



Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 95

JULY 1990

No. 7

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

The Divine Message

The waking and dream states

The state of waking consists in the knowledge acquired through the perception of sound and other objects by means of the organs of perception like the ear and others accompanied by the blessings of the respective deities (presiding over the different forms of perception). Therein the individual soul who has established himself in the middle of the eyebrows, after pervading (the entire body) from head to foot, becomes the doer of all actions like husbandry, study of the sacred books. He becomes the enjoyer of their respective fruits. On reaching another world he alone enjoys the fruit. He then stands like an emperor overcome with fatigue, on account of his activities having taken the path leading to the entry into (another) body. When the sense organ has come to rest (ceased to function) the knowledge of the percepts and perceptions arising out of impressions (left by) of the waking state is the dream state. Therein, owing to the cessation of active functioning such as we have in the waking state, *Viśva** alone, after attaining the *Taijasa* (dream) state, moves through the middle of the *nāḍīs*, (nerves) manifesting through his power the variety of the world in the form of impressions, and himself enjoys as he desires.

The state of sleep

The sleeping state is that in which only thought (functions). Even as a bird tired of flying about turns towards its nest, restraining its wings, even so the individual soul tired of functioning in the worlds of waking and dream, entering on the state of ignorance, enjoys his own bliss.

As if struck unawares by a hammer or a club, manifesting itself as tremor due to fright or loss of consciousness, caused by the fusing together of the several organs of perception is the state of fainting which resembles the state of a dead man.

From the *Paingala Upaniṣad*.

* The technical name for the soul in the waking state.

About This Issue

This month's EDITORIAL is on LOVE OF GOD. A true devotee, who has forgotten the world and everything in the whirlwind of divine love, *jnāna*, *karma* and *yoga* follow him as a natural corollary.

Richard Prescott of U.S.A. (Houston), in his essay: THE SCIENTIST, THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE VEDANTIN, lucidly explains how the conflicting views and interpretations of the scientists and the philosophers fall short in grasping Reality. He extols the role of Vedanta in presenting the complete vision of Reality in the clearest, most coherent and profound way. The author has been a supporter and follower of Vedanta in the West for several decades.

THE RELEVANCE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, a very thoughtful and penetrating paper, is by Dr. Satish K. Kapoor. The modern age, which has been afflicted by many maladies, can find a healthy and happy adjustment if it only heeds the sublime teachings of Swami Vivekananda—the author states convincingly. Dr. Kapoor, who has written a number of articles on Swamiji and an excellent book on *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, at present teaches History at the Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar City, Punjab.

SISTER NIVEDITA: AN UNPRACTICAL IDEALIST?—a scholarly and indepth essay is by Prof. Mamata and Dr. Anil Baran Ray. The authors, who have explored extensively the life and writings of and about Nivedita, effectively refute criticisms and misunderstandings. Sister Nivedita and her total dedication to the regeneration of Mother

India emerge in new lustre. Prof. Mamata Ray is a lecturer in the Department of Economics and Politics at Viswa Bharati, Santiniketan, and Dr. Anil Baran Ray is Professor of Political Science at Burdwan University, West Bengal.

Swami Vedananda discusses the difficult subject of PERCEIVING INACTION IN ACTION, an important topic in the practice of spiritual life. The Swami has been associated with the Ramakrishna Mission Centre, Nagpur, Maharashtra.

GNOSTICISM AND THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH is the concluding part of the essay by Jayanti, a free-lance writer and devotee at San Diego, California, U.S.A.

In his appealing article THE SCRIPTURES AND THE SPACE AGE, N. Hariharan graphically and poignantly depicts the plight of people living in the modern age. He points out how eternal truths of the scriptures apply to mankind in general, quoting aptly from the *Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*, and in kindness of heart, leads us to re-examine the holy precepts.

ARE BRAHMAN AND SUNYATA IDENTICAL? Prof. Arvind Sharma, in this short but pithy article, explains a subtle perspective of the difference between *Brahman* of *Vedāntic* monism and the *Sūnyatā* of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. With interesting analogies he explains that the two are not the same. Prof. Sharma teaches at McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

Love of God

In the *bhakti* tradition of the *Vaiṣṇavas*, five different states of liberation are recognized. (a) *sālokya*, (b) *sārṣṭi*, (c) *sārūpya*, (d) *sāmīpya* and (e) *sāyujya*. The last is attainment of identity with God which is disdained by all devotees. They want to be eternal servants of the Lord, immersed in the ocean of His love. Rūpa Goswami's prayer in his *Bhakti Rasāmṛta Sindhu* epitomizes this remarkable attitude of a true lover. He says:

*bhava-bandha-cchide tasmai sprhayāmi
na muktaye
bhavān prabhuh aham dāsa iti yatra
vilupyate (V-54)*

*O Thou breaker of the bonds of saṁsāra,
I pray not to Thee
to deliver me into a state where my
relationship with Thee,
O Lord, as a slave unto his Master is
obliterated.*

Sri Ramakrishna also prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, do not give me Brahmajñāna, I am but Thy child. ... A million salutations to the Knowledge of Brahman! Give it to those who seek it.'¹ Vallabhācārya, founder of the Rudra school, recognizes two kinds of *mukti*. Those who follow the *jñāna-mārga* merge into complete identity with Brahman, and those who choose the path of *bhakti*, the pure souls, experience the rare taste of the Divine *Līlā* of the Lord (*bhaktānām hi bhavati līlā svādam sudurlabhaḥ*). In this *Vaiṣṇavas* always maintain that liberation does not mean disappearance of one's individuality in God, but release

from egoity. Śrī Rāmānuja, in his *Śaraṇāgati Gadya*, prays for a complete vision of the Universal Lord which leads in turn to establishing a permanent relation of the devotee lovingly serving God in all states. Both God and the individual soul feel extremely pleased and blissful in this relationship. Christianity also does not agree that individual souls become dissolved in God in the state of salvation. It also believes in forever dwelling with the Lord in heaven.

Bhakti, or emotional fervour directed to God, is the most efficacious means for the soul to attain perfection. All other means set forth by Vedānta have secondary or complementary usefulness. *Bhakti* is acclaimed in the earliest Vedas and in the later Purāṇas as the intense and sublime attachment of the devotee to God, and as the sure means to liberation. Mystics in all ages, drunk deep with love of God, have shown the way of salvation in their divine songs. Every word of those songs is saturated with plenitude of feeling and stirring emotion. Defining this love Śrī Rāmānuja in his commentary on the *Gītā* says: 'Devotion is an unceasing and loving meditation upon the Lord who is the home of all auspicious qualities. A devotee considers God dearest to him, constantly remembers Him alone, and engages himself in activities that please Him. He dedicates himself to the eternal service of his Beloved, discarding the idea of 'me' and 'mine'. The cardinal mission of Sri Chaitanya was to re-establish *Prema-bhakti* once again in the hearts of people. Bengal *Vaiṣṇavas* believe that Sri Chaitanya added a fifth *puruṣārtha*—*prema* or *bhakti-rasa* to the existing four *puruṣārthas* (legitimate goals or guiding values of life), namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* describes this *prema* as the crest-jewel of all *puruṣārthas* (*puruṣārtha śiromaṇi*

¹ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) page 384.

prema-mahādhan).² Most of the Goswamis and Vaiṣṇava scholars, instead of engaging themselves in hair-splitting philosophical arguments, busied themselves in singing the glories of God and dwelling on the greatness of *Prema-bhakti*. Sri Chaitanya himself did not indulge in any polemics, though he was vastly learned in the different schools of thought of his time. Instead he lived an intense life of unceasing communion with God. Seldom did he preach publicly. Yet his blissful radiant presence filled the hearts of people with divine rapture and lifted them up to a higher plane of purity and emotion.

To a devotee, *jñāna*, *karma* and *yoga* find their consummation and fulfilment in love of God. Even one need not invest his energies in practising these disciplines if he can follow *bhakti* alone. They come as a natural corollary to a lover of God. Rūpa Goswāmi, therefore, while explaining the meaning of true *bhakti* remarks that real *bhakti* is serving Krishna whole-heartedly after freeing oneself from all desires and the effects of *jñāna*, *karma* and *rāja-yoga*. Voicing the same sentiment, Vedānta Deśikā in his *Tātparyacandrikā* says: '*Bhakti* is greater than *jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga* as it leads the *bhakta* directly to the realm of realization.' Sage Narada in his *Bhakti-sūtras* asserts: 'The supreme divine love is something more than *karma*, *jñāna* and *yoga*.'³ *Bhakti* is natural, gentle and sweet. The devotee even from the beginning feels joy in keeping company with God. The crowning statement from the *Gītā*: 'Of sciences it is the highest; of profundities, the deepest; of purifiers, the supreme is this; realizable by direct experience, yielding imperishable results, very easy to practise and it is of an

imperishable nature.'⁴ Sri Krishna explains the simplicity of pleasing the Lord: 'Whoever with devotion offers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that I accept—the devout gift of the pure-minded.'⁵ Commenting on the *Gītā* Śrī Rāmānuja 'says: 'Even at the time of *sādhanā* (*bhakti-rupeṇa-upāsanena*), the devotee feels the ecstasy of the Divine experience. It is also imperishable (*avyayam*, *akṣayam*). It never dies after leading one to the realization of God, but it remains eternally with the worshipped.' It is not the number of rituals performed with rich materials along with pomp and show that pleases the Lord. Or, it is not those who inflict injuries on others and then worship, who please Him. In the *Bhāgavata* the Lord tells Mother Devahūtī in a ringing voice: 'I am not pleased though worshipped in images with costly or cheap materials, by a man who disregards his fellow beings (*bhūtagrāmāvamāninah*).'⁶ Performing his duties a man should worship Me, the Supreme Ruler, through images, only so long as he does not realize Me as present in his heart (*svahr̥dī*) as well as in the hearts of other living beings (*sarvabhūteṣvavasthitam*).'⁷

What is of paramount importance in *Bhakti-yoga* is purity of heart and mind. Sri Chaitanya therefore laid more stress on purity than on lifeless rituals or ostentatious dry knowledge. It was impossible for anyone to go before him ostentatiously with a show of devotion or parading scholarship. His blazing purity burnt all that was worldly and trivial and awakened the love of God—love of Krishna in every heart. It is only possible for such great personalities to rouse all-consuming *bhakti* even in the hearts of rank atheists by a mere touch or glance. A number of incidents in his life show that his mere embrace brought an astonishing meta-

2. Krishnadas Kaviraj, *Chaitanya Charitamṛta* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1989) 2.20.125.

3. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* सा तु कर्मज्ञानयोगेभ्यो-
ऽप्यधिकतरा । (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, Myla-
pore, 1943) Sūtra 25.

4. *Bhagavad-gītā*, Ch. IX-2.

5. *Ibid.*, IX-26.

6. *Srīmad Bhāgavata*, Book III, Ch. XXIX-24.

7. *Ibid.*, XXIX-25.

morphosis in many. By touching many devotees, Sri Ramakrishna removed their spiritual obstacles. Blessed are those persons who see such messengers of God and sit at their feet. But how to rouse devotion to God in the absence of such apostles of divine love? The mind is so deeply enmeshed in the hypnotic trap of this world that it is a formidable task to extricate it and direct its focus towards God. Before that real hankering for God, *rāgānuga-bhakti* or the spontaneous outpouring of love, arises and one has to climb the steps of *vaidhī-bhakti* following the *vidhī* (injunctions) of the scriptures. Rūpa Goswāmi has enumerated sixty-four means to attain Vaidhī-bhakti. But according to *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, the five important ways of cultivation of Vaidhī-bhakti are: (1) *Sādhu-saṅga*—association with saintly persons, (2) *Nāma-kīrtana*—chanting of the name of God, (3) *Bhāgavata-śravaṇa*—listening to the reading of the *Bhāgavata*, (4) *Mathurāyavāsa*—dwelling at Mathura or other such holy places, (5) *Śrīmurtiśraddhāyesevan*—serving the image of the Lord with reverence.⁸

Jīva Goswāmi, however, formulates eleven stages of *vaidhībhakti*, namely: (1) *Śaraṇa-patti*—taking sole refuge in Krishna. Seeking the protection of Krishna may be to get rid of mental weaknesses. It also means cultivating firm faith in the protective power of the Lord, and believing that one acts in this world according to His will. (2) *Guru-sevā*—loving service of the spiritual preceptor. Guru and Deity are One. The preceptor is none other than God Himself. It is only by pleasing the Guru that the spiritual power is transmitted, and the portals to the Divine are opened. Everybody cannot become a teacher, therefore, the teacher should be selected with due care. Swami Vivekananda says:

The teachers whose wisdom and truth shine like the light of the sun are the very greatest the

8. *Caitanya Charitamrita*, 2.22, 125-150.

world has known, and they are worshipped as God by the major portion of mankind. But we may get help from comparatively lesser ones also; only we ourselves do not possess intuition enough to judge properly of the man from whom we receive teaching and guidance; so there ought to be certain tests, certain conditions, for the teacher to satisfy, as there are also for the taught.

