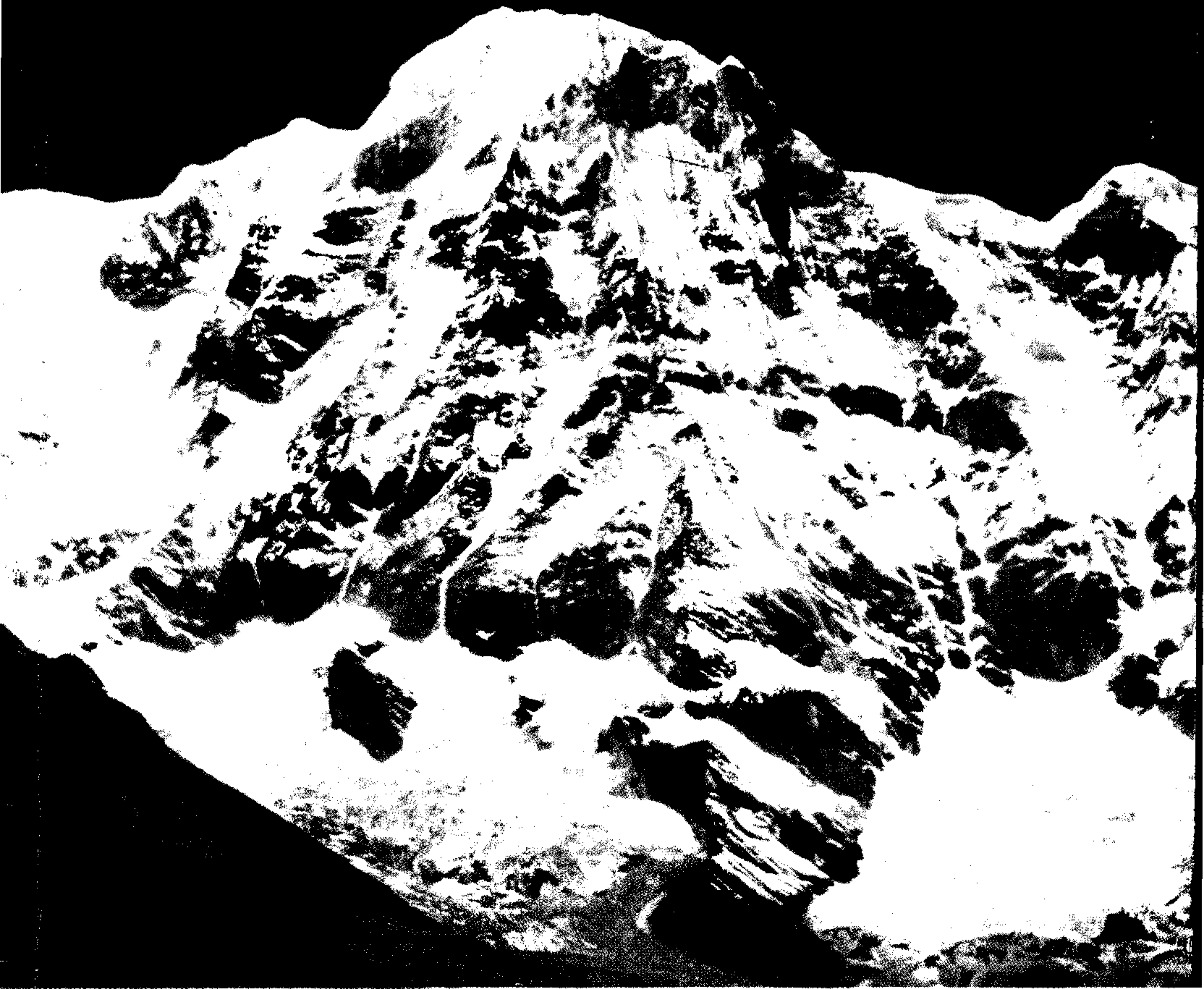


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or Awakened India



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Prabuddha Bharata

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वराभिबोधत



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

Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 97

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No. 10

Divine Wisdom

A Hymn to the Divine Mother Craving Forgiveness

न मंत्रं नो यंत्रं तदपि च न जाने स्तुतिमहो
न चाह्वानं ध्यानं तदपि च न जाने स्तुतिकथाः ।
न जाने मुद्रास्ते तदपि च न जाने विलपनं
परं जाने मातृस्त्वदनुसरणं क्लेशहरणम् ॥

Alas, I do not know either Thy mystical word-symbol (Mantra) or mystical diagram (Yantra), nor songs of praise to Thee, nor how to welcome Thee or meditate upon Thee ; neither do I know words of praise to Thee, nor Thy Mudrā (position of fingers in ritualistic worship), nor how to inform Thee of my distress, but this much I know, O Mother, that to take refuge in Thee is to destroy all my miseries.

विघ्नज्ञानेन द्रविणविरहेणालसतया
विधेयाशक्यत्वात्तव चरणयोर्या च्युतिरभूत् ।
तदेतत् क्षन्तव्यं जननि सकलोद्धारिणि शिवे
कुपुत्रो जानेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति ॥

Owing to my ignorance of the injunctions relating to Thy worship, as also owing to my poverty and laziness, I had not the power to do what I ought to have done ; so, O Mother, Auspicious One, Deliverer of all, whatever faults of omission I might have committed, forgive me, for a bad son may sometimes be born, but there is never a bad mother.

पृथिव्यां पुत्रास्ते जननि बहवः सन्ति कृतिनः
परं तेषां मध्ये विरलतरलोऽहं तव सुतः ।
मदीयोऽयं त्यागः समुचितमिदं नो तव शिवे
कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति ॥

O Mother, Thou hast many worthy sons on earth, but amongst them I am most insignificant, yet it does not befit Thee, O Shivā, to forsake me, for a bad son may sometimes be born, but there is never a bad mother.

—Śankarāchārya

Longing for Mother-Heart

When children want something, they go to their mother, and when they are in trouble mother comes to their rescue. That sweet filial relationship and healing touch are ineffable. Her tender care and compassion ever remain, spreading ethereal fragrance. Everyone is mother's child. A person may grow old, yet one remains a child, longing for mother's affection and protection. Deep within our hearts resonates inaudibly that unforgettable word, "mother" and when we are in distress that hum becomes louder and stronger. No other human relationship is as lofty and sacred as that of mother and her child. One may wander infatuated by a few shimmering objects for a time, but finally one has to seek for peace and succour within the orbit of the mother's self-effacing love and magic touch. Wife may divorce and depart, children may desert, and friends may snap ties, but mother never abandons her child. She is always ready to forgive the defects, the sins of her children and sacrifice everything for them. Her patience is limitless. And that patience and endurance is one of the most ennobling and enriching of human virtues. She does not have a personal life, but her children are her life. A mother orphaning her children or going off to seek her own pleasure is unheard of in human history, and for that matter even in the realm of animals.

She is the teacher par excellence. Who can teach with that infinite love and care? Therefore, the *Manu Smṛti* rightly says: "The teacher of scriptures (*Vedas*) is ten times more venerable than an ordinary teacher, a father, a hundred times more than the teacher, but a mother a thousand times

more than the father."¹ A father can teach a child, a teacher can educate a boy or a girl, but mother imparts knowledge to her babe even before it is born. She is the only one who can teach even before setting her eyes on her pupil, yet feeling its presence all the time. Many stories in the mythologies of the world bear witness to it. A baby is not only physically one with its mother, but psychologically as well. The influence of mother's thinking during the prenatal period as well as in the postnatal formative years of childhood is tremendous. The indissoluble tie between mother and child is too profound for language to tell. In the words of Swamiji, "The position of the mother is the highest in the world, as it is the one place in which to learn and exercise the greatest unselfishness. The love of God is the only love that is higher than a mother's love; all others are lower."² Mother's love, her natural supremacy, and her elevated status in human life—Are these limited to certain cultural traditions or matriarchal societies? Though certain patriarchal societies try to underplay the role of mother and woman, they can never deny the benign power and influence in their own existence. It is Nature which has endowed woman with the unique power and gift of motherhood. Human intelligence, strength and ability, knowledge and

1. *Manu Smṛti*:

उपाध्यायान् दशाचार्यं आचार्याणां शतं पिता ।

सहस्रन्तु पितृन्माता गौरवेरतिरिच्यते ॥

(II—145).

2. *Vivekananda, The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. I, p. 68.

masculinity, however great and grand—all have to pay gratitude and homage to the purity of motherhood.

