womb, as well as after birth during one's childhood.

The last lap is the visit to Prayāg *saṅgam*, the confluence of the three rivers: Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarāsvatī, of which the latter is *antarvāhinī* (lit., below flowing). Its surface is also dry. Prayāg (Allahabad) is about 125 kilometers from Benares and can be reached by bus or train. Here the pilgrim performs first a worship of Śri Rādhā-Krishna. It is done by the wife in presence of her husband. The temples of Venī Mādhava and Śri Hanumāna are important here. Hanumāñji is in a lying position. Kāñcī Śri Śaṅkarācārya has built a Śaṅkara *math* (monastic headquarters) here, and installed Lord Śiva and Goddess Kāmākṣī.

The journey to the *saṅgam*, to the actual point of the confluence of the three rivers, is by boat. Where the Gaṅgā joins the Yamunā the waters come together in two colours—the Gaṅgā clay-white and the Yamunā dark blue. The Vaṭa Vṛkṣa (holy banyan) can be seen inside the fort. This is the root of the sacred tree whose other part is believed to be seen at Benares. The place is a restricted area as it is within an Indian Army cantonment. After one performs his holy ablutions Gaṅgā water is usually collected from a place above the confluence from *śuddha* Gaṅgā near Prayāg proper. Devotees take the water to be preserved in brass pots. Some of this Gaṅgā water will be taken to Śri Rāmeśvaram temple in South India for the worship of Śri Rāma, and Gaṅgā *pūja* will be performed by the devotees at home afterwards,

VIVEKANANDA AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN INDIA

PROF. SANTWANA DASGUPTA

Background and Cultural Conflict

The socio-economic and cultural transformations that are manifest in India today germinated much earlier. Therefore we have to look first at the past before we look at the present in order to find out the role that was played by Swami Vivekananda in influencing these transformations.

In the nineteenth century when Vivekananda was born, everything in India was, as it were, in a melting pot. As a result of coming into contact with the scientific and technologically advanced West through British rule, there occurred a serious cultural confusion in Indian society. The conflict of ideologies was at its zenith: reason or faith? science or religion? secularism or spirituality? polytheism or monism? ancient values or modern values? Which to choose? Such were the questions of perplexed people, particularly the younger generations facing a forceful influx of foreign culture. Reformers came forward to eradicate some of the social evils like the practice of *satī*, child-marriage, the purdah system, and oppressive caste distinctions. On the political front there were turmoils and upheavals, mutiny and mass uprising, agrarian revolts and riots. On the economic front, there were the burning problems of the decline of the once flourishing handicrafts and cottage industries, the disintegration of village communities and the suffering caused by exaction of colonial revenues from impoverished people, fiscal policies and recurrent decimating famines.

Narendranath in youth: His search for answers

Even as a boy Naren (as Vivekananda

was called at the time) had a rare intellect, the fire of genius burnt in his eyes and above all he had a very sensitive mind. Naturally he was caught in the tempests of his time, and felt involved in every burning question of the day. His heart bled to find solutions to each one of them. Devouring books on western science, philosophy, political economy, history and sociology, he grew all the more restless, since the answer he sought was not there. With the spread of English education in India, there emerged a class of new intellectuals who were cut off from the country's time-honoured cultural and spiritual traditions. They were deeply influenced by western intellectualism that was born out of the European revolutions of 1789-1830. The hollow intellectualism, however, did not appeal to Vivekananda since it failed to satisfy his deeper urges. Herein lay the deficiency of intellectualism; it could not satisfy the spiritual longings of the human psyche. It totally ignored the human spirit. This hollow intellectualism, in the guise of rationalism, has once again gained ground in free India.

In the turbulence of his youth, amidst his studies in western philosophy and science, a chance meeting with Sri Ramakrishna at last brought the young Naren face to face with the challenge that old India held out for modern man. Ramakrishna, who was a great *sādhaka* (ascetic) did not pay much attention to social and political questions because he spent his life ascending peak after peak of spiritual realization. But Sri Ramakrishna had followed the disciplines leading to God-vision along many paths of various faiths, and had become a man of great achievements. Perhaps that is why

Rabindranath wrote a poetic eulogy of him as having realized unity underlying all contraries and conflicting ideals, adding—'... from far and near arrive salutations to which I add my own.'¹

Vivekananda also, at last found peace and unity in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, where formerly his young mind was torn and troubled by so many opposing forces. All his mental agitation became calm, even the problem of the presence of evil in the world created by a benign Deity, he found reconciled, while in contact with Sri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna was the revivifier of traditional values and the saviour of the eternal religion of the Hindus. He is well-known for his expression: 'So many ideals; so many paths to God. ... Whatever you do ... do it as an offering to the Lord, without attachment, and you will become free.' In addition to attaining personal blessedness at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda also conceived this second idea: the spiritual equality of all men and women, and further, how to inject consciousness of it into the machinery of human society to effect the uplift of the Indian masses. '*Jiva is Siva*', he conceived from his Master, and each soul is potentially divine. Everyone may attain the highest goal of human life by following *svadharma* (his own path or duty), however so-called high or low he may be. But, he determined, men must be made free—free physically, politically, mentally, and free spiritually, each to follow his own calling. Law and rules of society should help by providing equal opportunity for all. But at the beginning, Vivekananda understood, he and his band of sannyāsins, all the disciples of Ramakrishna, would have to sacrifice themselves and set to work. In time, others would follow. Safeguarding equal human rights for every man and woman

would in time level down privileged classes and castes, and bring nearer the ideal of true socialistic society.

Vivekananda face to face with socio-economic conditions

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda traversed the length and breadth of India. It was a time when the country was going through the worst economic crises in history. Mostly as a result of the harsh revenue and fiscal policies of alien rule, the country was caught up in the series of devastating famines which occurred from 1770 to 1900. As a wandering monk Vivekananda lived among the peasants, shoe-makers, sweepers, factory workers, and tribals—with men and women who toiled day and night just to survive. He was an eye-witness to their dire straits, their privations, miseries, oppression and hunger. He saw clearly that those who were producing the wealth of the country and building up the civilization were not getting even the fruits of their own labour. 'With soul on fire' he made a futile bid to awaken the ruling princes of the princely states and the educated elite of society. But very soon he realized that the privileged classes, living in luxury, were 'more dead than alive'. It dawned upon him that the landed aristocracy, along with the priestly class were themselves responsible for the age-long ruthless exploitation of the masses. He realized also that India's only hope for the future lay with the masses and their uplift. Fully developed men alone, would be worthy of throwing off the yoke of foreign oppression, winning and standing to preserve their country's freedom and independence. Spiritual giant that Vivekananda was, he opposed all kinds of tyranny—the tyranny of darkness over mind, the tyranny of caste-power and class-wealth over the poor, and no less, the tyranny of strong nations over the weak.

