



Prabuddha Bharata

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

THE DIVINE MESSAGE

Mother: The creation itself is full of misery and happiness. Could anyone appreciate happiness if misery did not exist? Sita once said to Rama, 'Why don't you remove the suffering and unhappiness of all your subjects? Please make all the inhabitants of your kingdom happy. If you only will, you can easily do it.' Rama said, 'Is it ever possible for all persons to be happy at the same time?' 'Why not?' asked Sita, 'Please supply from the royal treasury the means of satisfying everyone's wants.' 'All right,' said Rama, 'your will shall be carried out.' Rama sent for Lakshmana and said to him, 'Go and notify everyone in my empire that whatever he wants he may get from royal treasury.' At this the subjects of Rama came to the palace and told their wants. The royal treasury began to flow without stint. When everyone was spending his days joyously, through the Māyā of Rama the roof of the building in which Rama and Sita lived, started to leak. Workmen were sent for to repair the building. But where were workmen to be had? There was not a labourer in the kingdom. In the absence of masons, carpenters and artisans; all buildings went out of repair, and work was at a standstill. The subjects of Rama informed the King of their difficulties. Finding no other help, Sita said to Rama, 'It is

no longer possible to bear the discomfort of the leaking roof. Please arrange things as they were before. Then all will be able to procure workmen. Now I realize that it is not possible for all persons to be happy at the same time'. 'Let it be so,' said Rama. Instantaneously all things were as before and workmen could once more be engaged. Sita said to Rama, 'Lord, this creation is your wonderful sport!'

No one will suffer for all time. No one will spend all his days on this earth in suffering. Every action brings its own result, and one gets one's opportunities accordingly.

Nothing can happen without the will of God. Not even a blade of grass can move. When a man passes into a favourable time, he gets the desire to contemplate on God. But when the time is unfavourable, he gets all the facilities for doing evil actions. Everything happens in time according to the will of God. It is God alone who expresses His will through the actions of man. Could Naren (Swami Vivekananda) by himself have accomplished all those things? He was able to succeed because God worked through him. The Master has predetermined what he is going to accomplish. If anyone surrenders himself totally at his feet, then the Master will see that everything is set right.

One must bear with everything, because everything is determined by actions (*karmas*). Again, our present actions can counteract the effect of past actions.

Disciple: Does the Master really live in the picture?

Mother: Of course, he does. The body and the shadow are the same. And what is his picture but a shadow?

Disciple: Does he live in all the pictures?

Mother: Yes. If you pray to him constantly before his picture, then he manifests

himself through that picture. The place where the picture is kept becomes a shrine. Suppose a man worships the Master there (*pointing to a plot of land north of the Udbodhan*), then the place is associated with his presence.

Disciple: Well, good and bad memories are associated with all places.

Mother: It is not exactly like that. The Master will pay special attention to such a place.

from *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is ON DOCTRINE OF BHAKTI. It discusses the different stages of devotion as propounded in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, founded by Sri Chaitanya Deva.

In her scholarly essay, GOD IN VEDANTA, the author Dr. Leta Jane Lewis, formerly Professor of German at California State University, Fresno, U.S.A., now Professor Emerita, with wonderful clarity presents a discussion of man's evolving concept of God. As an aspirant progresses the idea that 'I am *here* and God is *there, far above*,' as Eckhart said, slowly disappears. As man evolves spiritually so also does his concept of God change. Finally the conceptualizing ego bursts into the infinitude of God-Consciousness.

TRENDS OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY is the concluding part of the well-researched article by Swami Bhavaharananda of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay. In this paper he highlights roles played by Gandhiji and Swamiji in uplifting the status and honour of women in India.

Dr. K. Sarada, former Reader at Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur, in her thoughtful

paper MAN, MODERNITY AND ETHICS evinces great concern for modern man who is madly racing to appease insatiable desires, tending always to throw off to the winds all ethical values and considerations for his fellow man.

MAYAVATI—A VISITOR LOOKS BACK is a descriptive sketch written with deep feeling by Sri H. M. Roy, of Tanakpur, Dist. Nainital. He tries to recapture the irresistible charm and beauty of the Himalayas and his sojourn in the Kumaon foothills.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE YOUTH—The author Prof. N.S.V. Rao of Bombay casts searching light on the problems faced by youth and the purposeless drift in which they seem to be caught. He suggests solutions, quoting aptly and extensively from the utterances of Swami Vivekananda who shook the world as a young monk.

A brief biography of SAINT EKANATH—PHILOSOPHER-POET of Maharashtra is by Swami Vipashananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

RENUNCIATION is an interesting poem by Sri V. Ramanan of Pondicherry.

In her GNOSTICISM AND EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH, the author Jayanti (Pamela Hoye) of San Diego, California, U.S.A., traces the

earliest history of ancient Gnostic thought and presents its main teachings. Gnosticism was perceived as a threat by early orthodox Christianity as it neglected the 'doctrine of faith'. Jayanti is a free-lance writer. The concluding part of her article will appear in the July issue.

DOCTRINE OF BHAKTI

(EDITORIAL)

Bhakti or love for God is spontaneous. The idea of the Personal God, or Saviour, object of such love, has in one form or another been prevalent in almost all religions except heterodox Buddhism and Jainism. Followers of these two religions, though they do not worship a Personal God, instead, worship the founders of their religions. Devotion to a Divine Being who is cognizant of the prayers, weal and woe of the worshippers, and who reciprocates their love is vastly appealing and reassuring. Man has to pass through the preliminary stages of *bhakti* before his mind can grasp the abstract and highest truths. Examples are many in the religious history of the world where the great saints and mystics have worshipped images and symbols before ascending to the transcendental plane. The pure *advaita* philosophy is too abstract for an individual soul which desperately needs a personal, friendly Deity. The extreme idealistic monism, postulating the sole reality of a *nirguṇa* Brahman, indeterminate Consciousness, devoid of all associations of personality, and admitting only an illusive temporary reality to the world and individual, hardly gives any opportunity for the concept of a personal Deity. Gauḍapāda, in the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* describes:

- ... There is no dissolution, no birth, none in bondage, none aspiring for wisdom, no seeker for liberation and none liberated. This is the absolute truth. (II. 32)
- ... No *jīva* is ever born. There does not exist any cause which can produce it. This is the highest truth. (III. 48)
- ... Everything cognized by the mind is unreal. (IV. 36)

To the followers of a religion with faith and belief in Grace, such doctrines as these are difficult to accept and hard to follow. Gauḍapāda himself says at the end of the *Kārikā*—'This ordinary men cannot understand' (*loko na gāhate*). (IV. 95) Philosophers can take these ideas and write learned treatises and commentaries and be either accepting or refuting because they are not necessarily interested in *sādhana* or spiritual practice. Intellectual curiosity and enjoyment may attract them more. But most people who turn to religion for guidance and solace want to adore a Supreme Being who in turn loves and cares for them. In the absolute monistic view, however, they are told that whatever they see and feel is ultimately unreal. An unconditioned, ripe mind only can understand the lofty teachings of Monism,

but to a conditioned, toiling person its precepts are of little value.

All beings are naturally inclined towards loving and being loved. There is joy in love. Erich Fromm, the famous psychoanalyst says: '... the basis for our need to love lies in the experience of separateness and the resulting need to overcome the anxiety of separateness and to achieve union. The religious form of love, that which is called the love of God, is, psychologically speaking, not different. It springs from the need to overcome separateness and to achieve union.'¹ Ordinarily this love is directed towards the objects of the world and persons and is characterized by a sense of possessiveness. Though it brings temporary joy, this love brings also its concomitant misery. The ordinary individual's concepts of happiness and unhappiness are always changing. The mind is fickle and it can never be long satisfied. When man becomes buffeted by joys and sorrows, fortunes and misfortunes, he realizes his condition, and can no longer trust the vagaries of his mind. He wants to control it. His attention turns towards something enduring and fixing his mind there, he becomes steady. Through persistent spiritual practices and the insight gained thereby, his wrong ideas are swept aside and a flood of light breaks in upon the slumbering soul revealing that God alone is the Source of eternal joy and bliss. Man's love then functions in a different dimension. That love flows with a sense of desire to give and not to grab. Man's thoughts shift from being self-centered to being God-centred.

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, in a striking analogy, describes the state of man who forgetting the real fountain of joy, invests all his energy in wrong pursuits:

Two birds of beautiful plumage, closely united in friendship, reside on the self-same tree. Of these two, one moving below eats the sweet and bitter fruits; the other bird, seated above, looks on without eating. (III. 1)

Śaṅkara says that the lower bird eats (enjoys) the pleasant or painful fruits of its past deeds (*Karma niṣpannam sukha-duḥkha lakṣaṇam phalam*). The second verse says:

On the self-same tree a person immersed (in the sorrows of the world) is deluded and grieves on account of his helplessness. When he sees the other, the upper bird, the Lord, who is worshipped, and His greatness, he becomes freed from sorrow. (III. 2)

In such state of helplessness and suffering, man longs for guidance and wishes to be told what he should do or avoid. He likes to be lifted up from where he is—groping and staggering in search of light and peace. The lower bird, experiencing the sweet and bitter fruits of life gradually hops upward on the branches towards the higher bird. At last as he draws nearer and nearer, he recognizes that the upper bird is none but his own Shining Self, his Soul, his God. He then merges into that Upper Bird with supreme joy. As Vivekananda pointed out, man is not progressing from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth. *Bhakti*, the path of devotion, takes into consideration this saying. From lower truth it helps the struggling soul to higher realizations. It builds a ladder of love, whereby ultimately one is taken to the realization of the Supreme Being. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes:

Philosophy has its roots in man's practical needs. If a system of thought cannot justify fundamental human instincts and interpret the deeper spirit of religion, it cannot meet with general acceptance. The speculations of philosophers, which do not comfort us in our stress

1. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York; Bantam Books, 1972) p. 53.

and sufferings are mere intellectual diversions and not serious thinking.²

He rightly observes that the non-dualism does not aim to satisfy the emotional appeal of the worshippers, rather it frightens them. They need something concrete, images and symbols, to support them as they begin their spiritual journey.

Fortunately, our age has received a tremendous message of synthesis from Sri Ramakrishna, who was the confluence of all divergent philosophies, a living laboratory of different religious faiths of the world. To him life is itself religion. Leaving aside, therefore, all metaphysical rigmarole, he straightway plunged into the work of awakening the innate divinity of man. Without uttering a word of condemnation or denunciation of sinners, Sri Ramakrishna healed the wounds of lacerated souls, and that healing touch is still working miracles in the world. In his *Gospel*, which is the *Veda* of the modern age, he gives solemn assurance to all. He has brought God very near to us. He said often, God is your own, pray to Him in any way you like. He will listen to your prayers. We belong to Him and He belongs to us. How can one properly evaluate such incomparable words? Holy Mother Sarada Devi also said, 'My child, remember always you have a Mother.' How promising and soothing are these words to a man burdened with the heavy cross of wordly sorrows, anxieties, fears and worries! They never said: 'Your sorrows are illusion; you are deluded in this unreal world.' Coming down to the human level, sharing the griefs of man, they slowly and very gently lead him to the altar of the Divine. The following sayings culled at random from the

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna show how Sri Ramakrishna encouraged and inspired forlorn, helpless and desolate people who did not know where to go, what to do:

...Let me tell you one thing. God can be seen. (p. 158).

...God can be seen. One can talk to Him as I am talking to you. (p. 109).

...God is our own. We should say to Him: 'O God, what is Thy nature? Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must show Thyself to me; for why else hast Thou created me? ...Therefore we should force our demands on God. He is our Father and Mother, isn't He? (p. 96).

...Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image: doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. (p. 80).

...Why clay? These images are the embodiments of Consciousness. (p. 124).

...Now you see that the mind cannot be fixed, all of a sudden, on the formless aspect of God. It is wise to think of God with form during the primary stages. (p. 127).

...As long as God keeps the awareness of 'I' in us, so long do sense objects exist; and we cannot very well speak of the world as dream. (p. 243).

...I tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind towards God. Otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands. (p. 137-38).

...A devotee who can call on God while living a householder's life is a hero indeed. God thinks: "He who has renounced the world for My sake will surely pray to Me. He must serve Me. Is there anything remarkable about it? ...But he is blessed indeed who prays to Me in the midst of his worldly duties. He is trying to find Me, overcoming a great obstacle—pushing away, as it were, a huge block of stone weighing a ton. Such a man is a real hero." (p. 471).

2. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927) Vol. II, pp. 659-60.

Giving the definition of *bhakti*, the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* say. 'That (*Bhakti*), verily, is

of the nature of supreme love of God.³ ...Gaining that, man realizes his perfection and divinity and becomes thoroughly contented.⁴ Śāṅḍilya, in his *Bhakti Sūtras* also defines *bhakti* in similar terms. He says: 'It (Bhakti) is the highest love for God.'⁵ Svapneśwara, commenting on this sutra says:

...Its (devotion's) special character is easily grasped by examining worldly affections. For instance, Prahlāda who possessed the highest devotion said thus: 'The firm affection the worldly people feel towards the objects of the senses, such a firm affection (may I have towards Thee, and) may it never depart from my heart remembering Thee.'⁶

Of all the schools of bhakti, Vaiṣṇavism has developed it most fully, and built a magnificent superstructure. It speaks to man's heart more than to his intellect. Metaphysics and epistemology receive scant attention in the exuberance of sublimation of feelings and ecstatic heights of emotion. A worshipper of Viṣṇu is called a Vaiṣṇava, says *Padma Purāṇa*. The *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads* do not mention the word Vaiṣṇava, but in many hymns of the *R̥g Veda* the benevolent and prominent God Viṣṇu is invoked. In the *R̥g Veda* it is said: 'Pious men are said to rejoice in the dear abode, the highest step of Viṣṇu. (R. V. I. 154.5)

3. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, Trans. Swami Tyagishananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1943) Sūtra 2.

सा त्वस्मिन् परम प्रेमरूपा ।

4. *Ibid.*, Sūtra 4.

यल्लब्ध्वा पुमान् सिद्धो भवति, अमृतो भवति, तृप्तो भवति ।

5. *Śāṅḍilya Bhakti Sūtras*, Trans. Swami Harshananda (Mysore: Prasaranga Manas Gan-gotri, 1976) Sūtra 2.