Swamiji further explains that a student should possess purity, a real thirst for knowledge and a spirit of perseverance, without which he cannot make much headway in spiritual life. With regard to the teacher he says, he should know the true spirit of the scriptures:

...The whole world reads Bibles, Vedas, and Korans; but they are all only words, syntax, etymology, philology, the dry bones of religion. The teacher who deals too much in words loses the spirit. ...You will find no one of the great teachers of the world ever went to these various explanations of the text; there is with them no attempt at text-torturing, ...yet they nobly taught while others who have nothing to teach have taken up a word sometimes and written a three-volume book on its origin.⁹

The second and third conditions that a true teacher has to fulfil, Swamiji states, are sinlessness and absence of ulterior selfish motive for money, name and fame. The service of such a teacher with faith, humility and veneration quickens the impulse for spiritual life. It is also advised to serve *mahā-bhāgavatas*—that is, learned and saintly Vaiṣṇavas, and persons possessing these noble qualities. Excavations of ponds, digging of wells and reservoirs, and construction of pilgrim rest-houses and temples and other such utility services for the public are also praised. (3) *Śravaṇa*—is listening to the account of the Lord's names, forms, qualities and His divine sports. It is advised that wherever there are recitals of the *Bhāgavata* or other holy scriptures, one

9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. III, pp. 48-49.

should attend and listen to them with reverence. It serves the dual purpose of purifying the mind and increasing one's love for God. As love for Krishna deepens it leads to dispassion. Therefore it is said in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*: '...even to hear of it is not available to many (*śravaṇāyāpi bahubhir yo na labhyaḥ*) (I. 2.7.). Steeped in worldly matters people neither have time nor interest in hearing about spirituality. They are buried neck-deep in their petty problems, worries and anxieties of the world. Therefore this listening to the reading and discussion of scriptures is given much importance. It shows to one that there are higher ideals, higher planes of living. (4) *Kīrtana*—is chanting and singing aloud the names, forms, and *līlā-s* of the Lord set to melody. Sri Chaitanya returned from Gayā a totally transformed person and engaged himself and others in vigorous *nāma-saṅkīrtana-s*. Like a spreading forest fire it enveloped villages and towns. Even during his last days on the earth, he sang and danced as if possessed by a divine whirlwind and sent the ineffable thrill into the crowds. There are many incidents recorded also in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who when overwhelmed by divine intoxication, sang, danced and made the devotees delirious with love of God. In the *Gospel* there is this moving description of the scene that took place during the festival at Panihati:

Thousands of devotees were gathered together for the festival. Wherever one looked there was a forest of heads. The crowd seemed to become infected by the Master's divine fervour and swayed to and fro, chanting the name of God, until the very air seemed to reverberate with it. Drums, cymbals, and other instruments produced melodious sounds. The atmosphere became intense with spiritual fervour. The devotees felt that Gourāṅga himself was being manifested in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. Flowers were showered from all sides on his feet and head. The shouting of the name of Hari was heard even at a distance, like the rumbling of the ocean. .. In the state of partial consciousness

he danced, sometimes gently and sometimes with the vigour of a lion. ...Hundreds of people around him shouted the name of God, and thousands outside caught the strain and raised the cry with full-throated voices.¹⁰

Śrī Rāmānuja in his commentary on the *Gītā* (Ch. XI) extols the *nāma-saṅkīrtana* with the words: 'A *bhakta's* love for God finds expression in various forms such as *kīrtana* and others. He feels elevated by reciting the name of Vāsudeva (*satatam matkīrtana yatan namaskārādīkam prītyā kurvāno*'). (5) *Smarāṇa*—means constant remembrance of God or mental enquiry into His Divine Nature (*manasānusandhānam*). Forgetting everything of the world, keeping the mind on His beatific form and name is *smarāṇa*. Nārada in the *Bhakti-sūtras* describes it as: 'Feeling extreme anguish if He were to be forgotten (*tadvismaraṇe param vyākulateti*).¹¹ (6) *Pada-sevā*—means worshipping the image of the Lord and seeing and touching it, and also includes pilgrimage to important holy places of Vaiṣṇavas like Puri, Gayā, Vrindāvan and Mathurā where Śrī Krishna's *līlā* in the human body took place. Swamiji, buttressing the practice of image-worship, remarks that every religion tells about the omnipresence of God which is incomprehensible to most.

...How few of you can have any idea what omnipresence means! If you struggle hard, you will get something like the idea of the ocean, or of the sky or of a vast stretch of green earth, or of a desert. All these are material images. It does not make much difference whether these images are inside or outside the mind. We are all born idolaters, and idolatry is good, because it is in the nature of man.¹²

Addressing the open-air meeting at Dacca, Swamiji sums up his defence of image-worship. He said: 'Ay, where would I have

10. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 253-54.

11. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, sūtra-19.

12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 40.

been if I had not been blessed with the dust of the holy feet of that orthodox, image-worshipping Brahmin!'¹³ Sri Ramakrishna, correcting the modern derogatory attitude of educated people towards using images, said: '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.'¹⁴

(7) *Arcaṇā*—worshipping the images of God according to prescribed rites, as taught by spiritual teachers, or as procedures laid down in the *Āgamas* (scriptures). Initiation by a guru is necessary to perform the worship. It is like baptism in Christianity. In the Vaiṣṇava tradition spiritual initiation by a qualified guru is necessary. Jīva Goswāmi says this *arcaṇā* is an aid to those people who are unable to control their restless minds to think of God even for a short duration. While doing *Bhagavata-arcaṇā*, with elaborate procedure their minds think of God and His purity, thus impure thoughts are kept at bay. As a result the mind achieves steady undivided attention. (8) *Vandanā*—is an act of homage. Wherever one sees the image of God or saintly persons, one must prostrate before them. This subdues the bloated ego and produces humility. Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna greeted people always with great respect. One should in like manner, without considering status and superiority, show due deference to all people because God Himself resides in the hearts of all beings. (9) *Dāsya*—means loving service of the Deity thinking that one is actually the Lord's servant. Humility is very prominent in this attitude (*bhāva*), enabling one to avoid being trapped in the bondage of *māyā*. Coupled with the devotee's intense desire to serve the Lord, this humility and devotion lead him to the perfect state of *bhakti*. All devotees consider themselves as God's servants or instruments. (10)

13. *Ibid.*, III, p. 460.

14. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 80.

Sakhyā—a sense of friendship (*bandhubhāva*) is reached between the devotee and his Chosen Deity and the intimate relationship between them deepens and ripens. In this state a devotee never regards the Lord with awe or fear-tinged obsequiousness, but loves and reveres Him as his dearest friend. Swamiji tells:

...Just as a man opens his heart to his friend and knows that the friend will never chide him for his faults but will always try to help him, just as there is the idea of equality between him and his friend, so equal love flows in and out between the worshipper and his dear God. God thus becomes our friend, the friend who is always near, to whom we may freely tell all the tales of our lives. The innermost secrets of our hearts we may place before Him with the greatest assurance of safety and support.¹⁵

(11) *Ātma-nivedana*—is complete self-surrender. When this stage is reached one feels that whatever one owns, including one's body, mind and soul—everything belongs to the Lord. A sense of separation is dissolved when one's efforts are directed towards the pleasure of the Lord (*tadārthaika-ceṣṭāmayata*). No single effort is made for one's own self (*ātmārtha-ceṣṭāsūnyatā*). These eleven steps stated above constitute what is known as *vaidhī-bhakti*. The wholehearted practice of one or more than one is capable of kindling an impulse for deepening and perfecting the purest *premā-bhakti*. Many examples are given in the ancient religious lore describing *vaidhī-bhakti*. King Parikṣit attained *Premā-bhakti* by hearing; Śukadeva by reciting; Arjuna by friendship with the Lord; Hanuman by service; Prahlāda by constant recollection, and Balī by self-surrender. Śāṇḍilya-ṛṣi says even one among these attitudes is sufficient to please the Lord.¹⁶

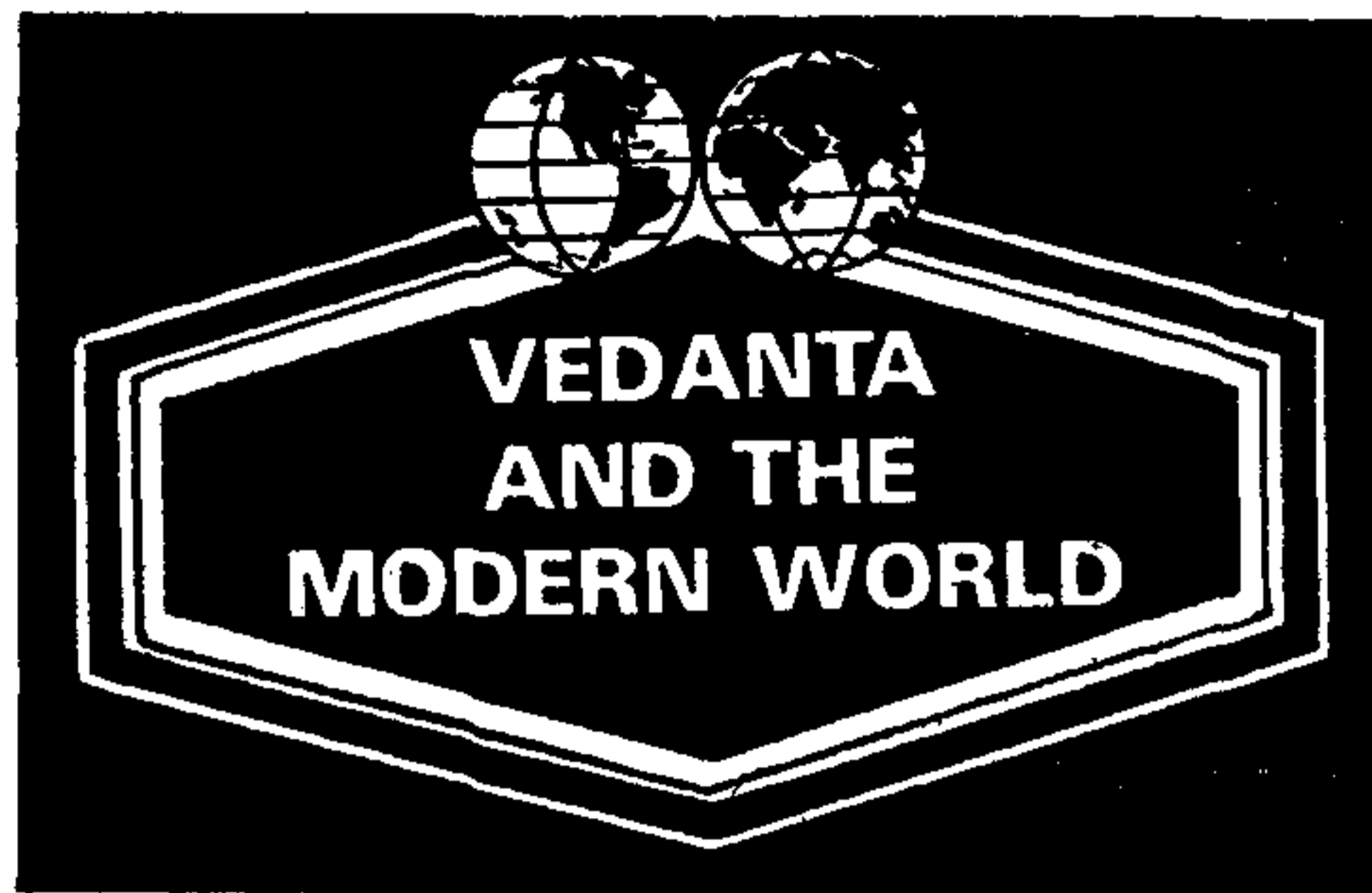
15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, p. 94.

16. *Śāṇḍilya Bhakti Sūtras* (Mysore: Prasaraṅga, Manas Gangotri, 1976) Sutra 63.

ईश्वर तुष्टेकोऽपि बली ।

The Scientist, The Philosopher and The Vedantin

R. PRESCOTT



Scientific thought is based fundamentally upon the atom. The atoms are the keystones of the super structure of the cosmos. The universe, the solar system, the atmosphere, the planet earth, motion, light and heat, fire, sun, air, water, and the element earth are all reduced to atoms, in the scientific mind. Even the organic and inorganic chemistries and electrical forces and other energies are reduced to the atom, in the scientific eye. Plant life, life born from moisture, life born from eggs or from wombs, is, in the physical sense reduced to the motion and the change of atomic structure. This is not to speak of other living phenomena such as cells and amoebas and such like. Even our own human physical body, with its bones and flesh, veins, blood, marrow, hair, nails, organs and nervous systems and centres is, in the physical sense, reduced to the atomic idea, of the scientific mind. The atom, this idea of science, is the substance of the physical cosmos to the observing experimenter, or seeker of scientific knowledge. The atom, though itself is within all the cosmos, is a fantastic creation within itself, with contents, arrangements, multiplicities and divisions, creations and lifetimes and dissolutions. They move and pass in incredible ways, in perfect ways. To the scientist, the atom's energy is the energy of creation. The atom is a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosmic universe. The atom is a mathematical idea to some and to others a chemical, electrical, magnetic, light energy and motion

factor as well. The atom itself is a force, a keystone in the superstructure of the universe. The fire and the force of the sun's light is the energy of atoms and of atomic contents, to the scientific eye. Even the fire and the light of the moon is, to the scientific eye, the atom and atomic structures. All this, that is all lights and sounds of the universe are the atom, yet this is still the physical universe. The physical universe seen by the physical eye and heard by the physical ear is the scientific domain of observation and practice.

Yet it is with his mind that he considers the physical world of the atom. The mind though is not taken into the account of his attention, for it is dispersed over the field of the atom idea and its diverse possibilities. The atom is the idea of his mind and he is fascinated and captivated by it. Never does he consider the mind, not the fleshy brain, the mind, the source of the ideas, thoughts and the visions. If he does go into this he is no longer called a scientist, he is a philosopher, a lover of thought, from the Greek word, philos. Though from modern conjecture he may be deemed a psychologist, studying the psychic world, but the psychic world of intensified emotional and mental workings, and even physical at times, is not the domain of the philosopher, although he is not ignorant of such subtle phenomena.

The scientist considers the atom as reality, yet the philosopher considers the atom as only a thought, a thought in the scientist

and the philosopher are in the level of the mind which is concerned with thoughts and feelings, but may be divided into other faculties such as memory, judgement and reason. The scientist lives and practises in the physical plane, the philosopher lives and practises in the mental or the subtle plane.

In India's domain there are many different philosophies and religious paths. One path is what is called the Cārvākas, the materialists. Their doctrine is based on the atom. The atom exists, then dissolves. All that is here and now is made of the atom, and that is their reality. They do not see any further, so the result is that they believe only in this physical world of the physical senses. The mind is taken into account, yet it is considered to be only composed of atoms as well. Then they say one should enjoy this physical world, for when it is gone, there is nothing afterwards. The true scientist should be aware of such thinking, where he would become bound, so as not to be limited and obstructed.

The philosopher and the theologian are involved in the subtle workings of the mind, which is thoughts and feelings. They may at times transcend the physical and subtle planes by their various paths, respectively. The path by which one goes to that experience of transcendence, or also called and may well be called, the spiritual, is one's yoga or path of union, in Indian philosophies. Yoga or union, is the union of the individual person to the supreme person, or the individual self with the supreme self. The "successful one" gets beyond the physical and the subtle planes into the spiritual experience. The scientist and the philosopher and the religious thinker and their worlds of thoughts and feelings are left behind, as it were, the respective dilemmas and wanderings in the physical and subtle worlds are transcended.

To return to the atom, the reality of the scientist's mind, is only a thought in the

philosopher's, but what is thought?

There are many sciences, philosophies, and religions that give their different and also mostly confusing and conflicting interpretations, in the Eastern world and Western world as well. Yet, the doctrine of the Vedanta, is the clearest, most coherent and most profound of all. The Vedanta lifts the scientist, the philosopher and the religious seeker alike. In the Vedanta, there is taught the knowledge of the four states and their descriptions. The first is the waking state. This is the physical world of physical body and senses. When impressions are left over in the mind, with the mind's detachment from the physical senses, there results and occurs the dream state. The dream state is the subtle world of thoughts and feelings in a finer form. The dream state is a world of subtle phenomena, where the waking state is the world of physical phenomena. These are the first and the second states.