1. *Prabuddha Bharata*, XLI (February 1936), p. 53.

Vivekananda's strength, his world view and prognosis

Vivekananda certainly realized that foreign colonial rule was to a large extent responsible for the degeneration of national life. In his letter of 30th October 1899, to Miss Mary Hale of America, he refers to British rule in India as 'the very source of pessimism'.² Yet the Swami did not engage himself in hostilities or confrontations with the colonial government. Like his mentor, Sri Ramakrishna, he was a great lover of humanity, a *sannyāsin* and a lover of God. Violence was outside his nature.

Great souls like Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda himself, used their spiritual powers to move heaven and earth, but in rather secret and silent ways, hardly perceptible to the intellects of ordinary men. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to catch those great Ones in actions like those of social reformers, revolutionaries, or topplers of empires! Yet, it is obvious that their world-moving ideas were at the back of the great events of history, often guiding, often inspiring, and sometimes precipitating those great events.

Vivekananda often said as he was growing older, that the longer he lived, the more everything seemed to him to lie in manliness. Indeed, he spent his whole energy imparting man-making character-building education to men and women of three continents, irrespective of nationality, creed, or race. Education alone, he declared, *man-making* education, is the panacea for all evils of society. Men and women, truly educated, would redress their own grievances and would not require any outside agency—or even any violence to bring about a revolution in society.

Visiting the West in 1893, Swamiji was

² *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) p. 394.

impressed favourably with the strides being taken in science and technology. Like all the visitors to the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893, he was wonderstruck to see the new theories of electricity had found unthought-of applications, and how rapid strides were being taken in physics, chemistry, medicine. Various kinds of industries, agriculture, and transportation were being revolutionized by the invention and application of machines.

Following, however, a longer and closer look at the state of affluent society, the Swami was dismayed to see that people were becoming more distracted and bestial in nature, and heedless of cruelties to their fellow men. Attendant evils were cropping up as a consequence of new-found power and efficiency-oriented thinking. There was cruel exploitation of the poor, children and women in factories overproduction and wastefulness in agriculture. Brotherly love and religious piety, already at a low ebb, was being abandoned or sacrificed on the altar of materialism. The West was going out-of-bounds in pursuit of earthly glory. Willingness of the powerful nations to sacrifice weaker brethren of poor countries was being strengthened by the growth of affluence, commerce and competition. Vivekananda warned of the 'vengeance of history':

The love of man is on their lips, in their hearts there is nothing but evil and every violence ...but the judgement of God will fall upon them: 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord'... God will have vengeance (he went on), you may not see it in religion, you may not see it in politics. But you must see it in history... If you grind down the people, you will suffer.³

Vivekananda on India—comparison with Europe

Direct contact with the Indian masses led

³ *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. VII, p. 279.

Vivekananda to realize the cultural unity of the people in the midst of endless variety of customs and manners. As described by Romain Rolland:

From North to South the ancient land of India was full of gods, yet the unknown chain of countless arms formed only one God. He realized it also in communion with the living men of all castes and outside castes.⁴

And Vivekananda had said:

Those uncared-for lower classes of India—the peasants and weavers and the rest, who have been conquered by foreigners and are looked down upon by their own people—it is they who from time immemorial have been working silently, without even getting the remuneration of their labours!... The world-conquering heroes of spirituality, war, and poetry are in the eyes of all, and they have received the homage of mankind. But where nobody looks, no one gives a word of encouragement, where everybody hates—that [there] living amid such circumstances and displaying boundless patience, infinite love, and dauntless practicality, our proletariat are doing their duty in their homes day and night, without the slightest murmur—well, is there no heroism in this? ... Blessed is he who manifests...unselfishness and devotion to duty in the smallest of acts, unnoticed by all—and it is you who are actually doing this ye ever-trampled labouring classes of India! I bow to you.⁵

It is interesting to compare here the direct experiences of Vivekananda regarding the socio-economic and cultural conditions of India with the studies of Karl Marx, which though made from long distance, contain certain typical insights. Marx observed that India was...

a country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindu, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste, a society whose framework was based on a sort of equilibrium resulting from a general repulsion and constitutional exclusiveness

4. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda & Universal Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), p. 22.

5. *Complete Works*, op. cit., VIII, p. 358-59.

between all its members who are locked in a 'war of all against all'.⁶

This comparative glance at the two historical figures is worth while, because it demonstrates how the same object or set of facts is readily interpreted differently, according to one's perspective. Vivekananda, like Marx, was poignantly aware of the paradoxes and incongruities and maladjustments within India which were due to hundreds of years of life under foreign domination. Both men discerned the extreme conservatism of social leaders, either of the priestly cultural side, or of the land-owning aristocracy, was holding the country back from any hope of progress from within. Certainly some outside force would have to be brought to bear. Would it be the Hegel-Marxian dialectic, or intervention from Above, or would it stem from a resurgence of India's own primordial fount of vitality expressed through a Vivekananda? At any rate, Vivekananda's approach was something novel....

The moneyed people will only help them to regain their vitality and nothing more...then you must take care not to set up class strife between the poor peasants, the labouring people and the wealthy classes. Make it a point not to abuse the moneyed classes. *Svakāryamudharetprājñah* (The wise man should achieve his own object).⁷

And Vivekananda decided that it would be necessary to go to the West. With the blessings of God of Fortune and History, he would himself awaken the conscience of England and America to India's condition. In the Swami's own words:

To give and take is the law of nature. Any individual or class or nation that does not obey this law, never prospers in life. We must follow the law. That is why I went to America...They have been for a long time giving you of what—

6. A. K. Roy, 'An Article', *The Statesman*, Calcutta: 25 April 1989.

7. *Complete Works*, op. cit., VI, p. 428.

they possess, and now is the time for you to share your priceless treasures with them. And you will see how the feelings of hatred will be quickly replaced by those of faith, devotion and reverence towards you, and how they will do good to your country even unasked.⁸