सा पराऽनुरक्तिरीश्वरे ।

6. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

... 'The ever-prayerful and awakened wise ones realize that supreme state of Viṣṇu.' (R.V. I. 22.17.21) In the *Kāṭha Upaniṣad*, one of the oldest *Upaniṣads*, it is mentioned that he who controls his mind reaches the supreme abode of Viṣṇu (*Tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam*).⁷ This supreme abode of Viṣṇu is called *Vaikunṭha* by the followers of Rāmānuja, and the followers of Chaitanya call it *Gokula*. In later *purāṇas*, that one formless Reality, which the Vedānta describes, assumes different forms. Out of eighteen *purāṇas*, as many as nine of them are devoted to Krishna and Viṣṇu. This undoubtedly points to the fact of Krishna's popularity and the adoration he claimed from the seers, bards and common people. These popular *purāṇas* set forth the Krishna legend with the lively and rich background of myth, mysticism and theology. Out of nine *purāṇas*: the *Brahma*, *Padma*, *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, *Brahma Vaivarta*, *Skanda*, *Vāmana*, *Kūrma* and *Bhāgavata*, the latter *Bhāgavata*, a monumental work is an undying fount of inspiration and is the essence of the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads* to Vaiṣṇavas. Above all, the holy text contains the full and final teachings and the divine *līlā* in a human body of the Supreme Teacher of mankind—Sri Krishna. Bengal Vaiṣṇavas regard the *Bhāgavata* as Vyāsa's own commentary on his *Brahma-sūtras*. Krishna is none but the Lord Himself—says the *Bhāgavata*.⁸ The *Bhagavad-gītā* also identifies Krishna with Viṣṇu.⁹ The *Padma Purāṇa*, extolling the greatness of the *Bhāgavata* says: 'Brahmā, the Creator, having weighed all the scriptures against the *Bhāgavata*, discovered that this sacred text outweighed them all because it is the embodiment of the Lord in this *kali-age*. *Skanda Purāṇa* sings the glory of

7. *Kāṭha Upaniṣad*, III. 9.

8. *The Bhāgavata*, I. iii. 28.

कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम् ।

9. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Ch. XI.

the *Bhāgavata* in several of its verses. The Lord says to Brahmā:

The man who recites with a pure heart everyday a single verse of the *Bhāgavata*, My son, attains the reward of reciting all the eighteen *Purānas*.¹⁰

...Men who worship in their houses the sacred scriptures (the *Bhāgavata* and others) of the Vaiṣṇavas, are thoroughly purged of all their sins and are adored by the gods.¹¹

...How can he be recognized a Vaiṣṇava whose house does not contain a copy of the scripture *Bhāgavata*? He is worse than an outcaste.¹²

...Wherever in the *kali-age* the holy scripture *Bhāgavata* exists I stay there all the time along with the other divinities. I never forsake the man who daily narrates my stories and who is engaged in listening to them and whose mind takes delight in them.¹³

The *Bhāgavata* is the only book which is entirely devoted to the detailed depiction of the life of Sri Krishna and his spiritual companions.

In the opening chapter itself of the *Bhāgavata* the stage is ingeniously set for unfolding the eternal play (*līlā*) of Sri Krishna which has rapturously thrilled and filled the hearts of countless devotees of past and present. After Krishna's departure from this world to his Abode, the *kali-yuga* commenced wherein unrighteousness and

the lowest qualities exerted their baneful influence on the minds of people. Anxious to mitigate the sufferings of the new era and to realize God, Śaunaka and other sages were engaged in a great sacrifice in the forest known as Naimiṣāranya. The sacrifice was to take a thousand years to complete. One morning after offering the oblations to the sacred fire with due respect, the sages asked Ugraśravā Sūta, who had come there, many questions:

...O Sūta, may God bless you! Please tell us as you know it, the purpose of the descent of Lord Hari in the womb of Devakī, Vasudeva's consort.¹⁴

...Narrate to us, who are full of reverence, the divine sports of the Lord, who in His *līlā* assumes various forms, and whose glories have been sung by the seers.¹⁵

...Indeed the celestial Krishna who disguised himself in a human body and displayed super-human feats on this earth along with his elder brother, Balarāma.¹⁶

Thus addressed by the ṛṣis, Ugraśravā Sūta replied, glorifying devotion to Lord Krishna:

...Contact with God Krishna through devotion quickly awakens dispassion and immediately bestows Knowledge.¹⁷

...The Vedas ultimately dwell on Vāsudeva; the sacrifices are aimed at the attainment of Vāsudeva; all the yogas eventually lead to Vāsu-

10. *The Skanda Purāṇa*, Ch. XVI. 34.

यः पठेत् प्रयतो नित्यं श्लोकं भागवतं सुत ।
अष्टादश पुराणानां फलमाप्नोति मानवः ॥

11. *Ibid.*, Ch. XVI. 36.

वैष्णवानां तु शास्त्राणि येऽर्चयन्ति गृहे नराः ।
सर्वपापविनिर्मुक्ता भवन्ति सुखन्दिताः ॥

12. *Ibid.*, Ch. XVI. 43.

कथं स वैष्णवो ज्ञेयः शास्त्रं भागवतं कलौ ।
गृहे न तिष्ठते यस्य श्वपचाधिको हि सः ॥

13. *Ibid.*, Ch. XVI. 45.

यत्र यत्र भवेत् पुण्यं शास्त्रं भागवतं कलौ ।
तत्र तत्र सदैवाहं भवामि त्रिदशैः सह ॥

14. *Bhāgavata.*, Ch. I. 12.

सूत जानासि भद्रं भगवान् साक्षतां पतिः ।
देवक्यां वसुदेवस्य जातो यस्य चिकिर्षयः ॥

15. *Ibid.*, Ch. I. 17.

तस्य कर्माण्युदारानि परिगीतानि सुरिभिः ।
ब्रूहि नः श्रद्धधानानां लीलयां दधतः कलाः ॥

16. *Ibid.*, Ch. I. 20.

कृतवात् किल वीर्याणि सह रामेण केशवः ।
अतिमर्त्यानि भगवान् गूढः कपटमानुषः ॥

17. *Ibid.*, Ch. II. 7.

भगवति वासुदेवे भगवति भक्तियोगः प्रयोजितः ।
जनयत्याषु वैराग्यं ज्ञानं च यदहेतुकम् ॥

deva ; all rituals and works have their ultimate end in Vāsudeva...¹⁸

...Knowledge has its culmination in Vāsudeva ; the goal of all penances is Vāsudeva ; the end of all virtues is the realization of Vāsudeva ; and the final destination is the Lord Vāsudeva.¹⁹

There are four traditional sects in Vaiṣṇavism: *Śrī*, *Hamsa*, *Brahmā* and *Rudra* ; and all these sects claim divine origin in Viṣṇu. The four great Ācāryas: Rāmānuja (*Śrī*), Nimbārka (*Hamsa*), Madhva (*Brahmā*), and last, Vallabha (*Rudra*), rejuvenated these sects by providing firm philosophical foundations to their respective traditions. Each of these schools developed its own doctrines and religious practices, producing a vast devotional literature. Chaitanya belonged to the school of Madhvācārya, as he was initiated by one Īśwara Purī who belonged to that sect. But the teachings of Chaitanya and Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas differ in many respects from Madhvācārya's *Brahmā* sect. In the traditions of Madhvācārya there is more leaning towards metaphysics, and hardly any place is given for special adoration of Rādhā or for the Vrindāvan *līlā* of Krishna. Chaitanya introduced many new things not found in the earlier traditions. Therefore the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism has its distinct philosophy and doctrine of *bhakti*.

According to the school of Chaitanya, God possesses many powers. Through these inherent and inscrutable powers, He creates the universe and sustains it. But this *śakti* of the Lord is inconceivable to us. It is super-rational. The finite human mind can in no-wise grasp this *acintya* (unimaginable)

18. *Ibid.*, Ch. II. 28.

वासुदेवपरा वेदा वासुदेवपरा मखाः ।

वासुदेवपरा योगा वासुदेवपरा क्रियाः ॥

19. *Ibid.*, Ch. II. 29.

वासुदेवपरं ज्ञानं वासुदेवपरं तपः ।

वासुदेवपरो धर्मो वासुदेवपरा गतिः ॥

Power of God. As fire and its burning power are one, similarly God and His Power—*śakti* and *śaktimat* are inseparable. As Śrī Madhvācārya says: 'He holds eternally all the excellent attributes in all their fullness.'²⁰ This concept in the Bengal Vaiṣṇava school is different from the monistic concept. Monism maintains that Brahman, Who is *advaya* (without a second), is Knowledge Itself, omniscience and omnipotence and all other qualities are attributed to Him through ignorance or *Māyā*. Once the existence of *śakti* in Brahman is admitted, then we have to accept a dualistic position—Brahman and His *śakti*, but there is nothing other than Brahman that is the only Reality that exists. But Jīva Goswamin refutes the argument of the monists and says that *advaya* (one without a second) really means there is only one Supreme Reality the like of which there is no other reality. Everything is subordinate to the *Paramātman*. Conscious *jīvas* and inanimate matter, space and time, all are dependent on the *Paramātman* (Supreme Self) as the substratum of Supreme Reality. Therefore the Lord is the only Reality, with His inseparable Powers, which are His attributes.

According to *Advaita*, a *jīva* after releasing itself from the hold of *māyā* through purification of mind, merges into the limitless ocean of Brahman, losing its illusory individuality. Buddhists also maintain that all-devouring *nirvāṇa* swallows an individual soul leaving no trace behind. Therefore to an *advaitin*, liberation means bringing an end to this limited self and going back to the original state—*Nirguṇa Brahman*. Śāṅkarācārya in his small treatise *Pañcī-*

20. *Śrīmad Visnutattva-Vinirṇaya of Śrī Madhvācārya*, Trans. Prof. S. S. Raghavachar (Bangalore: Śrī Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1959) Verse 545.

'गुणसर्वस्वमूर्तिमान्' ।

karaṇam sums up the standpoint of an *advaitin*:

I am the *Atman*, Witness of all, the Absolute, of the nature of Pure Consciousness. I am neither Nescience nor even its effect, but I am Brahman alone, eternally pure, ever enlightened, eternally free, and Existence Absolute. I am the Bliss Absolute. One without a second and the Innermost Consciousness. Remaining in this state of absolute identification is what is called *samādhi*, a super-conscious state.²¹

All the Vaiṣṇava schools vehemently oppose such interpretations of the scriptures. To them the loss of one's identity in the state of *nirguṇa Brahman* is abhorrent. As devotees of Viṣṇu (by which name Brahman is called) Vaiṣṇavas prefer always to have an eternal relationship in His blissful presence. Śrī Madhvācārya forcefully maintains that the individual selves are different from the Supreme Being, and there is no identity. Further, he says: 'There is no proof for the hypothesis that the scriptures' purport is the identity of the Supreme Being and the individual selves.'²² Moreover, '...there is no scriptural passage in support of the said unity. All the scriptures vindicate difference.'²³

Sanātana Goswamin, casting further light on the ancient problem, explains through an analogy of the ocean and its waves: A wave rises in the ocean and disappears in it. It is identical with the sea in so far as both are water. But at the same time it is different from the sea as far as immensity and depth are concerned. Liberated souls realize their identity with Brahman because

21. *Pañcikaraṇam of Śrī Śankarācārya* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) p. 6.

22. *Viṣṇutattva-Vinirnaya*, Verse 118.

न चाभेदे तात्पर्यमित्यत्र किञ्चिन्मात्रम् ।

23. *Ibid.*, Verse 168.

न चाभेदे कश्चिदागमः ।

सति च भेदे सर्वागमाः ॥

of the oneness of their substantial nature, but they do not merge in Brahman as a wave disappears into the ocean. No individual soul can ever attain the total bliss or omnipotence of Brahman due to certain of its limitations. There is identity (*abheda*) between liberated souls and Brahman in essence, but difference (*bheda*) between Brahman and *jīvas* must eternally exist—even in the liberated state. As the mystic-poet of Bengal, Rāmprasād, sings addressing the Divine Mother:

When man aspires to understand Her, Rāmprasād must smile ;

To think of knowing Her, he says, is quite as laughable

As to imagine one can swim across the boundless sea.²⁴

To Vaiṣṇavas nothing is unreal. Everything is the manifestation of God. According to Chaitanya the world is real but not eternal. It is by God's power that the universe which existed at the time of creation in the unmanifested state, unfolded itself into the manifest form. Creation was spontaneous. It did not proceed from any particular purpose or motive. As Sri Ramakrishna also said: 'Everything is God's *līlā*, His sportive pleasure.'²⁵ The infinite number of *jīvas* are like sparks issuing from a great fire. As sparks, they are limited and are of the size of atoms (*aṇucit*). *Jīva*, which is an infinitesimal part of the Lord, finds itself in a body due to the influence of *māyā-śakti* and by ignorance identifies itself with the body and senses. It functions in the world with its finite independence and exercises its free-will. But even this limited free-will (*aṇu-swātantrya*) is derived from God. Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāj in his *Chaitanya Charitāmṛta* divides *jīvas* into two classes. One class is the *nitya-muktas*

24. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 106.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 667.

or liberated souls who are eternally in a blissful state serving Sri Krishna; and the other are the *nityasamsārīs*, who having come under the spell of demon of *Māyā*, experience always pain and afflictions. If they are fortunate enough they meet a pious soul who transmits to them love of Krishna and as a result they free themselves from *Māyā*.²⁶

Jīva Goswamin further divides these *nitya-samsārīs* or souls in bondage, into four groups: (i) Those persons who have seen the Deity yet forgetting Him engage themselves in worldly affairs, (ii) Those who show utter disregard to Him even after seeing the Deity, (iii) Those who are unfortunate, in that having received the grace of his Lord have no interest (*aruci*) to relish it, and (iv) the last group of persons who are totally deluded due to perverted understanding. The *Bhagavad Gītā* also describes the nature of these demoniac types of men who are hostile to all spiritual values.²⁷ In their sensebound life there is no place for God. Sense-pleasure is the only reality for them. In the cosmic scheme the continuation of *samsāra* is forever.