As the mother is an embodiment of purity, love and forbearance, the same attributes are seen infinitely magnified in the Universal Mother—God worshipped as Mother. Our individual efforts and dwarf intellect fail to sustain us in our times of trouble and sorrow, when we, like helpless children, can do naught but surrender ourselves at Her feet. Knowing Her infinite power and sensing that we belong to Her, we supplicate Her for protection. Julian of Norwich (medieval anchoress, 14th century), who looked upon God as Mother, wrote that “this fairly lovely word ‘mother’ is so sweet and so kind in itself that it cannot truly be said of anyone except of him who is the true Mother of life and all things. To the property of motherhood belong nature, love, wisdom and knowledge, and this is God.” This great mystic described God as Mother, and God as Father *and* Mother.

In *Lalitāsahasranāma* (the Thousand Names of the Great Mother) Her first name is *Śrīmātā*. Bhaskararaya, the famous commentator, explains why She is called Sri Mata: “The Mother is usually called upon in times of sorrow; but our natural mothers are not able to remove the three kinds of afflictions. Great men have said: ‘Since I have had many thousands of births, I have had many mothers; many also have been my fathers; I know not how many I am yet to have in the future; and their number is beyond calculation. O Treasure-house of Compassion! Save me, who am overpowered with fear and have no other refuge, from the vast disastrous ocean of Samsara.’ The great Cosmic Mother is the only one who is capable of removing endless miseries of existence. We should praise Her as the Mother so that She may be induced to show mercy to us.”

Worship of God as Mother has been slowly spreading in Europe. Mary or Madonna has been capturing the hearts of millions and she is being worshipped as God, and the Roman Church looks at it in utter consternation. The Church claims that Mary, the Mother of God, can only be venerated and not adored. It insists that she can only intercede with God, that she is only a petitioner on behalf of the faithful. In and of herself she can do nothing. Only her son or his father has any power. This concept finds its echo in some followers of Rāmānuja. The Vaiṣṇava followers of Ramanuja believe that Lakṣmi, the Consort of Viṣṇu, does not have much power. But through her motherly intercession the prayers of devotees are granted by the Lord. The Lord rules by law, whereas Lakṣmi rules by love. She is said to be a living link between the individual soul and Īśvara. She softens the anger of God on the one hand and converts the sinner on the other. The functions of Mary and Lakṣmi are similar. But *Śākta* literature of India looks upon God as the Universal Mother. She is the Supreme Goddess. Her grace is sought by all spiritual aspirants and she is the goal of all spiritual practices.

This profound idea of seeing God as Mother is not new to Europe. According to scholars, Great Mother worship flourished throughout old Europe from 7000-3500 B.C. Figurines of the Goddess over thirty thousand years old have been unearthed in eastern Europe, from Yugoslavia to France. In the early Christian Gnostic tradition the Mother was called “Wisdom”, the “Holy Spirit”, “Earth”, and even “Lord”. To the early Jewish Christians, the Holy Spirit was personified as the Great Mother and was worshipped because she was God as well. The Gospel according to the Hebrews states that Jesus called the Holy Spirit his Mother. When the Roman State took complete con-

trol of the Church it defined the Holy Spirit in Latin as *Spiritus Sanctus* in masculine gender. China Galland, in her recent interesting book, writes: "Isis was worshipped from around 1800 B.C. and, like Mary, was a virgin who brought her son forth "of herself". Some scholars claim that some of the early statues of the Madonna and Child were actually Isis and Horus, renamed Mary and Jesus."³ The worship of Mary in many parts of Europe has caused unspoken conflict between the religious practices of millions and the dogmatic stand of the Church. The presiding Deity and unofficial patroness of Solidarity and its leader Lech Walesa is the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, in Poland. Millions of devotees undertake the arduous pilgrimage, walking nearly two hundred miles from Warsaw to Her sacred shrine at Czestochowa. There they have the vision of the Mother Madonna. The former Polish communist regime did not like the pilgrimage, but the pilgrims' number was so large there was nothing it could do to stop it. Even today it is said Lech Walesa always wears a badge with the Madonna's picture on it. Everywhere Solidarity members believe that She is the Queen of Workers. They have a very special relationship with Mary—the Mother Goddess. In a tiny village of Medjugorje in Yugoslavia, where Mary is reported to appear daily to a group of peasant children, the visions have been occurring since 1981. Thousands of people stream to the tiny village from far off countries for "miraculous" healings and to be blessed by the Holy Mother. At Lourdes, in France, nearly 5.5 million of the faithful every year visit the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes. In 1858, Bernadette Soubirons, a fourteen year old girl, had numerous visions of the Virgin Mary. Since then the

pilgrimage town has attracted millions. Fatima, in Portugal, has been one of the most famous Marian shrines in the world. The shrine of Our Lady of Fatima draws a steady 4.5 million pilgrims annually. At Medjugorje in Yugoslavia, the Madonna's message is that She is the Mother of all children belonging to different faiths. To her, all faiths are true, and no particular faith is superior. Such message by the Blessed Mother is timely when different religions are fighting for supremacy even in our technological world.

Virgin Mary is venerated by Roman Catholics as not only "the Mother of God" but also, according to modern Popes, as the Queen of the Universe, Queen of Heaven, and Seat of Wisdom. The *Lalitāsahasranāma* praises the Devī as *Śrī Mahārājñī*—the Great Empress of the whole Universe. The *Devī Māhātmyam* (the glory of the Divine Mother) describes Her as *Mahāvidyā*, *Mahāmedhā* (77)—She is the Supreme Knowledge as well as the Great Intellect. But Protestants, for centuries, have strongly disapproved of Mary's exaltation to the status of Goddess. Even the Vatican has been unable to do anything against the "re-emergence" of the Goddess—God, the Mother. The phenomenon is taking deep roots. An article in *Time* (30.12.91) has this to say:

"Yet even through the Madonna's presence has permeated the West for hundreds of years, there is still room for wonder—now perhaps more than ever. In an era when scientists debate the causes of the birth of the universe, both the adoration and conflict attending Mary have risen to extraordinary levels. A grass-roots revival of faith in the Virgin is taking place worldwide. Millions of worshippers are flocking to her shrines, many of them young people."

3. China Galland, *Longing for Darkness* (London: Century London, 1990) p. 157.

Many books and articles are appearing by the believers, liberals and feminists redefining the life and works of the Blessed Madonna—challenging the remote and passive role assigned to her by the Vatican. The 20th century is witnessing the unprecedented populist wave of the Virgin Mary. This upsurge is not an unrelated phenomenon. Judeo-Christianity has been exclusively male-dominated, creating a chasm in the hearts of devout people that long for Mother's love, grace and protection. There is nothing unnatural about this happy revival. Who is Mother Mary or Black Madonna? "The Mother Kali," said Vivekananda, "is still exacting Her worship in China and Japan; it is She whom the Christians metamorphosed into the Virgin Mary and worship as the mother of Jesus the Christ."⁴ The article in *Time* summed up the stupendous renewal of worship of God as Mother in the West:

The world is crying out for many things from Mary, and in some fashion is receiving them. Devoted mother or militant, independent female or suffering parent, she remains one of the most compelling and evocative icons of Western civilization. Renewed expressions of her vitality and relevance are signs that millions of people are still moved by her mystery and comforted by the notion of her caring. Whatever aspect of Mary they choose to emphasize and embrace, those who seek her out surely find something only a holy mother can provide.⁵

The Mother-and-Child sweet relationship reached its transcendental height and found its loftiest expression in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He himself was a personification of the Divine Mother. Therefore

Vivekananda said, "The motherhood of God is prominent in this incarnation." Sri Ramakrishna by his extraordinary Cosmic-Mother-centred life, his utter childlike dependence on Her and his teachings vibrant with Her power and glory, impressed many people that the easy and sure spiritual path to approach God is as one's own Mother. Such childlike bhakti touches the rich vein of tender feelings hidden in all. His advent has ushered in a stupendous upsurge everywhere in Mother worship. He said: "God is your own Mother. Is She a stepmother? Is it an artificial relationship? If you cannot force your demand on Her, then on whom can you force it?"⁶ His acceptance of a woman as his Guru and the worship of his wife as the Divine Mother Durgā are either the acts of blasphemy or complete mystery to the Semitic religions. But it no longer remains a wonder to those, who are awakened to the fact that the dormant *Śakti* in woman all over the world is rousing. On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna said, "Pray to the Divine Mother with a longing heart. Her vision dries up all craving for the world and completely destroys all attachment to 'woman and gold'. It happens instantly if you think of Her as your own Mother. She is by no means a godmother. She is your own Mother. With a yearning heart persist in your demands on Her."⁷

It is not surprising that in the Western countries believers are more and more taking refuge in the Virgin Mary. She is to them Mother Goddess—a wish fulfilling tree. She listens to their prayers, she understands their tears and turmoil, and stretches her helping hand to assuage their griefs. She is not remote or passive, but very near to her-longing children. Such faith is uplifting and

4. Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 445.