Vivekananda—a positivist in two cultures

The immediate need, history ordained, was for Vivekananda to gain recognition as the most avant-garde social philosopher of his day. The World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 presented itself as an opportune occasion and a world-wide forum. As almost every man, woman and child in India knew, as large numbers in the West also knew, his part in that Parliament was an instantaneous resounding success. Vivekananda succeeded in awakening sympathy and recognition for the ancient culture and present vitality of India. His life and work seemed, even from the 1890's astonishingly significant and portentous for the future. Hardly had he made history, than many rose up to acclaim his importance in historical perspective. To quote Sister Nivedita:

The Swami's Vedantic mission served a twofold purpose—one of world-moving, and another, of nation-making. The function of the Swami's movement as regards India, to quote his own words, was—'to find the common bases of Hinduism and awaken the national consciousness to them'.⁹

More than immediate pecuniary gains, and more even than winning over to the cause of India's emancipation numerous willing disciples, Vivekananda captured the hearts and enthusiasm of millions of Indians who spontaneously became proudly consci-

ous of his tremendous appeal and success in the West. India, it seemed, was ready to rise as a man to pursue her destiny and take her rightful place as a contributing member in the community of nations. From the time of Vivekananda's return to India after four years of intense work, a new vigour and new life poured into India's soul. Education, political consciousness, science and the arts—all got an impetus of strength from the world-renouncing sannyasin.

However, it was not India alone that gained from Vivekananda's visit to the West. People of America and Britain, about to be swept off by the scientific and technological revolution, found urgently needed moorings in religious life. Great was the wonder and appreciation of the best minds, when they heard the message of Vivekananda that science, nor even technology, was at odds with or in deadly confrontation with fundamental principles of religion! Vivekananda, it may be said, gave new life to both East and West. By winning in the West, the East, notably India, was triumphant. The whole world was foundering at the time of Vivekananda's leaving India, and the whole of humanity recovered its lost balance after he infused a new consciousness of what practical spirituality, practical religion could achieve for individuals as well as for whole nations.

Especially in England, Vivekananda was aware that *socialist* ideas would soon have to be accepted by society. But in both countries, England and America, he observed labouring people were being ground down to poverty by unrestrained capitalist power. Industries and spreading mercantilism were making slaves not only of weak nations, notably India, but also of indigenous peoples. Vivekananda said:

...Everything goes to show that socialism or some form of rule by the people, call it what you will, is coming on the boards. The people

8. *Letters*, op. cit., p. 172.

9. 'A Memory of Vivekananda', *Prabuddha Bharata*, XXVIII (March 1923), p. 109.

will certainly want the satisfaction of their material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, more food. What guarantee have we that this or any civilization will last unless it is based on religion, on the goodness of man? Depend on it, religion goes to the root of the matter. If it is right, all is right..... I am socialist not because it is a perfect system but because half-a-loaf is better than no bread... What guarantee have we that this or any civilization will last, unless it is based on religion, on the goodness of man?¹⁰

Vivekananda and Modern India

Thus he has made it clear that religion plays the vital role of making men good, the one essential quality upon which depends stability of socialism or of any order. Professor P. A. Sorokin, the Russian-born American sociologist, also upheld this view.¹¹ As seen by Vivekananda, only strong, fearless men, not prone to corruption, selfless persons, real brave heroes, who could make supreme sacrifice for the happiness of many, for the good of the many, could ensure stability for socialism. In view of the vital role of religion in man-making, it was necessary, he felt, to build up socialism on the bedrock of true religion. Western socialistic ideas, on the other hand, Swamiji found, were based on materialism. This he pointed out emphatically more than once.¹² In contrast, regarding India, he pointed out:

The Indian people are intensely socialistic. But, beyond that, there is a wealth of individualism. They are tremendously individualistic—that is to say, after laying down all these minute regulations. They have regulated how you should eat, drink, sleep, die! Everything is regulated there; from early morning to when you go to bed and sleep, you are following regulations and law¹³...And you are trying today what you call socialism! Good

things will come; but in the long run you will be a blight upon the race. Freedom is the watchword. Be free! A free body, a free mind, and a free soul!¹⁴...Well, these things that they are crying for now in the West, they have done ages before (in India). Land has been nationalized... by thousands all these things.¹⁵

Vivekananda thus brought our national awakening and was the guiding spirit behind our freedom movement. As succinctly put by Sri Chakravarti Rajagopalachari: 'But for him we would not have gained our freedom.'¹⁶ And as recently stated by the late Professor Benoy Sarkar, eminent Indian sociologist: 'But for him we who claim ourselves as socialists, today, would not be so.'¹⁷ We claim, thus, that Vivekananda was not only the apostle of nationalism, but was the apostle of Socialism also:

Let new India arise (he said) out of the peasant's cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from the factory, from marts, and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains.¹⁸

To Vivekananda, therefore, the heart of the nation was composed not of the handful of English-educated elite which formed the core of colonial administrative service, but of the masses of common people who lived by their labour. He considered that the welfare of India and the social liberation of the masses were mutually connected. Without the uplift of the masses, the attainment of national emancipation would be meaningless. To those who were pleading for concessions of political power from the British, he said sternly: 'Slaves want power to make others

10. *Complete Works*, op. cit., V, p. 202.

11. Pitrim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, 1957: p. 628.

12. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. VI, pp. 71-82.

13. *Complete Works*, op. cit., III, p. 516.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 515.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 516.

16. *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* (Calcutta: 1963) p. xiii.

17. Professor Sarkar was heard by the author to say this on several occasions.

18. *Complete Works*, op. cit., VII, p. 327.

slaves¹⁹ ... No amount of politics would be of any avail unless the masses in India are once more well-educated, well-fed and well cared for ... If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them.²⁰

In one sense it would not be wrong, as some have done, to declare Vivekananda the father of modern materialism in India. These words were actually uttered by Professor Sarkar at Calcutta University. Though one may not go so far as to agree fully on the point, we remind ourselves that Vivekananda did write to Sister Nivedita:

You will find that I have never quoted anything but the *Upaniṣads*. And of the *Upaniṣads*, it is only that one idea *strength*. The quintessence of the Vedas and Vedanta and all lies in that one word.²¹

Even the Soviet thinkers today appreciate the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda which elevate man and seek to bring peace, progress and amity among nations. Soviet writer, philosopher and research associate of the USSR Institute of Oriental Studies, *Academy of Sciences*, Dr. E. P. Chelishev, said significantly in a recent (1984) Calcutta interview:

We do not look upon Vivekananda and his

19. *Letters*, op. cit., p. 174.

20. *Complete Works*, op. cit., V, pp. 222-23.