Vaiṣṇavas believe that the personal effort alone cannot help us cross the ocean of *māyā* without obtaining God's grace. To become receptive to His grace the heart should be freed from all impurities. Sri Ramakrishna also said: 'The doubts of the mind will not disappear without His grace. Doubts do not disappear without Self-realization.'²⁸ Madhvācārya categorically states: 'Liberation is not to be attained except by the grace of Viṣṇu.'²⁹ The *Sauparṇa-śruti*

says: 'There is no love equal to that of Viṣṇu, the Adorable One, towards a devotee who recognizes His surpassing excellences. By thus pleasing Him all the devotees attain liberation. Therefore all the Vedas aim at glorifying the surpassing excellences of Viṣṇu.'³⁰ Divine communion or *mukti* is attainable through the grace of the Lord, who is ever eager to redeem the bound souls. The state of liberation is of five categories, namely: (i) *Sālokya*—attainment of the divine realm of the Deity; (ii) *Sārṣṭi*—gaining similar divine power; (iii) *Sārūpya*—attainment of a form similar to that of God; (iv) *Sāmīpya*—achieving a state of nearness to God; and (v) *Sāyujya*—attaining of unity or divine communion with God. Śrī Saṁpradāya of Rāmānuja recognizes four kinds of liberation. Except *Sāyujya*, other categories do not virtually signify the state of liberation. It is *Sāyujya* alone which signifies the state of *mukti*. Then why are the other three states designated as liberation? Answering this question Vedānta Deśika, a great scholar and saint of Rāmānuja tradition, says that they are called *mokṣa* because they relate to the attainment of various wonderful sub-realms of God. *Sāyujya* is all inclusive. It includes the other three: *Sālokya*, *Sāmīpya* and *Sārūpya*. In his *Acyuta-śatakam* he states that final liberation (*jīvanmukti*) is never possible during the state of embodiment. Vaiṣṇavas do not like this kind of *Sāyujya-mukti*. This *mukti* is complete immersion in divine bliss and consequently the capacity of experiencing Bhagavata (God) in all His intrinsic Energy and super-sensuous sports becomes lost in the state of immersion. They want to maintain their individuality for all time to come, enjoying the eternal rapture. But the individuality with body and senses should not be confused with the emancipated state

26. Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāj, *Chaitanya Charitāmṛta* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1989) Vol. II, XXII. 13-23.

27. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Ch. XVI, 8-20.

28. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 116.

29. *Viṣṇutattva-Vinirnaya*, Verse 105.

of *jīvanmukti*. The liberated soul released from *Māyā-śakti* is in reality no longer a *jīva*, it becomes a non-phenomenal being, *parikara* or attendant, lovingly serving Him. not affected by jealousy, anger, hatred or grief. It remains in the Abode of God as a *parikara* or attendant, lovingly serving Him.

GOD IN VEDANTA

BY LETA JANE LEWIS

“But what *is* God in Vedanta? Is he personal or impersonal?” queries the newcomer perplexed by Vedanta’s apparently contradictory statements regarding ultimate Reality. “We create our own gods” is the baffling answer. “Nonsense!” the inquirer retorts. “We do not create our creator. He creates us!” To this objection Swami Vivekananda responds, “Man does not manufacture God out of his own brain; but he can only see God in the light of his own capacity....”¹ “The idea that we form of God is a mere manifestation, our own creation. Behind that is the real God that never changes.”² According to Vedanta, God is real and unchanging, but before we know him our concepts of him are relative and varied.

As long as we have not known God, we project our life’s experience upon him, creating him in the image we have of ourselves. For this reason there have always been people who think of him as a man of gigantic proportions dwelling somewhere outside the solar system in a heaven where he is the absolute monarch and where they hope to go some day. Before we experience God’s divine love we tend to equate it with the only kind of love we know, that is, our fallible human love, which can reach superb

heights at one moment and degenerate abysmally at the next. Because it is commonly adulterated with some form of self-interest, human love is not always consistently reliable. Although the humanized God of the Old Testament loved the Israelites, he was a jealous God who could be angry and punitive.

To many thinking people, the pious saying, “God’s in his heaven, all’s right with the world” is callous sentimentality. They protest that they cannot believe in a cruel anthropomorphic God, who created a world in which there is so much misery. Insisting that they cannot accept such a monstrous deity, who, furthermore, is an obvious figment of the imagination, some reject God and religion altogether.

There are others, however, who can neither accept the traditional conceptions of God with which they are familiar nor remain content with a purely materialistic view of life. An imperative need for something better compels them to seek an ultimate Reality which meets their own standards. As a young man, Swami Vivekananda, then Narendranath Datta, went on such a search. Disappointed with the theoretical philosophy his Western education had offered him, he longed to find someone who could tell him with certainty that a God he could believe in actually existed. So he went from one respected Indian spiritual leader

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1969, VII, p. 82.

2. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1968, II, p. 107.

to another asking the crucial question, "Have you seen God, sir?" Surprised and somewhat taken aback, these good men had to admit that they had not seen God. But when Swami Vivekananda put the question to Sri Ramakrishna, the answer was positive. "Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense."³ These words were music to Swami Vivekananda's ears, but he did not permit himself to be carried away by them. He loved Sri Ramakrishna for his purity, wisdom, and radiant compassion, but he had to spend several years confronting and testing him before he became convinced that he was truly a great saint.

Unfortunately, few inquirers are as blessed as the young Narendranath was. The average seeker begins his spiritual life groping alone in the darkness. The dust and dirt of wrong thought and habit blind his vision causing him to take devious routes. Unable to discern the straight path to the goal, he often follows rocky, winding roads or goes up blind alleys. But if he is sincere, a little light will eventually appear to guide him. Somewhere, somehow, perhaps in a church, a temple, or a mosque, at home or on the job, a glimpse of spiritual light will come to him. Then his deepening prayer will be for light, more light, and if he persists, this prayer for greater inspiration, unlike most prayers for material well-being, is sure to be answered. Perhaps a guide who has already taken the path ahead of him and knows the dangers will come to give him a hand up rocky inclines and a not-so-gentle push back onto the right path when he starts up a dead-end street.

The guide is a spiritual teacher who studies the aspirant's personal tendencies

and recommends the combination of devotion, discrimination, and unattached action most appropriate for him. And if the aspirant practises these disciplines faithfully over a period of time, he will begin to feel the presence of God, faintly at first but later with greater intensity, and as he does so, his sense of values will undergo a change. Worldly goals will slowly lose much of their old attraction, making it easier for him to cultivate virtues and overcome bad habits.

As the aspirant grows still closer to God and experiences his love, he all but ceases to think of him in terms of his creative power. He is hardly concerned about whether or not God created this universe, although, if he were asked, he might answer that only God could have done it. Nor is he disturbed when friends break out in angry protest that no decent God could have created a world in which there is so much pain and suffering. He does not know the cause of suffering, but he does know that God is motivated only by love. He has the same sort of confidence in God that we have in old friends whom we know to be incapable of any meanness. With the deepening of his love of God heaven, hell, and salvation itself recede into the background of his thought. To live in God's presence in this world and the next is his great desire; he empathizes with saints who insist that they would be content in the lowest hell if God were there. He has ceased praying for anything but purity of heart and devotion, although he is willing to admit that he would probably pray for help in a grave emergency. Asking God for worldly prosperity, however, would be as odious to him as marrying for money. A great devotee, Śrī Chaitanya, prayed:

3. Swami Vivekananda's Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1960), p. 47.

Oh Lord and Soul of the Universe,
Mine is no prayer for wealth or retinue,
The playthings of lust or the toys of fame;

As many times as I may be reborn
Grant me, Oh Lord, a steadfast love for Thee.⁴

Śrī Chaitanya's pure love was untainted with demands for reciprocity. He would have been sad if his Lord had withdrawn his love from him, but he would have gone right on loving him; for, like an artist absorbed in the contemplation of a great masterpiece, he wanted nothing from the object of his adoration.

With the passing of time, it occurs to the devotee that the divinity which he thought of as exclusively outside himself must also be within him. He has learned from psychology that we understand each other's emotions and reactions because we share one human nature. We feel and respond to our friends' love because, like them, we are human and capable of loving. Similarly, the devotee reasons, some element of divinity in us must make it possible for us to experience and return God's divine love (agape), which appears to have much in common with the best human love (caritas) but is essentially different.

Although it may be long before the evolving aspirant is able to love God with *all* his heart, soul, and mind, even a little progress brings peace and joy. Finally, however, the day must come when, beside himself with an irresistible longing, he is overwhelmed by a great surge of ecstasy. The little ego, afraid that it will die, struggles desperately to resist it. But it does not die. Instead, divine bliss flows into it. Only a thin barrier, transparent as a pane of glass, separates the radiance within from the radiance without. Enraptured, the saint sees that every atom in the universe is pervaded

and sustained by God's divine Existence in much the same way that the eggs in the body of a fish are sustained by the fish. The fish is greater than the eggs it nourishes. Likewise, God, who is the source and sustenance of the universe, transcends all finite things.

Most saints are content with this exalted vision. There are, however, a few insightful sages who press on to the ultimate Reality where the distinction between God and the devotee is completely obliterated. When the barrier separating the radiance within from the radiance without is shattered by the intelligent will, the ego bursts like a bubble into an infinitely expanded consciousness, so peaceful and pure, so transcendent of all human experience, that there is no word for it. The sense of separate identity constituting the ego vanishes, while the universe whirls away to disappear in the undifferentiated ocean which is at once Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss. Although nothing remains but the Impersonal God, nothing has been lost. After this supremely blissful absorption in God, only a very few sages return to life in the world for the good of humanity.

Although, as we have seen, the average aspirant approaches ultimate Reality positively through disciplines inspired by love, this is not always the case. Some heroic aspirants, reasoning from the outset that all finite things are erroneous interpretations of the one divine Existence, negate the world and the ego by means of discrimination. They tear themselves away from all earthly attachments by confronting each with a determined "Neti. Neti. Not this. Not this." Because their short path straight up the precipice of spiritual life is rough and arduous, only a few such aspirants reach the non-dual Existence at the top. Those who do succeed, however, may look back and discover to their amazement that the steps they carved out with great effort and disdainfully left behind on their ascent are of

4. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 331.

the same substance as the peak.⁵ Everywhere they look they see only the effulgent Being, which is the universe and infinitely more.

For those few who return to life in the body after the non-dual absorption, the finite world remains, but it has been transfigured. "And again we see the panorama of the universe going on before us and we know it is but 'a mosaic work set upon God, who is the background of all things.'"⁶ The personal God, too, remains "...but on a better basis. He has been strengthened by the Impersonal....This universe, in its various forms, is but the various readings, of the same Impersonal, by the human intellect. So that the personal God is true as much as this chair is true, as much as this world is true, but no more."⁷

When he opens his eyes to the world after his absorption in the Impersonal, the sage seems to have an ego, a body, and a personality, but he is not deceived. He is always aware that he is the Self untouched by any finite limitations. Because he experiences the divinity of man as a living fact rather than a mere theory or potentiality, he finds God not only in himself but in everyone he meets. His bright vision pierces through the obstructing ego and perceives the divine spirit behind it. And since nothing is more precious to him than the divine Existence wherever he finds it, he has unqualified love for everyone.

Although he knows that all are the Self, which cannot be injured and never dies, the sage remembers how he once suffered under the delusion that he was the vulnerable body and personality. So in spite of his greater wisdom, he is pained by the

misery he sees all around him. Instead of passing it off as the illusory product of a false identification and going on his way, the sage grieves and strives to relieve suffering wherever he finds it. For love of God he seeks to "serve the needy, to feed the hungry, to console the stricken, to help the fallen and friendless, to attend and serve those who are ill and require service."⁸ He wouldn't think of preaching religion to cold and hungry people without first doing his best to clothe and feed them. But, like the compassionate Buddha, he knows that there is no permanent earthly remedy for sickness, old age, and death, to say nothing of the many psychological maladies that afflict mankind. He realizes that ignoring anyone's spiritual welfare after relieving his pain would be like giving an injured soldier an anaesthetic without dressing his wounds. So after he has done all he can to relieve the sick and down-trodden, he tries to help them acquire the wisdom that can eventually free them from all suffering.

Although he makes every effort to present the truth verbally, speech is not his best means of communication. He teaches best simply by being himself. No words could teach as directly or effectively as his amazing attitudes. For instance, he is totally indifferent to insults aimed at him. Like arrows that have missed their mark, they fall into emptiness. He feels no anger where others might hold their tempers purely for diplomacy's sake. To most people the saint's readiness to give a shivering tramp his coat on a cold winter night might seem incredibly foolish. But the saint sees God in the tramp and loves him as a mother would a freezing child whom she would gladly wrap in her only warm coat.

In his attempt to help others grow spiritually, the sage neither teaches the superiority of any religious faith nor condemns

5. See *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952) pp. 103-4.

6. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1964, VIII, p. 11.

7. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1965, I, p. 377.

8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 474.

any as being absolutely false ; he has a sense of kinship with all of them. From his ultimate realization that there is only one divine Essence he has learned that the saints and sages of every religion have experienced the same transcendent Consciousness, that the Presence he felt with growing intensity throughout his spiritual quest is likewise felt by the aspirants of all religions. He is aware

that their saints and symbols embody the divine Consciousness for them just as the saints and symbols of his religion did for him. He has discovered that God can appear in many true ways, that he can be personal or impersonal, with or without form, but experience has taught him that only the non-dual vision completely embraces God's divine Reality.

TRENDS OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

AND EXPECTATIONS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND MAHATMA GANDHI

SWAMI BHAVAHARANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Both extremes of traditional attitudes—those tending to idolize women up to the skies, and those which aimed at keeping them tied to earth in śudra-like roles of housebound servitude, obscure woman's true human potential as members of society. In spite of many obstructionistic renderings, there is no denying the fact that in our cultural traditions a tremendous potential of strength for right conduct is stored within, ready to face all conservative or reactionary forces which would nullify chances of women's social advancement.

In the West too there are traditional attitudes towards woman which inhibit their progress towards equality and emancipation. There feminists like Andrea Dworkin have analyzed attitudes towards women contained in the popular fairy tales, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and other ... 'all of which,' she declares, 'are characterized by passivity, beauty, innocence and victimization.'¹ These traditional heroines of chil-

dren's fiction figure as strengthening the continuation of a culture which casts women on the whole as spiritually undeveloped, and weak in character from generation to generation.