5. *Time*, weekly, December 30, 1991.

6. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 613.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 629.

reassuring. "Established in the idea of Mother," writes Vivekananda, "we can do anything. She quickly answers prayers."⁸ China Galland rightly points out,

But Mary does not belong just to certain belief systems. She belongs to everyone who longs for a richer, more vital conception of a power greater than ourselves, which some choose to call God. She presents a challenge and opportunity for anyone who talks about the "reemerging Goddess" or a Goddess of religion. ...Perhaps then we can consider what it means to have the presence of God the Mother in our midst today."⁹

In India, women have liberty in spiritual matters. The country has seen and venerated, down the ages, many famous women saints and brilliant *sannyāsinīs*. Thousands of men and women sit at the feet of a woman saint and become her disciples. Many learned *sannyāsinīs* and women preachers travel and preach spiritual truths to thousands in audience. People are eager to listen to them. In recent times they have even become itinerant and travelled abroad to teach in foreign countries. Yet the women while enjoying near complete freedom in religious affairs are commonly deprived of liberty in social matters. In society she is still discriminated against as inferior to men. This want of recognition has certainly been a detriment to the healthy growth of society and culture and as a result we have a cramped society. In West the picture is paradoxically the opposite. Women have great liberty in social and economic concerns. Yet though they have struggled long for this, in the sphere of religion it is *they* who are cramped owing

to the male dominance in Judeo-Christian traditions. The Vatican adamantly refuses to consider the ordination of women as priests and bishops. The conflict between women's demands and Rome's refusals goes on and seems nowhere near being resolved. In one place Swamiji remarked in sadness that Jesus did not give woman an equal place with man. "...Women did everything for him, yet not one was made an apostle. This was doubtless owing to his semitic origin."¹⁰ And, Swamiji's prophetic utterance was: "The new cycle [i.e., the future] must see the masses living Vedanta, and this will have to come through women."¹¹ Will that new cycle come? There are already signs of change visible on the horizon; no earthly power can thwart the onward progress of the Almighty Mother's will.

Individual lives are bedevilled by troubles and the world is in turmoil. We want to hear the message of strength, hope, and above all love. We struggle hard and yet from time to time our steps falter and we slip. At such times we find we can hardly endure more. To stand alone and go on working seems impossible. Then we try to stretch out for the arms of the Mother. Yet, on the other hand, *our problem has been that we only know how to demand and receive love, kindness and compassion*. But we never feel to reflect that Mother-heart lying within us. Have we cared to develop in us this self-effacing love of the Mother and share it with others? The sad spectacle of the world around us gives the answer. Unless we learn to nurture and express for others the mother's warmth that we have felt from her, her unselfishness and her forgiveness, neither in our homes nor in the

8. Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, Vol. VII, p. 27.

9. *Longing for Darkness*, p. 159.

10. Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, Vol. VIII, p. 68.

11. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 95.

external world shall we have peace. Especially in our country we desperately need this mother-heart. How shall we kindle it in our hearts little by little ?

(1) Let us be up and doing for others. Let us give whatever we have to give, without expecting return or gratitude. To give, one need not be a rich person or one holding a high position. Whatever we have with us in overflowing measure will be sufficient. Even a cheerful smile, or an encouraging gesture, or a kind word are at times a great wealth. Sometimes when we go to government offices, airports, banks or other institutions, we only see the perpetual frowns and irritable moods of those employed. All are our own people. Most of them are 'religious' too. They go to temples and pray to God to bestow on them His kindness and mercy. But strangely, the outer life they display to others is a sharp contrast to their devotional moods. Somehow to make a connection with the outer world and our inner life is the problem we have to solve. In fact, a cheerful smile, a kind word for others expands our own hearts as well. Happiness wells up inside. It is not a theory, but a proven fact, that what we give, we receive. Let us greet people with a smile and exchange a few kind words. This surely brings sunshine in our own lives and to others also.

(2) We are so self-centred that we rarely notice good qualities in others and hardly appreciate good deeds. If we highlight those good qualities in others we not only can encourage them in their good way, but we can plant the seeds of those very qualities in our own hearts. Why feel so reserved or shy at a time when a little praise or gratitude expressed to others would be so helpful? Praise and encourage a man and you will see how marvellously he responds to your kind gesture. Always communicate

with others. Even writing a friendly letter emphasizing the bright side of things is an effective means, bringing out that "mother's touch" we all seek. The capacity to express those qualities of the Divine Mother are also within us.

(3) To forgive is divine. Little hurts and insults, in course of time become festering wounds. Seldom, we forgive people who have wronged us. We pray to the Divine Mother to forgive our own heinous crimes and sins, yet on our part do not want to forget even the petty offences of others. Our resentment boils and we foolishly rush to retaliate. Let us have some patience and restraint. Why not reverse this impulsive behaviour? Instead, pray to the Mother, "Mother, as you forgive all our guilts and wrong doings, grant me also the strength to forgive those who have offended me." Or speak highly of some good in persons estranged from us. Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna never spoke ill of others. They always praised some good qualities of even wicked people. Thus, they were able to transform the lives of unvirtuous persons. Why not we cultivate a little of this divine virtue and achieve peace of mind ?

(4) Motherland is a very sweet word. We all use it, whether we know the meaning of it or not. The land which nourishes us physically and mentally with care and love is sacred. We only know how to exploit her for our insatiable pleasure seeking and greed for gain. We have made this great land ugly by our dwarfishness. There is no national pride nor love for the nation and its people. Vivekananda untiringly worked and spoke of the glory of this nation. But we, in our thoughts and actions do not manifest an iota of his pride and altruism. People always harp on their "rights", but never seriously think about how they can serve their country. There is not much use

in simply crying, "our motherland, our motherland!" while in actual practice treating this "Mother" in a callous way. Unless everyone of us works diligently, efficiently and unselfishly for the welfare of all our brethren, for the land of our birth, the nation will not be able to rise higher.

(5) Probably all old civilizations spoke of our planet as Mother Earth, and used the term Mother when referring to Nature. In his latest hypothesis, scientist James Lovelock describes the Earth as *Gaia*—goddess of Earth. We, who have become infatuated and conceited by our technological achievements, regard Mother Earth with scant respect. Through greed and irresponsible wasting of her resources, our so-called progress and material advancement have denuded this Mother of all her beauty and grace. We are facing ecological debacles one after another: global warming, stratospheric ozone depletion, littered oceans, encroaching deserts, severe droughts, water shortages and contamination, and so on. If we fail to remember that the Earth is as a living being—a goddess—our fate will be sealed. As our forbearers used the word Mother to convey the ideas of holiness, purity, divinity, our immediate task is to resurrect such noble conception in our day to day life. Then, it may be possible for individuals and humanity as a whole to restrain the urge to over-progenitiveness to within safe limits, curb runaway avariciousness, and restore our Mother Earth to her former health and radiance. We have to revere our Earth as our own Mother.

(6) The time is ripe for all religions to unite together in a great struggle against

the power of rank materialistic outlook, and to lift human consciousness again to the realization of its Mother-child, Father-child relationship with the Divine Being. There can then be perfect harmony and cooperation among them all. We are the children of the Universal Mother. The Mother, whether She is called Durga, Tara, or Mary, does not make any distinctions amongst her children. We must remember She is impartial and the Onlooker also. It is She who has become this universe and all beings. We belong to Her and She belongs to us. When our life becomes Mother-centred all our petty fight and bitterness disappear.

In his book (*Shakti and Shākta*, Sir John Woodroffe wrote that the worship of Shakti (the Primordial Energy looked upon as Mother) would not only revivify India, but give other religions a metaphysical foundation. And:

For him who sees the Mother in all things, all scientific research is wonder and worship. The seeker looks upon not mere mechanical movements of so called "dead Matter" but the wondrous play of Her whose form all matter is. As She thus reveals Herself She induces in him a passionate exaltation and that sense of security which is only gained as approach is made to the Central Heart of things.¹²

The Divine Mother plays a game of hide and seek with Her children, for fun for some-time. Finally, She draws all to Her warm bosom, revealing Her secrets of wisdom and power.

12. Sir John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shākta* (London: Luzac & Co., 1918) p. 102.

Religion, Faith and Medicine

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

Religion, faith and medicine cannot be divorced from one another. There is a subtle interconnection between them. The author is a physician and has more than three decades of experience in the medical field. His advice to the medical fraternity, therefore, carries weight and conviction. The Swami is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order serving in the Varanasi Sevashrama Hospital.