21. 'The Master as I Saw Him', *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1967) p. 157.

mentor, Sri Ramakrishna, to be mere religious leaders as they are commonly looked upon. They are far greater than that; they are the prophets of human emancipation, of equality and human progress...The message of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is the message of peace, amity and world brotherhood. That message can indicate the path of survival in the fear-stricken world of today.²²

If we want to tide ourselves over the present crises in India, in culture, in economics and in politics, which are threatening national integration, we would do well to look back on the thoughts of this prophet, Vivekananda, who showed up the path to a new life. He was truly a modern man and a man speaking for an up-to-date religion, who urged India to awaken to the lessons that history has taught, and to the blessings that modern science has to offer. Significantly, like the holy seer of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, bidding adieu to his pupils, Vivekananda often reminded: truth, human welfare and material prosperity should not be neglected.²³ In truth, the bold thoughts and progressive social ideas of Vivekananda have done much to shape modern India, and are still an active, leavening power, influencing the shape of events to come. His life and ideas deserve serious consideration by all of us.

22. *Prabuddha Bharata*, XCIV (January 1989), p. 70.

23. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, I. 2.1.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN—VI

ANN MYREN

SRI RAMAKRISHNA BLESSES

'I come because I love you, because I want you. I want your blessing,' the wife of Navagopal said to Sri Ramakrishna, who

immediately went into *samādhi*. And as he came out of *samādhi*, he put his hand on her head and blessed her. On another day when

the Master was at her house, he saw a picture of Krishna in her shrine and then went downstairs where all of the devotees were singing holy songs. They put a garland of flowers around his neck and he went into *samādhi*, assuming the posture of Krishna. Then Navagopal's wife, who must have longed to see Krishna, told the Master that she was partly satisfied by seeing him as Krishna, but that she also wanted to see Rādhā. The Master said she would have to wait for that.¹

When the Master was at Cossipore, he blessed Navagopal's wife in a rather unusual way. She went to see him one day, but he could not see her, so he sent her a photograph of himself, and said, 'Tell her to be content with looking at this to-day.' He said to her later that the picture would travel far and wide and be carried about by people.² For Navagopal's wife to have the photograph given to her by her spiritual teacher was a unique blessing.

The Master used to say that the spiritual teacher is, as it were, a woman-friend. Until the devotee had the longed-for divine experience, until Rādhā was united with Krishna, there was no end to the woman-friend's 'love-errands'. Like a woman who waits on all, who serves all, who is constantly attentive to the needs of others, the 'supremely glorious teacher' takes the disciple by the hand to the Chosen Ideal. Here, once again we see the high value Sri Ramakrishna places on woman when he compares the spiritual teacher to a woman friend. Truly the Master was a divine teacher whose blessings were boundless, and there was no end to his 'love-errands'.³

1. Sister Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, (La Crescenta, California: Ananda Ashrama, 1928), pp. 125-6.

2. *Ibid.*, 154.

3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans., Swami Jagadananda, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952), p. 399.

Once an elderly woman, probably Jadunath Mallick's mother, who lived at her son's home close to the Kali temple in Dakshineswar, prepared offerings in her room and sat for meditation. Meanwhile at the Kali temple the Master fell into a trance. In that state of mind, he left the temple and went to Jadu's house and to the room where Jadu's mother was sitting in meditation. When she opened her eyes, the Master was eating the offerings she had prepared for the Lord. On seeing the Master, she said, 'Ah, today the aspirations of my mind have been fulfilled. I have realized your true nature. Bless me that I may realize God in this very birth.' At this the Master put his foot on her head, and she was filled with the bliss of 'divine communion'.⁴

On 23 December 1885, two unnamed women devotees of the Master came to Cossipore to see him and receive his blessings. On this day he also blessed several men; among them was Kalipada whose chest he touched and said, 'Be illumined.' When the two women bowed down, the Master touched them on the chest with his foot while he was in *samādhi*. One of them wept and said, 'Oh, you are so kind!'⁵ In a similar manner he blessed his sister, Hriday's mother, with an altogether different kind of blessing. She used to worship his feet with flowers and sandal-paste. Then one day, the Master put his foot on her head and said to her, 'You will die in Benares.'⁶

Another way in which he blessed women was to visit their houses. On 28 July 1885, he paid a visit to Golāp Mā. When she heard that he was on his way, she became

4. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Mayavati, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1948), pp. 528-9.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 577-8.

6. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans., Swami Nikhilananda, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), p. 359.

very excited and rushed out to find him, going in one direction, but he came to her house from another. When she returned and found the Master there, she was 'overwhelmed with emotion'. Golāp Mā had been filled with grief over the death of her daughter, but the divine emotion swept away her sorrow. Her friend, Yogīn Mā, had also experienced the magic of Sri Ramakrishna's presence when she first knew him. She would go to him prepared to ask many questions, tell him her secrets and problems, but as soon as she came into his presence, her agonies vanished. Like Yogīn Mā, Golāp Mā, with the Master right in her house, in her own presence, became utterly absorbed in him, leaving all her duties as hostess to her sister.⁷ To give some idea of her state of mind, Golāp told a story in which a labourer died of joy when he won a hundred thousand rupees in the lottery. She told her guests that she too would die of joy unless they all blessed her.⁸ So she was twice blessed, first by the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, and second, by her guests.

Then the Master went to the house of Yogīn Mā, who was also known as Ganu's mother. He sat down in the drawing-room where some young musicians played for him. The Brāhmani, Golāp Mā, said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Ganu's mother [Yogīn Mā] requests you to bless the room [Yogīn Mā's] with the dust of your feet. Then the room will be turned into Benares, and anyone dying in it will have no trouble hereafter.'⁹ The Master granted Yogīn Mā's request, went to her room and blessed it with the dust of his feet. She had no doubt that the

Master's presence made a place holy. After his visit she certainly must have felt that if she died in her room, she would attain liberation, just as she would in Benares.

To continue with Golāp Mā, she received many other wonderful blessings from Sri Ramakrishna. He had, for example, taken her 'entire responsibility', making her his direct disciple.¹⁰ It is likely that this very close relationship made possible two other rather extraordinary experiences. One day when the Master was eating his midday meal, she sat down to talk with him. As she sat with him, she saw a snake-like creature darting out of his mouth and taking each morsel of food as it was put in. She told the Master what she saw, and he said that it was fortunate that she had both seen and understood the meaning of this. Later when she saw men eating she always 'visualised' the snake-like coiled power, the Kundalinī, accepting the food as an oblation.¹¹ Golāp Mā's most unusual blessing happened this way. One day she noticed the Master walking along in an ecstatic mood. However, he appeared to her not as himself, but as Kali, the Divine Mother of the Universe. Naturally, Golāp Mā was filled with wonder.¹²

Golāp Mā was adept in meditation. She, for example, had the 'direct vision of the living goddess Tārā', her Chosen Ideal, during meditation. Nevertheless, she did not take credit for earning this vision through meditation and japa, but attributed this blessing to the Master's grace.¹³ Then on 23 December 1885, she was granted another great blessing. By this time Sri Ramakrishna was living at the Cossipore garden house.