The third state is called deep sleep or also profound slumber. The Upaniṣads call it a mass of consciousness entire, that enjoys its own bliss. The deep sleep state is the place of the origin and dissolution of the physical gross phenomena and the subtle mental phenomena. It is sometimes called a void or nothingness, though in truth, it is not. This is something the Buddhists say about the dissolution of the Samsārik illusion (the Wheel of birth, life and death) in Śūnya, the void. Though the Vedantins here speak of something much more indeed, and that is the Fourth State, called Turīya in Sanskrit.

Turīya is the Real and the True. It is Pure Consciousness, Pure Existence and Pure Joy, *Sat-Cit-Ananda* is the Turīya. Here, the physical gross waking state world and the subtle mental dream state world of thoughts and feelings and the profound slumber that is the deep sleep, or ignorance which is sleep, are merged one and all into the Fourth State, which is Turīya, or Pure

Consciousness. It is Pure Experience with out the Experiencer. This is the Real Self, the Reality, the otherness of duality is not, the problem of dualism no longer exists. This stands as the Witness of the three states, aloof and free, and is recognized as

Pure Consciousness, when the veil, the sleep of ignorance is lifted. The duality of world and God, Lord or anyone and anything is dissolved in the Non Dual, the Advaitic Experience of Pure Consciousness, Existence and Joy, *Sat-Cit-Ananda*.

The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda

Dr. SATISH K. KAPOOR

Are the gospel of Swami Vivekananda and the ideals which he professed still relevant? The question is as absurd and preposterous as asking, does mankind still need the light of the sun.

Luminaries like Swami Vivekananda are always needed because man tends to forget his innate divinity and incarcerates himself in the self-created cocoons of caste, regionalism or sectarianism. Having become oblivious of his roots in infinity, and quite unsure of his actual mission in the terrestrial region, he wallows, more or less, in a state of purposelessness, and does things which do not either justify the Biblical epithet tagged to him as being the crown of creation, nor help society in obliterating tensions and conflicts.

Modern man gloats over his civilized state but he forgets that he has abandoned primitive ways of barbarism only to adopt subtle and mechanical ways of oppression in the so-called welfare state. He has won battles of political emancipation but has surrendered before his own lower instincts. He has unravelled the mysteries of the universe but has remained ignorant about his real self. He can gauge atmospheric pressure, not the pressure of anger, burning passions or prejudices charring his being. He has created neural networks, and the laboratory

models of the brain, but is deeply fragmented within. He has entered the age of supersonic jets but cannot fly an inch towards the Supreme source.

Hence the first thing which Swami Vivekananda exhorted every human being to do was to realize, and if possible, to become his own self, not the imitation of someone else, to decondition his mind of the prevalent notions about man which regard him as a sinner, governed primarily by his libido and material conditions, and to grasp, in turn, that he is one with the Supreme Being in his essential nature, and that all existence is the projection of that one alone. At the Chicago Parliament of Religions he asked: 'Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions—a powerless, helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect; a little moth placed under the wheel of causation....Is there no hope? Is there no escape?'¹ But then he thundered: 'Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970) Vol. I, p. 10.

beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so....Ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.²

Ignorance about one's real self, or one's relationship with the universe tends to give birth to egocentric perceptions with such concomitant vices as jealousy and hatred, which generate in their turn a flurry of ignoble actions. Swami Vivekananda was aware that a deep-rooted faith in the divinity of human nature could rid one of one's complexes, shake off complacency, and help one gain a sense of fulfilment. The feeling of oneness with the entire existence could eliminate the man-made barriers of caste, creed, colour, community and root out the idea of waging wars. The very concept would look ridiculous, as attacking another would be tantamount to attacking oneself. It would give birth to nobler visions for the creation of a virtually conflict-free world. 'Love every man as your own self and not as your brother as in Christianity. Brotherhood should be superseded by universal selfhood. Not universal brotherhood, but universal selfhood is our motto.'³

The idea of the totality of existence has found votaries among reputed scientists and writers like Fritjof Capra, Michael Talbot, David Bohm, A. D. Reincourt and Erwin Schrodinger. But it was emphasized by Swami Vivekananda at a time when the Cartesian-Newtonian palisades between mind and matter, individual consciousness and universal consciousness, the discerning and the non-discerning, the here and the hereafter, pervaded the domain of science. 'The Absolute is [like the] ocean,' he said, 'while you and I, and suns and stars, and everything else are various waves....And (what makes the waves different? Only the form, and that form is time, space and causation,

all entirely dependent on that wave.'⁴

Sadly enough, a sense of weakness and fatigue is slowly engulfing mankind. Even the psychiatrist suffers from occasional bouts of depression, and the marriage counsellor sometimes experiences a family crisis in his own home. Despite the spurt in man's resources and objects of entertainment an aura of sadness surrounds his being and he feels a void in all that he does at the sensory level. Audio-video instruments, tranquilizers and sedatives, pubs and nightclubs' sexy shows, cassinos and discotheques have not in any way diminished his agony, though these have helped him escape momentarily from reality. Although Swami Vivekananda was not opposed to recreation and relaxants, obviously of the moral type, including morning and evening walks, light conversation with friends or family members, a trip to some hill station or holy place, or a solitary trek in the woods to cope with the moods of depression or despair, he was against a luxurious approach to life. Enjoyment for its own sake was like 'the million-headed monster that we must tread under foot.'⁵ All the pleasures of the senses, or even of the mind were evanescent, but within ourselves lay 'the one true unrelated pleasure, dependent upon nothing.'⁶ Attaining the state of a *sthitaprajña* ought to be the goal of man because both happiness and misery act as demulcents and make us forget our true nature. In the Swami's view both were chains—one made of iron, the other made of gold. Behind them is the Atman which knows neither happiness nor misery.⁷ 'Conquer yourself, and the whole universe is yours.'⁸

It is a harsh reality that the prevailing turbulence in society echoes the turbulence

2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

3. *Complete Works*, Vol. VI, p. 122.

4. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 136.

5. *Complete Works*, Vol. VII, p. 15.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

within man himself. This is the result of negative thinking, misconstrued perspectives and ill-conceived goals. Swami Vivekananda tried to help us resolve this predicament by exhorting mankind to open up the treasure chests of their own being, create a balance between *bhāva* (feeling) and *vicāra* (thought) and keep loftier ideas and aims rather than pursuing trivial objects. He bluntly argued that it was useless vanity to gloat over the achievements of prophets of the past if one could not acquire similar powers. 'Christ and Buddhas are simply occasions upon which to objectify our own inner powers.... We are the living books and books are but the words we have spoken. Everything is the living God, the living Christ; see it as such. Read man, he is the living poem. We are the light that illumines all the Bibles and Christs and Buddhas that ever were.'⁹

Many problems of human relationship have their roots in *moha* (delusion) or *āsakti* (attachment). While shouldering personal or social responsibilities, one hopes for the bounty of reciprocity in the near future. But expectations are often belied, and one is left in a state of despondency. Said the Swami: "All relatives and friends are not 'old dry wells'; we fall into them and get dreams of duty and bondage, and there is no end."¹⁰ But this does not mean that man should remain cut off from one's kith and kin, and lead his life in isolation. Rather, he should perform his duty in a most conscientious manner. 'Ask nothing; want nothing in return. Give what you have to give...and there it ends,' he said.¹¹ The gospel of selfless action advocated by Swami Vivekananda remains to this day an abiding ideal for many who seek sustenance in him and his philosophy. His words: 'Feel yourself in other bodies'¹² provide a new dimen-

sion to the concept of service. One must not serve others with some ulterior motive in mind, viz. hoping for reward in this or the next world, or for gaining converts to one's religion, but with a crystal clear heart which shares its throb with the entire existence. ...'Doing good to others out of compassion is good, but the *seva* (service) of all beings in the spirit of the Lord is better.'¹³ True service was a form of prayer, and it led one towards the realization of the Supreme. To quote him: 'Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking the least good of others gradually instils into the heart the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I wish you all to die working for others.'¹⁴

Swami Vivekananda's humanistic vision saw the creation of a new man who will become aware of his dormant energies and use them for the welfare of mankind, who will see himself in all, and thus achieve harmony with himself and the world, who will be renunciatory in outlook and liberated in spirit, and who will develop all the dimensions of his personality in accordance with the laws of his inner nature. To achieve that he suggested a new kind of education which did not lay stress merely on 'storing information' or 'getting high jobs', but which would stress controlling the vagaries of the mind, building up character and acquiring qualities of purity, chastity and self-control.¹⁵

While through the ages religious teachers have worried only about the spirit of man, ignoring the body, Swami Vivekananda's emphasis on the physical along with the

13. *Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 325.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

15. For this aspect see *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*, R. C. Majumdar, editor, (Calcutta: Swami Vivekananda: Centenary Committee, 1963) pp. 462-94.

See also V. Sukumaran Nair, *Swami Vivekananda: The Educator* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987).

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 89.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

11. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 5.

12. *Complete Works*, Vol. VII, p. 91.

mental, the moral and the psychic, tantamounts to a new doctrine for total living. To a young man he said, 'You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the *Gītā*...You will understand the *Gītā* with your biceps, your muscles a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the *Upaniṣads* better and the glory of the *Ātman* when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men.'¹⁶ To Swami Vivekananda strength was the keynote of life, and weakness the drum-taps of death.¹⁷ He wanted men with 'muscles of iron, and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made'¹⁸. '...The weak have no place here in this life, or in any other life,' he said.¹⁹ 'Strength, manhood, *Kṣātra-Vīrya* plus *Brahma-Teja*'—these were the planks on which he built up his philosophy of man-making.²⁰ To his ardent disciple Alasinga Perumal he wrote from America: 'Have faith that you are all, my brave lads, born to do great things! Let not the barks of puppies frighten you—no, not even the thunderbolts of heavens—but stand up and work!'²¹

Swami Vivekananda was aware that the utmost fulfilment of man in the spatio-temporal world could be achieved by a fusion of science and religion, which were not, he viewed, in themselves incompatible. Science dealt with the circumference, the outward, religion with the centre, or core of existence. The former deals with what can be measured, gauged, weighed and observed with the physical senses, or with instruments

created for the purpose; the latter is an attempt to measure the immeasurable, to reach the transcendental reality behind. Science is necessary for material progress, for eliminating poverty and disease, and for satiating the propensities of the questioning mind. Religion too is needed for savouring the elixir of virtue, for attaining the supernal bliss beyond the reach of sense experience, the mysterious urge of the human soul. Science can unleash energy and forces of vast magnitude but is unable to develop humanist perspective without the help of ethical vision of religion. Likewise, religion alone cannot provide for the needs of the body or of the inquisitive adventurous mind. Hence Swami Vivekananda envisioned religion imbued with the scientific spirit, and science humanized by the moral sensitivity of religion, to bring about the optimum condition for human welfare and progress. East and West which tend to confine their spirit of inquiry in one or the other of these realms must meet, must come together and collaborate in the interest of humanity.²²

In an age when denominational quarrels and communal clashes are again on the increase, Swami Vivekananda's views on religion gain added importance. 'The whole sky is the censer of God, and the sun and moon are the lamps. What temple is needed?' he said.²³ Religion does not consist in books, beliefs, dogmas or rituals, though these have their uses, but in self-realization. Like so many flowers which express beauty in nature, in diverse shapes and forms, each religion is an expression of the divine glory and ought to kindle heavenly virtues in man. Religions lead men through different paths

16. *Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 242.

17. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 3.

18. *Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 117.

19. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 3.

20. *Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 117.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

22. For this aspect, see *Complete Works*, Vol. VI, pp. 81-82; Vol. VII, pp. 103, 403; Vol. III, pp. 423-24, 432-33; Vol. II, pp. 432-33.

See also Satish K. Kapoor, *Cultural Contact and Fusion: Swami Vivekananda in the West* (Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1987) pp. 362-63.

23. *Complete Works*, Vol. VII, p. 13.

towards the same goal. 'The little streams that ripple down a thousand mountain sides are destined at last to come to the ocean. So with the different religions. They are destined at last to bring us to the bosom of God.'²⁴

The same reality when viewed from different perspectives and angles appears differently, although it remains the same. Each religion presents one perspective and suits the inner urges of men of particular mind. Man does not move from error to truth, but from lower truth to higher truth. His conception of God in each stage reflects his own state of mind, and is wholly true and precious as far as he is concerned. As one advances in spiritual progress, however... 'The God of heaven becomes the God in nature, and the God in nature becomes the God who is nature, and the God who is nature becomes the God within this temple of the body, and the God dwelling in the temple of the body at last becomes the temple itself, becomes the soul and man—and there it reaches the last words it can teach.'²⁵

Religious chauvinism betrays mental sickness and has led to inhuman and barbarous acts evidenced by such historical events as Wars of the Cross, the extermination of Waldenses, Lollards and Albigenses, the Hussite Wars, and the ten persecutions in ecclesiastical history. Ironically, people loved God but hated His creatures when they upheld principles and followed beliefs different from their own. The plurality of ideas about God and religions is inevitable, if not necessary, yet as Swami Vivekananda told the Chicago Parliament that anyone who dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others is only hoping against hope.²⁶ His prophetic

words in this context were listened to with rapt attention:

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.²⁷

Freedom in its social, economic and political aspects is regarded today as crucial for man's overall development. But Swami Vivekananda provided the concept a deeper meaning by describing it as the innate nature of all beings. 'What is this universe? From what does it arise? Into what does it go?' he asked before giving the reply. 'In freedom it rises, in freedom it rests, and into freedom it melts away.'²⁸ The assertion of freedom he saw necessary for obliterating the veil of *māyā*, for discerning the principle of unity in variety in nature, for living in harmony with the universe around, and for leading a happy unrestrained life. Freedom is a quest for growth in terms of an individual's nature and capabilities, and is as much concerned with the outer world as with the inner one. Freedom is 'the first condition of growth', and everyone must realize it for himself.²⁹ Like the Buddha who preached, 'Be lamps unto yourselves', Swami Vivekananda observed, 'Self is the Saviour of self, none else.'³⁰ The idea that one could make others grow, always retaining for oneself 'the freedom of the teacher', was plainly absurd, and it had 'retarded the growth of

24. Vide *Appeal Avalanche*, January 18, 1894.

25. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 128.