Search for Holistic Medicine

In modern times there is a trend towards holistic studies. There is a general disillusionment among intellectual circles all over the world with the Cartesian and Newtonian models of the world and their corresponding attitude towards life. The change in thinking began with the startling discoveries of modern sub-atomic Physics. It became disillusionment as people began realizing the disastrous results of our ruthless exploitation of nature, which has now brought us near to the verge of ecological holocaust. Scientists, philosophers, and thinkers everywhere are searching for new philosophy and a new way of life more wholesome and healthy. This probing and exploring has given rise to holistic sciences—holistic psychology, holistic medicine, biology and others. The “study of parts” as in the traditional classical sciences has proven inadequate for explaining integrated systems as a whole, and although compartmentalized studies are useful, they have to be complemented with another type of study which takes into consideration the integrated totality. In short, this is the attitude of the modern advocates of the holistic sciences.

Modern Western medicine too, is based upon the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. Allopathic medicine studies the human being as a physical body made up of organs

and cells. Thus to a doctor, the body appears something like a machine made up of cells, organs, joints, and muscles which functions due to electro-magnetic and chemical reactions. The great and astounding advances in medicine, especially in medical technology, have taken place solely because of this mechanistic conceptualization of the human body. Unfortunately, however, the great successes and advances have strengthened the attachment of medical men to their present ways of thinking and doing things and their approaches towards their patients is becoming more and more technical rather than humane.

Man is not merely a body, or a conglomeration of cells, flesh, bones and blood. He also has a mind with complex emotions and thoughts. And he is a social being as well. Unless medical science takes into consideration all these aspects and treats the whole human being,—and not merely the human machine—it cannot be considered complete. In an attempt to obtain a holistic, complete system of medicine, in recent times there has been great interest and enquiry into various ancient systems of medicine like Ayurveda, the principles of Homoeopathy, Naturopathy, Chinese systems of medicine, etc.

Understandably, medical philosophers have shown interest even in primitive

methods of healing, prevalent among the tribals and aboriginals. Faith healing and the role of religion in physical healing too have come under the searchlight of modern researches. We shall in this essay restrict ourselves to the relation and interaction between religion, faith and medicine.

Medicine And Religion Are Poles Apart.

There can be four ways in which this interaction between medicine and religion can be looked upon. According to the *first approach*, religion and medicine are thought of as two entirely different branches of human endeavour, having no relation with each other. Religion is based on faith, its goal is supernatural, other-worldly or entirely spiritual, and the means it employs to its ends are mostly psychological. Medicine on the other hand is a practical science based like any other empirical science on observable signs and symptoms, and laboratory data. Its goal is physical healing and the means employed are drugs, therapeutic procedures and nursing care. Thus the goal, the domain, and the means used are entirely different; the two have nothing in common between them. They are divergent human activities which have no meeting ground.

Often, religion in its crude, primitive, and ritualistic forms is considered a hindrance to the practice of rational and scientific medicine. Religion often breeds superstitions which prove detrimental to health. Diseases like smallpox and measles are thought by ignorant people to be caused by semi-divine beings who must be appeased and propitiated. Medical help is not sought and deaths and complications are the result. Such superstitious people are more often found in villages, though they are not altogether absent among the city dwellers.

The Common Goal

The *second view* is that religion and medicine may have different methodologies, but they have a common aim between them. Both are labouring to make humanity happier by eliminating suffering. True, religion emphasises the other-worldly aspect of existence and lays stress on happiness after death, but it also helps man to attain happiness in this life. It must be remembered that most people do not resort to religion for *mokṣa* or salvation, nor even for enjoying heavenly pleasures after death, but for the alleviation of worldly suffering (*ārta*) and for the fulfilment of mundane desires (*arthārthi*). The story of *Dhruva* as narrated in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* is an excellent illustration to the point. The child, *Dhruva*, underwent the practice of severe austerities and prayed to Lord Viṣṇu not for *mokṣa*, but for obtaining the kingdom.

The story of Lord Buddha is another proof of the fact that both religion and medicine have a common aim in view. The young prince, *Siddhārtha*, saw a sick man, an old person and a dead body. These scenes of physical suffering and death triggered a process of discrimination and enquiry into the ultimate cause of suffering and its solution. *Siddhārtha* finally became the Buddha and propagated a new religion. Interestingly, the triad: disease, old age, and death which led to Gautama Buddha's enlightenment are the very foes against which medical science has been waging untiring battle since time immemorial. The four basic aims of medicine are: the preservation of life (prevention or postponement of death); the alleviation of suffering; the prevention and cure of diseases; and the promotion of knowledge. Can religion ever be opposed to or disapproving of such noble aims? But, as already pointed out, the methodology and the philosophies behind these two branches are

different. The Buddha preached the Eight-fold Noble Path to extinguish all suffering, while medicine resorts to physical means for the temporary alleviation of suffering and the cure of diseases. However, the Buddha, though the propounder of the path of righteous living, was never opposed to treatment of physical diseases. On the contrary, he personally set an example by nursing the sick.

Religion and Medicine are Complementary.

The *third approach* can be to look upon religion and medicine as not only not contradictory, and not merely as serving the common goal, but as complementary to each other. A strong argument in favour of this view is the fact that medicine has originated out of religion. A study of the history of medicine shows that the earliest therapeutic procedures employed for physical ailments were mostly religious and ritualistic, such as propitiation of deities by religious rites, going on pilgrimages, chants and talismans, keeping vows, fasting on special days, making religious gifts, etc. This was known as *daiva-vyapasraya chikitsā*, cures depending on divine intercession. These practices were more prevalent at the time when medical science was not developed. But now with the accumulation of vast medical knowledge, the scope of their practice has narrowed and they are resorted to only in such incurable and problematic cases where medical science has not been able to contribute much. Many of these procedures have great psychological value for which they are often successfully employed.

Sickness As Stress

In recent times a phenomenal advancement in medical technology has made the modern medical man extremely powerful. He can detect smallest defects in structure

and functions of the human body with amazing accuracy. He can change a failing heart and can transplant a healthy kidney for a non-functioning one. He can work miracles with his tools of diagnosis and treatment and can infuse new life into patients who are almost dead. But when self-confidence becomes arrogance, he is apt to forget his limitations. Sri Ramakrishna in his inimitable manner describes the arrogance of the medical man: "God laughs...when the physician says to the mother weeping bitterly because of her child's desperate illness: 'Don't be afraid, mother, I shall cure your child.' The physician does not know that no one can save the child if God wills that he should die."¹ No one can better appreciate the truth of Sri Ramakrishna's statement than a conscientious physician.

In spite of all the technological advancements in the medical sciences, man has not been able to conquer disease, old age and death. If some fatal disease has been brought under control, newer ones have cropped up. Uncertainty regarding the outcome of disease processes looms large in many cases, and unequal distribution of available medical facilities continue to maintain the scarcity situation in an unjust society. With all the wondrous modern equipment, the modern medical man continues to be uncertain, only marginally powerful, and certainly incapable of providing help to all. Thus the three inevitable situations, viz, uncertainty, helplessness and scarcity, for which religion too tries to seek an answer, continue to exist in the field of medicine as well.

Every disease is a stress situation and every surgical operation an uncertainty for

1. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1986) p. 324.

the patient and his relatives. Hence those who are less fortunate and less equipped physically, monetarily and psychologically naturally resort to some form of religion and faith for consolation and support. Even in a technologically advanced society, human ventures, however carefully planned and expertly executed, are liable to end in disappointment or failure. Emotional involvement in such situations leads to deep psychological stress and man is led to breaking points. Religion comes to help at such points by supplying a supra-empirical view of a larger total reality. The theory of *karma*, the concept of life after death, the faith in divine dispensations, the will of God, and so on, are the solutions which religion offers to sustain the patients as well as to provide a holistic dimension. During such stress situations a doctor can invite a priest or a religious man to help the patient and his relatives to bear the crisis. Unlike a majority of their colleagues, some doctors themselves resort to prayer and appreciate its value for themselves and their patients.

Faith, A Great Healer

It is recorded that Jesus Christ used to cure blindness, drive away ghosts, and even raise the dead by his mere touch or command. But there is one striking incident in his life, which highlights the power of faith as a healing factor. Once while Jesus was passing through a road, a great crowd followed and thronged about him. A woman who was suffering from 'flow of blood' for twelve years touched his garment saying to herself that if she touched even his garment she would be cured. Immediately the bleeding stopped. Jesus realized that power had gone forth from him and turning around asked who had touched him, although a great crowd was pressing around him. When the lady who had touched him told him the truth, Jesus told her, "Daughter, your faith has

made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."²

A funny story is narrated of a villager who visited a doctor for his ailments. He was examined and was given a prescription written on a piece of paper. A few months later, fully cured and healthy, he came back to pay his respects to the doctor. Unable to recognize the patient by his looks, the doctor wanted to remember him with the help of his written prescription. When asked for it, the patient, now cured, pointed to the amulet on his arm. The patient was cured by the paper worn on the arm as an amulet!