Compared with such attitudes in literature, the traditional Indian characterizations such as those found in *Sītā*, *Sāvitrī*, *Damayanti*, *Śrī Durgā* and others are not that bad. But wherever may be the diminished, unrealistic or romanticized versions, Swami Vivekananda stood firmly against respect and honour for women which has only or predominately the beauty or biological orientation. 'Our aim,' he often said, 'is to raise humanity up to the level of strength, purity and God—nearer and nearer to the realization of its own true divine nature.' The consideration of men or women as male or female does not arise here. He said, addressing his audience in America: '...Not until you learn to ignore the question of sex and meet on a ground of common humanity will your women really develop.'² The real business of religion and human uplift is not

1. Kathryn Hannsen, 'The Virangana in North Indian History: Myth and Popular Culture', *Economic & Political Weekly*, April 1988.

2. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. V., p. 412.

advanced much by the mutual admiration of men and women for each other at the level of the physical body. Rather, since men and women naturally feel the attraction of love for each other, physical and emotional contagion always tends to drag them to a low level. Therefore Swami Vivekananda sought a parallel line of growth and a complete development for both men and women independently of each other. He did not like the so-called bartering attitude or interdependence. In this regard his theory of 'the two wings' of a society has to be properly understood. Men and women are forced by nature to serve in different capacities and roles in society. Without freedom and excellence in each there is lop-sided growth of society. For the individual to attain his optimum in life, such a condition is a great obstacle. But if the social environment is excellent his chances are improved. Society can be compared to a bird, its two wings the male and female members. They being strong, the flight of the bird will be even, swift and unbroken. The chance for individual excellence in such a society will be greater.

It seems in the Indian experience that in spirituality, in high culture, and in fine arts, greater excellence is attainable by both men and women when they are independent of each other, but moving in parallel lines, than by their joining together in all matters. Adjustment by the individual requires effort, no doubt, but then what great end is attainable without hard work? Let men and women try individually to raise the spiritual level of their culture. Leela Dube writes: 'It should be kept in mind that gender differences *that are culturally produced* are almost invariably interpreted as being rooted in biology as part of the natural order of things.'³ For humanity to attain its highest,

that is to attain God-realization, men and women do not require to be reminded that they are male and female. Rather they better meet the spiritual challenges of life when they lift their minds above these notions. The saints and sages taught, 'In the soul there is no sex or gender.'

Now the problem is to aid women, who being weaker and suffer more, come to the fore and gain by struggle the freedom that arises from realization of fearlessness and strength, just the same as with men. There are enough ideas and suggestions in our scriptures through which our women can imbibe social and spiritual values, equal dignity and a vision for their future. Some educated women complain against unjust genderbased division of occupations, and wanton discrimination in other fields also. They are perhaps imitating their western sisters in a kind of ultra-modernistic attempt to absolve themselves of responsibility in life's hard struggle. Swami Vivekananda wanted Indian women to have the intellectuality of their western sisters, but not at the cost of purity and dignity. Yet alertness is also required along with a healthy respect for one's limitations, as a safeguard of dignity.

The Indian woman's greatest asset is her heritage of *vīrāṅganā*, or heroic strength found in India's hallowed examples of history. Besides the honour of the strong but self-effacing wife and mother, there lies an alternative paradigm in Indian womanhood: the *vīrāṅganā*, who manifests the qualities of *vīrya* or heroism. Very aptly she has been described as 'one dedicated to virtue, wisdom and defence of her people'. Above all, she is 'fighter and victor in the struggle with all the forces of evil'. There should be no confusion that Sarada Devi or Sītā Devi were not such *vīrāṅganās*, though they did not appear in the classical mould of warrior-women found in history. They were shining examples, embodiments of the best of India's

3. Leela Dube, 'On the Construction of Gender—Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India., *Economic & Political Weekly*, April 30, 1988.

cultural and moral power, of unparalleled dignity, strength and virtues. They were examples of that rarest of all kinds of strength, that which stems from *sattwa*, the quality of love and gentleness. It is an irresistible power. Swamiji described it as a gentle and mild dew which helps the blooming of human qualities and character. This power also continually endures, without attracting anybody's notice, in all silence. So we must not take the meaning of the term *vīrāṅganā* only with the outward glamour and valour in the physical or material sense. Swami Vivekananda was all in favour of women striking a balance between all the apparently contrasting qualities and forming an ideal character.

After Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi was another remarkable visionary of contemporary India. He thought deeply on the problems of women as he did for the country as a whole. And because of his position in politics and as leader of India's freedom movement, his contributions figure very prominently in history. From the beginning, Gandhiji sought to utilize and foster an effective political role for women, as India's political freedom struggle was the burning issue of his time. Without doubt, he made it possible for them to take an active part in the freedom struggle. According to Gandhiji, women can achieve a higher moral and spiritual life by coming out from their traditional confinement within the four walls of the house and home. The attitude of 'making the whole world your own' was as much needed for them as for men. In this Gandhiji was in complete agreement with Swami Vivekananda. He also upheld Swamiji's spiritual ideals and the necessity for maintaining personal purity and integrity.

Traditional attitudes, however, change very slowly. Really, how true it is that society is conservative and does not easily allow women to grow into new roles. For this reason, Gandhiji also recognized the

necessity of organizations for women so that they could manifest greater freedom and strength. The practice of child marriage over long centuries, abuses of *sati* and the systems of dowry and purdah not only made women weak, but deprived them of dignity. Gandhiji's idea also was that women's organizations should be formed which would not only help win national freedom, but fight these evils. A new consciousness would be engendered in woman for her more effective future role in Free India. Gandhiji favoured women's organizations run by women, for women alone know their own problems best and can solve them best when allowed to do so. He wanted separate and different programmes for women's activity.⁴ Separate programmes Gandhiji meant for greater freedom, for the purpose of manifesting greater strength for the good of society as a whole. Like Vivekananda, Gandhiji believed and exemplified in his life that in India, through religion alone lies the key to all future progress. By religion alone is the Indian mind inspired to make practical the high ideals of universal brotherhood and unselfish love of humanity, so necessary for improving the society. So, in this spirit, for the period of the non-cooperative movement, Gandhiji advocated that 'spinning, civil disobedience, picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops' be taken up as special women's programmes. He wanted, like Swamiji, that women should become visible and carry religion and spirituality into all the practical affairs of the world.

Perhaps in the beginning Gandhiji was more hesitant to recruit women for any work beyond their domestic environment than Swami Vivekananda, for those days of pre-independent India were indeed dangerous and troubled times. With the establishment of the Sabarmati Āśrama in Gujarat, and

4. Sujata Patel, 'Construction and Reconstruction of Women in Gandhi', *Economic & Political Weekly*, February 1988).

other projects, Gandhiji wanted to search for new ways to bring women out of restrictive social bonds and help them to become full citizens of future India. Paramount of course was the need for providing all-round education. Only by education could new doors be opened for them. Sabarmati Āśrama was an experiment which had in the beginning its strong *swadeśī* (freedom struggle) orientation. As such its focus was primarily on winning national freedom as well as women's uplift. Indeed, the Āśrama pointed out a way for women to become more free, useful and productive.

To compare Gandhiji with Swami Vivekananda in regard to women's service of the country and humanity, it may be said that both of them stood for the cause of individual spiritual *mukti* or liberation through service to the country and uplift of the down-trodden masses of India. Vivekananda, the patriot sannyāsin, lived and worked during the latter part of the 19th century, and Gandhiji, political leader of his nation, *sādhaka*, and family head, flourished in the early 20th. Swamiji gave urgently needed impetus to women and the masses to move ahead to meet the challenge of the future. The Indian freedom struggle was boiling furiously even then. By the 1920s and 30s, it had become white-hot with intensity. Mahatma Gandhi seemed as though astride an uncontrollable volcano of nearly bursting energy of the Indian masses. His slightest word drew attention and brought action. One recalls how a single utterance of his in one context in one part of the country, drew action from all sections of the people in all sorts of conditions, sometimes according to his wishes, sometimes not.

At one stage Gandhiji was troubled to think of the insecurity and the abuse of the working women and children going out for daily wage earning in the village itself, to say nothing of those attending local indus-

tries and factories. At a meeting of workers in Ahmedabad he said:

If the workers find it necessary today to send their wives and children to work in factories, it is our duty to see that they do not have to. There ought to be no need for women, children to go to work at the cost of their education for the sake of an extra income of three or four rupees. Work is not for children, nor is it for women to work in factories. ...If we send them to the factories who will look after our domestic and social affairs? If women go out to work, our social life will be ruined and moral standards will decline. I feel convinced that for men and women to go out for work together will mean the fall of both.⁵

People were living, as it were, 'on the edge of life' as Jawaharlal Nehru said in those days:

...Early in April (1930) the country was in the grip of civil disobedience and governmental repression, and I was in prison again.

Most of us menfolk were in prison. And then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there of course, but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British Government but their own menfolk by surprise. Here were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes—peasant women, working class women, rich women—pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government order and police *lathis* (sticks). It was not only that display of courage and daring, but what was even more surprising was the organizational power they showed.⁶

Commenting on Gandhiji's *Swadeśī* Movement, Sujata Patel writes:

'Purity, the attribute of *Sītā* (was) now transformed into a fight for freedom. *Sītā*'s

5. *Complete Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Government of India, New Delhi) Vol. 17. pp. 47-51.

6. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Trust, 1982) p. 41.

purity made possible Rāmarājyā ; the fight for Swadeśī (gave) purity to India.⁷

Due to the great upheaval and turbulence of the time, the unfoldment of events could not be simplified as Gandhiji could simplify his own life. So mixed up had religious idealism become with the political upheaval and the impending division of the country, Gandhiji could not be so very clear about the issue of women's freedom or his envisioned role for them as custodians of India's spiritual culture. Unfortunately Gandhiji was killed before he could contribute his greatest efforts. Like Vivekananda, Gandhiji too, left the future work in the hands of his successors.

To sum up the work of Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda for the uplift of women, we can say that they favoured it, and tried to make a way for it. Each hoped and

7. Sujata Patel, *Economic & Political Weekly*.

expected to see women themselves come forward to help themselves. Their view was that any benefit society would give to women as a disadvantaged group would not be effective actually. Women have to prepare for themselves a general condition of development through education and other means. Without such general groundwork, economic or political, or other easy measures, would likely go fruitless. From Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi, including Swamiji—all tried only to create this general condition for growth from within. Gandhiji rightly emphasized that change of attitudes on the part of men would bring corresponding favourable improvements in the social environment. And as K. R. Malkani has concluded: 'In spite of everything, the Indian woman is fundamentally better off than her western counterpart...'⁸

8. *Indian Post*, August 2, 1988.

MAN, MODERNITY AND ETHICS

DR. K. SARADA

Man is the most wonderful creation of God. The Lord has bestowed on him a highly sophisticated and powerful mind. He has given him the finest sense of adjustment and immense potential. Man is capable of working wonders. He has the ability to conquer nature and even to realize God. Today man has to his credit varied types of achievement in all spheres of human existence. A glance at present-day life in general provides sufficient testimony, demonstrating man's endless desires and aspirations, and his ceaseless efforts to satisfy or realize them. He is becoming ever more well-versed in new techniques and technology he feels necessary for his future existence.

The modern industrial system with all its

intellectual sophistication shows vividly the fact that man must move faster and faster in getting desirable things one after another. Because the pursuit of economic growth is one of the highest of values in such modern society, there is no limit on man's conception of what is enough. The opportunistic mind is always on the look-out for new inventions and discoveries, and also new applications to keep man in the most comfortable and luxuriously favourable position. When any problems arise, again, he will invent stop-gap temporary solutions, and the process continues indefinitely. Thus, man the individual citizen consumer, man the industrious producer, and man the efficient economist and technocrat, all have

become competitors in the race to set new records and achievements. And, as though this is not enough, the large rise in world population which is adding to both the productive and consuming forces, is fueling the ever-climbing upward spiral. This condition is not free from heart-burning effects on some perceptive minds, just as it must be extremely pleasurable to others whose desires are insatiable. One thing is obvious, it is that a sort of unrest due to unjust and unethical disparities between man and man are producing unprecedented rivalries, jealousies, hatreds and violent reactions in the world today.

The questions that arise are: How long and how far will this race with shadows continue? It may be the way in which the Divine Lord wishes to perpetuate His creation. Or could it be to bring everything down—to destroy the creation? Is nature so bountiful as to allow man to exploit indiscriminately all her gifts to benefit people of only one *yuga* or *age*? Is She responsible, or is it man's own responsibility, that part of the world should perpetually enjoy riches and the rest be eternally deprived? Why has man, so divinely endowed, become so narrow in vision, unreasonable, exploitative and selfish? Could it be that trends, events and discoveries in the modern age have made it incumbent on man to develop a broader, more universal sympathetic way of thinking enabling him to survive?

Perhaps a man's philosophy in simple terms can be expressed as 'a way of life, led by wisdom, that takes into account all his limitations and potentialities'. His philosophy aims at helping him attain an all-round development and finally realization of his highest potential. It does not exclude the satisfaction of his simple essential wants at the early stage of his evolvment. Unfortunately, or unpleasantly, for him, his philosophy also imposes on him a disciplined life. Man's wants have no limit. Because

every increase of one's desires tends to increase one's dependence on outside agencies, over which one does not have absolute control, his philosophy requires him to control or limit himself.

One is reminded that his economics like his philosophy, has been created by him to make his life in society easier and more self-fulfilling. Up to now every society has tried to practise its economic principles, excluding as far as possible, benevolent consideration of other societies. But now that the world has been rendered small by science, is it possible to go on in this way? All signs indicate that if man is to happily live longer on earth, he must try to reduce competition and foster a spirit of cooperation between himself and his fellow men, not just within his own society, but up to every nook and corner of the globe. Granted all men are entitled to enjoy the gifts of nature; and history indicates that by exercise of all his powers, as circumstances require, man *will try* to fulfil himself. Therefore let the welfare of the maximum be our motto. This is the philosophy of new world-economics.

Up to now, he has considered his individual consumption the paramount end and purpose of life. He has become so clever as to live his comfortable, easy-going, happy life without wisdom, and with least consideration for other's lives. His prosperity merely widens the gap between himself and his fellow men and nature. Towards nature his only attitude has been one of greed, exploitation and conquest. Present global deforestation is an example of the damage of this attitude.