26. *Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 24.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

28. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 125.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

30. *Complete Works*, Vol. VII, p. 91.

millions and millions of human beings in this world.³¹ East and West each stultified their own growth because each gave liberty in parts—the former only in spiritual matters, and the latter mainly in social matters. To ensure the total freedom of man it was essential to break whatever bondages existed in East or in West. In a lecture in London, Swami Vivekananda explained the point thus:

We, in India, allowed liberty in spiritual matters, and we have a tremendous spiritual power in religious thought even today. You grant the same liberty in social matters, and so have a splendid social organisation. We have not given any freedom to the expansion of social matters, and ours is a cramped society. You have never given any freedom in religious matters but with fire and sword have enforced your beliefs, and the result is that religion is a stunted, degenerated growth in the European mind. In India, we have to take off the shackles from society; in Europe, the chains must be taken from the feet of spiritual progress.³²

Although in present times the situation is changing for the better, Swami Vivekananda's diagnosis of the malady afflicting mankind still holds good. The spirit with which he expressed his ideas appeared to be far more ennobling than that of some of the western proponents of freedom, like Samuel Adams, Heinrich Heine and Archibald MacLeish. 'Freedom is the watchword. Be free! A free body, a free mind, and a free soul! That is what I have felt all my life. I would rather be doing evil freely than

be doing good under bondage.'³³ Not many had pleaded before Swami Vivekananda that the service of mankind was the true service of God, or that the principle of equality, deriving from the Vedic idea of innate potentiality in each person was a prerequisite to the establishment of an egalitarian order. But none had expressed his desire to be born again and again to suffer untold privations for the *daridra-nārāyana*, or the poverty-stricken masses... 'swarming the body of India like so many worms on a rotten stinking carcass.'³⁴ No one again had ever reprimanded Indians in such harsh terms as this, while at the same time glorifying their past so magnificently: 'Nowhere in the world have I come across such frogs-in-the-well as we are...we men of Aryan blood!! Where that heredity really expresses itself, I don't see.'³⁵ Swami Vivekananda's denunciation of the luxury-seeking, self-seeking West with its business-like attitude towards everything and flagrant sensualistic approach to life was equally vehement:³⁶ 'You are not Christians. No, as a nation you are not. Go back to Christ ...Yours is a religion preached in the name of luxury. What an irony of fate! Reverse this, if you want to live, reverse this.'³⁷

The rebukes administered are as relevant today, as Swami Vivekananda's message to mankind.

³³. *Complete Works*, Vol. III, pp. 515-16.

³⁴. *Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 442.

³⁵. *Complete Works*, Vol. VI, p. 256.

³⁶. Vide *Northampton Daily Herald*, April 16, 1894; *Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 45; Vol. VII, p. 482.

³⁷. Vide *Detroit Free Press*, February 22, 1894.

³¹. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 115.

³². *Ibid.*, p. 115.

Sister Nivedita : An Unpractical Idealist ?

MAMATA AND DR. ANIL BARAN RAY

Sister Nivedita was, no doubt, an idealist. But was her idealism devoid of realism, in so far as such idealism was related to her representation of Indian life and thought in her writings? The purpose of this essay is to take stock of some of the more prevalent criticisms against Sister Nivedita and to evaluate these criticisms from an appropriate perspective.

I

Let us take first the criticism of the Christian missionaries. For reasons not difficult to guess, Nivedita was an anathema to them. It is not unusual, therefore, to see *The Church Times* observing that 'in *The Web of Indian Life* the authoress lets herself go, so to say, with entire abandon, to give us a *couleur de rose* picture of Indian life and thought.'¹

Nivedita's own purpose in writing the book, as she mentioned in a letter to Miss Macleod, was four-fold: (a) to end the Zenana Missionaries, (b) to clear up misconceptions about India, (c) to teach India to think truly about herself, (d) to help the earnest souls put themselves in the current of Swamiji's writings and teachings.² Writing against the background of the vast accumulation of calumny against India, she was reacting deliberately to the denigration of the Hindus by the Christian missionaries and even by the Derozians and the Brahmos. Reacting to the epithets of a disparaging nature from the West, she chose not to say anything against such evil customs as *sati*, child-marriage and perpetual widowhood. In seeking to eulogize the Hindu women she

did not show particular awareness of the fact that they were at times the poor victims of social tyranny flowing out of practices such as *sati*.³ Nor had she anything to say on the plight of Hindu widows, especially the child ones. Hard realism of Rammohun and Vidyasagar has been better appreciated by history than the barren idealism of Sister Nivedita in respect of Indian women, observes even a sympathetic critic like Girijasankar Roychoudhury.⁴

It should be noted that if Nivedita had glossed over the inadequacies of Hindu society in these and other respects, that was because of her feeling that it was for the Hindus themselves to correct them where they needed correction.⁵ Her work in India was based on the principle of 'no uprooting of Indian people from their familiar surroundings'. That was a basic premise with her. She ran her school at Baghbazar on the same premise: It was like going from 'one home to another'. No change can

3. 'Unselfish', 'unobtrusive' and 'ungrudging'—are the three adjectives Nivedita uses to characterize the Indian women. See the blurb to the Vol. II of *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*. 'She was enchanted by the Hindu woman's self-abnegation and the magnificence of the widow's resignation to her fate and dedicated way of living,' observes Basudha Chakravarty in *Sister Nivedita* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1975) p. 78.

4. Girijasankar Roychoudhury, *Bhagini Nivedita O Banglāya Biplabbād*, Bengali, (Calcutta: Jijnasa, 1969) p. 56.

5. To quote Nivedita, 'Only those can do vital service to the Indian woman who, in a spirit of entire respect for her existing conventions and her past, recognise that they are but offering new modes of expression to qualities already developed and expressed in other ways under the old training. Therefore, the fundamental task of grasping and conveying the inspiration of the West must be performed by Easterns for Easterns, and not by foreigners. (emphasis added). *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. II, pp. 81-82.

1. *The Church Times*, August 19, 1904, quoted in *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1972) Vol. II, p. xi.

2. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Sankari Prasad Basu, Editor (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982) Vol. II, p. 652, Letter dated 30/6/04.

be 'imposed from without—it must develop from within', she used to say.⁶

The principle apart, Nivedita must have felt that despite her adoption of Hinduism, she was, after all, an Irish Christian-turned-Hindu and that her adverse criticisms, far from serving the purpose for which they were intended, might be self-defeating. She knew too well the lot of Christian missionaries. Some of them were not as ill-meaning as the rest. Yet, in general, they were not taken kindly by the Hindus. Sympathetic appreciation rather than destructive criticism was, therefore, the approach she used with regard to the Hindu social customs and rituals. Moreover, what a Rammohun or a Vidyasagar could do, she, after all a foreigner, could not possibly do because it was probable that in that case she would have encountered a much greater amount of hostility of the Hindus, being accused of undue interference in their internal affairs.

It should not be forgotten that the basic goal of Nivedita's work in India, which she was never tired of pointing out in her writings and speeches, was to inspire a great feeling of nationality among Indians and as such she wanted to look only at the positive aspects of the life in India, to look at all that was noble in the Indian life, Indian home, Indian institutions and to portray the truth about the India in its 'vitality' and not merely in its 'dimensions'.⁷ Sister Nivedita wanted to *inspire*—a task which she thought she could do better by *sympathizing* than by *criticizing*. But the fact that she did not criticize did not mean that she wanted to maintain the old customs unchanged. As S. K. Ratcliffe, the editor of *The Statesman* during Nivedita's time, observed: 'It appeared to some that Sister

Nivedita, alike in her school and in the Zenana, was in certain respects a reactionary influence—upholding the *purdah* and child marriage and perpetual widowhood as institutions essential to the preservation of the society which she had learned to admire. But she was far indeed from seeking to maintain the old unchanged.'⁸ An even more perceptive comment comes from Rabindranath which puts Nivedita in a perspective most appropriate to understand and appreciate her:

As a race we have our special limitations and imperfections, and for a foreigner it does not require a high degree of keen-sightedness to detect them. We know for certain that these defects did not escape Nivedita's observation, but she did not stop there to generalize, as most foreigners do. And because she had a comprehensive mind and extra-ordinary insight of love she could see *the creative ideals at work behind our social forms* (emphasis added) and discover our soul that has living connexion with its past and is marching towards its fulfilment.⁹

When Nivedita is called 'anti-change' and insensitive to the causes of Indian women, it is forgotten that she had written with undiluted optimism the following:

It is certain that woman, with her determinately synthetic interests, *will refuse long to be balked of her right to consider things as a whole* (emphasis added). The interest of the mother is ever with the future. Woman will readily understand that a single generation of accomplished defeat is sufficient to divorce a whole race from its patrimony; and she will determine, and effectively determine, that the lot of her own sons shall be victory, and not surrender.

And if once the Oriental woman seize the helm of the ship in this fashion, solving the problems of her whole country, whom is it suggested that she will afterwards petition for the redress of her own grievances?¹⁰

6. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

7. See 'Introduction by Rabindranath Tagore' to the 1918 edition of *The Web of Indian Life* in *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. II, p. 246.

8. *Bhagini Nivedita O Bānglāya Biplabbād*, p. 199.

9. 'Introduction by Rabindranath', p. 245.

10. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. II, p. 85.

II

Nivedita has been criticized also for putting forward the plea in *Aggressive Hinduism* towards the activization of Hindu religion. Nivedita's thesis was that for far too long, Hinduism had only defended itself; the time had now come for it to attack as well, i.e. it must now direct its efforts towards converting others. 'Our work is not now,' writes Nivedita, 'to protect ourselves but to convert others. Point by point, we are determined, not merely to keep what we had, but to win what we never had before.'¹¹ Critics note that Nivedita might have gone a little too far in so observing.¹² Hinduism, it is pointed out, was always an ethnic religion which was distinctive in never seeking to convert others. Such criticisms fail to grasp the fact that Nivedita had a far greater significance in mind than mere literal conversion. She wanted to change the meek submissive and docile 'face' of India so that she could stand up to her foreign aggressor and come into her own by being free from the foreign domination. That Nivedita did not mean to give a narrow sectional meaning to her words and that her real purpose was to change the attitude of the Indians in the larger perspective of their internal freedom (i.e. freedom from their own inhibiting attitude of mind) and external freedom (i.e. freedom from the foreign domination of India) could be seen from the following observation of her: 'Aggression is to be the dominant characteristic of the India that is today in school and classroom,—aggression, and the thought and ideals of aggression. Instead of passivity, activity; for the standard of weakness, the standard of strength; in place of a steadily yielding defence, the ringing cheer of the invading host. Merely

¹¹. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. III, p. 509.

¹². *Bhagini Niveditā O Bānglāya Biplabbād*, p. 46.

to change the attitude of the mind in this way is already to accomplish a revolution.'¹³

Nivedita's real purpose was to remake individual and national character. She makes this purpose even more explicit when she writes:

The Indian people as a whole for the last two generations have been as men walking in a dream, without manhood, without power to react freely against conditions, without even common-sense.

But today, in the deliberate adoption of an aggressive policy, we have put all this behind us. Realising that life is struggle, we are now determined that our wrestling with the powers that are against us, shall enable us to contribute to the world's sum of culture, not merely to make adaptations from it. Our part henceforth is active, and not passive. The Indianising of India, the organising of our national strength, the laying out of our line of march, all this is to be done by us, not by others on our behalf. We accept no more programmes. Henceforth we become the makers of programmes. We obey no more policies. Henceforth do we create policies.¹⁴

III

Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar, an admirer of Nivedita, was nonetheless a critic of her approach to India. According to Sarkar the picture of India that Nivedita presented was basically an idealist India. The picture that he traced and established in his *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* was that of a *materialist* India wedded to politics, power and violence. Naturally, to Sarkar the Niveditian image of India was idealistic and even sentimental, having no relation to hard data and facts of life.¹⁵

How far this criticism of Sarkar is justified is a point to be pondered carefully. It

¹³. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. III, pp. 506-07.

¹⁴. *Ibid.*, pp. 516-17.

¹⁵. Haridas Mukhopadhyay, *Benoy Sarkārer Baithake*, Part I, Bengali (Calcutta: Chakraborty, Chatterjee and Co. Ltd., 1944) pp. 288-92.

should be noted that Nivedita believed in the *reality of ideals* and that she wanted the fullest extension of the family ideal of Indians to the larger civic and national ideals. She strove relentlessly towards bringing the social consciousness of Indians in such direction. As for political consciousness, Nivedita used her tongue and her pen ceaselessly towards creating a sense of pride among Indians and making them believe in their own power, thereby seeking to rid them of the rule of foreigners. She did not want to exclude materialism. She only wanted a synthesis of idealism and materialism so that the Indians, charged with idealism, focus their strength and energy and give their all in the realistic cause of the freedom of their country. That is the reason she wanted the Indians to combine the use of the *Gītā* and the sword. Thus, in one of the exhortations to the Indians she asked, '...when will the real fighter in the good cause rise up again, the *Gītā* in one hand and a sword in the other?'¹⁶

Nivedita was, no doubt, primarily an idealist, but to say that she was totally devoid of any sense of realism is to stretch the facts a little too far. It should be remembered that as a practical idealist wanting to enthuse the Indians with that sense of nationality which will enable them to assert their rightful place in the scheme of things, Nivedita wanted to found a new *math* (order) after the name of her Guru, Swami Vivekananda, wherein the students will receive training in political education for seven years. The first six months of each year they will devote to the study while the next six months they would be travelling to different places of pilgrimage in India, thereby receiving the first-hand knowledge of the soil and the people of their country. The students will, of course, live the life of

brahmacharya in these seven years. Thus, knowing the *Jana-deśa-dharma*—the people, the country and the religion, they would get a true education. '*Jana-deśa-dharma*' was the motto that Nivedita conceived for the students of her *math*. The plan fell through as the sannyasi authorities could not give their approval.¹⁷ The point that needs stressing, however, is that Nivedita was not an unpractical idealist, nor was she unrealistic in her ideas and conceptions. Perhaps she was a bit too romantic in her vision of the past, present and future of India.¹⁸ But that again had served a practical purpose: she was telling the Indians what a great people they were in the past and that once they took that lesson to their heart there was no reason why they should not again be able to reclaim their greatness and thus ensure for themselves an even greater future. Thus, if overflowing she was sometimes in her speeches and writings, that sort of indulgence was not far-fetched or far away from her central purpose, i.e. making India truly a great nation. Indians must be given that sort of *consciousness* and that was the motive force behind all of Sister Nivedita's writings. 'The whole task now,' Nivedita wrote, 'is to give the word *nationality* to India in all its breadth and meaning. The rest will do itself. India must be obsessed by this great idea. Hindu and Mohammedan must become one in it, with a passionate admiration of

16. Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated* (Madras: Samata Books, 1985) p. 285.

17. Though the plan was not realized in fact, it served a practical purpose. As Lizelle Reymond observes: 'This plan was not in fact realized, but it served as a basis for Satis Chandra Mukherjee in giving a more solid foundation to the somewhat nebulous and intermittent student organization called "The Dawn".' p. 284.

18. That Nivedita was too romantic—an inveterate one—was noted even by her brother Richmond. To quote Lizelle Reymond, 'a romantic sense...can be traced in all Nivedita's writings and actions, and it is impossible to form any assessment of her character without taking this into account.' p. 28.

each other. It means a new view of history and customs, and it means the assimilation of the whole Ramakrishna-Vivekananda idea in religion, the synthesis of all religious ideas. ...The one essential fact is the realisation of Indian nationality by the nation.¹⁹

Thus viewed, Nivedita, far from being unpractical, was realistic enough to write for a basic purpose which, in turn, was rooted in the Indian situation of the time. She was, so to say, neither a vague idealist, nor a barren realist. Her idealism was tempered by her realism and herein lies the strength and uniqueness of the noble character that was Sister Nivedita—'the Dedicated'.