These are two extreme examples of healing produced by the power of faith. They may or may not be true, but they do highlight the value of faith in the physician as a healing factor. More authentic records of faith healing are found in the life of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. She had firm faith that the earth within the precincts of Goddess Simhavahini Devi's temple at Jayrambati could cure ailments if applied to the affected part. Cases of snake bite are on record which got cured by the application of the earth on the bitten part.

Psychosomatic Diseases

Just as physical suffering leads to anxiety and mental stress, so also worry, anxiety and psychological tensions affect the body and cause diseases. These are called psychosomatic diseases. Peptic ulcers, asthma, diabetes, hypertension, neurodermatosis and others are sometimes caused and sustained by worry, anxiety, fear, frustration, jealousy, etc. The fast pace of modern life with its rigid fixation with the clock is causing tremendous stress, leading

2. *The New Testament*; The Gospel according to St. Mark, 5. 25-34.

to hypertension and heart diseases. Hostile emotional reactions not only consume a lot of psychic energy, but they can also precipitate serious problems, like the perforation of a peptic ulcer. A greedy person is more liable to develop diabetes than a contented one. An over-ambitious person is more prone to hypertension than a contented one. An over-ambitious person is more prone to hypertension, and an emotionally high-strung one runs greater risk of having an attack of stroke.

These observations have led to rapid growth and popularity of psychiatry and psychotherapy. But more than palliative and superficial psychiatric help, what most patients with psychosomatic disease need is a healthy way of living and a right attitude towards life, which religion can provide. Religion teaches how not to become a prey to greed and anger and thus helps one to avoid psychosomatic problems. This is the reason why Yoga is becoming extremely popular, not only as a treatment for diseases like diabetes, asthma and hypertension, but also as a way to a healthy tension-free life.

Medical Ecology and Shamanism

Shamanism is another offshoot of primitive religion which is practised for the treatment of physical ailments. A Shaman or witch-doctor claims to have contact with gods and is supposed to suggest divine remedies. In recent years some Western anthropologists have tried to study shamanism as prevalent among tribal people. Belgian anthropologist Professor R. Pinxten with his many years of experience with Navajo Indians feels that shamanistic medicine is more holistic than Western medical science. The Western view regards an illness as a local and isolated phenomenon. The patient is seldom regarded 'wholistically' in the socio-ethnic context. Conversely, the shamanistic view is that all

elements must be in harmony. Sickness is the result of a disturbance in the relationships between people and other living beings, between people and their ancestors, etc. Each individual has a place in, and is a part of, the social order. The shamanist healer is the person who finds out where that order has been disrupted and indicates how that harmony can be restored (through ceremonies, for example). Dr. Cl. Farrer, an American anthropologist working among the Mescaler Apache Indians, has come to a similar conclusion—"In contrast to the Western mode of thought, Apache know that suffering, illness, pain and grief occur when the inherent balance of life is upset. Only by reasserting properness and re-establishing the ethnic relationships among people and the other aspects of the creation can rupture causing illness, suffering, pain and grief be mended."³

A large number of ecological factors affect human health. The effect of climatic changes on the body is well recognized. Astrology claims that the course of diseases can be influenced by stars and planets. Based on this concept a number of ritualistic procedures and ceremonies have been evolved to counteract the bad effects of these astrological factors. Though not directly a part of religion, these ceremonies are akin to religious ritualistic practices. This astrological view is not unscientific and can be combined, if necessary, with other medical means and procedures. Sri Ramakrishna indicated by his observances and by his example that all of these have an element of truth in them.

Religion The Best Medicine

The *fourth and final approach* can be not to consider religion and medicine as

³. "Ethical Reflections on Health and Illness," Sion Conference 1990-91; The Netherlands. First written symposium, *Introduction*, p. iv.

separate. According to this view, religion is the best medicine and medical science is the best religion in practice. Since religion tries to remove suffering by going to its very root, it is considered the best medicine. The cycle of repeated births and deaths is spoken of in religious parlance as *bhava-roga*, an affliction or disease, and God is called the Physician—*bhava-roga-Vaidya*, *Vaidya-Nārāyaṇo-Harih*. Lord Buddha is similarly referred to as *Bhīṣaka*, Physician par-excellence, also *Mahābhīṣaka*, and *Sallakatta*—Surgeon.

Again, this view looks at evil propensities not merely as the cause of physical ailments but as diseases themselves. According to Tulsidas, the author of the great epic, *Rāma Charit Manas*:

Delusion is the root of all ailments (of the soul) and from this again spring many pains. The flatulence of lust, the phlegm of insatiable greed, and the bile of passion constantly inflame the breast, and when these three combine there results a miserable paralysis of the whole system. Who can tell the names of all the diseases represented by the various obstinate sensual cravings? Such are the leprosy of selfishness, the itch of envy, the rheumatic throbs of joy and sorrow, the consumption that burns at the sight of another's prosperity, the horrible open sore of malignant spirit, the excruciating gout of egoism, the sciatica of heresy, hypocrisy, vanity, pride, and so on.⁴

A similar description of the symptoms of the afflicted soul is found in a Bengali song Sri Ramakrishna used to sing:

What a delirious fever is this that I suffer from!
O Mother, Thy grace is my only cure.
False pride is the fever that rocks my wasted form ;
"I" and "mine" are my cry. Oh, what a wicked delusion!

4. *The Ramayana of Tulsidas*, Tr. E. S. Growse, 6th Edition, Ramanarayanlal, Allahabad, p. 671.

My quenchless thirst for wealth and friends is never-ceasing:
How, then, shall I sustain my life ?
Talk about things unreal, this is my wretched delirium,
And I indulge in it always, O Giver of all good fortune!

My eyes in seeming sleep are closed, my stomach is filled
With the vile worms of cruelty.
Alas! I wander about absorbed in unmeaning deeds ;
Even for Thy holy name I have no taste, O Mother!
I doubt that I shall ever be cured of this malady.⁵

What are the remedies suggested ?

Pious religious observances, penance, meditation, sacrifice, prayer, and almsgiving are so many different remedies. By the grace of Rama every disease is extirpated if the treatment is conducted in the following manner ; with the holy teacher for Physician, faith for a prescription, contempt of the world for regimen, devotion to Hari for life-giving drug, and a soul full of faith for the vehicle in which it is administered...⁶

That none can be truly healthy without a healthy mind was the opinion of Plato in ancient times. "No attempt should be made to cure the body without the soul," he said, "and if the head and body ought to be healthy, you must begin by curing the mind."⁷ Thus, religion can indeed be looked upon as the best medicine. While an average physician cannot possibly rise to the spiritual heights of a Buddha or a Christ, he can certainly become a better physician by imbibing spiritual values and being himself

5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 203-04.

6. *The Ramayana*, p. 672.

7. Udupa and Gurumohan Singh, "Religion & Medicine", Institute of Medical Sciences, BHU, Varanasi, 1974, p. 9.

a religious man. "Blessed is he who carries within himself a God, an ideal of beauty... for therein lie springs of great thoughts and great action,"⁸ said Louis Pasteur the great scientist.

A physician is in an excellent position to act as a spiritual healer of his patient. By his position as a physician, he acquires certain privileges which are denied to others. He can come in close psychological, spiritual and confessional relationship with the patient. A patient seeks an unshakable ally in whom he can unburden the deep and complex problems of his life. He needs someone who can listen to him patiently and to whom he can disclose his secret worries and feelings of guilt, someone who can understand problems and sympathise without moralizing or accusing. A deeply religious doctor can do this job much better.

Medicine—The Best Practical Religion

Finally, let us see how the practice of medicine can become one of the best forms of practical religion. According to Swami Vivekananda, a human being is the best and highest temple of God. To consider the sick and suffering as veritable embodiments of God, and to serve them in the spirit of consecration is the first condition for transforming medical practice into a religious act.

The commonest form of worship prevalent among most religions is the ritualistic worship of a symbol of God such as an image, a picture, or a pitcher, or other forms. First of all, ritualistically, life is infused into the lifeless symbol. This is followed by purification of the articles of worship. After such preliminaries, the worshipper offers five, ten or sixteen items to the deity with the help of ritual acts and

the chanting of verbal formulae or *mantras*. Such deeply sacred acts can be performed while serving a human being, looking upon him as an embodiment of divinity. Instead of flowers and incense, tablets and mixtures are administered; instead of water for bathing an image, a patient is sponged or bathed with medicated lotion. Application of ointments or dressing a wound may be compared to offering sandalpaste to the Deity. An amiable manner and reassuring words of hope to the patient are like *mantras* in the worship of God.