Man bypasses the whole theme of ethics, which is so important for the well-being of others, and equally so for himself. There is truth in the observation of John Maynard Keynes, the famous economist, that economic progress can be achieved only if we employ those powerful human drives of selfishness which religion and traditional wisdom uni-

versally call upon us to resist. However, even Keynes believed in self-discipline. The basic drives of man by which human life is sustained must also be curtailed when their force endangers the health or the existence of human society itself. Gandhiji too, recognized that the increase of human needs in the modern age, and their satisfaction, would make man more dependent on nature's resources and upon other men, and would in the end make him more anxiety-ridden and less happy. But there is little doubt that man in his present condition has become stupefied with his success and power over nature, and is at present incapable of recognizing fruitfully, that by this, his own greed, he is digging his grave. The present industrial system and highly strung economic prosperity flourishes due to his great intellectual acumen, not as an expression of noble promptings of his heart. Scientific management is cutting away the very bases of truth, human trust, and benevolent idealism upon which it was founded. Signs are in evidence, ruthless exploitation of nature and competition within human society will likely reach a disastrous climax and finish.

India too, is experiencing the disturbance of the times. The faith of the younger generations is under severe and persistent attack by the materialistic forces, avarice, and love of possession and expression of power. Again, industrial pollution, destruction of forests and concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, point to the evils arising of misapplication of the blessings of science, not to mention the rise of violence, drug abuse and terrorism due to easy availability of weapons, drugs, money and damaging mixture of religion and politics. Life in India too is getting faster and faster day by day. Mechanization has blunted man's feelings, fostered indolence and false pride. Selfish desires do not allow man to think of the need to sacrifice for the good of the whole country, or to serve his fellow beings.

The unity among the members of one's

own family is not only eroded, but there is no binding force to maintain consensus even in major issues of the family. Family limitations, desires to imitate western life-styles, insatiable thirst for power, money and status cause younger members to blatantly ignore cherished ideals of brotherhood, sympathy, love of God and adherence to minimum moral and ethical principles.

In short, modern man seems to be trapped between the two horns of a fearful dilemma. Is there no way out? Has he either to throw overboard all the progress of the century and merge again into the lassitude and darkness of the past? Or continue—full-speed ahead risking widespread destruction that must surely follow when all the powers of science fall into the hands of tyrants or madmen, or generations of our young people who will be reduced to bestiality by ethical, moral and spiritual degradation? What is man to do?

There is a way. Our faith in the future must not give way to despair. Each nation as each individual must find his own way. Solutions will show some common elements. Each and all will implicitly or explicitly ask and find out an answer: How can the future be built most effectively upon our realizations and achievements of the past? Inherent logic indicates that everyone will face the problem with this question. Everyone and each society will look into the uniqueness of its own past. For best results, there should be no excited reversion to violent childish fundamentalism for quick security. But the eternal principles of religion and the ethics of a higher life will have to be examined, re-learned and brought out from the encrustations of rusted memory. Every religion, in truth, deals with the body-mind complex of man in *this* world and the spirit-soul complex of man at the spiritual level. The Indian religion of the Vedas, being one of the world's most insightful, has declared from times immemorial that

the path is an ancient one, trodden by the wise perhaps from the earliest time in which man had the intelligence to inquire into the nature of God and the world. What the wise perceived will not be found at odds with any modern religion of today.

There are two kinds of knowledge open to man. One is the lower knowledge or *aparāvidyā*, having for its object acquisition of that knowledge or skill which fosters material prosperity, and the second is the higher knowledge or *parā-vidyā*, having for its object the knowledge of man and the world as we cannot perceive with the five senses; but which exists as the root of all, like electrons, protons and neutrons exist imperceptibly as the support of all that is.

The lower knowledge, so the scriptures say, leads a man to the exquisite enjoyments of all the things of earth. While the Higher Knowledge leads man to the direct perception that he is immortal in his real nature, and is eternally untouched by all these experiences of human life. Sickness and health do not touch him, nor does pleasure or pain, rags or riches, or life or death. Coming in contact with the Higher Knowledge man feels free, peaceful and unworried by anything of this earth, while winning the lower knowledge, he merely enjoys and suffers all the contrasting pleasures and sorrows of the earth. Both these types of knowledge are necessary say the Indian scriptures and the wise ones of all the world's eternal religions.

Both are necessary because man must live his life in the world. But he should not lose his inner equipoise, forget his calm spiritual nature or behave foolishly, at odds with himself, violently or destructively. Most important, man must not forget the lessons of the Higher Knowledge, that he is not all-important here. It is God's world, after all, and man's place in it is very insignificant.

One day in April 1882, a neighbour asked Sri Ramakrishna:

Neighbour: 'Why does a man have sinful tendencies?'

Master: 'In God's creation there are all sorts of things. He has created bad men as well as good men. It is He who gives us good tendencies, and it is He again who gives us evil tendencies.'

Neighbour: 'In that case we aren't responsible for our sinful actions, are we?'

Master: 'Sin begets its own result. This is God's law. Won't you burn your tongue if you chew a chilli?...So one should be careful about anger, passion, and greed.'

In this inconceivably great universe where myriads of galaxies like our exist, whether man lives on his small planet peacefully or not, or whether he lives at all is probably not important to any except himself. Since, however, he does live, and we do live together, might it not be just as well that we try to live at peace with one another, with God, and with nature so far as possible?

MAYAVATI—A VISITOR LOOKS BACK

H. M. ROY

A long path divides a dense forest of tall trees into two parts, and runs to the hill-top at one end, as it snakes toward the plains at the other, encircling the hills. The forest looks deep and dark; movement of cool air with its fragrance is soothing. The rhythmic sound of insects strikes the ear, as if a

song of the forest which goes on ceaselessly. Smell of wet earth emits from the soil. The sun shines over the tree-tops ; it can barely penetrate the thick roof of leaves to touch the soil. And yet it takes an opportunity now and then to peep through. Some cattle are moving round the forest at their will. But bells tied up round their necks ring with their movement. At some places of vantage point, the panoramic view of snow peaks in the long mountain range appears before the eyes vividly. The sky-high peaks stand magnificently. The view appears like a great manifestation of Lord Śiva. The grandeur of the Himalayas ushers a feeling of The Absolute, and a new horizon where wisdom dawns.

A state of calmness and tranquillity that prevails in the forest leaves a serene impression on the restless minds of on-lookers. In fact, it transforms the restive mind to a restfull state. The tall and beautiful trees present a divine sight to the eyes. The wandering lone man pauses for awhile, to bow down his head humbly at the feet of the majestic trees honouring them.

At the end of a day of November, the full moon rises up in the clear sky with its graceful beams, and flashes floods of light on the forest keeping aside the darkness. Adding to this, one bright and glittering star appears in the sky, paling others with its pride and smile. That beauty is enhanced when innumerable cheerful fire-flies keep themselves at work illuminating the dark forest. Taken together, a mystic spell is cast on the mountain environment. The cool air carries sweet smell of flowers. All creatures and birds of night are out of their hide-outs and becoming active. At this hour, the lone man walks up the hills without fear. Perhaps all the animals and birds look on him with surprise. The stranger wonders at the sight and charm of nature's canvas. All these stir the mind of the solitary visitor to find out the Great Artist, Creator of the Cosmos. Once more the lone wandering man pauses, but suddenly kneels down and closes his eyes to look for Him!

Starting from the plain of Tanakpur, Pithoragarh Road runs through the Kumaon ranges of the lower Himalayas, giving magnificent views to the North of some twenty great snow-peaks, like Kamet, Nanda-Devi, Trishul, Panch-chulli and others. Two

separate diversions of the road, one at Sukhidhang leads to Shyamala-Tal where a Ramakrishna Math ashrama exists, and the other at Lohaghat leads to the Advaita Ashrama and Mayavati's Charitable Hospital, serving the poor of the region, serving Śiva in His human manifestation.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE YOUTH

PROF. N. S. V. RAO

Swami Vivekananda loved and adored this India of his birth as a *punjabhūmi*, or holy land. He said:

This is the ancient land where wisdom made its home before it went into any other country. ...This is the land from whence, like the tidal waves, spirituality and philosophy have again and again rushed out and deluged the world. ...It is the same India which has withstood the shocks of centuries, of hundreds of foreign invasions, of hundreds of upheavals of manners and customs. It is the same land which stands firmer than any rock in the world, with its undying vigour, indestructible life. Its life is of the same nature as the soul, without beginning and without end, immortal; and we are the children of such a country.¹

Even though born in a land of such glory and rich heritage, youth of today find themselves drifting and directionless, forlorn and frustrated, and are looking forward to one who can understand and lead them to fulfilment of their hopes and aspirations. The so-called advancement of civilization, science and technology has only added to further confusion and chaos. While it has contributed towards material comforts and made possible a glamorous life of physical pleasures, it has robbed youth of the poetry of life, of the growth and development of inner beauty and bliss. It is in this context we have to examine the relevance of Swami Vivekananda today and for a long time to come to understand the wealth of his contributions towards the welfare of the human race which he kept up till the last breath of his life.

Youth represent temper and will-power, imagination and emotion and a freshness of the springs of life. They represent an elemental force like the river in flood that

can be devastating unless harnessed to give power and light. They indeed represent the precious wealth of the Nation. Beset with perplexing problems and insurmountable challenges, the youth of today are facing an unknown future, and are looking for a messiah to lead them from this darkness to light and life.

At the very first Vivekananda Youth Convention held in this Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay in 1983, over seven hundred youths participated. They placed before the intellectuals and elders of that Convention several of their problems—very searching and sharp questions. Those highly important and relevant questions are still demanding attention and are classified under the following heads: (i) Political and Economic, (ii) Educational and cultural, and (iii) Religious and spiritual. We shall examine some of the issues and problems in the light thrown upon them by Swami Vivekananda, who knew the pulse of the youth and whose prophetic vision anticipated problems the younger generations of the future would face due to the advancement in science and technology and changed social conditions.

Youth's first outstanding question is put as follows:

While we see the scope of Vivekananda's ideals and concepts were universal in nature, those of our present-day leaders and intellectuals are not even wholly national and practical in scope. In the prevailing depressed atmosphere of moral decline and spiritual degradation, with political and intellectual corruption all around, how can the beautiful ideals propounded by Swami Vivekananda be achieved? And how to usher in an integrated system of social and cultural values?

1. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. III, p. 285.

Let us answer this question this way:

India has faced such problems before in the midst of upheavals of the past and the challenge was always met by Her noble sons and daughters. Young people will certainly rise to meet the challenges of modern times as well. Swamiji's contribution in inspiring them stands without a parallel. Great objectives can be achieved only by hard work, dedication and intense involvement. Swami Vivekananda himself worked with such personal involvement and exhorted his countrymen to do likewise. By his dynamic personality and inspiring call he raised the forgotten banner of our national and spiritual glory. It was his inspiration that roused up the revolutionaries and national leaders during the freedom struggle. He was the inspirer behind Gandhiji's work of social uplift, raising the national consciousness, and application of spiritual force in the non-violent movement. Sri Rajagopalachari rightly observed: 'Swami Vivekananda saved Hinduism and saved India. But for him we would have lost our religion, and would not have gained our freedom. We therefore owe everything to Swami Vivekananda. May his faith, his courage, and his wisdom ever inspire us, so that we may keep safe the treasures we have received from him.' Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose said that had Vivekananda been alive he would have been at his feet. In the mind of Sri Aurobindo, one time a revolutionary and recognized spiritual giant, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of Mother India, and in the souls of Her children. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said,

'Rooted in the past and full of pride in India's prestige, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems and was a kind of bridge between India's past greatness and her present.' Vivekananda was full of dynamic and fiery energy and his passion was to awaken India to her eternal greatness, which has not dimmed with the passage of time. He came as a tonic to the depressed and demoralized Hindu mind,

to awaken once more self-reliance and full memory of our roots in the past. I do not know how many of the younger generation read the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda, but I can tell you that many of my generation were powerfully influenced by him and I think it would do a great deal of good to the present generation if they also went through Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches. They would learn much from them.²

Again, Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan reminded: 'Vivekananda gave us fortitude in suffering, hope in distress, and he gave us courage in despair. He told us not to be led away by appearances. Deep down there is a Providential Will; there is a purpose in this universe. You must try to discover that purpose, which is the goal of human life, and try to achieve it.'

Thus imbibing the spirit of Swamiji, the youth have to face the problems and challenges of today and work out solutions, not only by bringing leaders and intellectuals to the right path, but by becoming leaders themselves, leading the nation onward and evolving an integrated system of social and spiritual values. Then how shall they bring about this change in themselves and in others?

O Youth, if you are seeking to build something in the world then look deep in your heart. As Swamiji said, be content to work, and above all be true to yourself. Be pure, staunch and sincere, to the very backbone, and everything will be all right. Identify yourselves as a spark of the Infinite Being. The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. Be free from jealousy and hatred, stand in the whirl and madness of action and reach your goal. Life refuses to yield its sublimest secret to the lazy. The heart must be plucked out and placed on the altar of service to God and humanity. Then

2. Jawaharlal Nehru *Discovery of India*, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 337.

alone great things can be done. Whatever you wish to be, you have the power to make yourselves. It is cowardice to say, 'it is fate'. The strong actually stand up and thunder, 'I will shape my own fate, come what may'. Arise, awake and sleep no more and the power will be manifested. Swamiji said:

O my brave boys, push on with the organization. Nothing else is necessary but these—*love*, *sincerity*, and *patience*. What is life but growth, i.e. expansion, i.e. love? Therefore all love is life, it is the only law of life; all selfishness is death, and this is true here or hereafter. It is life to do good, it is death not to do good to others.³ ...

It behoves you and me to try our best. ...Let us tell our countrymen of the danger, let them come and help us. I will cry at the top of my voice from one part of this country to the other, to awaken the people to the situation and their duty. ...Be patriots, love the race which has done such great things for us in the past.⁴

This is the way Vivekananda guides the youth to achieve the ideal for themselves and for their country. Youth power is tremendous. With discipline, faith, courage and character they can achieve the highest and noblest. It is far better to die in the field in achieving a worthy ideal than to live and die like worms.

Turning now to the inter-related fields viz. the educational and cultural, religious and spiritual, we find the following questions faced by the youth today. The youth want to know:

(i) What is lacking in our education? What kind of education is it that does not inculcate enduring values and build character in students?

(ii) Is our secular education faulty in that youth do not imbibe ennobling truths enshrined in religion, and do not develop a universal outlook?