7. Swami Madhavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India*, (Mayavati, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1982), p. 449.

8. Swami Prabhananda, *First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna*, 1st ed., (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1987), p. 378.

9. M., *Gospel*, p. 824.

10. Prabhananda, *First Meetings*, p. 379.

11. Swami Gambhirananda, pub., *The Disciples of Ramakrishna*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1955), p. 481.

12. Prabhananda, *First Meetings*, p. 380.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 381.

On that day the Master had *samādhi* and, while in this state, touched her heart with his feet. Golāp Mā shed tears of joy, and from that time on her spiritual life became even more intense.¹⁴ Yogīn Mā, Golāp Mā's friend, had a similar experience.

One day Yogīn Mā passed by Sri Ramakrishna, who was leaning against the wall of the northern porch by his room. She had been in the garden picking flowers which she put in her apron. When the Master saw her, he asked her what she was carrying in her apron. She showed him the flowers, knelt, and placed them at his feet. Sri Ramakrishna became ecstatic and, while in that state, placed his foot on Yogīn Mā's head. Gopāl Mā was standing nearby and suggested that she hold his foot on her chest. Yogīn Mā did this and experienced such divine emotion that she believed the footprints of Viṣṇu Gadādhara had been enshrined in her heart.¹⁵

Yogīn Mā's heart may have borne the footprints of Viṣṇu Gadādhara, but in the very center of her heart was the indweller, the *antaryāmi*. She once said, 'Often I noticed that I had gone to him with certain questions in mind; strangely, such or similar questions I would hear someone else asking and in response he would resolve all my doubts directly or indirectly. He was indeed the Indweller.'¹⁶ To know directly that the Master was the *antaryāmi*, the indweller, was certainly a very great blessing for Yogīn Mā. Another great blessing the Master conferred on Yogīn Mā was the boon of passing away while in *samādhi*.¹⁷ Yogīn Mā's spiritual attainments were distinguished. But nevertheless, Yogīn Mā wanted to practise more austerities, so she planned a pilgrimage to Vrindaban.

She asked the Master, who by this time was living at Cossipore, if she could go, and he told her she could if Sri Sarada Devi also gave her permission, which she did. Before she went, the Master said to her, 'You will get everything.'¹⁸ Unfortunately, the Master died before she returned to Calcutta. Yogīn Mā was heartbroken. But her life was complete. The Master had once said to her, 'What more is there left to be attained by you? You have seen, fed and served this body.'¹⁹

Besides her great spiritual attainments, Yogīn Mā was accomplished in other ways such as reciting passages from holy books. She learned by heart many stories from the *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* and helped Sister Nivedita when she wrote *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* by telling her stories from these books.²⁰ Further, she knew many things about the Master and his devotees, so Swami Saradananda often used her recollections in his authoritative book, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*. Yogīn Mā's accomplishments were many. But one of her most notable achievements was her initiation by Swami Saradananda at Puri into *Tantrik sannyāsa*.

Gaurī Mā, another young woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, had wandered about India and lived like a *sannyāsini*. She came to Dakshineswar when she was about twenty-five years old and met the Master. She longed to experience the state of mind known as *mahābhāva*, which Sri Chaitanya lived in most of the time. One day she cooked the Master's meal and took it to him. She remained in his room to see if there was anything more she could do for him. When he tasted the food he stood up in ecstasy. Suddenly she too became ecstatic and tears flowed from her eyes. Then all

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., p. 282.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p. 287.

18. Ibid., p. 285.

19. *Disciples of Ramakrishna*, p. 472.

20. Ibid., p. 474.

the devotees became absorbed in the same divine mood. They danced, they laughed, they wept and sang. Finally, the Master touched each one, and all returned to ordinary consciousness.²¹

Gaurī Mā had been blessed by Sri Ramakrishna when she was a girl and was called Mr̥ḍānī. One day in south Calcutta Mr̥ḍānī passed the Master in the street and he blessed her. Later she wanted to see him again and found out from her grandmother that he would be at the *Rāsa-Pūrṇimā* which was to be held near her aunt's village close to Dakshineswar. She went there and the Master initiated her. She persuaded her mother not to give her in marriage and finally, at the age of nineteen, she left her home with a band of 'up country *sādhus*.' It was during her early wandering years that she began to be called 'Gaura Māyee'. Her fair complexion made her look like Gauri, the daughter of the Himalayas.²² She returned to Calcutta and met the Master in 1882, when she was twenty-five. This third meeting with him was most extraordinary.

When she returned to Calcutta, she stayed with Balaram Bose, who wanted to take her to the Master; however, she resisted. Then one day she could not complete her worship. She fell down unconscious and when she came to, she felt as if someone was pulling her by an invisible string tied to her heart. Balaram Bose was told about her strange mood, came to see her, and decided then and there to take her to the Master at Dakshineswar.²³

So they set off for Dakshineswar and when they arrived at the Master's room, they found him seated on his bed humming a song to himself. He had just finished win-

ding a string around a piece of wood. The string which Gaurī Mā had felt pulling her disappeared along with her anguish.²⁴ When she saw Sri Ramakrishna, she recognized him as the Brahmin who had blessed her and who had later initiated her.²⁵

The Master conferred his grace on Gaurī Mā—and, for that matter, all women—in a very unusual way. One day when Gaurī Mā was in the garden picking flowers for worship, he came to her and said, 'Look here, Gaurī, I am pouring water, you prepare the clay.' The Master was actually pouring water from a vessel in his right hand while he held a branch of a tree with his left hand. She replied by saying, 'Where shall I get the clay to mould. *All* is gravel here.' She had taken his words literally and did not understand that he was referring to his power to raise women through her. 'The women of this country are in a sorry plight. It is among them that your work must lie', he then told her. She replied that she was willing to take some girls to the Himalayas and train them. But this was not what the Master wanted; he wanted the work done in Calcutta.²⁶ If the work was well established in a city, then it would continue on even after the death of Gaurī Mā.