While the general outline of the process of worship is the same, the items offered and the mantras chanted vary from deity to deity. The mantras and items employed in the worship of Kali are not those used in the worship of Siva. Similarly, there are differences in the form of medical service given to patients suffering from typhoid, meningitis or intestinal obstruction. Indeed, a surgical operation can be compared to an elaborate Durga Puja. The operation theatre is the *pūja mandapam*, worship hall, the chief surgeon is the chief priest conducting the solemn ceremony of the operation ritual with the help of his team of assistants. The elaborate preparations, the perfect solemnity and careful method and procedure—all are comparable to those of a Durga Puja.

Service to a suffering human being as God is even superior to a ritualistic worship. While one has to imagine or ritualistically infuse life into a stone image, nothing of the sort is required in serving a man as God, for he is already alive. There is a far greater manifestation of divinity in a living human being. Secondly, serving God in man helps both the server and the served, while the traditional worship helps only the worshipper. Finally, serving a human being as God requires greater intellectual, moral and spiritual training than is required for ritual-worship.

8. *Ibid.*

But seeing or feeling the presence of God in a miserable, poor, ignorant, suffering patient is not easy. A physician is apt to see in his patients only man or woman, rich or poor, saint or sinner, or a fellow being of high or low caste. The human God may grunt or complain, and unlike the mute ever-smiling stone image, may weep, shout or at times become irritable or violent. On such occasions one is apt to wonder whether one is serving God or devil.

The service of a living God, therefore, demands greater patience, forbearance and perseverance. Repeatedly the physician will have to remind himself that the being in front of him is not a man or a woman, but God Himself. He will have to overcome his reactions of disinterestedness, irritation, annoyance and repulsion—disinterestedness, because a patient may not present any fascinating clinical problem; irritation at the patient's verbosity, lack of consistency and clarity in giving the history of his condition; annoyance, because the patient does not follow his instructions or because the disease does not respond to treatment as expected; and repulsion, because of the patient's lack of cleanliness, self-control, or absence of a sense of intelligent cooperation.

The service of God in man is therefore a training in itself, a process of character

building, and a spiritual practice of the highest order. It demands an intelligent combination of technical skill, human understanding and spiritual and religious virtues. All those persons who engage in serving the sick, the diseased, or otherwise needy, are indeed most blessed and fortunate.

We may best summarise the purport of our points on the inseparable relation between the practice of religion and the practice of medicine with the perceptive words of Sister Nivedita as she explained the practical philosophy of Vedanta in the light of Ramakrishna's and Vivekananda's teachings: "No distinction, henceforth," she said, "between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid..."⁹ And as Vivekananda himself said, "...the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality."¹⁰

9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984) "Introduction", by Sister Nivedita, p. xv.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. xv-xvi.

There is only Brahman, the One without a second, which is within all, homogeneous, infinite, endless and all-pervading; there is no duality whatsoever in It.

Vivekachūdāmani, 466.

Miss Noble into Sister Nivedita

MAMATA RAY AND ANIL BARAN RAY

In the initial stage, Sister Nivedita had to struggle to win over the barriers of orthodoxy in Hindu society. The story of her anxiety and trepidation and also of her persevering and intelligence in this regard are brought out in this article. Mamata Ray teaches Economics in Visvabharati University, and Anil Baran Ray is teacher of Political Science at Burdwan University, West Bengal.

At the instance of Swami Vivekananda, Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) arrived in India in January, 1898 to start her work in the field of women's education. She felt she was ready to serve. But there were doubts too. Would she be accepted in India by the orthodox people who traditionally looked down upon the Westerners as *mlecchas*? There were orthodox people both in the Ramakrishna Order as well as in larger society. How could Miss Noble and Swami Vivekananda win *them* over to the cause of liberal views and progressive society which they represented? This is the burden of our article, an account of their *modus operandi*.

I

At about the time of Miss Noble's arrival in India there were already six other Western disciples with Swami Vivekananda: Mr. J. J. Goodwin,¹ Miss Henrietta Muller,² Captain

1. Mr. J. J. Goodwin, an Englishman from America, first met Swami Vivekananda as a stenographer appointed to take notes of his lectures in New York. Within a week of his coming into contact with Swamiji he became so deeply influenced by him that he refused to take any payment for his job and accepted the spiritual guidance of Swamiji. It is his stenographic skill which has preserved most of the lectures of Swamiji for posterity. Unfortunately, he died shortly after his arrival in India at the young age of twenty-seven.

2. Miss Muller accompanied Swami Vivekananda to countries such as Switzerland and gave

and Mrs Sevier,³ Miss Josephine MacLeod,⁴ and Mrs Sara C. Bull.⁵ Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull were lodged by Swamiji at the old cottage at the Belur Math by the side of the Ganga, and Margaret Noble, after spending her first few days in Calcutta in a house in Chowringhee, joined them in the guest house at Belur. Together they made up what Swamiji called 'the trinity', bound together in their devotion to him and their dedication to his work for India.

But, not surprisingly, there was opposition to Swami Vivekananda's associating with these Western ladies. The opposition came from some of the monks in the Math

him money for the purchase of land for the Belur Math.

3. Captain and Mrs. Sevier met Swamiji in England, accepted him as their Guru and having come to India dedicated themselves to the starting of the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati.

4. Miss Josephine MacLeod, affectionately called 'Jaya' by Swami Vivekananda for her invincible spirit, met him during his first visit to the United States in the 1890s and ever since dedicated herself to working for the India of Swami Vivekananda. Though not a disciple formally, she "meant" more to Swamiji than most of his disciples.

5. Mrs. Sara Bull, the widow of the famous Norwegian violinist Ole Bull and the hostess of Swami Vivekananda at Boston during his first visit to the United States in the 1890s, had ever since become a mother to Swamiji in temporal things, helping him generously with her money and was called "Dhira Mata" (the steady mother) by Swami Vivekananda.

too, who did not much approve of their leader's talking with women.⁶ Looking back, Swamiji seems to have used a two-fold strategy to win over recalcitrants. These were (1) reasoned arguments, and (2) doing some things strikingly bold and unorthodox, always in good humour and always successful, giving a shock to prudery and hyper-sensitiveness wherever it was seen. Swamiji had an exceedingly delicate and good sense of humour and he put it to effective use at such times. Once he challenged with the question, calling for an answer: "Who is *Ārya* or *meleccha*, noble or base?—the man who lives within the shell of his pride, or the one who, over and above race and caste divisions, brings a universal interpretation to the highest truths?"⁷ With a poser such as this he defended not only his associating with these foreign ladies, but also asserted, on suitable quotation of the authority of the Vedas, that he had the right to give *supreme* ordination to a foreigner as well as to a Hindu.⁸

In order to open the eyes of the orthodox people, and open their minds too (though it must have shocked some of them) he would openly accept the food cooked by the Western ladies and drink water served by them, both these acts decidedly out of bounds to the orthodox elements. Nor would he stop there only, but would prevail upon his hesitant Indian disciples to do the same! Having then succeeded so far, Swamiji would rejoice, and announce with a laugh before everyone how the poor fellows had ever since lost their 'caste'! Nothing could withstand these shock tactics of the Swami and his bold sense of fun. Pravrajika

Prabuddhaprana writes in her *Life of Josephine MacLeod*:

He would openly eat the food which the Western ladies had cooked for him and also make his reluctant Indian disciples eat with them. After doing just this, one day he arrived at the monastery with an Indian disciple, an orthodox Brahmin. Vivekananda announced to all present, "By the bye, have you heard that this 'priest' has today taken food which was touched by Nivedita? That he took the sweets touched by her did not matter much, but (addressing the disciple) how did you drink the water she had touched?" To this the disciple replied, "But it was you, sir, who ordered me to do so. Under the Guru's orders I can do anything. I was unwilling to drink the water though. But you drank it and I had to take it as prasada." To this, the Swami declared, "well, your caste is gone for ever. Now nobody will respect you as a Brahmin of the priest class." "I don't care if they do not," said the disciple. I can take rice from the house of a Pariah if you order me to." At this, all roared with laughter.⁹

As Sister Nivedita said, Swami Vivekananda was nothing, if not a breaker of bondage¹⁰ and a breaker of bondage he definitely was when he breached those strong walls of social and caste customs which tyrannised over the lives of people at end-of-century India. He would have nothing to do with the non-essential tyrannies of Indian civilization and his mission was nothing short of awakening people to the need of rising above them to realize the spiritual unity of all humanity.

II

However, soon winning over the qualms of the pious orthodox people, both among the pandits and in the monastic brotherhood, Miss Noble with Swamiji's help set about to join the society of the women of Cal-

6. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982) Vol. 1, p. 53.