(iii) Have religious organizations failed in not exerting their full influence on those at the helm forming national educational policies needed for development of our young people?

(iv) Is our claim and faith in India's greatness failing to make its impact on the deteriorating social system?

(v) Religion being at the centre of chaos and violent social disturbances, it cannot solve the problems of the younger generations anymore. Is it true?

(vi) Has the current amassing of wealth by some religious organizations become more important to them than the dissemination of spirituality?

(vii) Despite high spiritual values being preached by religious leaders for so many decades, corruption and other social evils have persisted. When these have not been rooted out by spiritual leaders, how can bewildered, sceptical or materialistic youth eradicate them?

All of these questions reveal sincere and deep thinking by the youth, and show their concern for their country, their desire to have a role and their desire for fitness to serve. It is really the time when the youth begin to flower into offerings fit for the sacred altar of God and country!

Look now at the youth being turned out by the thousands from our educational institutions, mass-produced, as it were, as from a factory assembly line. Though young and energetic, most youth are not possessed of any higher idealism or even any particular altruistic motivation for the national or social good. The thought instilled in them by the pressures of family and social responsibility is only how to get better qualifications for better job opportunity which will enable them to settle down to the work-a-day world. Sometimes the youth do not seem even to be aware of how much their elders sacrifice for them.

3. *C.W.*, Vol. IV, p. 367.

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 198-99.

For all this the youth are not to blame. It is the system of education that has been foisted on them which they have rightly called into question. It is purposeless, soulless and directionless. Hence they are what the system has made them. Then what can be done? What then is the type of education they should turn to? To paraphrase Swami Vivekananda, education should help the development of concentration of mind. It should not be only for collection of facts, but should help the students equip themselves for the struggle of life, bringing out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion to enable them to stand on their own feet. Education, he said, is the disciplined but natural unfoldment of what is within, a manifestation of the perfection already within. The purpose of education is not to acquire a computer-like memory, but to help the young person develop a capacity to assign proper values to everything. After all, a value-based education does not flow from an assembly line, but calls for the 'master-spirit' as Milton put it. Youth have to be wide awake, organized and demand the best from the teachers, and what is excellent in the institutions.

Secularism does not mean a non-religious state or country. It is a policy of government which upholds and allows the right of every religion to exist and grow in the highest spirit its own beautiful tenets. Unfortunately, power politics and the mixing of religious organizations in the competition of politics have distorted the usefulness and true intent of both politics and religion. Responsible religious organizations and youth must continue, however, to try and bring round the national administration to adopt useful and corrective measures. Politicians also must profit from the teachings of the country's spiritual giants of the past. Just as Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji and other freedom fighters took their inspiration direct from Swami Vivekananda and Sri Rama-

krishna, so must our modern leaders do the same. It is said that Swamiji even influenced the wealthy J. D. Rockefeller in the U.S.A. to start his philanthropies. Sister Nivedita, his foremost English disciple, helped not only in the political and educational fields, but also in women's welfare schemes. Youth also have to derive inspiration from such examples as Swami Vivekananda and join service-oriented religious and social organizations in large numbers, rather than taking part in the highly shortsighted, explosive and selfish politics. This is the constructive road for building up excellent education and culture, and proper understanding of *dharma*, religion, politics and everything. Without righteousness and spirituality, life becomes a meaningless race and a dry desert not only for youth but for others also.

Again, there is a good deal of false understanding and propaganda about the role of religion and spirituality. True *dharma* can never be the cause of social chaos, or the chaos in the mind of individuals. It is the wrong use and interpretation of religion by bigots, powercrazed people and fanatic caste leaders that have created chaos, confusion and strife. True spirit of religion, indeed, brings harmony and peace in the world.

Religious ideals form India's unity, and India's lifeblood is spirituality. When this blood flows clean, strong and vigorous everything will be all right, and with this, political, social and other material defects, and even the poverty of the land can be cured. This is what Swami Vivekananda said. And he added further, that the secret of religion does not consist in mere theories, but in the *practice* of being good and doing good.

So the youth are underestimating their tremendous capacity to do good to themselves and to the world, and to eradicate social evils persisting for centuries. The foregoing exhortations of Swamiji make it clear that they are indeed commissioned by the Lord to wipe out all these deep-seated

human failings, just as did Jesus Christ, his disciples and many others from the church of Jerusalem. Likewise, our youth of today, all of us for that matter, who are heirs to Swamiji's bequeathals, are born to face all such challenges, wipe out deeply entrenched social ills and establish a new order. But especially the youth must vow to do it and apply all their energies, forgetting for the time being their comforts and pleasures.

Swami Vivekananda believed and emphasized that to help uplift the masses, an organization was necessary, and hence he built up the Ramakrishna Mission as a service-oriented monastic order, involving dedicated monks and householders to render unselfish service in the spirit of renunciation and love. The Ramakrishna Mission Association, as it was called when it was founded, is indeed a unique organization of monks and devotees, who instead of confining themselves to the original pursuits of bygone years, serve also among the masses in villages, schools and hospitals. They also quickly reach places affected by natural disasters to lend emergency assistance. In this way they have given new meaning to the worship of God in man and have established on a practical basis the concept of service of man as service of God. It is a unique gift of Sri Ramakrishna set in motion by Swami Vivekananda and his followers.

On 1st May 1897, on the day he founded the Ramakrishna Mission Association, Swami Vivekananda told the assembled gathering of monastic and lay-devotees that he was convinced that the lack of an organizing spirit (as seen in the Christian and Buddhist faiths) was the shortcoming of Hindu character. Hence he called on the monastic and household disciples of Sri Ramakrishna to organize educational, philanthropic and religious activities.

He was overjoyed to see the happy beginning of his work in the famine relief efforts of Swamis Akhandananda and Trigunatita-

nanda in Murshidabad and Dinajpur. In a letter written on 9 July 1897 to Miss Mary Hale, he wrote: 'Only one idea was burning in my brain—to start the machine for elevating the Indian masses, and that I have succeeded in doing to a certain extent.'⁵ It was his tremendous contribution made with modesty and humility.

To assist in the task and make others partners in the service, money had to be solicited from available sources. It was not to be utilized for ostentatious living, but to be employed scrupulously in the service of the needy and downtrodden. Every pie (penny) had to be accounted for as having been applied for its said purpose, and not for buildings or acquiring assets.

It is for this dedication that the youth have to organize themselves and plunge into unselfish patriotic activities fearlessly. Swami Vivekananda bequeathed this unique wealth of fearlessness to them:

It is those foolish people who identify themselves with their bodies, and piteously cry 'we are weak, we are low'. All this is atheism. Now that we have attained the state beyond fear, we shall have no more fear and become heroes. This indeed is theism which we will choose, the servants of Sri Ramakrishna. ...If you are really my children, you will fear nothing, stop at nothing. You will be like lions. We must rouse India and the whole world.⁶

Thus we address the modern youth: how blessed you are that such great souls as Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were born in your country and left their message to show you the way! The only thing remaining is for you to shake off hesitation, laziness and fear. To achieve this we all must only imbibe that marvellous spirit of Vivekananda. Read his life; study his message and writings, especially his letters.

5. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) p. 349.

6. *Ibid.*, 25 Sept. 1894, pp. 143-44; 1894, to Alasinga, p. 190.

It is sufficient to read his life alone, to start with. It fills up one's heart with reverence, calm, and tremendous energy to do what is right.

Finally, we should pause and ponder over his message to us, and a warning he gave at the same time:

...But, my son (he said), there are the drawbacks. Nothing shall be done in haste. Purity, patience and perseverance are the three essentials to success and, above all, *love*. All time is yours, there is no indecent haste. Everything will come

right if you are pure and sincere.

Do any deserve liberty who are not ready to give it to others? Let us calmly and in a manly fashion go to work, instead of dissipating our energies in unnecessary frettings and fumings.

...Look not to me, look to yourselves. I am happy to have been the occasion of rousing an enthusiasm. Take advantage of it, float along with it, and everything will come right. Love never fails, my son; today or tomorrow or ages after, truth will conquer! Love shall win the victory.⁷

⁷. *Ibid.*, 30 Nov. 1894, p. 188; 18 Nov. 1894, p. 172-73; 27 Oct. 1894, p. 170.

SAINT EKNATH—PHILOSOPHER-POET

SWAMI VIPASHANANDA

What would a boy of twelve years pray for? He might pray for good health or achievements, or some special happiness for himself, or other boyish thing. But what did the boy Eknath pray for? He did not pray for any temporary pleasure, but for the blessings of Lord Śiva, the Deity of Paithana. More than anything Eknath wanted a spiritual guide, a guru. Days and nights passed and the boy prayed continuously: 'O Lord, please give me my Master!' He used to pray, 'O Śiva! ... Dhruva, Prahlāda and others got the blessings of Guru Nārada-ṛṣi who revealed God to them face-to-face. When shall I obtain such grace of the guru?'

Thus passed many days and nights. One night the Lord became gracious. In the third quarter of the night the boy heard a voice coming from some place, he knew not where. It said: 'A saintly man, Janārdana-swāmi, lives at Devagarh. Go to him and he will initiate you and instruct you.' All at once Eknath left the temple and with all haste started for Devagarh, even forgetting to inform his guardians. In time the boy became the renowned saint Eknath, still

revered as one of the great saints of Maharashtra.

Eknath was born in a pious brāhmin family in the holy city of Paithana on the banks of the river Godāvarī in Maharashtra, western India. Paithana was a great centre of Sanskrit learning and was everywhere famous as 'the Kāśī of the South'. The forefathers of the boy had been faithful worshippers of the Sun-god Āditya or Savitr. But both parents, the father Sūryanarāyana and mother Rukmiṇī, died soon after the boy was born, so he was lovingly brought up by his grandfather and grandmother. His grandfather's name was Chakrapāṇi.

Eknath pursued his childhood studies avidly and became talented and well-versed in the religious culture of his province. He was obedient to his grandparents and developed a good mind and sympathetic heart. He had a wonderful memory and could grasp and retain the meaning of the scriptures easily, and moreover, showed a great inclination towards prayer and worship of gods and goddesses. One might say he was a born devotee, and used to meditate daily

in the Śiva temple for hours together. When not so engaged he loved to sing devotional songs. At the age of six his *upanayana* (investiture with the sacred thread) took place, and after that he performed all the routine sacred duties obligatory to a brāhmin boy. With love and faith he worshipped the gods and studied the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and other scriptures under the tutelage of a learned paṇḍit of the town. These formed an important part of his formal education. Scriptural studies further intensified his longing for God and a guru, and created in him the sense of non-attachment and dispassion for worldly objects. He became introspective and more and more deeply absorbed in his meditation and prayers.

Having heard the divine voice in Pimpateswara-Śiva temple at Paithana, Eknath started for Devagarh in search of Sri Janārdana-swāmi. Enduring hardships for a number of days, he reached Devagarh. One day in the early morning he saw the saint, and feeling overcome with emotion bowed down, bathing the feet of the holy man with tears of joy.

Janārdana-swāmi was a well-born and educated man of his era, with deep faith and knowledge of the scriptures and an insight into their teachings. From early morning till noon he would remain engaged in prayer and meditation on his Chosen Deity who graced him with His vision. A householder, in the afternoon he would go to his office, and again in evening he would sit for meditation and merge in the thought of God. At nightfall he commonly held discourses on the *Jñāneśwarī* and the *Amṛtānubhava*, two well-known works of the popular Maharashtrian saint Jñāneśwara. Janārdana-swāmi was endowed with a compassionate and just nature. Same-sightedness and calm detachment were natural to him. His life was an ideal reconciliation of the secular and spiritual. With his mind and

body purified by the practice of *bhakti*, *yoga* and unselfishness, he radiated a rare spiritual light. He was honoured by Hindus because of his saintliness. Muslims also respected him as a *pir* (Muslim saint).

Strange to say, Janārdana-swāmi had also been eagerly awaiting the arrival of the eminent disciple. After seeing Eknath, the young and ardent soul, the Master's joy was also overflowing. Janārdana-swāmi knew that for a spiritual master to find such a worthy heir to his spiritual treasures was a rare event indeed. He lifted up the boy after his pranām and cast on him an approving glance. He assured Eknath that he should not worry any more, he would be blessed. The spiritual master placed his hand on the head of the boy and instructed him. The touch of the guru produced a wonderful experience in Eknath. He related later in his life in one of his works, *The Ānanda-laharī*, this experience. 'As soon as his hand touched my head, the whole world, I felt, disappeared. Every direction was flooded with an ineffable Light and was permeated by divine bliss.'

Śrī Janārdana-swāmi, though a householder, was a highly honoured man. He served in the Muslim judiciary as a *hākim* (judge) under the Badashah of Daulatabad. But he was both a *karma-yogin* and a great devotee. His personal *Iṣṭa-devatā*, or Ideal in life, was Śrī Dattātreyā, one of the incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu. Now and then in deep trance Janārdana-swāmi used to get the visions of Śrī Dattātreyā. Eknath tells about the experiences of his guru:

When he felt the burning desire to see his Chosen Deity Dattātreyā, Śrī Janārdanaswami passed through three states of mind: Consciousness limited by physical body and other physical objects of the universe; Consciousness limited by subtle-body and other subtle forms of the universe; and finally, Consciousness limited by the causal-body and the universal ego or I-consciousness. Then he entered into the state beyond mind and speech, experiencing oneness only with God,

Śrī Dattātreya. Again, he regained the normal consciousness and resumed his normal duties in the world.

After receiving the blessings of his master, Eknath stayed in Devagarh and renewed his efforts for God-realization with greater intensity than ever. The guru graced him, not only by granting the spiritual vision of Lord Viṣṇu as Dattātreya, but opened other portals also of the spiritual world. Coming in contact with the spiritual guide for whose grace he had prayed day and night, the boy was overwhelmed by the saint's loving behaviour towards him and he served Janārdana-swāmi with heart and soul for six long years. The way he served the guru, he writes:

I got up from bed before the guru, and after massage of his body, would sleep at his feet when he went to bed. Day and night, in and out of home, I did all my duties with love and enthusiasm, without waiting for the guru's order, though he had servants to do those things. After his meal I would prepare betel-leaf, and when he rested, fan him. At the time of the guru's morning and evening worship I would keep the articles for worship ready, and keep a vigil at the door to prevent disturbances. Forgetting my own hunger and thirst, I thought of his hunger and thirst. By this my own desires became controlled. I took measured food in order to control sleep. The guru was my all-in-all. For six years I put aside all memory of my native place and relatives. *Guru-sevā* became my chief and only aim. I did not think of anything other than the guru in waking, dream or dreamless sleep. In this way, with all my mental modifications quietened—hunger, thirst, lust, anger, greed and other passions left me forever. Body and mind became pure by devotion to my spiritual mentor.