Sometime during her stay at Dakshineswar Gaurī Mā received another blessing from the Master. In an informal initiation into *sannyāsa*, he gave her an ochre cloth, signifying her *sannyāsini* status, and a new name, Gauri-ananda.²⁷ The relationship between Gaurī Mā and her guru was deepened still more by his gift of the ochre cloth.

We can get a further idea of Gaurī Mā's relationship to the Master from two incidents. When she stayed at the *nahabat* with Sri Sarada Devi, she often sang devotional

21. *Gauri Mata*, Durga Puri Devi, pub., (Calcutta: Saradeswari Ashram, n.d.), p. 36.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

23. Madhavananda and Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India*, pp. 545-5.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Gauri Mata*, p. 32.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

27. *Ibid.*, 38.

songs, which made Sri Ramakrishna go into *samādhi*. At another time she was with the Master at Jadu Mallick's house when he went into *samādhi*. Gaurī Mā then chanted the names of God in order to bring him back to ordinary consciousness.

Although she had been commanded by the Master to begin work to raise women, she was not yet ready to obey him. However, she did have an introduction to working women when the Master sent her to Jadu Mallick's house to talk to the women about the different forms and incarnations of God.²⁸ As holy as life must have been at Dakshineswar, Gaurī Mā elected to go to Vrindaban, with the Master's blessing, for spiritual practice. While she was there the Master died, and when she heard this, she decided to take her own life. But Sri Ramakrishna blessed her once more, this time with a vision of himself, and as a result, she gave up the idea of suicide.²⁹ Gaurī Mā wandered about India, to the Himalayas and other places for several more years, but finally followed the Master's command, returned to Calcutta and established Saradeshwari Ashrama, a school for girls. This school was named after Sri Sarada Devi and has continued on into present times.³⁰

Lakshmi, Sri Ramakrishna's niece, like the other great women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, used to experience *bhāva samādhi* and have visions of the gods and goddesses. She had two spiritual realizations which were directly related to the Master. One time she had a vision of the Master in which he was standing in front of Jagannath in the Jagannath temple at Puri. From that time on she was convinced that the Master and Jagannath, the Lord of the World as

Krishna, were one.³¹ The Master often talked with Lakshmi about her life and blessed her many times. He told her that she should not worry about herself and that many people would come to her to hear about God. These devotees would look after her.³² As it turned out, she initiated many persons, telling them in particular about Sri Ramakrishna and Rādhā and Krishna.³³ Before she passed away in 1926, she had a vision which she described to Swami Saradananda:

I saw a mountain of dazzling mica. On one side of that mountain were Lakshmi and Narayana, and on the other side was Sri Ramakrishna. I saw that the Master was surrounded by Holy Mother, Swamiji, Rakhal Maharaj, and others. Then I saw Yogin-didi and Golap-didi, and they told me: 'O Lakshmi, here there is no problem of food and sleep or disease and grief. Living with the Master gives us uninterrupted bliss.'³⁴

This unusual vision indicates the stature of Lakshmi's spiritual attainments as well as her very close relationship with the Master.

The Master knew a child, Bhavatāriṇī, with whom he had a close family relationship. She was a blood relative of Sri Ramakrishna on her mother's side and also a niece of Holy Mother. From her childhood he blessed Bhavatāriṇī many times in many ways. For example, he thought that she should be married (betrothed), so he found a prospective husband and arranged the marriage when she was around eight years old.

At about this time, she had a remarkable spiritual experience. One day when she was at her father's house, Sri Ramakrishna visited. She called the Master Thakur (Lord). Thakur saw that she was biting her nails, so

31. Swami Chetanananda, "Lakshmi Devi", *Prabuddha Bharata*, 91 (July 1986), p. 315.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

33. Madhavananda and Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India*, p. 461.

34. Chetanananda, "Lakshmi Devi", p. 315.

29. *Ibid.*

29. Madhavananda and Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India*, p. 456.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 456-7.

he told her to stop, and then he asked, 'What is your opinion of me? Some say that I am God Himself. What do you think of that?' Here we have an example of the playful nature of the Master when he asks this question of an eight-year-old child. She replied, 'No, no, no, you are not God; you are the guru of my husband.' Then suddenly Bhavatāriṇī began to smell something sweet like the incense used in worship. Perhaps wondering if the Master might be God after all, she looked behind his ears trying to locate the source of the fragrance. While Bhavatāriṇī stood very near, Thakur, his form suddenly disappeared in a 'brilliant light the colour of the rising sun, and his form appeared as a luminous shadow in that light.' She cried out, 'Thakur, Thakur, why are you doing that?' She tried to feel his body but could not. She called him again and again, but he did not answer. Finally, the light faded and once again she could see Thakur clearly.³⁵

Bhavatāriṇī was puzzled by her experience of the Master's disappearance into light. One time she went to stay with Holy Mother for a few days. She resolved to ask the Master about her experience, so she waited until the worship was finished one evening, went to the Master's room, and sat down to wait for him. When he came he sat near her, but before she could ask him, he again disappeared in a 'blaze of light.' She touched him, but his body was soft as if there were no bones in it. Bhavatāriṇī lost consciousness and when she came to, Thakur was passing his hand over her back. She said, 'Thakur, Thakur, what are you? Are you *Bhagavān* [God]? Are you Krishna? Are you Rama? What are you, Thakur?' Then he gave her some water to drink.

35. Bhavatarini, "My Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna", trans., Swami Yatiswarananda, *Vedanta and the West*, 193 (Sept.-Oct. 1968), pp. 49-50.

There is no record that he gave an answer to her question.³⁶

During her stay with Sri Sarada Devi, she again went to the Master's room, this time with her husband. The Master playfully teased her by saying that he had given much to Upen, her husband. She became angry on hearing this, and although she did not know what her husband had received, she, in her child's way, wanted more. In the hubbub of teasing and tantrum, the Master finally blessed Bhavatāriṇī with a mantra.³⁷ Sri Ramakrishna blessed many women abundantly, but in the case of Bhavatāriṇī, he not only gave her direct experience of God when she was a child, but also initiated her with a mantra.