IV

Nivedita has been criticized for her 'naive' efforts to keep *together* leaders of such divergent views as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh, and to keep thereby a heterogeneous body like the Indian National Congress *united*. Girijasankar Roychaudhury sees in such efforts of Sister Nivedita her lack of political shrewdness.²⁰ Before we rush on to such a conclusion we should keep in mind that Nivedita was working for the actualization of a goal. The Congress being a means towards the realization of that goal, it was absolutely necessary that this national organization maintain its unity and pursue with single mindedness the progression towards that goal. As she perceptively observed:

The Congress represents not a political, or a partisan movement, but the political side of a national movement—a very different thing. ...The real task of the Congress is that of an educational body, educating its own members in that new mode of thinking and feeling which constitutes a sense of nationality; educating them in the habit of prompt and united action, of political trustiness, of communal open-eyedness; educating itself, finally, in the knowledge of a mutual

19. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. II, p. 553. See also p. 791.

20. *Bhaginī Niveditā O Bānglāya Biplabbād*, p. 83.

sympathy that embraces every member of the vast household which dwells between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin, between Manipur and the Arabian Sea.²¹

To say that Nivedita was a mere idealist and not a shrewd politician at all is to fail to grasp the essence of the stuff that Sister Nivedita was made of. She had the shrewdness to realize that the 'house' of Congress, divided against itself, could not stand very firm, especially when it had on its hands a fight against a mighty empire like that of the British. She therefore urged all Congressmen to sink all their differences and stand as one man against the British. 'Those who are fighting on different parts of the self-same field,' Nivedita warned, 'are wasting time and ammunition by turning their weapons on each other.'²²

Nivedita not only preached the goal of unity but practised it herself in her own life. It was at once a measure of her statesmanship and shrewdness that she was able to maintain in her personal life the friendship with a moderate Gokhale, an extremist Bipin Pal and a revolutionary Aurobindo. These men, especially Gokhale and Aurobindo, were the anti-thesis of each other and therefore had never any love lost between them.²³ And yet when it came to Nivedita these men would pay obeisance to her in equal measure, respectfully accepting her advice and guidance in numerous affairs of public concern to them.²⁴ At the time of

21. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. IV, p. 272.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

23. Gokhale considered people like Bipin Pal and Aurobindo as lunatics outside the lunatic asylum. Aurobindo called Gokhale a 'Vibhisan'. Gokhale was particularly harsh on Pal whom he characterized as 'a very unscrupulous man'. See Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (Calcutta: PPH, 1973) pp. 31-91.

24. The role of Nivedita as a counsellor to leaders of all shades of opinion became particularly evident during the Benares session of the Congress Party in December 1905.

her first meeting with Aurobindo in Baroda in October 1902, Nivedita assured him with the following words: 'You can count on me. I am your ally.'²⁵ She kept her words to the last day of her life. Likewise, though she was never fond of the moderate politics of Gokhale, she maintained her friendship with Gokhale to the last day of her life. Gokhale had considerable influence in politics in those days and Nivedita realized that a friendly rather than an antagonistic Gokhale would be far more congenial to her goal of pushing forward the cause of India's freedom.

The cause of India's freedom was so dear to Nivedita's heart that she would never allow personal differences or differences in political *modus operandi* to interfere with this cause. As one who dreamt of a revolutionary uprising in India, Nivedita's politics did not have much in common with the politics of Gokhale. And yet if she maintained her relations with a moderate Gokhale as much as a revolutionary Aurobindo, the reason was her overwhelming concern for the freedom of India. More than anybody she realized the necessity of a united front against the British.²⁶ She did not want the warring groups within and outside the Congress to waste their energy in internecine fight as she wanted them all to direct their fighting power unitedly against the British Raj. She could not wish away the differences of Moderates, Extremists and Revolutionaries. But what is remarkable is that she herself was perfectly true to her preaching of unity among Indians.²⁷ She did not

indulge in the mutual bickering of these groups. She did not lose her composure in the heat and dust generated by differences of opinion and methods. Like a true *karmayogin* she was unruffled and steadfast in her goal of an India united enough to carry on to successful conclusion the struggle against the British Raj.

Put against this goal for India, personal promotion was nothing to Nivedita. She was offered in 1906 the editorship of the *Bāla Bhārat* published from Madras. Tirumalacharya of Madras wanted to place the paper entirely at the disposal of Nivedita so as to improve and increase its influence. 'In spite of the satisfaction such a post would have given her, Nivedita refused it. She had to remain detached, ready at a moment's notice to replace any "opposition" editor who might find himself in difficulties, and to preserve (between the lines) the tone of "constant sedition" that moulded public opinion.'²⁸ According to Girijasankar, she declined the offer also because her task of training the young revolutionaries of Bengal, especially those attached to the Yugāntar group, in the techniques of Sinn Fein revolutionaries of Ireland was yet to be complete.²⁹ Keeping her relations with Gokhale, writing for the Aurobindo-edited *Bande Mātaram* and training the young revolutionaries were the dimensions of the same work for

an unhealthy intolerance which was dividing individuals, falsifying the relations, and sowing suspicions everywhere. In 1906, Gokhale, who was savagely assailed by the extremists, was threatened with death, and Nivedita was thunderstruck. She went from one nationalist to another, demanding, "Did you do that?" and adding, "It is impossible! This is not the time to tear ourselves to pieces." p. 328.

²⁸. *The Dedicated*, p. 326.

²⁹. *Bhaginī Niveditā O Bānglāya Biplabbād*, p. 95. That Nivedita was busy throughout the year of 1906 in training the 'young revolutionists' is a fact also mentioned by Reymond. See p. 326.

²⁵. Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated*, p. 269.

²⁶. To quote Reymond, the French biographer of Sister Nivedita: 'She knew very well what the armed struggle in Ireland had been like. In London she had taken part in active organizations and had lived among rebels.' See *The Dedicated*, p. 326. See also p. 28 of the same book.

²⁷. Note, in this connection, the following observation of Reymond: 'Nivedita fought against

Nivedita. However contradictory these operations might have seemed to an outsider, they were not so to Nivedita. She could make a synthesis of all this because she was guided by that one single goal of a *united India* fighting as a *nation* against the foreign usurper of her independence and regaining it on the strength of her unity and nationality.

By asking the Indians not to waste their energy in mutual bickerings and misdirected efforts against their own countrymen, the point that Nivedita made is a consistent feature of her life and philosophy: the prime concern of all Indians had to be their sense of nationality, the most primary ingredient of which was their mutual sympathy and their sense of unity, not only in respect of their immediate concerns of ridding their country of foreign domination but also in the more positive respect of building a glorious India, having its rightful place in the comity of nations and commanding their respectful recognition and admiration.

This is an aim which India continues to strive to fulfil and which remains as valid

today as it was in the days in which Nivedita fixed her sight for it. The only snag is that despite her repeated exhortations and personal examples, we have not been able to suffuse ourselves with that sense of nationality, that mutual sympathy and fellow-feeling which she identified as the most basic element of the Indian nationality. 'If the whole of India could agree to give, say, ten minutes every evening ...to thinking a single thought, "we are one, we are one, nothing can prevail against us to make us think we are divided. ...The power that would be generated [by such thought] can hardly be measured", observed Sister Nivedita.³⁰ Could Sister Nivedita, the idealist, have uttered more vital and realistic truth about India of those days as India of today? And now, the vital question that faces us today is: do we have the *inner urge* to follow what she professed and practised herself? The road is clear, but do we have the will and the strength to follow it?

30. *Nivedita Centenary Memorial Volume* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1967) Advt. pages; p. 14.

Perceiving Inaction In Action

SWAMI VEDANANDA

Karma or activity is the most evident function in all human beings. We are all incessantly working throughout our lives. In the *Gītā* it is shown how the proper performance of *karma* leads one gradually to *mokṣa* or freedom. This article concentrates on three *ślokas*, from the fourth chapter of the *Gītā* reproduced below, and deals with the subject of action, inaction, forbidden action and the perfect vision of the man of wisdom.

*Kim karma kim akarmeti
kavayopi atra mohitāḥ
Tat te karma pravakṣyāmi
yat jñātvā mokṣyase aśubhāt. (IV-16)*

Even sages are bewildered as to what is action and what is inaction. I shall, therefore, tell you what action is, by knowing which you will be freed from evil,

*Karmaṇo hi api boddhavyam
boddhavyam ca vikarmaṇaḥ
Akarmaṇaś ca boddhavyam
gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ.* (IV-17)

*Indeed you ought to know about action, also
you ought to know about forbidden action,
and besides you ought to know about in-
action. Karma is a profound science.*

*Karmanyakarma yaḥ paśyed
akarmaṇi ca karma yaḥ
sa buddhimān manuṣyeṣu
sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt.* (IV-18)

*He who sees inaction in action, and action
in inaction is wise among men, he is a yogi
and a doer of all action.*

By stressing that even the sages are perplexed as to what is action and what is inaction, Bhagavan Krishna is showing that *Karma yoga* is a profound science and not so easy as one usually thinks it to be. A great effort is required to understand this profound science of Karma. Now karma and *akarma* can be better understood from the standpoint of an individual. When he does work he is conscious of himself as the doer, and is conscious of the object to be attained and also of his act of doing. Thus, within our consciousness we always feel the separate existence of these three factors in every work of ours. Karma therefore means for us a divided consciousness in which separate-ness of subject and object and the action performed is visualized. For example, in the act of serving one's father, one is conscious of himself as subject, separate from his father as the object served. Karma implies action involving the consciousness of 'I' and 'mine', and it can also be said that by karma or action we mean a divided consciousness, a sense of duality where the consciousness of 'I' and 'mine' functions. This karma-consciousness is within the realm of *avidyā* or ignorance.

The *Gītā* also elucidates on what is implied by inaction or *akarma*. In dealing with *Jñāna-yoga* in chapter II, it has been shown that in the state of *Jñāna* or Supreme Knowledge here is only oneness, the consciousness is not divided into subject and object. In the Absolute or Brahman there is no existence of the subject and the object, it is all One. It may also be said that there is no sense of 'I' or 'mine'. In the *Gītā*, inaction or *akarma* refers to this consciousness of Unity or Oneness. In that Consciousness there is only Existence or Reality. The karma-consciousness described above involving 'I' and 'you'—subject and object, is superimposed due to ignorance on the *Akarma*-consciousness. This divided mind is unreal.

Since this karma-consciousness or divided consciousness is at the root of all misery and suffering in the world, an aspirant has been advised in the *Gītā* to go beyond this duality and establish himself in the witness-consciousness of *Akarma*. Evidently, from the literal meaning of the verse, it would appear contradictory to perceive karma in *akarma* and vice-versa, but in the language of philosophy we may say that the Absolute-consciousness Itself manifests as our karma-consciousness of 'I' and 'mine'. This division implies the entire world of phenomena. The actual perception of this is what is called seeing *akarma* in karma. Using the ocean as an analogy, the waves are the karma and the sea itself is the *akarma*, meaning that the Absolute (the sea) Itself appears as the relative or phenomenal universe (the waves). And conversely, that which is appearing as the phenomenal world is Itself the Absolute or Noumenon. This indeed is the philosophical meaning of seeing karma in *akarma* and *akarma* in karma mentioned in the *Gītā*. Thus all kinds of work performed with intellectual conviction and recollection of *akarma* or the Absolute, become *sādhana* for salvation or *Mokṣa*. In

Karma-yoga we have to bring illumination on the false consciousness of 'I' and 'mind' which induces man to remain in misery, by bringing in pure consciousness of Oneness or *Akarma* while performing the work. Bhagavan Sri Krishna therefore says that the wise man is he who perceives *akarma* in karma and knows it is the way to freedom. We must realize that there is a relative life and an Absolute life, and this distinction is true and has to be accepted so long as one is in ignorance and is a slave to the senses. Even though everything is Brahman or God, the Absolute, since we are in ignorance at present, therefore in the beginning we have to avoid doing what ought not to be done and devote ourselves to the duty which should be done surrendering the results to God. Obviously, there will be obstructions and difficulties as the aspirant tries to practise spiritual disciplines. Temptations to perform *vikarma-s* or forbidden works also arise, yielding to which would more firmly root the consciousness to the lower levels of dualistic awareness, attachment to karma, and bondage to sense objects. There is, therefore, need for every spiritual aspirant to avoid forbidden works. This is what Sri Krishna implies when in the *Gītā* he says that we should know also what *vikarma* (forbidden action) is.

The goal for the aspiring soul is to perceive *akarma* in karma, witnessing the intense activities of body-mind with serene indifference. However, in the actual life of a *sādhaka* as he proceeds in his *sādhana* (spiritual practice), there is the possibility at every step of self-deception or error in such perception, resulting in pseudo-renunciation of activities. But if he succeeds in avoiding forbidden actions and engages steadfastly in his performance of duties, always remembering the state of *akarma*, the Unchanging Lord, and relinquishes the fruits of all actions to Him, his knowledge (*Jñāna*) deepens. An awareness of 'Thou-

ness'—of the Lord, as opposed to his own egoism grows, revealing that it is the Lord alone who is the Doer, the Object, and the Path of attainment. Yet there remains at every stage the possibility of misconstruing partial attainment for the whole, or mere intellectual conviction for realization, and the aspirant may try to embrace a life of premature inactivity. The *Gītā* cautions him to introspect further and try to discover whether the 'unripe ego' or sense of karma, ('I' and 'mine') still remains in him under the veneer of complete Knowledge (*pūrṇajñāna*) and false peace or inactivity. The implication is that until the attainment of *samādhi* he may properly know that the idea of 'body and mind as reality' is still with him, and he should proceed with his efforts in *Karma-yoga* till he attains the real, mature *Akarma* state, the state of the Witness. The lesson we have to learn is that so long as the real *akarma*-consciousness has not been attained, action or karma is not to be given up. Thus the statement seeing karma in *akarma* refers both to the stages of *sādhana* as indicated above and to the perfect vision of the perfected Yogi who has realized his oneness with Ultimate Reality.

As we progress and become real yogis, a deeper understanding dawns and we become aware that *akarma* and karma are not two different things. The mystery clears and we realize that it is *akarma* Itself which appears as our karma and vice-versa. It is the Absolute Itself which appears as the Relative world of names and forms—it is the Noumenon Itself which appears as the phenomenon. It is the Impersonal which vibrates as the Personal. It is infinite rest and intense activity at one and the same time. It is the Unchangeable which appears as all that changes. This indeed is the perfect vision or *samyak-darśan* of the sage.