Again, through the grace of the guru, I heard from him the contents of the scriptures—*Jñāneswari-gītā*, *Amṛtānubhava*, and the *Bhagavata*. By this, Self-knowledge was awakened in me.

Through his service a deep love for the guru entered into my heart and I forgot even my physical existence, not to mention rest for the body, hunger and thirst. Everything I surrendered totally to the guru.

When the guru used to sit for meditation Eknath also used to sit, keeping his mind

on the guru's form. He said about this method of worship:

Seeing my attitude the guru appeared before me in my meditation as a guest might appear in the home. Then I would offer him a seat in my heart after cleansing the place, would wash his feet with the water of devotion, burn before him the incense of egoism, apply the sandalwood-paste of desires, burn the candle-light of goodness, offer the vital forces of the body (*pañca-prāṇa-s*) as *naivedya* (food-offerings to the Deity), the *tambula* (betel-leaf and nuts) of *sāttwa* qualities, and abandon all the *rājasic* and *tāmasic* qualities—by all these becoming one with the master.

Being an ideal disciple himself, Eknath extolled *guru-sevā* and described how it should be performed. He says:

He is the real devotee of the guru who firmly believes his guru and God to be one and the same. Blessed really is he who has accepted with deep devotion the service of his spiritual guide with an earnest longing to realize God. He is so very eager to serve his teacher that his body hurries up to perform service to him even before the thought of it flashes in the mind. As the service becomes more and more, his enthusiasm for it also increases proportionately, and ultimately the disciple finds rest and peace in service alone. He forgets his leisure and even rest, as he engages himself more and more in service. This selfless *sevā* makes him forget all sense-pleasures—even food, drink and sleep. Forgetting everything, thus absorbed in the loving service of the guru, the disciple loses his separate individuality and merges in the *Atman* of the Guru. He experiences oneness with the Master.

One day it so happened that Janārdana-swāmi was in deep meditation. Eknath too was at the door meditating and thinking of his guru. Suddenly officers of the Sultan of Daulatabad came in great haste to inform Janārdana-swāmi that enemies were at the border. Without disturbing the guru, Eknath dressed himself as a warrior of the appearance of Janārdana swāmi and departed at once for the battlefield. There he served fighting like a skilled soldier along with other soldiers. Returning from the battle he said

nothing of it to the guru, but Janārdana-swāmi came to know of it.

Another event took place in Eknath's life showing how deep was his devotion to *guru-sevā*. The guru had given him some work of keeping accounts. A mistake was found by Eknath amounting to one *pie* (about one penny) in the balance sheet. After the guru's evening service Eknath sat with the account books till late at night trying to discover the error. At last, in the early light of daybreak, he found the cause of the discrepancy. At that moment in joy he clapped his palms. The sound woke up Janārdana-swāmi, but the master was pleased to see the joy of Eknath. On inquiry Eknath told him all about it and he blessed Eknath saying, 'O Eknath, finding out a mistake of one *pie*, you are overjoyed, then how much joy you will have when you learn the error you have made coming to regard your infinite *Ātman* as limited and finite in this sea of worldly existence (*Māyā*)! If you meditate with this thought in your mind, you will certainly realize God before long.

Janārdana-swāmi had realized God in both personal and impersonal aspects (*sākāra* and *nirākāra*). Pleased with the services of Eknath he wished to grace the disciple with the holy vision of Śrī Dattātreyā. One day both of them entered a secluded area of deep forest where people seldom went. On that particular day, after the evening service, Śrī Dattātreyā came there in the form of a *fakir*, a Mohammedan saint, with a dog and a cow. He and Janārdana-swāmi fell to discussing about *Ātman* and *Brahman*, the individual Soul and God. Śrī Janārdana-swāmi milked the cow and both of the holy men drank from the same earthen pot. Standing by, Eknath found that the two were not different but one and the same. At the sudden revelation he bowed down at their feet in reverence. Śrī Dattātreyā blessed Eknath and said: 'You are a great devotee, born to teach people devotion and love of

God.' Later Eknath wrote some *abhañgas* (poetic musical compositions) in which he described his condition:

I have exhausted all my *sañcita*, accumulated results of past actions and future actions. And through *prārabdha*, with human birth, I meditate on Śrī Datta Guru!

Māyā has left me. All kinds of differences have melted away, and I have been freed of all limitations. I am Śiva—my Guru Janārdana!

I have lighted the lamp of knowledge, have become free from the darkness of worries by that Light, and have seen the face of Dattātreyā with joy. Eknath got the grace of Guru Śrī Janārdana and has become united with Him.

I see Dattātreyā within and without, and in every being. Śrī Dattātreyā has attracted my mind and I have lost the sense of me and mine, you and yours.

Instructed by Janārdana-swāmi, Eknath now left Devagarh to practise *sādhanās* and spiritual austerities alone in the mountains. Eknath joyfully left Devagarh and selected a serene and beautiful place to start his spiritual exercises. Rising up very early in the morning he used to finish his bath and sit in *siddhāsana* for meditation, taking the holy mantra of Sri Krishna's name. Through the grace of the Guru, his mind was already purified by the practice of self-control and *sevā*. Here Eknath soon attained perfection in yogic posture and concentration of mind. He realized through the grace of the Guru the oneness of God abiding alike in all beings. Now the realization of Sri Krishna as his *Iṣṭa-devatā* became his spiritual goal, and he applied all his energy to its realization. In deep meditation he used to merge in the thought of God, forgetting altogether the demands of the body for comforts, food and drink. Like a statue he sat. Birds used to sit on his body thinking it perhaps to be an inert object or to search for insects moving on it. One day a black cobra was seen by a villager as it was standing erect over Eknath's head, protecting him, as it were. The man was alarmed but saw that

Eknath was not at all aware of the snake. When he informed him of it, Eknath said that it was actually Death that had come to him in that form, but by the Guru's grace it had become a friend.

Eknath realized the blissful Lord as Sri Krishna seated in the hearts of all, and his oneness with him. He became established in the knowledge of the Self (*Ātman*) by constant practice of yoga for days and nights. His mind was merged in God and all other impressions were, as it were, burnt out. He returned to Devagarh after three years to see Janārdana-swāmi, his teacher.

Śrī Janārdana-swāmi recognized the high spiritual state of his disciple and advised him to make pilgrimage to several holy places of the South and North, and to teach people he met devotion to God. The guru agreed to accompany Eknath up to the town of Nasik-Tryambakeśwara in Maharashtra. On the way they halted at a brāhmin's house in the evening. There they heard the Sanskrit chanting of the *Catuṣṭlokī* of the *Bhāgavata*. Here the guru asked Eknath to translate the *Bhāgavata* into the Mārāṭhi language which he agreed to do. When they reached Nasik, Eknath gave a recitation (*kathā-pravacana*) and discourse on the *Bhāgavata*. He gave *kathā-pravacana* in the *Rāma-mandira* (temple) before his guru and a gathering of devotees where he sang his Mārāṭhi translation of *Catuṣṭlokī* in the *dvi* metre. In his introduction to the Mārāṭhi *Bhāgavata*, with remarkable but characteristic humility he says: 'A child cannot speak of its own accord. It is the mother that teaches it to speak. Even so, my master himself taught me the words which I have expressed in the form of this work.'

At Nasik they went to Brahma-giri Tryambakeśwara (holy mountain) and visited the *samādhi* (cremation site) of Śrī Nivrittināth, another great saint of Maharashtra, and circumambulated the holy mountain. Janārdana-swāmi then took leave of Eknath

after instructing him about his travels to other places of pilgrimage. In those days moving over long distances on foot, one had to face many hazards due to uncertainties of food, water and robbers. Embracing the disciple, Janārdana-swāmi assured him: 'Fear not. I am always with you in your heart. God will protect you. Think of Him and repeat His Name day and night. See Him in everything and every man; never bring duality into the heart. By this many have crossed the ocean of this world.'

Eknath travelled to the North and South in India with God's name on his lips and feeling the master's presence in his heart. He bathed in all the holy rivers, took *darśan* of eight Gaṇeśa temples, twelve Śiva temples and visited Jyotitirthas, Mathurā, Vrindāvan, Gayā, Kāśī, Badrināth and other places, finally returning to Paithana after three years. In Paithana he again stood before the image of Pimpaleśwara-Śiva where he had sat as a twelve year old boy and heard the disembodied divine voice. He settled down near the temple and began to live on alms which he would beg from the houses of the town. He did not try to make contact with his family members. Chakrapāṇi, the aged grandfather of Eknath had tried in vain to find the boy years ago, but only after long search he had come across Janārdana-swāmi. He had secured a promise from the saint that Eknath would lead an ideal householder's life and return again to stay in his native Paithana.

Eknath's life became a great example to householders. As Sri Ramakrishna taught: 'One may lead a householder's life after realizing God. It is like churning butter from milk and then keeping the butter in water. Janaka led the life of a householder after attaining *Brahmajñāna*.'¹ Eknath did likewise.

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 387.

Eknath was at first not willing to enter into the householder's life but due to the guru's wish he did so, keeping the mind on God and doing his duties as a householder with mind perfectly unattached to the results of action. Holding to God with one hand and doing his duties in the world with the other, and seeing God in all beings, Eknath led his life. Also Eknath got married as per the wish of Chakrapāṇi to a suitable girl, one who was devoted to God and her husband and kept the vow of Eknath to serve whoever came to the door at anytime.

Once it so happened that Eknath was doing *kathā* (preaching) in his home at evening. Some thieves entered and took shelter in the darkness of the house. When the *kathā* was over they began to remove some valuable things. Eknath knew what the thieves were after but did not disturb them nor allow his wife to say anything. Somehow they lost their vision while in the act of thieving. In that condition some of them touched Eknath and got back the eyesight. Eknath encouraged them to take away the valuables they had picked up, and gave them a gold ring from his finger besides, but begged them not to go before taking a meal. So the dutiful wife Girijabai had to cook food for them. For forty years Eknath maintained the same routine of life that he had followed as a youth practising *sādhanās* and preaching devotion, spiritual discrimination and love of God. He wrote and translated many works in Mārāṭhi such as his commentary on the *Catuhślokī* of the *Bhāgavata*, *Rukhmiṇī Swayamvara*, *Rāmāyana* and ten smaller works which were accepted by pandits of Kāśī even in his own time.

By this time Eknath had become 66 years old. In the month of *Phālgun* (spring), he announced his decision to enter into *samādhi*,

the supreme concentration of mind of the yogi, and leave the body. On that particular day he came to the bank of the river Godavari and gave advice to the assembled devotees and joined in *kīrtana*, the singing of God's name. He took his bath in the holy river, sat in *siddhāsana* (meditation posture) facing the river and entered into deep meditation on Lord Krishna. He gave up the mortal form and his soul was united with the Universal Spirit amidst the *bhajana* and *kīrtana* of the devotees of Paithana and nearby villages in 1599 A.D.

Eknath was a great philosopher and poet. He wrote a number of books giving new interpretations in the light of both *jñāna* and *bhakti*. He also composed innumerable poetical and musical works of great beauty and literary taste. His devotional songs are even today quite popular. Dr. Ranade, a famous philosopher of our time, has said that it was Eknath who made Vedanta familiar to the men in the street. He made the abstract truths of the scriptures simple and presented them to the masses in their own language. Professor M. S. Deshpande very aptly describes the great personality of Eknath by saying: 'A perfect diamond is supposed to possess eight facets (*aṣṭapailu*). The spiritual diamond of Eknath had been endowed with the following eight facets which contributed to the perfection of his unique personality: (i) He was a born devotee, (ii) a devoted disciple, (iii) a popular preacher, (iv) a gifted poet-philosopher, (v) an ideal householder, (vi) a superb saint, (vii) an apostle of synthesis and (viii) a lover of humanity.'²

², Prof. M.S. Deshpande, *Saint Ekanath's Light for Life Divine* (Aurangabad, Maharashtra: Ekanath Sanshodhan Mandir, 1976) p. 190.

RENUNCIATION

V. RAMANAN

Along the trek to Amarnath,
Winds a silver streamy path,
Across the mighty Himalayas
With floats of marble, icy mass.

Sullen is the ceaseless flow,
Void of aim and void of rest,
Pondered a part of the River—Lo!
A life of solitude, the best.
Void of rest, devoid of aim
Wandering is waste of time ;
Stable I, as the King of hills,
Shall sit to find an end of ills.

Earnest was Its longing, vast,
The Heaven was moved to help at last—
Showering softly flakes of snow,
Scented sweet, of blue-white glow—
Countless petals of the Divine Flower
That Nature garlands with, Her Lover ;
For days and weeks from day to night
Akin to Rudra's arrows' might ;
A cooler, cold, and colder breeze
Made It gently freeze and freeze,

Until It became all the easier
Transformed into the glassy glacier!

The River continues its flow beneath,
Singing the glory of the glacier—
Action wrapped in Inaction's sheath,
Attending to Will of Mahā-Īśwar!
Sandy winds of time have turned
The Glacier into an ugly shame ;
But lost in trance inward, It learned
Not to care for mundane fame.

Pilgrims on their way to God
On Its back have always trod—
Some cursing now Its slippery frame
Crossing the river they can never tame!
Causing the river below to flow,
And passing the men above to go—
In Gita's mood, It goes its way:
'Rid of action none can ever stay.'

Hail Thee, Glacier, all bliss a-glow,
Great as rishis' Vedic lore!
O Best and blissful enunciation,
True use and form of Renunciation!

GNOSTICISM AND THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

JAYANTI

Jesus said :
He who uncovers
The significance of these words
Shall not taste death.
Let him who seeks,
Not cease from his search
Until he finds.
When he finds, he will be bewildered,
And, when bewildered,
He will wonder, and reign over All.
If your guides claim
That the Kingdom is in the sky,
The birds of the sky will be there before you.