7. Quoted in Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated* (Madras: Samata Books, 1985) p. 86.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, *Tantine, The Life of Josephine MacLeod* (Calcutta: Sri Sarada Math, 1990) p. 38.

10. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 1, p. 67.

cutta. First she would meet the women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were then living with Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of the Master—'Holy Mother' to all the devotees ever after. Some of these ladies were widowed from their childhood and for obvious reasons, were the most rigid adherents of traditional customs, rituals and observances which are prescribed for such women. But if Miss Noble could be accepted by them, she could reasonably well look forward to acceptance by other sections of society too, and her work in education could proceed smoothly.

A first but crucial test came for her on 27th February, 1898, exactly a month after Margaret's arrival in Calcutta. It happened to be the day on which Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was being celebrated publicly. There was a festival being held at the temple of Babu Chandra Daw at Bally, not far to the north of present Belur Math. Miss Noble felt that before attending the festival she would like to visit the temple garden at Dakshineswar where the great saint had his realization. She made the trip accompanied by Miss Muller. Though the presence of these foreign ladies at the temple premises was not taken to kindly by the general public—there were suspicions and questions rankling—Did these foreign ladies have the love and earnestness to entitle them to such a presence? But once the people came closer and saw them, they were convinced of their sincerity and devotion and gave them freedom. They had not to face any kind of difficulty, and were warmly welcomed into the room where Sri Ramakrishna had lived for so many years, sanctified by his austerities. So making their obeisance to the Great Soul, the ladies with joyful hearts crossed back again to the other side of the Ganga to attend the birthday festival.

Having passed this sort of 'pre-test' at Dakshineswar, Margaret now came to grips with a 'real' test at the Bally festival. She met Gopaler Ma (Aghormani Devi) one of the great devotees of the Master. Gopaler Ma used to see in Sri Ramakrishna the Baby Krishna, and he too used to accept her worship in that attitude. She was the most orthodox of the Hindu lady disciples of the Master, who was then staying with Sarada Devi as her companion. Doubtless Miss Noble, Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod wondered how they would be treated by Gopaler Ma and other orthodox ladies. Would they be greeted affectionately? Would East meet West on the plane of cordiality? And how, after all, would it all be possible with the formidable barrier of no common language between them? But a basis 'emerged', wrote Nivedita a few years later, from the love and devotion all bore together for Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and the great religious ideal. Nivedita wrote:

A sweet American lady was the first of us to discover Gopal's mother and I was taken by her to be blessed and kissed. The "kiss" consists of two fingers placed gently under one's chin, and Gopal's mother has a touch as light as down!

Though we had not a word in common, her wealth of beautiful feeling put us in touch at once, and without an effort at enquiry she took our hands in hers, and led us away into a screened building where the high caste women from the neighbouring village had taken up a post of observation. Friendliness and pleasure greeted us here once more, and no language was necessary to express the readiness of these Eastern women to meet love lovingly and trustfully half-way. Only, I fancy, in some such fashion as this, can the real genius of the Indian people be gauged.

Let the occasion be religious, and all barriers be broken down. High and low, men and women, kindred and alien, all are one, because all realise so intensely, like Gopal's Mother, the common devotion that has drawn them together.¹¹

11. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, (1972), pp. 404-05.

With such a happy outcome of her first meeting with the women devotees, Miss Noble and the other foreign ladies must have nearly walked on air for pure joy. Now, as for their meeting with the Holy Mother, would it be the same? All of them joyfully anticipated meeting the Mother and longed for her blessings. In a way, this was a climactic test for Margaret Noble. In a sense everything depended on Holy Mother herself, as on no other single person or event.

On March 17th, an auspicious day for all the Irish,¹² Margaret along with Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod came to see the Holy Mother together. It was at the Mother's house in Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar. Their minds were filled with thoughts about the Mother—that she had been one of the foremost disciples of the Master, that she had been wedded to him by an act of Providence at the age of five only, when he was eighteen years older, that when she came to Dakshineswar for the first time at the age of eighteen it was to stay with her husband not as a partner in worldly life, but as a helpmate in his spiritual mission. They remembered too that Sarada Devi was worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of the Divine Śakti, the same as the image of Mother Kali in the temple; and now, after the passing of the Master, how she was revered by innumerable devotees as a visible Goddess in her own right, the model of the virgin mother, perfect in purity.

While the ladies anticipated a kind welcome from Holy Mother on the day of their first visit to her, Margaret must have felt some special trepidation, for she had made a great commitment leaving her own home and homeland to come to live, as she

12. A festival day, St. Patrick's Day, for all the Irish.

thought, permanently in India. Could she be really sure of how the Mother would respond? It was no small wonder to her then, when Holy Mother lovingly addressed Margaret and each of the ladies as 'my daughters.' She seemed to be the soul of sweetness, and to be really true to her words of address, the Mother accepted food from her new daughters and ate with them. It was nothing short of revolutionary—an orthodox Brahmin lady breaking down the barriers and rules of caste society by sitting for food with the *mlecchas*! In her own way, the Holy Mother was signalling her approbation for the foreign disciples to be admitted into the fold of Hindu society. In her infinite wisdom she must have been able to look into the hearts of these ladies and found them filled with love and spiritual qualities, and so did not hesitate to take them to her bosom and companionship. Sister Nivedita wrote the significance of this "day of days", March 17, 1898, thus:

She [the Holy Mother] is the very soul of sweetness, so gentle and loving and as merry as a girl...and she is so tender—"my daughter", she calls me. She has always been terribly orthodox, but all this melted away the instant she saw the first two Westerners—Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod, and she tasted food with them! Fruit is always presented to us immediately, and this was naturally offered to her, and she, to the surprise of everyone, accepted. *This gave us all a dignity and made my future work possible in a way nothing else could have done* (Emphasis added). ...She really is, under the simplest, most unassuming guise, one of the strongest and greatest of women.¹³

Understandably, the joy of Miss Noble's Guru was unbounded when he learnt of the disciple's warm welcome by the Holy Mother. His intuitions and plans for Marga-

13. Sri Ma (Holy Mother) felt so much drawn to these foreign daughters of hers that she asked Gopaler Ma, the most orthodox of all the women in her group, to accompany them in their carriages all the way to Belur.

ret's future were materializing. The initial difficulty in bringing people round to his own faith in the foreign devotees was overcome now since, of all people, Sri Sarada Devi herself had given her blessings. A joyful Swami Vivekananda wrote to his *guru-bhai*, Swami Ramakrishnananda that "Shri (Holy) Mother is here, and the European and American ladies went the other day to see her, and what do you think, *Mother ate with them even there!* Is not that grand?"¹⁴

III

It was grand indeed, for true to her Guru's wish Margaret Nobel could now be said to have truly 'arrived' in her home and country. Not only had she won the hearts of the most conservative people and the orthodox Hindu women, but she earned the acclamation of the general public as well. At the instance of Swami Vivekananda, on March 11, 1898 Margaret had made her first public speech in India at the Star Theatre in Calcutta. She spoke at length on how the spiritual thought of India contained in the Vedanta and preached by Swamiji in England had changed the lives of many English people for the better. She indicated that she too was one of those, and that it was due to her deep appreciation of Vedanta and the grand universal teachings of the Swami that she was attracted to come to India to serve, and thereby fulfil her heart's and life's destiny.

This speech of Margaret was extremely important because it allows us now to understand her character and her reasons for making this greatest change of her life. As she said, her soul had been in torment

before she was enlightened by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. Like many others of her time, she was afflicted by burning doubts arising from the conflict between the fundamentalist Biblical teachings and the modern scientific drift towards independent thought started by Darwin's publishing *The Origin of the Species*. Questions like: "If 'God is love', as the Bible says, then how is it that the ceaseless struggle for survival (implying the negation of love and therefore of God) was the law of Nature?" Finding a resolution of this problem in Vedanta, which answered other of her doubts too, Margaret found mental peace and joy at heart. Unutterably grateful to Vivekananda for "the great spiritual treasures" that she found India had preserved for the world through six thousand years of civilization, Margaret Noble now voiced the depth of her feeling. Her maiden speech in Calcutta was a resounding success.

Embracing agnosticism could never have been a way out of intellectual dilemmas for Margaret Noble. Did not the great agnostic, Professor Huxley himself, acknowledge as his last conviction that humanity was unlike the rest of the animal kingdom, in being governed by something higher than mere physical evolution?¹⁵ And long before, did not Herbert Spencer in his well known "*First Principles*" move from the position of complete negation to the theorem that "a first cause existed, and of it we can know nothing intellectually."¹⁶

Yet, Margaret Noble was too much of an intellectual to find solace in the narrow channels of belief in a personal God. Under the circumstances, she was in a great

14. From a letter to Mrs. Eric Hammond, dated 22 May, 1898. See *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Editor, Sankari Prasad Basu (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982) Vol. 1, p. 10.