Therefore, perceiving inaction (*akarma*) in action (karma) becomes both the means and

the goal, as this corresponds with the nature of Reality. When we struggle to see inaction in action, it becomes the means, and when we realize the identity of inaction and action it becomes the goal. Therefore the sages have said we should have equal regard for the means and for the goal. This correspondence between the means and the goal is the essence of spiritual discipline. It is this correspondence between the means and the goal that has the inherent power to lead us from the Relative to the Absolute.

Sri Ramakrishna has explained this great mystery of the nature of Reality in the following words:

Both the *Lilā* and the *Nitya* belong to the same Reality. In one form It is the Absolute, and in the other, the *Lilā*. Even though the *Lilā* is destroyed, the *Nitya* always exists. Water is water, whether it is still or in waves; it is the same water when the waves quiet down.

...The brick, lime, and brick-dust of which the stairs are made are the same brick, lime, and brick-dust of which the roof is made. The universe and its living beings exist on account of the Reality of Him who is known as Brahman.¹

In conclusion it may be said that the ultimate culmination of *Karma-yoga* is the attainment of perfect vision and this is

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1947) p. 784.

beautifully illustrated in the following passages from Swami Vivekananda:

...When we come to that non-attachment, then we can understand the marvellous mystery of the universe; how it is intense activity and vibration, and at the same time intensest peace and calm; how it is work every moment and rest every moment. That is the mystery of the universe—the impersonal and personal in one, the infinite and finite in one. Then we shall find the secret. 'He who finds in the midst of intense activity the greatest rest, and in the midst of the greatest rest intense activity, he has become a Yogi.' He alone is a real worker, none else.²

On the central theme of *Karma-yoga* Swamiji said:

...Ay, that is it! Intense action in the whole body, and withal a face expressing the profound calmness and serenity of the blue sky. This is the central idea of the Gita—to be calm and steadfast in all circumstances, with one's body, mind, and soul centred at His hallowed Feet! ...He who even while doing action can keep his mind calm, and in whom, even when not doing any outward action, flows the current of activity in the form of the contemplation of Brahman, is the intelligent one among men, he indeed is the Yogi, he indeed is the perfect worker.³

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp. 442-443.

3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. VII, p. 273.

Gnosticism and The Early Christian Church

JAYANTI

(Continued from the Previous Issue)

Gnosticism drew a sharp distinction between the person of Jesus and the Redeemer Christ. Because the material world was evil and in Darkness, Christ as the revealer of

God and Light, could not be of that world. That Christ did appear was not questioned. Some taught that the Spirit of God descended upon the body of Jesus at the time of his

baptism, where it dwelt until Jesus was delivered into the hands of Pilate for crucifixion. Certain verses in the Gospel of Mark suggest a similar concept of spiritual "adoption" and "withdrawal."³ Other Gnostics explained Christ's appearance on the cross as Docetic or phantom-like. It was a mere phantom that hung upon the cross, upon which Jews and Romans unleashed their vengeance ignorantly.

Important to either explanation is the principle that because of His purely Spiritual origin, Christ could not have undergone the suffering and humiliation endured by the person, Jesus. That is, Divine Light could not have revealed itself by becoming imprisoned in the Darkness of a fleshy, material existence.

The Gnostics were not merely speculators. Moreover, they found support in Christian literature, especially given the concepts of the "Word", "Truth", and "Light" as presented in the Gospel of John. Paul contributed too, with his sharp distinction between spirit and flesh. Paul also speaks of Christ's being descended from Heaven and victor over the "powers" and "principalities", the forces of evil which are the "world rulers of this present darkness."⁴

Hence Gnosticism found answers to pertinent questions within the Christian community. Evil they had attributed to the world; but other Christians, viewing their

3. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending on him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

Mark 1:10-12

And at the ninth hour (upon the cross) Jesus cried in a loud voice, "Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Mark 15:34

4. Ephesians 6:12.

Old Testament heritage, knew that "God had created the world" and had seen that "it was (at least often times) good." The contrast between Jesus and the Christ had been resolved, but in a way which denied the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Saviour.

Believing that Christianity had been stripped of its historical foundation by Gnosticism, the Church was required to respond. The surest way to protect itself against possible destruction was to assert its position as "guardian of the truth." By the end of the second century the relatively independent congregations had been formed into a union possessing creed, scripture, and a doctrine of apostolic succession giving to bishops the authority to define faith and to close out anyone who did not adhere to its rules. Once used to denote a religious party or sect, "heresy" came to signify a departure from "truth" as it had been defined. To be called a "heretic" meant condemnation.

Although the Gospels and Epistles were probably highly regarded, the *New Testament* had not been accepted as scripture. For authority, most Christians turned to the *Old Testament*, which they held to be divinely commissioned. Gnostics, however, had rejected the *Old Testament* as being merely an account of the Creator Demiurge. (And when not rejecting, they applied allegorical interpretations which were unacceptable to many.) On the other hand, they made much use of the Gospels and other literature written after the coming of the Christ. The Gnostics, themselves, had also produced literature which bore Apostolic titles and linked to secret conversations between Christ and His disciples.

The Church was not to be left out. After all, why should they, the Apostolic Fathers, think less of its post-Christ writings than the "heretics"? Effort began to secure an authoritative Christian canon in an attempt to combat the spread of Gnostic writings.

Books were selected which were supposed to have been written by an Apostle or by those known to the Apostles. Although the *New Testament* did not receive final canonization until the fourth century, the end of the second century saw the four Gospels and Letters attributed to Paul standing firmly alongside the *Old Testament*.

Also established was a specified profession of faith. (This would come to be known universally among Christians as The Apostles' Creed.) Some declaration of faith had already accompanied the sacrament of baptism, but it was simple and tended to vary among congregations. The formalized profession, established in Rome between 150 and 175 AD, was in direct opposition to the Gnostic notion of a Docetic Christ. Emphasis fell on the human aspects of Jesus' life on earth; while special note of the crucifixion under Pontius Pilate secured historical ties.⁵

Influential in the organization of the Church, Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, significantly formulated early Christian doctrine. He is best known for his *Against Heresies*, in which he set out to refute the teachings of the various Gnostic schools and reaffirm Church authority. Born in Asia Minor during the first half of the century, he eventually moved to Lyons, France, where he became presbyter in the church. In Rome in 177, Irenaeus escaped possible martyrdom, for a persecution of Christians had befallen Lyons during his absence. On his

5. From references which appear in early Church writings, the creed may have read something like the following:

I believe in God the Father Almighty; and in Jesus Christ his Son, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried, the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into the heavens, sitteth at the right hand of the Father, whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit, and in the resurrection of the flesh.

Carpenter, J. Estlin, *Phases of Early Christianity*, G. P. Putnam's Sons; New York, 1916, p. 58.

return home he received appointment as Bishop, successor to the martyred Pothinus.

Like the Gnostics, Irenaeus was concerned with the questions of evil and salvation. However, keeping close to *Old Testament* tradition and belief in the person of Jesus Christ, he fashioned a doctrine which would incorporate both. Irenaeus saw in the scriptures the history of humanity.

In the beginning God had created man in his own image. Man then possessed both goodness and immortality. However, through Adam's voluntary disobedience and submission to Satan, man lost his divine attributes and fell into sin. Jesus, being an incarnation of the Word, had existence before Adam and was, therefore, free of the taint of sin assumed by mankind. For Irenaeus, Jesus served as a second Adam. Through His suffering Jesus was thought to have defeated Satan, thereby restoring man to the divine state in which he had been created.

Such a redemption could not have taken place had Christ not been incarnate. To resist temptation and bear the consequences, He must necessarily possess human qualities (frailties). But for His actions to thus be *redemptive*, the Christ must also be originally free from sin and, hence, divine. Salvation thus came from union with Christ, signified by the sacraments of baptism and communion together with right faith.

The Gnostics had still another claim, based on a secret conversation which is supposed to have taken place between Jesus and His disciples after the resurrection. By virtue of perfection through gnosis, Gnostics considered themselves heir to this secretly revealed truth.

This was a more serious threat to the Church, for who could really say that a secret wisdom among the spiritually qualified did not exist? Had not a separate tradition of imparting a divine wisdom to those whose faith rested not "in the wisdom of

men, but in the power of God" been alluded to by Paul in his letters ?

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.⁶

Irenaeus was undaunted. Against this claim he placed the infallibility of tradition; the effect of which greatly strengthened the position and authority held by bishops. He postulated the concept of Apostolic Succession, arguing that if such Truth existed it would have certainly been passed on to those who were selected as their successors. Affirming that the Church's teachings had been preserved through the orderly succession of bishops, he then drew up lists for each congregation which carefully traced the transfer of leadership back to its original founding Apostle. Thus "authority" came into the hands of the bishops, together with the practice of "obedience" to that authority. This argument went further than to enhance the power of Church heads. It helped unite all Christians under the guidance of Rome. The prominence accorded the Church of Rome was nothing new, but tradition gave its founding to both Peter and Paul; and it was the only church in the western Roman empire to have direct contact with the Apostles. Thus, with the same boldness he had displayed in imparting authority to the bishops, Irenaeus declared it a matter of necessity that every Christian congregation be in agreement with Rome.

The Church was still far from exercising the organizational unity and power which it would have during the middle ages. However, a significant change had taken place. Orthodoxy and heresy now stood in sharp opposition to each other, with orthodoxy (the Church) in advantageous position.

6. I Corinthians 2:6-7. See also, I Corinthians 2:1-5.

And what of gnosis? It seems that Irenaeus never quite addressed the possibility of there being a tradition handed down other than that which had been preserved within the church. Nor would he admit that church tradition might have in any way been altered or corrupted. In the course of Church history, however, these "weaknesses" in Irenaeus' argument for "Apostolic Succession" are of little consequence.

In the wake of a Church "victory," most Gnostic literature was either destroyed or "lost". So thorough were Church efforts that most of what is known about Gnosticism has come from the writings of its adversaries. Recent discoveries of Gnostic texts, such as the Coptic *Gospel According to Thomas* already cited and the Nag Ham-madi Library, will both shed light on the future study of Gnosticism and validate or invalidate the credibility of Church polemics. It is doubtful, however, that these discoveries will alter the course of Christianity, or that the Church will ever embrace its "outcasts."

Jesus had severely condemned the religious authorities of His time for their religiosity. His harshest words of criticism fall on those who "love the best seat in the synagogues and salutations in the market places"⁷ and who "are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."⁸ When the religious leaders scoffed, Jesus replied, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination before the sight of God."⁹ Jesus repeatedly warns His followers not to copy those who externalize religion and make public professions of their faith. "The Kingdom of God is to be sought within, in private communion with a God who sees into a man's heart. A God who,

7. Luke 12:43.

8. Matthew 23:27.

9. Luke 16:15.

in turn, may be *seen* by one whose heart has been made pure."¹⁰

As already noted, Paul writes of a progression of spiritual readiness by which one becomes "mature" and heir to that divine wisdom of God by which one becomes glorified. Clement of Alexandria, had postulated that "the Word became man, that we learn from man how man may become God."¹¹ John said of the Word: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew not."¹² Finally, there is Jesus' own assurance:

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.¹³

Theological difficulties granted, might not the Church Fathers have gleaned from Gnosticism the seeds of a spiritual tradition wherein Jesus' promise of liberation could be realized?

It feels both presumptuous and unfair to deem Irenaeus and his supporters insincere. They took actions which they, themselves, truly felt were best for the Christian community. Yet, one wonders what threatened the early Christian religious leaders so profoundly that they appear determined to eradicate not only Gnosticism, but also the transcendent experiences and principles on which the new faith rested. Less than two hundred years after Christ's coming, and already the pervasive powers of worldly self-interest were reasserting a hold over man?

Whatever the cause, by the end of the second century the Church had begun its long history as an institution whose interests would seem to rest in exercising social, and eventually political, control over its followers,

often at the expense of its original spiritual impulse to freedom. And despite warnings by the Lord not to externalize and patent one's inner religious experience, the Christian now found his "faith" bound within the scope of a public declaration, and circumscribed by Church authority.

A multiplicity of sects and denominations characterize contemporary Christianity. Their emergence must, to a certain extent, be attributed to man's resurgent longing for freedom and individuality. Looking closely within the resultant divergencies one can find the ever perennial seedlings and plants of spirituality. Mystic traditions have survived, despite Church efforts toward suppression. And many souls diligent in their seeking have found their longing fulfilled. Spirituality must triumph, for only the Real endures.

Still the journey is long, difficult, and usually very lonely. For hopeful as variety may seem, the successive denominations bear the imprint of the Church as it was first formed. In "breaking away" for freedom (be it religious, political, or otherwise) the sects have retained individual claims to exclusive authority and continue to extract from their adherents varying proofs of conformity and allegiance.

In reviewing the history of early Christianity, one wonders at God's grace that devotees throughout the world are taking refuge at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother; recipients in the newness of a spiritual regeneration. Feeling their living Presence and seeing the Light still brightly shining within devotees and disciples, it is difficult to conceive of Vedanta succumbing to the pitfalls which darkened religious development in the West.

We hope Vedanta will never follow in the footsteps of the Christian Church in its striving for power. Yet it would be a mistake, perhaps, to be overly complacent. We Westerners often look longingly to India as

10. Gleaned from the *Sermon On the Mount*.

11. Carpenter, *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

12. John 1:10.

13. John 31b-32.

an undimmed beacon of Spiritual Light. Yet India herself teaches that spirituality is cyclic. The veiling power of *Mahāmāyā* (ignorance) is such that regeneration is always followed by forgetfulness and decline. Hence the need of great saints and incarnations. Heralds of a new age, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda decried the spiritual poverty and religious corruption prevalent

in India during their time.

As heirs to this most recent dispensation we cannot depend on time or place or historical developments to keep the spiritual fires blazing steadily. We must do our best to hold fast to the Ideal set before us, remembering to carefully and faithfully tend the flame which the Master and Mother graciously ignite within our hearts.

The Scriptures and the Space Age

N. HARIHARAN

The modern super technological age has heaped on us physical comforts, satisfied a number of our real needs, and created many new needs and satisfied them too. But in this blinding glare we cannot ignore its alarming and destructive influence that is wrecking the fabric of individual and collective life. Compared with recent times past, the maintenance of close family ties and specially in India, the joint-family unit, is everywhere crumbling, dissolving and vanishing. Mutual love between members is breaking up under the stress of inordinate selfishness and egoism. Filial love seems also to be drying up. Grown-up children leave their decrepit parents to fend for themselves. Teachers are held in scant respect and are regarded as no better than mean purveyors of information for a fee. Students are devoid of *vinaya-sampat*, the wealth of humility. Emphasis in education has degenerated into mere competition to amass large quantities of sterile information to pass examinations. Refined and gentle behaviour and expression of fellow-feeling for one's equals and expressions of mercy and compassion for inferiors are becoming passé. To turn away the mendicant and rebuff the poor in peremptory tones is a mark of modern cul-

ture. Fakirs and sādhus living on alms have become persona non-grata. The wandering holy man is the butt of ridicule and is looked upon as an idler and called a social parasite.