If they say it is in the sea,
The fishes of the sea will be there before you.
The Kingdom is within you and without you.
When you know yourselves, you will be
known.

Then, you shall know that you are
Sons of the Living Father.
But if you do not know yourselves
You are in poverty and you are poverty.
Logions 1-3¹

1. *The Gospel According to Thomas*, Concord Grove Press, Santa Barbara, 1976.

I first read a translation of *The Gospel According to Thomas* in 1971. Then, as now, I marvelled at these opening words. Who were these "Gnostics?" Was I correct in thinking that such direct references to a process of spiritual unfoldment were absent from the *New Testament*? A knowledge without which mankind is in poverty; but by which we may realize our divine heritage and reign over All? Drawing primarily from the Christian experience, I had identified the establishment of a church as a process whereby religious experience is likely to become a "religiosity" of ritual, dogma, and professions of faith. Salvation, once in the hands of God, passes into the care of those (priests, bishops, etc.) who have been appointed guardians of *THE* Way. And the individual, once confident that God could be reached personally and significantly through spiritual insight, finds that insight subject to interpretation, alteration, and rejection by those around him. For the study of the conflict between Gnosticism and early Christianity is a study of the beginnings of doctrine and solidification which gave rise to the Christian Church. Until about the end of the second century following the death of Jesus, and until the "Gnostic threat", Christianity and its Church were largely undefined.

Although Christianity arose in response to Jesus who was called the Christ, it was expanded and shaped through time and by the circumstances with which it had to interact. Its universality made it syncretic. Despite eventual appeals by Church officials to an orthodoxy based on the "purity of tradition", that very tradition had been drawn from a synthesis of foreign or "pagan" cultural elements.

It is impossible to delineate what Christianity was to its early followers. Rather than try to untangle the mass of beliefs then in existence it is better to have a look at the essential characteristics of Gnosticism

and the ways the Christian Church became defined in response to it.

* * * *

By the beginning of its second century Christianity had made significant advances into Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. As with any deeply felt religious movement, questions had arisen; questions which had already been encountered during the first century, leading to the split between Peter and Paul. As Christianity spread and the number of those who had been directly and profoundly influenced by Jesus or his apostles lessened, these questions became increasingly important. The time had come to begin promoting the new religion.

What is the nature of salvation and how may it be obtained? What is evil? How is man to escape from it? What was the nature of Jesus? Of Christ? How is the historical person of Jesus known to the twelve disciples to be reconciled to the Christ of experience described by Paul? These are some of the questions facing the early Christians and their converts. From an enthusiasm for inquiry together with the still free spontaneity of spiritual experience came a variety of answers and solutions, all of which would make some contribution to the eventual development of doctrine.

It was a literary age. On the one hand were the Apologists, most often philosophers, seeking to make Christianity known to those government officials who might listen, and to combat the false accusations which arose from rumour and misunderstanding. (Christianity itself had not yet become illegal. "Persecution" was largely based on more specific charges, notably atheism, anarchy, and immorality.) On the other hand were the Apostolic Fathers, representing the interests of a then loosely organized "Church" and working to solve difficulties within the Christian community. Perhaps lacking the literary talent of the Apologists, their letters

remain important sources of early Christian history and belief.

Among those seeking answers were the Gnostics. There seems little reason to assume them less sincere in their efforts than other Christians. Nor is there reason, given the syncretistic nature of Christianity, to think them moved by anything less than a deeply felt religious impulse. However, the answers they provided proved more than the Christian community could accept. In their passion to seek the Truth, Gnostics had overturned the one thing which had united all Christians from the beginning. The universal Christian belief in a historical Jesus as the Christ had no place in the Gnostic scheme of salvation.

The term Gnosticism refers to a number of religious movements, or sects, which were closely tied to Christianity and reached their greatest importance during the second century. Whether they arose from within Christianity, absorbing other elements, or were an independent movement which drew heavily from Christian sources is still being debated. Perhaps the various systems arose by both means. One thing is agreed upon, however. Regardless of their origin, those Gnostics about which the Church had concern *considered themselves to be Christian*. Among their ranks were some of the brightest minds in the community, serving to make Gnosticism seem a significant threat to Christian unity.

The sources of Gnosticism appear to be many, with each system tending to have some predominant influence. From Persia came the dualistic concept of Darkness and Light. From Babylonian literature may have come the concept of the Underworker, or Demiurge. Some scholars trace much of Gnostic mythology directly to Hebrew and Christian sources. Others point to the Hellenistic thought and culture of the day. Of particular note in this regard was the Platonistic distinction between matter and

soul. Also important in giving the sects their common designation was the concept of a spiritual wisdom, *gnosis*, by which one could achieve a true understanding of the universe and union with God while still on earth. This was essentially the same goal as the Greek mystery religions.

Thus the Bishop of Lyons, writing his *Against Heresies* during the latter part of the century (around 185, AD) applied the term "Gnosticism" to a wide range of phenomena. It is unlikely that the groups to which he referred considered themselves united under this designation. Instead, each sect went by the name of its founder. Tradition identifies Simon Magus, the magician referred to in the *New Testament*, as the originator of all Gnosticism.² Little is actually known about this Simon, however, or about his supposed disciple, Menander. More certain are the schools which arose around Satorilus of Antioch, Basilides and Carpocrates of Alexandria, and Valentinus, also an Alexandrian but who spent much of his time in Rome.

Although each school had distinguishing mythologies, religious practices, moral and ethical systems, and so forth, certain general characteristics were shared by all. It was against these that the church "orthodoxy" began to assert its authority.

In looking for the cause of evil and suffering Gnostics placed blame on the world of matter which served as stimulus to human wickedness and passion. Above the world of matter existed the one True and All-Perfect God, who was beyond all conceptualization. Such a God could be referred to only inadequately, using such terms as infinite, formless, disinterested, etc. This God resided solely within the realm of Spirit

2. Acts of the Apostles, 8:9-24. Scriptural quotations are taken from *Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version* (1952), The World Publishing Company, New York, 1962.

and was totally detached from the world. Since this God could never be the cause of evil or misery, He could not be the Creator revealed in the *Old Testament*. Gnostics could find support for this distinction simply by noting scriptural contrasts. The Creator was just, demanding "an eye for an eye"; while the God of the Gospels implored man to "love thy neighbor" and to "turn the other cheek." The Creator deity was vengeful, selfish and to be feared for his wrath. In contrast to this, the Gospels present a loving, merciful and forgiving God who, in His goodness, seeks to bring man closer to himself. Postulating a distinction between matter and spirit, they held both that the one True God was not the Creator but also that the Creator was not a god at all.

Complex mythologies served to explain the distance intervening between God and the world. In each, God was assigned the position of First Cause. In the beginning all existence was in the form of rays emanating from God. These emanations, called Aeons, were divinely perfect in origin; and there prevailed a peaceful tranquillity over all. In the course of time, however, there occurred a catastrophe of some kind which destroyed this divine existence. From the original Aeons issued successive generations of beings, each less divine than the generation before it. The last of these generations was the Demiurge, hence the least godlike, to which the Creator belonged. All that manifested as matter was said to be the work of these lesser, evil beings. However, in the course of creation, divine sparks made their way through the Demiurge and became imprisoned in the flesh of man.

Scholars question what importance this mythology had for the Gnostics. Certainly, however, it served as an explanation supporting their view of salvation. Gnostics, like Christians in general, embraced a doctrine

of redemption which gave Christ central importance as Redeemer.

Salvation by gnosis is based on knowledge, but not knowledge gained through rational or factual or intellectual learning. For a Gnostic, knowledge derived from an inner Light, a divine wisdom present at the core of his very being. The task facing each person was an inner search for spiritual insight through which one would come to have a true understanding of the universe and an awareness of his divine nature. Through these realizations man was freed from his bondage to the visible, material world and made able to experience direct communion with God. As the nature of God was boundless and infinite, so must the divine in man be infinite. Therefore, the aspirant could never end his search for Truth.

The Christ was central to Gnostic salvation. He revealed the true God, which had been unknown to the world; unknown even to the least god-like Creator, on whom man had mistakenly bestowed the title of "God." With the coming of the Christ, the Darkness of ignorance had been swept away. To those able to receive the illuminating Truth revealed through Christ came freedom by gnosis and everlasting life.

Not everyone was capable of this illumination, however. Gnostics, the Valentins in particular, divided mankind into three groups. Highest were the "pneumatics," spiritual individuals who already possess the illumination of Christ's Word. Next were the "psychics," ordinary aspirants who by faith and effort come to possess this gnosis and thereby obtain salvation. Last were the "hylics," materialistic individuals so involved in worldly pursuits that they are unable to rise above the material realm. Salvation was considered impossible for this last group.

(To be continued)

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

The first thing needed to be spiritual is truthfulness. Never forsake truth, even for all life. God is truth itself and is at the command of one who is devoted to truth. Spirituality is impossible to him who does not cherish truthfulness in thought, word, and deed; without this, all attempt is in vain. So, first of all, try to be unflinchingly truthful with all heart and soul. Truth is ever victorious, in all times—past, present, and future.

Many do know theoretically much of what spirituality is; but alas! how few are there who put their knowledge into actual practice. The achievement will be his only who would follow up truth. We hear many say that it is impossible to be truthful in business. But I do not believe it. Where truth reigns there the Lord Himself abides. If the man of business carefully enshrines truth in his house, he will be looked upon as the greatest of all virtuous men and his business too is destined to thrive. Nag Mahashaya (a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) was greatly devoted to truth. Once he went to buy something in the market and the shopkeeper charged four annas for that. As he was truthful, he took the shopkeeper also at his word and did not bargain. A bystander seeing him pay four annas thought within himself, 'What sort of a man is he, he did not even care to bargain!' But when he came to know that he was Nag Mahashaya, the saint, who believed that no one would dupe others, he took the shopkeeper to task for charging four annas for what was worth only two annas. The shopkeeper took this to heart, and so the next day when Nag Mahashaya came to buy something he charged only two annas for a thing which was worth five annas, at which Nag Mahashaya with folded hands addressed the shopkeeper thus: 'Why do you behave like this with me? This is worth more than two annas. Please take from me the proper price.' The shopkeeper was deeply moved at this and fell at the feet of the saint. Therefore I say that you will never be a loser if you stick to truth. If you stick to truth, Divine grace is sure to flow to you through all channels—you will

prosper not only in worldly affairs, but in spirituality as well.

If you have truthfulness, every other virtue is sure to come in its wake—even self-control. But we have lost this truthfulness, and that is why we have come to such a pass—groaning under the crushing weight of misery and degradation. Now all our efforts must be directed first to retrieve it—not by mere empty speech, but by sincere action, pledging all our heart and soul to it. The principal element in spiritual practice is this sincerity of life—making the inner life tally with the outer, thought with speech. At present we are hypocrites, for we think one way and talk in a different strain. We are not sincere. This is delusion, this is ignorance. He who wants to be spiritual must give up talk and take to practice. God's grace descends upon such a person—he is sure to prosper here and hereafter.

* * * *

Many like to hear of Bhakti, indeed it is very pleasant to listen to it, but it demands the very life-blood, as it were, when one goes to practise it. Once a man wanted to have *Prema* (intense love) for God. Just then he saw a vendor passing by the street with a basket on his head, crying, 'Ho, here is *Prema*. Who wants it? Who would buy it?' Hearing this, some boys cried out, 'Oh, we, we will eat *Prema*;' some grown-up people also called out, 'Oh, yes, we want *Prema*, we will buy it.' At this the vendor lowered the basket from his head and said, 'Come, let me know how much *Prema* each of you will have. I sell *Prema* by weight. How much do you want, a pound, eh?' And with this he drew out a sharp knife and said, 'Look here! cut your head off with this, and I shall give you *Prema* as much as your head weighs.' If you want *Prema* you will have to give the price—your head! Verily, never has spirituality been attained by mummery—by empty words!

from *Religion and Its Practice*
'Truthfulness' by Swami Premananda

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

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OCCASIONAL NOTES

The moment we accept the Self as the centre of our being, there is a thorough transvaluation of our outlook on life. The world around us, then, instead of giving suggestions of dead matter, becomes replete with suggestions of the spirit and instead of inhabiting a dead world and moving among lifeless objects, we begin to live in a world which is realized to be as mind-born. One of the first effects of purification of soul from the thralldom of matter is seen to be in an awakening of our faculties, and objects of sense which had previously conveyed no meaning to us are seen as aflame with intelligence, pregnant with suggestions which carry the mind to a wholly different region.

* * * *

If we are to be spiritual, we have deliberately to take birth in a world of thought. The whole of thinking has to be replaced by a new order of thinking. The *Vichara* (reasoning) arising from true *Viveka* (discrimination), that the Self is thoroughly separate from the body, and unaffected by the deficiencies of the latter, has to be impressed on the consciousness by repeated thinking: “न ह वै सशरीरस्य प्रिययोरपहृति अस्ति ।”

‘For the embodied being there is no freedom from pleasure and pain.’ Do not we see how often our thinking and imaginings are based on the presupposition that we are body first and a Soul afterwards, and that which advances the interests of the body is accepted with avidity, and the interests of the Soul are ignored or subordinated to it? This has to be reversed. We have to regard ourselves as Spirit first and body

afterwards, as souls manipulating a body for the interests of the Soul; we have also to regard our fellow-beings as spirits, souls, and conform our relations and attitude to them accordingly and ignore, discard, or altogether renounce all relations which have the least taint of materiality in them.

* * * *

This attitude of mind will greatly improve our human and social relations and instead of binding us fast in chains and slavery to those whom we affect to love it will give rise to the bliss of non-attachment in all our human relations. It will also deepen our relations and love. Our feelings and emotion for those we love will not lose anything in intensity, it will increase a hundredfold, yet it will not make us selfish, or attached to our objects of love. For all relation in which the body is involved is sure to vanish after a time and always results in a reaction; but it is the spiritual relation alone that lives and grows too in course of time.

* * * *

“अशरीरं वाव सन्तं प्रियाप्रिये न स्पृशतः ।” ‘For the disembodied existence there is no tainting by pleasure and pain,’ so says the *Śruti*. So it is possible by *ātma-nigraha* (self-restraint) to gradually draw back our consciousness which is spread over the whole body and to concentrate it on the super-physical Self or Atman of man. In that is Freedom, the advent of all immortality and the end of all death. This is compassed in different ways in the different Yogas.