Although he did not initiate the much older Gopāl Mā in the conventional way, she too received immeasurable blessings from him. Gopāl Mā was a Brahmin widow in her sixties who had worshipped the child Krishna for most of her life. She lived in Kamarhati, where the wife of the owner of the temple of Kamarhati, gave her a room to live in. Gopāl Mā had six or seven hundred rupees on which she drew the interest. She used to supplement her income by spinning sacred thread and selling it. Kamarhati was just three miles from Dakshineswar, and one day in 1884, she went with another woman to visit the Master. Gopāl Mā was very much attracted to the Master. But he always asked her to bring him something to eat, so she resolved not to visit this 'Sādhu who always wants to eat'.³⁸ However, her great attraction to the Master overcame her resolve, and she continued to make trips to Dakshineswar frequently.³⁹

Early one morning in 1884, the great event

36. Ibid., pp. 51-2.

37. Gayatri Devi, *Divine Joy at Play*, (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1985), pp. 94-6.

38. Saradananda, *The Great Master*, pp. 638-9.

39. Ibid., pp. 637-42.

in the spiritual life of Gopāl Mā took place. That day she arose very early, before three, to do japa. When she finished she began to perform *prāṇāyāma* (breathing exercises). Before offering the results of her japa to her Chosen Ideal, she saw the Master sitting by her side with his left hand half clenched like the child Krishna's hand. The Master appeared the way he did at Dakshineswar, clearly and distinctly. She herself told the story in the following way:

I was looking at him with astonishment and thinking thus while Gopala (as she called Sri Ramakrishna) sat and smiled. Then, with a beating heart, as soon as I caught hold of Gopala's (Sri Ramakrishna's) left hand with mine, that figure vanished into the void and a ten-month-old real Gopala, as though of flesh and blood as big as that (indicating the size with her hands) came out of that figure.⁴⁰

The baby Gopala acted like a real child, demanding food, crawling around the room, and sitting on Gopāl Mā's lap. When dawn came, Gopāl Mā set off for Dakshineswar with Gopala on her breast. She held him with one hand on his buttocks and the other on his back and let his two purple feet dangle. When she arrived at Dakshineswar, a woman, probably Yogīn Mā, was cleaning the Master's room. She observed that Gopāl Mā appeared to be quite mad, her eyes were turned upward and her sari was dragging on the ground. When the Master saw her, he went into ecstasy and sat on her lap like a child. And like a child playing, the Master rode on the back of another woman, probably Yogīn Mā. With her own hand, Gopāl Mā fed him the thickened milk, cream and butter she had brought with her. A little later the Master's mood ended, and he got up and sat on his bed. But Gopāl Mā's mood continued. She was beside herself with joy, she stood up, and dancing around the room in divine ecstasy, said,

40. Ibid., p. 640.

again and again, 'Brahmā dances, Viṣṇu dances'. The Master said, 'Just see, she is completely filled with Bliss; her mind has now gone to the sphere of Gopala.'⁴¹

Gopāl Mā lived in a high state of *bhāva* continuously for two months. She saw the form of Gopala whenever she felt a deep longing to see him. Gopala even instructed her when she needed to learn something by appearing and showing her by signs or words, or by doing the necessary thing himself. But the supreme blessing the Master bestowed on her was the realization of the absolute identity of Gopala and himself. This came about by Gopala's merging in the Master's person again and again. Eventually she saw her beloved child Gopala less and less as she became convinced that the Master was her Chosen Ideal. Gopāl Mā was disturbed by the gradual disappearance of her beloved Gopala and went weeping to the Master. He told her that in the *Kaliyuga* continuous visions such as she had been enjoying would destroy her body.⁴² By this time Gopāl Mā had become absolutely devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, who was, in fact, her Gopala. As time passed she felt the presence of Gopala in everything—all distinctions disappeared, high and low, clean and unclean, holy and unholy. And the Master said, 'You [Gopal Ma] have achieved the impossible; such a realization as yours [Gopāl Mā's] is rare in this age.'⁴³

Hundreds of people visited the Master. And many, many of these hundreds were women. Exactly how many women received his grace will never be known, nor can we ever know all the blessings he gave them. Although the literature on women is scant, we do know that the Master's blessings varied greatly from woman to woman and

41. Ibid., p. 641.

42. Ibid., pp. 643-4.

43. Madhavananda and Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India*, p. 439.

that each woman was blessed in a way often unique to her, but always appropriate.

We must reflect on the meaning of the Master's grace for women. The nature and extent of the blessings show that the Master had full confidence in women as spiritual aspirants and adepts. In no way did he stint women. Women had a full range of experience with the Master. They cooked for him and took care of him. They danced in spiritual fervour and sang devotional songs. He scolded them and teased them. He gave them *sannyāsa*. While in ecstasy he played in their company. They learned to do japa from him, and through his guidance, experienced *samādhi*. Sri Ramakrishna, the divine musician, sounded high themes, joyful dances, and majestic harmonies. Women came, listened and moved to the divine music coursing in their hearts.

To our lengthy discussion of Sri Ramakrishna and his meaning for women, published in several issues of the *Prabuddha Bharata*,⁴⁴ we now must add our conclusions.

First, we should note that the drama of Sri Ramakrishna and his women devotees took place in the Industrial Age. The advent of the Master does not direct us to look back to an age gone by, but to set our sights on the present and its concomitant problems. We have seen by our investigation that the Master was aware that there was a 'woman problem'.

Now let us quickly review the kinds of women who were influential in his life. There was, of course, his mother who taught him so much so well and whom he took care of to the last day of her long life. When he was a young man, two of the most important figures in his life were women, the

Bhairavī and Rāṇi Rāsmani. Both of these women were powerful, the Bhairavī as a spiritual preceptor, and the Rāṇi as an innovator, mover and shaker of traditional Indian society. The Master accepted these two powerful women fully, and in no way did he try to reduce their power. We can say at this juncture, that one of the traits of the prototype woman for this new age is power, spiritual power and social power.

Of course, there is another extremely powerful feminine figure in his life, Sri Kali Devi, the Divine Mother of the Universe. His worship of her and his intimacy and identity with her, point the way for a new evaluation of women. The dominant divinity in his life was the Goddess, the feminine divinity. It was to Sri Kali Devi that the Master deferred. He obeyed her, made obeisance to her, and worshipped her. His great devotion to her and his absolute and unreserved respect for her, indicate the ideal attitudes toward women which must develop throughout the world. The Master saw woman as the Divine Mother, so he taught us one way to look upon woman—to view her as divinity Herself.

In addition, the Master taught us something new about gender. He had in his personality completely integrated both the female and male genders. This was possible for him because of his realization of the Self, the Ātman. With absolute knowledge as the anchor of his personality, he could move freely within himself from one gender to the other. We see that ultimately gender is not a permanent aspect of the human being. What is permanent in the human being is the ground of all being, the Self, the Ātman. Here we find that he has taught us a second way to view woman, to go beyond gender and to see her as the Self, the Ātman.