The above remarks neatly sum up the view of our generation on the present-day trends in life and society. Terrible maladjustments are due to people's inability to adjust to social pressures in this space age. The scenario that presents itself is frightening. Traditions and values having scriptural sanction have been thrown overboard. In their place have been set up new-fangled ideas and norms of behaviour which offend the spirit of the scriptures. A mighty obnoxious wave of pseudo-culture arising out of enjoyment of *kāminī-kāncāṇa* is sweeping over the world. And it is leaving in its great wake destruction of moral values, erosion of faith in humanity and disregard of the eternal holy scriptures. A life and death tussle has now ensued. Will scripture and spirituality survive or be submerged in a sea of technological gadgetry and gross materialism? It is to be a great struggle which, prima facie, seems to be an unequal one with all odds heavily loaded against scriptures. What is the role of scriptures? Are the scriptures to lose their hold on the

hearts of men? Are we to lose courage, give up the battle in despair and watch young generations sink down under the deluge of crooked values in the garb of modernity? For the scriptures to avoid the encounter in a mood of defeatism would amount to an abject confession that falsehood will ultimately prevail over truth. This cannot be. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* oracularly asserts: *Satyam eva jayate nāṅṅtam—Truth alone succeeds, not falsehood.* What is true will be recognized. The final triumph of scriptures over the intruding tides of perverted values is underwritten in the scripture itself which is divine in origin and infallible for all time.

The capital paradox of man is that he lives simultaneously in day-light and darkness. Man basks in the sunshine of sense-delights and is at the same time groping in utter darkness of spirit. The *Gītā* describes his plight:

*Yā niśā sarvabhūtānām
tasyām jāgarti saṁyamī
Yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni
sā niśā paśyato muneh* (II-69)

The self-restrained man keeps awake during that which is night for all creatures. That during which creatures keep awake is night to the seeing sage.

It is a fact that the generality of the masses suffer simultaneously from the twin diseases of chronic insomnia and deep somnolence. They are incapable of 'sleeping' midst the plethora of exciting sense-delights, or waking up to the supernal bliss of the Spirit. The one and only remedy for these twin ailments is the sane counsel of the scriptures which exhort us to eschew 'preyas' (the outgoing sensual life) and to aspire for śreyas (the life of self-control).

The scriptures do not categorically oppose science and technology or the immense material benefits that flow to humanity from

them. But the scriptures insist that the more the creature comforts the more is the need for man to be alert to insulate the mind from their subtle but powerful blandishments. They counsel us to stand as a rock unmoved against the surging tides of false desire buffeting on all sides. The way to meet the menacing army of sense delights that hem us in, is not to yield, not to pander to their powerful demands, but to develop inner equipoise and detachment which shuts us off from their venomous reach. The *Gītā* spells out this 'spiritual strategy of retreat' in pithy terms:

*Yadā samharate cā'yaṁ
kūrma aṅgānī'va sarvaśaḥ
Indriyānī' ndriyārthebhyas
tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā* (II-58)

When like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs on all sides, the wise man withdraws his senses from the sense objects, then his wisdom becomes steady.

In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I. 3-9) we get a picturesque metaphor on this theme of sense control. The *Upaniṣad* says:

Know that the Self is like the Lord of a chariot and the body is his chariot. Know that the intellect is the charioteer and the mind the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses, the objects of the senses their roads. When the Self is in union with the body, the senses and the mind, the wise call Him the Enjoyer. He who has no understanding and whose mind is ever unrestrained—his senses are out of control as vicious horses for a charioteer.

Thus the *śruti* (Vedas) and *smṛti* (later scriptures) are unanimous in their chorus of denunciation of an undisciplined life subject to the violent tossings of wild senses and a wayward mind. If one were to heed the sane message of the *śrutis* and *smṛtis*, one would dismiss as snares and delusion all avenues of sense-gratification which the space age has liberally spawned.

Scriptures are unsparing in their censure of greed. Through the words of seers like Nachiketa and Maitreyi, scriptures expose the worthlessness of wealth in the spiritual sphere. Scriptures point out how craze for wealth and its acquisition and enjoyment degrade one, coarsen one's intelligence and drag one to the abyss of spiritual ruin. With unmistakable firmness, the scriptures warn against soft appeasement of the senses in the universal hunt for wealth and power. They highly extol the austerity of simple life and watchful restraint of the senses as the only shield against self-conceit and arrogance. Yet with these virtues even a king is secure and may live an ideal life midst opulence, though it is far beyond the power of the ordinary man to do so. In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Lord Viṣṇu says to Brahmā: 'O Brahmā! Whomever I really wish to bless, I first take away his wealth. For wealth makes a man proud and arrogant as a result of which he is led to insult the world and Myself (Skanda VIII, Ch. 22)'. The stout opposition of scriptures to the mad chase of wealth is of particular value in our present age when the pursuit of money has indeed become mad, and outlandish bizarre sense enjoyments have offended all canons of ethical and moral traditions and threaten to plunge man into sub-bestial levels of depravity.

By far the most sensible and effective suggestion for solving the baffling problems of our space age society is presented by the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* in Chapter I, section II:

...Having taught the Veda, the teacher instructs the pupil: 'Speak the truth. Practise virtue. Let there be no neglect of your (daily) reading. Having brought to the teacher the wealth that is pleasing (to him), do not cut off the thread of the offspring. Let there be no neglect of truth. Let there be no neglect of virtue. Let there be no neglect of welfare. Let there be no neglect of prosperity. Let

there be no neglect of study and teaching. Let there be no neglect of the duties to the gods and the fathers.

Be one to whom the mother is a goddess. Be one to whom the father is a god. Be one to whom the teacher is a god. Be one to whom the guest is a god.

Whatever deeds are blameless, they are to be practised, not others. Whatever good practices there are among us, they are to be adopted by you, not others.

Whatever Brahmanas there are (who are) superior to us they should be comforted by you with a seat. (What is to be given) is to be given with faith, should not be given without faith, should be given in plenty, should be given with modesty, should be given with fear, should be given with sympathy.

Then if there is in you any doubt regarding any deeds, any doubt regarding conduct, you should behave yourself in such matters as the Brāhmaṇas there (who are) competent to judge, devoted (to good deeds), not led by others, not harsh, and lovers of virtue, would behave in such cases.

Then as to the persons who are spoken against, you should behave yourself in such a way, as the Brāhmaṇas there who are competent to judge and are devoted to good deeds, not led by others, not harsh, and lovers of virtue, would behave in regard to such persons.

This is the command. This is the teaching. This is the secret doctrine of the Veda. This is the instruction. Thus should one worship. Thus indeed should one worship.'

The entire gamut of intractable problems like the weakening of the structure of the family and joint-family, the withering of filial love, the lack of pleasing communication between the teachers and students, the neglect of showing hospitality and reverence

towards worthy guests and many others is ably tackled by the above teaching in a few telling lines. They may be taken as a blueprint of behaviour to help family and society in our present space age when loss of traditional moorings seems to have left us foundering like a ship on the rocks of despair.

Scriptures are opposed neither to science nor to its offspring material prosperity. They are opposed only to the weakening of human intelligence which devolves upon an individual with thralldom and enslavement to enjoyment of sense pleasures. A society of contented individuals, loving, free, non-attached and self-disciplined is, perhaps, what the scriptures would favour. They do not condone or encourage mutual acrimony, selfish withdrawal from others. Their watchword is the unity of all existence. The scriptures are a mighty force for peace among men and peace between man and God. They are firm opponents of violence and feuds. The scriptures hold up King Janaka as the spiritual model which it will be useful to emulate. In the midst of exceeding affluence, King Janaka lived his life with exemplary detachment and did not bat an eyelid even when he saw his opulent kingdom go up in flames. Such an ideal life was possible for King Janaka because his heart and mind were anchored in the reality of Spirit and not in flesh. To anchor one's life in the Holy Spirit is indeed the gist and behest of all the scriptures.

In the onward march of science, we are now in a decisive phase. We are living in the age of space which offers humanity an incredible array of cozy creature-comforts. The very merit of the Age (viz. the existence of a vast array of creature-comforts) is also its curse, because such a huge proliferation of physical comforts seduces man's intellect and makes him oblivious of the Spirit. The

space age holds the danger of making *Virocanas* (demons) of all of us. It has the potency to vastly aggravate our inborn tendency to identify ourselves with our matter-vestures and of making us reap the tragic consequences of such wrong identification. To escape the tension and mental agitation attendant on the prosperity-explosion of this space age, we have to *exorcise* the Virocana in us and become *Indras* (devas or gods) with sure anchorage in the life of the Spirit. The space age we live in, like the sun, is neutral. One can read the scripture in the light of the sun. Similarly, the space age is here with us full of tremendous possibilities. Whether we shall be demons in this age, or angels of virtue, depends upon our mental and spiritual orientation. Identified with our bodies, we degenerate into beasts with all our animal instincts gaining upperhand. Identified with the Self (Spirit) we evolve into divine beings absolutely beyond the pale of mundane contaminations.

Scriptures are neither an anachronism in the space age nor have their messages become obsolete in the present-day rational milieu. The call of the scriptures is the clarion call to embrace the life of Spirit which alone is the antidote to the deep maladies endemic in this space age. Scriptures are the surest bulwark and bastion for spirituality in this materialistic age. Yells of hatred, howls of anguish, soft words of sycophancy, ravings of demon lust—all these and more make up the Tower of Babel of the space age and degrade us with their cacophony. The one sane voice ringing above this infernal din, and audible only to spiritually sensitive souls is the nectarine refrain of the *śruti*: '*Tat tvam asi*'—'*That thou art*'. Space age, if it is not to hurtle to its spiritual doom, should betimes catch this refrain and make this message the core of its culture.

The Bhagavad Gita—As A Way of Life

P. S. NARAYANAN

There are many today who think that religion is not necessary except for those who relish it. They believe that it is enough if we are kind and tolerant. But a balanced life of moral culture requires a stronger basis than mere amiability and good-will. Basically, life needs to conform to the truth of the Spirit in man. When people say that they have no faith in religion or the Divine it is because they rely on perishable things of the world and on their own changing body and mind. In real life, however, as we realize sooner or later, our finite faculties can never fathom the fathomless. A purely materialistic or rationalistic approach can never provide lasting solutions. Some of us do not hesitate to question the existence of the soul, but we never doubt our bodily life; yet a man does not live because he has a body, but because he has a soul. The so-called atheist who relies on his own self does not know that behind him is the Spirit or God. Man must have faith in himself, but not in the egoistic sense, i.e. not as a person with certain name or fame, but in his higher Self as a child of God and a direct heir to divinity. He must base his faith on the soul-force within, which is pure, free and strong. The fundamental truth taught by all religions is that man has to transform his base human nature into the divine that is within him. All religions lay down disciplines to spiritualize our attitudes and thus make it possible to live and work with peaceful mind and in harmony with others. Our balance in life increases or decreases according to our development of spiritual consciousness and consequent ability to maintain even-mindedness amid the opposites of life.

The decline of religion is largely due to our over emphasis on the value of science

and technology. The study of material sciences can teach us about the objective universe and how things are conditioned by each other, but it cannot teach how to fathom our own subjective consciousness, or what should be the goal of human aspirations. A realization of this goal and of corresponding values alone can reveal a true meaning for our existence and all our activities. Religion is needed to clear doubts about life's ultimate goal and how to achieve it. In a society with healthy culture, whether it be Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or Christian, these ends and means exist as living traditions established by the superconscious experiences of great personalities—sages, mystics, monks or sufis. Their revelations are embodied in holy scriptures which have stood the test of time. The goal of human life is very exalted and high and the spiritual journey is difficult, but small steps taken on the right path build confidence in us.

In the light of the teachings of the great sages, it should be obvious that the greatest crisis of the modern age is man's tardy adjustment in life with spiritual reality. Man has either neglected spiritual life altogether, or tried to bring religion down to make it adjust with society. Spiritual values must take precedence. Religious enlightenment doubtless helps one to harmonize the spiritual and temporal, but the purely intellectual and heavily materialistic culture of the kind that modernity favours bears in its heart the seeds of destruction as we are already beginning to realize.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is a comprehensive and practical exposition of the science and art of living founded on true religion. Divinity speaks to 'representative' man. The crisis that Arjuna finds himself in, which deludes and immobilizes him at a critical

junction is man's problem in everyday life. Arjuna was not opposed to the war as such, but could not distinguish between right and wrong. As it happened with him, it is only the strong hand of God that can lift us out of the slough of despair and enable us to see things in the true light and do the right.

The ethical disciplines and spiritual practices taught by Sri Krishna help us develop a personal morality founded on knowledge of truth, a new consciousness and life attuned to the truth of the Spirit. Developing a sãttvic mind and life is the first step towards attaining divine knowledge. The *Gītā* enjoins ethical purity of mind with action as an outward index. As each individual develops a spiritual life, a social ethics inspired by a passion for the good of all beings and social cooperation is built up. It is based on dharma. The comprehensive spirituality taught in the *Gītā* embodies eternal values for changing times.

The *Gītā* does not demand unthinking faith or rigid practices and rituals. It stresses on real spiritual experience enabling one to achieve union with God, the consummation of human birth. After eighteen chapters of instruction, Sri Krishna leaves the decision to Arjuna. Earlier He stressed the importance of self-effort in chapter VI where He says: 'By one's own Self should one raise oneself, and not allow oneself to fall. For the Atman (Self) alone is the friend of one's self, and the self alone is the foe of one's self.' (verse 5) Sometimes we are not able to maintain the activity in the higher centers of consciousness due to old impressions and tendencies. Then there is a 'tug-of-war' which cannot be avoided if we are to grow at all. By conscious and intelligent discrimination and daily prayers, meditation and studies we must learn to stop the activity of the lower centers and stimulate that in the higher ones. We must try to dissociate our selves from body and mind, and see ourselves and others in terms of the one

Higher Self manifesting in all. Then we are bound to get strength and purity and acquire clear thinking and ability to do our work dispassionately. It is well to remember constantly that the body and mind are inert and function only when activated by the Atman, and thus resist delusions and doubts.

The central point of religion lies in faith. God-experience is super-sensuous. He is not subject to proof but He *is*. Seeing the firm faith and determined efforts of the devotee, Divine Grace descends. The spiritual life does not demand that we give up everything physically, but without mental renunciation there is no spiritual unfoldment. When an aspiring soul recognizes that nothing belongs to him, a better understanding of the whole scheme of life dawns. We grow strong in faith and become independent of the world of matter and objects. The entire process of our spiritual awakening has been expounded in the *Gītā* with a new insight.

The Gita addresses man as man, not by his creeds and dogmas, and leads him step by step to the realization of the Highest. Then he gets free from all bonds, external and internal. The *Gītā* shows that this perfection can be attained here and now and that it is a blessing not only to the individual, but also to society. The art of life as taught in the *Gītā* aims at the development of a spiritual character, pure, steady, strong and generous through the manifestation of the divinity in man. The methodology blends the essential features of spiritual education as expounded in the world's religions without any sectarianism or elements of creed. It recognizes different paths to spiritual perfection suited for varied temperaments, aspirations and individual stage of evolution. It classifies them into four well-known paths—Karma-yoga (work consecrated to God), Bhakti-yoga (love directed to God), Raja-yoga (one-pointed concentration of mind leading to meditation) and Jnana-yoga

(rational inquiry to disassociate the non-self from the Self). The Bhakti path permits devotion to a Personal God or one of His Incarnations as a means to spiritual perfection. Sri Krishna declares: 'Whatever form of the Divine a devotee desires to worship with faith and devotion, in that very form do I make his faith firm and steady.' (VII, 21) Further, 'Through whatever paths men seek to come unto Me, I accept them through those very paths. All paths lead ultimately unto Me.' (IV, 11) The *Gītā* is a gospel of toleration. The realization of God is the end and aim of spiritual quest and not the assertion of a particular faith over others. There are no sects and denominations in the Kingdom of God.

In practice the four paths are intermixed. As the aspirant proceeds in his journey, the differentiation between them vanishes and all the paths become more or less harmonized in the totality of spiritual life. The human mind is a world of many dichotomies synthesized, where faculties of willing, feeling and knowing function simultaneously. Thus for instance, how can one love God without knowing Him or His attributes and powers? The aspirant need only concentrate on the means suited to him, and in time the goal will reveal itself.

Let us look on the *Gītā* as addressed to each one of us. When, for instance, Arjuna is being reprimanded by Sri Krishna, let us assume that we are being reprimanded for our weaknesses. Let us in our prayers

gradually move away from requests for fleeting things and pray: 'O Lord, cleanse me of my evil thoughts and sins. Grant me Thy protecting Grace—not my will but Thy will be done,' and thus steadily break the self-limitations of the ego. God will reciprocate warmly to such earnest prayers. Jesus has assured: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' Equally emphatic is Sri Krishna's assurance in the *Gītā*: 'On Me fix thy mind, to Me bring thy devotion. Offer thy sacrifice, make thy obeisance to Me. Indeed thou shalt come to Me. This is My solemn promise to thee, thou art dear to Me.' (XVIII, 65).

Let us deliberately in the beginning introduce a rhythm into our lives by regular studies, meditation and the cultivation of right understanding. This is what Voltaire says when he asks us to cultivate our little garden. The practice of meditation strengthens and deepens the mind. In the comprehensive vision of the drama of human life, the *Gītā* seeks to impart a sense of lofty purpose and direction.

Civilization as a way of life has its essence not in any political or economic arrangements, but in the values that create and sustain them. The root cause of our growing distress is the rootless secularism of our age. Yet, as explained in the *Gītā*, we are primarily Spirit. The universal religion as taught in the *Gītā* will help regenerate ourselves and change our way of life.

Everybody is wonder-struck at the mere sight of a rich man's garden house. People become speechless at the sight of the trees, the flowers, the ponds, the drawing-rooms, the pictures. But alas, how few are they who seek the owner of all these!

—Sri Ramakrishna

Are Brahman and Sunyata Identical ?

ARVIND SHARMA

I

It is often asserted, especially in the context of the comparison of the Advaitic Vedānta in Hinduism with the Mādhyamika School in Mahāyāna Buddhism, that Brahman and Śūnyatā are identical.¹ And this identity is posited by both those who are hostile to convergence between Hinduism and Buddhism² and those who are not.³

It is the purpose of this note to show that this need not necessarily be the case if the argument is based on 'contentlessness' or 'undifferentiatedness' of either.

II

Let the case of 'contentless consciousness' be examined first. If according to both Advaitic Hinduism and Mahāyāna Buddhism, the ultimate reality is contentless, then obviously, so it is said, the conceptions are identical. Brahman is pure consciousness, without any content, indeed. This is how *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* IV. 5.13: *na pretya saṁjñāsti* (when he is departed there is no more [separate or particular] consciousness) is understood. Radhakrishnan qualifies by adding 'separate or particular', following Śaṅkara,⁴ but the statement by itself simply says there is no consciousness. Emptiness in Mahāyāna Buddhism can be seen as indicating the same—empty of any content.

1. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London: Fontana Books, 1971) pp. 330-31.

2. F. Copleston remarks: 'According to Madhva, there was really no difference between the Advaitin Nirguṇa-Brahman, the qualityless Absolute, and the Buddhist concept of Emptiness. He does not however intend this assertion as a compliment to the Advaitins.'

Religion and the One: Philosophies East and West (New York: Crossroad, 1982) p. 86 fn. 16.

3. K. Satchidananda Murty, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) pp. 158-59.

4. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953) p. 285.

Hence the two are one in their common emptiness.

Contentlessness, however, can be of different types. But before we turn to that point let it be realized that emptiness by itself does not ensure identity. Let us suppose one has two cups and both are empty. Does it make the two cups one—even if they are of identical make? The cups are not identical; it is their emptiness which is identical; there are still two cups. Speaking conceptually, therefore, and not mystically, it is clear that both Brahman and Śūnyatā could be empty and yet different.

But emptiness or rather contentlessness can itself differ. A larder may be empty and a glass too—but the larder is lacking in solid content and a glass in liquid content. Both are contentless—but the nature of the fact is different. Thus in Śūnyatā nothing possesses its *own existence* (*svabhāva*)—that is the content it lacks. In Brahman nothing possesses its *own existence* apart from Brahman, whose existence is not doubted; hence its contentlessness.

III

Let us now examine the view that there are no distinctions within Śūnyatā and Brahman. Professor F. Staal argued on the basis of an insight suggested by his student at the East-West Conference in Hawaii (1984) that as neither Śūnyatā nor Brahman possesses any distinguishing marks they could not be distinguished from each other and were therefore the same. This, Staal suggested, is an advance in logic on par with the Law of Contradiction for it seals the issue of the identity between Brahman and Śūnyatā.

Now Śūnyatā suggests that:

Undifferentiated emptiness is the sole absolute truth. Nirvāṇa is therefore that mental state in which one realizes that all things are really non-existent and that they are ultimately all the same. The moment an individual realizes this state of mind, he is enlightened and realizes the

buddha-nature within himself. He eradicates from his own mind not only the concept of his own individuality but also the concept of substantiality of everything. He cannot distinguish himself from any other thing or even from the absolute, for he has merged into the absolute. Since the absolute or the buddha-nature is eternal, he also becomes eternal.⁵

But distinctionlessness can be of two kinds: the distinctionlessness of total absence, or the distinctionlessness of pre-

5. Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism: The Light of Asia* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1968) pp. 72-73.

sence. Let us look at the sky when it is clear: both blue and empty. There are no distinctions in it because it is empty; but there are no distinctions in the blueness either. But the emptiness of the sky represents the distinctionlessness of absence; the blueness of the sky represents the distinctionlessness of sameness.

IV

To conclude: however fine a hair we might split, a hair-breadth difference seems to persist between Brahman and Sūnyatā.

Reviews and Notices

I AM ALL: A COSMIC VISION OF MAN by Sudhakar S. Dikshit; published by Chetana Pvt Ltd. 34, Rampart Row, Bombay 400 023; pp. xvii + 157; Rs. 100/- 1988.

Sudhakar Dikshit is no stranger to lovers of Indian philosophy and culture. His publishing concern—Chetana—has always been a symbol of discriminatingly chosen, meticulously edited and, content-wise, stimulating books.

In *I Am All*, we see a different, but not entirely unpredictable, facet of Dikshit: a mature thinker, acute in his perception, authentic in his awareness of the nature of interior quest reflecting, above all, a contemplative and comprehensive centrality of vision. Rooted in the texts of perennial philosophy/psychology, he gives the reader an insight into the different facets of this inner quest. This is deepened and intensified, in his case by the experience of "deep hurt" on the personal level (by the death of his wife and the more shattering premature one of his son). It is this *dukkha*—"the sorrow that sorrow is"—that led Dikshit to *Vicāra*, an exploration into the nature of existence.

The basic truth of this existence, as Dikshit sees it, is the oneness of "human consciousness" with "universal consciousness". Thus the 'patent' and the 'latent' intersect, irradiating the entire cosmos with Brahman, the

holograph of both the inner and the outer. This truth is achieved in and through, in Dikshit's words, "the realization of the Kalapurusha within us." The Kalapurusha is the "inner man", "a microcosm of the cosmic man." In effect, this is an integration of what the author calls "Aham—the I Complex" and "Idam: the Mind Complex."

This integration—the realization that the "purified man" is God himself—is possible only for one "who has axed the tree of desire at its root and has no desires, not even desire for God." This "desirelessness" is part of what Dikshit calls the "Blueprint for Self-realization" which subsumes introspection, egolessness and, above all, renunciation. Renunciation is not negation but the cultivation of "right attitude" towards the phenomenal world, "abandonment of all the shrouds in which reality is entombed." The most persistent and exasperating of these shrouds is 'death' and, indeed, even the cosmos is not exempt from the apocalyptic pralaya. But then these are only 'shrouds', appearances.

I Am All, in short, is marked by lucidity, clarity and, above all, authenticity and is strongly recommended for all those seeking reliable guides for the inner life.

Dr. M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

Practical Spirituality

Disciple: "— instructs his disciples not to practise *Japa* without taking bath etc. Are such observances compulsory?"

Swami: "The Master came to make religion easy. People were being crushed under the weight of rules and regulations. To repeat the Lord's name and to worship Him no special time and place are necessary. In whatever condition one may be, one can take His name. The Master never used to give too much importance to these external observances. As to means, adopt whichever suits you best. If you like God with form, that will also lead you to the goal. If you like God without form, well and good; stick to it and you will progress. If you doubt His very existence, then better put the question to Him thus: 'I do not know whether Thou existeth or not, whether Thou art formless or with form. Do Thou make known to me Thy real nature.' As to changing of clothes, taking bath, and other external observances, if you can observe them, well and good; if not, go on calling on Him without paying much attention to all these. The Master once sang a song to me and told me, 'Assimilate any one of these ideas and you will reach the goal.' The song runs as follows:

O Lord, Thou art my everything, the sole support of my life, the quintessence of reality: There is none else besides Thee in this world whom I can call as my own.

Thou art happiness, peace, help, wealth, knowledge, intellect, and strength; Thou art the dwelling house and the pleasure garden; Thou art the friend and relative.

Thou art this present life, the sole refuge; Thou art the life hereafter and the heaven; Thou art the injunction of the scriptures, the Guru full of blessings, and the store of infinite bliss.

Thou art the way and the goal; Thou art the creator and preserver and the worshipped; Thou art the father that punishest Thy child, the loving mother and the storehouse of infinite bliss art Thou.

Disciple: "What do you think about astrological calculations as to auspicious and inauspicious moments?"

Swami: "The Master used to observe these things. He believed in auspicious and inauspicious times. And because he used to observe these things, we too observe them. But then these calculations, nowadays, are not absolutely correct. There have been many changes in the position of the constellations and planets, but these calculations have not been corrected accordingly. So I do not observe them so much in these days."

Disciple: "The Master used to say that *Śrāddha* food (offered at the last funeral rite) is harmful to *Bhakti*. Why is it so?"

Swami: "The object of food is to build a strong body and a fine intellect. Unless the body and the mind are pure it is not possible to go through spiritual practices. It is the food offered to God that builds a pure body and mind. The *Śrāddha* food is offered to the manes and not to God and as a result instead of building a pure mind and body it affects people otherwise. Food builds the body and the mind and the nature of the food also affects them. In Chaitanya's life we have a case where an ordinary man who happened to touch him in a state of ecstasy was also overpowered by religious emotions. He was prescribed to take *Śrāddha* food to get over these emotions, and as a matter of fact this food did put an end to that person's ecstatic moods."

Spiritual Talks of Swami Saradananda

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

DEDICATORY STANZAS ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

हित्वा स्वदेशं प्रियजन्मभूमिम्
यातो विवेकामरघाम वीर ।
शोकाग्निदग्धा तवदेशमाता
रोरुद्यते क्लेशभरासहिष्णुः ॥१॥

1. Leaving your own country, the beloved place of your nativity, thou has gone, O Hero, to the immortal abode of the Wise; your mother country is now weeping in bereavement unable to bear the heavy pain (of your loss).

अभूस्त्वमस्याः क्षणजन्मपुत्रः
त्वया विना साद्य वभूव दुस्था ।
प्रत्यूषमेघैः पिहितेऽहिमांशौ
छायेव देशं जडताधिचक्रे ॥२॥

2. Thou wert but a short-lived son of Thy mother; without thee, She has today become very destitute; like the sun's rays covered by early morning clouds, has inertia like shadows overpowered the country.

स्वधर्मनिष्ठा परितः पलायिता
कर्मानुरक्तिर्न च कुत्र लक्ष्यते ।
परार्थसेवा श्रवणेन्द्रियालया
परानुवृत्तिः परमंहि पौरुषम् ॥३॥

3. Devotion to one's Dharma has fled all round; love of work and activity are not to be seen anywhere; service of others has been reduced to a mere sound residing in the ear, and slavish dependence on others is the highest manliness.

वेदोक्तमन्त्रैरिव ते निनादैः
सुषुप्तसिंहा इव लोकसिंहाः ।
निरस्यनिद्रां पुरुषत्वहन्त्रीम्
नवोद्यमेनात्र कृतौ यतन्ताम् ॥४॥

4. By thy trampet-call, like unto the sound of Vedic Mantrams, let all the lion-hearted men, like roused-up lions, cast off their sleep, the killer of manhood, and with rejuvenated energy strive for success in work.

तवाशिवः सन्तु शिरःसु वृष्टाः
भवन्तु देवाः सततं सहायाः ।
मनांसि नः सन्तु निरङ्कुशानि
कर्मप्रवाहाः प्रबहन्त्व जलम् ॥५॥

5. May thy blessings descend like rain upon the heads of all, may the gods be always helpful, may our minds be in peace without any trouble, may the current of work flow in a copious stream!

नवरविकरदिप्तो दृश्यते दिग्बिभागः
दिशिदिशि मृदुवायुः पुष्पगन्धी प्रवाति ।
ललित मधुर गीतं गीयते पक्षिसङ्घः
भवत भवत वीर-भ्रातरः कर्मशूराः ॥६॥

6. The quarters are seen radiant with the fresh rays of the sun, in all directions the soft breeze is blowing laden with the sweet fragrance of the flowers, the birds are singing sweet and melodious notes—Be thou, be thou, O brothers, brothers, heroes in action.

A servant

(Read at the birthday anniversary at Bangalore)