Sri Ramakrishna attracted a number of women who became very accomplished,

44. "Reflections on the Meaning of Sri Ramakrishna for Women", *Prabuddha Bharata*, Parts I and II, March and April 1988; Parts III and IV, June and July 1989; Parts V and VI, February and March 1990.

These women became genuine spiritual experts. They experienced *bhāva*, they experienced *samādhi*, they became fearless, they recited the scriptures and holy books, they sang devotional songs, they made pilgrimages, they took *sannyāsa*. They served the Master and Sri Sarada Devi. While they led lives dedicated to all these spiritual pursuits, they took care of families and raised

children. The orthodox became liberal, and the liberal became models for a new age.

Time may show that the Master's greatest work was his work with and for woman. As his message spreads and woman manifests her divinity, the power of the feminine, rooted in divinity, will become a force for the transformation of the world.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA JYOT, Year 1, Issue 1, April 1989; Publisher: Ramakrishna Ashrama, Jagnath Plot, Rajkot—360 001, Gujarat.

People of Gujarat really feel blessed to have in their hands a precious gem, named *Shri Ramakrishna Jyot*. The long cherished dream for the periodical in Gujarati language has been fulfilled by the Ramakrishna Mission. The devotees and people at large will derive spiritual solace from it.

The get-up of the journal is very good. The title page is very attractive, showing the gorgeous temple photograph of Sri Ramakrishna at Rajkot. The issue under reference contains sixty-three pages of thought-provoking articles, sayings of saints and other features.

It opens with the caption 'Divya Vani', with the message of the Upanishad, 'Awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached', and also selected shlokas from the Gita. The teachings of Bhagavan Mahavira, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Guru Nanak, Sri Ramakrishna and other saints also find place in 'Divya Vani'.

The main objectives of *Shri Ramakrishna Jyot* have also been put before us. They are as under;

(a) To spread the message of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

(b) To elucidate the eternal values and their importance in our lives.

We also find in this issue 'the aims and objectives of *Udbodhan Patrika*' as explained by Swamiji, when that journal in Bengali was first launched. 'World thinkers on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda' was a section that captivates the readers.

Some articles translated in Gujarati are really instructive. Some aspirants asked questions to Revered Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj on subjects like initiation, Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. These question-answers by Revered Maharaj are very helpful. 'Message of Sri Ramakrishna' by Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Revered Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj's article on Holy Mother and 'Vivekananda's Message to the Women of India' by Swami Ranganathanandaji, are really inspiring.

We all know that Gujarat has its glorious past, and has wonderful culture. It has also produced many saints, thinkers and great personalities. Let us hope that the *Shri Ramakrishna Jyot* will highlight this valuable treasure of Gujarat and will always try to

give something of this land in the subsequent issues.

Ignoring the minor spelling mistakes, the first issue of *Sri Ramakrishna Jyot* was really rich in its content and attractive in its get-up.

Congratulations to Ramakrishna Ashrama,

Rajkot, for starting publication of a Gujarati journal for spiritual aspirants.

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Principal, Shree P.D. Malaviya
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PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

Maharaj, how should we perform our worldly duties?

Do your duties conscientiously, and without attachment. Always remember that you are an instrument in the hands of God, and that God himself is the only doer. Keep your mind fixed in God. It is not always easy to keep the mind steady in God while working; the ego creeps in. But never be discouraged by your failures. Repeated failure is inevitable in the beginning, but keep your faith and redouble your efforts. Try hard to live up to your ideal.

Let your watchword be: 'I must realize God in this very life!' After all, what is the use of this body and this mind if they do not help you to realize God? Do or die! What does it matter even if you die in the attempt!

How may I check a distracting thought that persistently arises in my mind?

Think to yourself: 'This thought is immensely harmful to me. It will be my ruin!' Impress the idea again and again upon your mind. The mind is extremely susceptible to suggestions and will learn whatever you teach it. Therefore, if through

discrimination you can impress upon it the joy and fullness of the spiritual life and the folly of worldly attachments, it will devote itself more and more to God, and you will find yourself freed from all distracting thoughts.

The supreme ideal of the human life is to know God. Everyone must have this ideal firmly established in his life, and the ideal must never be lowered. He 'who is smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest' shines forth always and everywhere. He dwells within all beings, great and small; He dwells in the plants and herbs. He dwells everywhere in greater or lesser manifestation. Make that one supreme, all-pervading Spirit your ideal. Even after a little effort to realize Him you will see what fun it is! You will find in Him an inexhaustible fountain of joy. You have seen enough of one side of life—now see the other side, the real side. 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.' A veil is hiding the Reality. Remove that veil and you will find Him. If you will apply yourself to the attainment of this ideal, the whole world will be transformed for you.

[*Spiritual teachings* of Swami Brahmananda page 243 & 246.]

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

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CHICAGO NOTES

In domestic life, too, there is a readiness to turn to, and make the individual task lighter by sharing it—a tendency to consider work as fun.

In the elementary schools, where the great mass of American children are educated, one sees the same beauty of architecture and ornament as in the homes of the rich,—photographs of great pictures and beautiful buildings, and casts of the wonderful sculptures of ancient Greece. The wealthy go to Europe to buy these things and their houses are adorned with them, but the same choice objects are considered perfectly appropriate to the education of the poorest; and teachers contrive ways and means of bringing them in reach....

But here, perhaps, we come upon the most potent of all factors in the Americanising force—the frank enjoyment of life. This is a civilisation in which every man is struggling to succeed, many have a chance of succeeding, and where all who do so know that their possession of the highest spiritual and intellectual gifts will be held as pro-

ved by that fact! The result is a childlike frankness of materialism. 'How *can* India have all this Truth', one man asked me quite seriously, 'when the Plague comes there?' That a man may sometimes hold aloof from choosing a profession, out of a sincere desire to devote himself to larger ends, is another of the ideas which would be held as axioms in older countries, but are difficult for the American mind to grasp.

Work and succeed, succeed and enjoy! Something of this sort is the unspoken motto of life here. And new feet are quickly drawn to join in the mad race for wealth, luxury and pleasure.

Yet in her women America has reached a height which all the culture and religion of other countries has not enabled them to reach. I have been here only a few months, yet already I have met, in my own personal circle, four of the women whom a whole continent might be proud to have produced.

Nivedita