15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977) Vol. 8, p. 448.

16. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 2, p. 398.

quandary, literally a turbulent sea, battling the waves in search of truth. At such a stormy time in her life, Swami Vivekananda came to her with the gospel of Vedanta that "God is one, without a second." Apparently many, He is really One. The whole world is the manifestation of God and all apparent struggles and conflicts arising out of ignorance find resolution in the realization of oneness of God and of man's inner Being identified with Him. The bold and fearless teaching of this great truth by Swami Vivekananda brought hope and peace to many souls in England groping in darkness. To quote Margaret Noble:

I cannot tell you in detail of the personal energy that has been shown by people, whom I could name, in consequence of their intense realization of the world as the manifestation of God, and of themselves as identical with God; and for whom, therefore, errors, sins, and impossibilities cannot exist.

It is indeed a new light. It is a new light to the mother dealing with her children. Because, if sin does not exist, if sin is only ignorance, how changed, how different is our position towards wrong and towards weakness and towards fear, instead of the old position of condemnation! The old notion, the old conception of any sort, which has at the bottom hatred, goes away, and instead there is love—all love.¹⁷

Continuing her exposition on the contribution of Indian spiritual thought to the West, Margaret Noble said that in Europe people entertain a passion for service—

...Even here your Eastern wisdom brought the light of non-attachment. ...that if it is a matter of the least consequence to us, whom we serve, then, our service is as nothing.¹⁸

She concluded by saying that it was for the great spiritual treasures of India that she had come... "to receive enlightenment

and fulfilment through service to this great land and its people."¹⁹ In this same speech, in reply to the rhetorical question "Who is Nivedita?" She said with the simplicity of a child, "I must learn everything like a child; my education is beginning. Help me! When the road is difficult, I shall remember the welcome in your kindly faces."²⁰

Margaret's speech was a great success. By the time she ended, she had by her unruffled calmness, poise and stage-presence, and by her sincere and forthright remarks, endeared herself completely to her audience. They applauded her thunderously, signifying their spontaneous acceptance of her as one of their very own.²¹

IV

With this acceptance for Nivedita, Swami Vivekananda's aim was doubly fulfilled. Margaret was established as an authority in her field of service to society, and by making her feel 'at home' in India, he inspired the other Western disciples to feel they too could become useful and constructive workers in the holy cause of India's welfare and in propagating the message of spiritual unity of mankind all over the world.

The auspicious beginning behind them, the Guru decided to initiate Miss Noble into *Brahmacharya*, the holy vows of the novitiate in monastic life. The simple initiation ceremony was performed in the chapel of the Math on the morning of 25 March, 1898. In this solemn religious ceremony as she joined the monastic Order of Ramakrishna she received her new name *Nivedita*—"The Dedicated". The Guru then taught the disciple to perform the worship of Siva, and the ritual ended with his request to her to

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 399.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 399-400.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Quoted in Reymond, p. 92.

offer flowers at the feet of the Buddha with the following words: "Go thou and follow Him, who was born and gave His life for others five hundred times, before He attained the vision of the Buddha."²² Margaret Noble had already taken her vow of service to India. Now, as Nivedita, she was made to dedicate her life for others as selflessly as Lord Buddha had done.

Our recounting of this momentous period in Margaret Noble's life would be incomplete if we fail to reflect for a moment on the deep philosophical significance of Swamiji's and Nivedita's subtle *modus operandi*. Vivekananda stood as a beacon light for all human beings to come up and realize the Divinity of the individual Soul and common spiritual human brotherhood. This great purpose of human life is the spiritual goal and birthright of every human being. It is the most fundamental teaching Vivekananda emphasized. Caste, colour, creeds or language diversity, things which seem to divide people from one another and separate them from the One Father in Heaven, Vivekananda taught, were secondary, and their importance should always be kept within bounds. He always emphasized these spiritual truths and urged Indians to make them practical in life. And he sought all

²². Swami Vivekananda himself was so pleased at this that he considered Miss Noble to be "really an acquisition". See *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 447.

to accept the goodness of people wherever and whenever they found it, whether amongst their own countrymen or in foreign visitors and admirers of India's religion and culture. On the other hand, he inspired his Western disciples and workers such as Sister Nivedita likewise, and taught that renunciation of selfishness and service to humanity is the best means for people to realize their oneness with God and humanity. This common spiritual identity he knew was the spiritual basis for all unity and human solidarity, irrespective of divisions artificially created by man. This he believed would pave the way for a new world order.

The idea of Universalism, so to say, should be reduced to practice in every man's and woman's life, now in the twentieth century itself. As Prabuddhaprana aptly put it in course of her discussion of Swami Vivekananda's message and its relevance: "It [the idea of universalism] was a valid hypothesis then ; it is even vital today, when, as we near the twenty-first century, separatist elements threaten once again to divide humanity."²³

²³. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 1, p. 114. "After the service," Nivedita reminisces, "we were taken upstairs. The Swami put on himself ashes and bone earrings, and matted locks of a Shiva-yogi, and sang and played to us Indian music—on Indian instruments, for an hour." *Ibid.*, p. 282.

Do not let worldly thoughts and anxieties disturb your mind. Do everything that is necessary at the proper time, and let your mind be always fixed on God.

—Sri Ramakrishna

Practical Vedanta

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

This inspiring article is based on the speech delivered by the author at the Fourth International Congress of Vedanta, organized by Miami University, Ohio, U.S.A. in connection with the Centennial Celebration of Vivekananda's appearance at the Parliament of Religions. The Swami is the head of the Vedanta Society of New York in New York City.

Vedanta is a living philosophy which is interested in the study of a whole Reality—the timeless Reality in man and in nature. It discovered the Oneness of God, the divinity of mankind, the identity of the individual with Godhead, and the harmony of faiths. Religion is realization. The truth of Vedanta is living and poetic. The practice of this truth will enrich our total life. Religion means a way of life that enables us to know the divine within as well as without—in other words, Self-realization. It caters the vital need of nourishing man and giving him real fulfillment in life. Vedanta views life in all its aspects. Its main aim is Man—man in the perennial quest of Truth, Beauty and Goodness in its absolute sense. Vedanta also investigates the external world, but its main passion is the study of the inner life of man. The study of external nature culminates in material prosperity; the study of inner nature gives a clue to the spiritual treasure which ultimately brings spiritual fulfillment, as well as all-round growth.

The teaching of Vedanta is addressed to all humanity—to all people struggling to have freedom from bondage. Therefore, universality and humanism are two of the essential characteristics of this fruitful study. Vedanta seeks the real welfare, peace and spiritual fulfilment of man as such, and not man chained by sect or race. It is concerned with man in his depth, beyond the frontiers

of narrow and parochial dissension. This original incentive to seek the genuine welfare of man in himself, unlike philosophies elsewhere and unlike other philosophies of India, has saved Vedanta from becoming a mere academic quest. It is a living philosophy, and its universalism, freshness, intensity, courage, and broadness of outlook have captivated the mind of the scholars of all nations.

Vedanta has twice saved India from materialism. According to Swami Vivekananda, Buddha first brought the essence of Vedanta to light, gave it to the people, and saved India. Again Śankara revived it. Buddha preached the moral excellences of life and the spirit of unselfish service. Śankara gave the intellectual support. He gave a complete philosophy based on reason. He rationalized it and placed before us the wonderful, coherent system of Advaita. ~~This time we see~~ Swami Vivekananda extolling this message of Vedanta for the regeneration of all humanity. The passion for purity, knowledge and freedom were preserved and amplified by every subsequent age of Indian thought. But in the modern period, Swami Vivekananda infused life into it and gave it dynamism. Through his great life, he made Vedanta a living and practical philosophy.

Religion, by which we mean a spiritual view of life, nourishes a culture which, in

turn, supports people by guiding them to find the excellences of life. Without this nourishment people stagnate and, consequently, religion is lost. Therefore, a great culture is the product of a deep spiritual quest which sets the tone of that culture. Indian culture, inspired by messengers of spiritual truth, has acquired a spiritual direction. That India is mainly based on this spiritual outlook can be seen both from its spiritual earnestness and from its variety of religious expression. Saints and illumined souls always did receive far greater honour than any celebrity. The nature and character of spontaneous ovation accorded to Swamiji after his triumphal return to India, speaks high of her spiritual culture.

The Indian Renaissance owes its birth and growth to spiritual leaders from Rammohan Roy to Swami Vivekananda. Romain Rolland, in his *Life of Ramakrishna*, presents this great spiritual luminary and his chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda, as "the splendid symphony of the Universal Soul," and reports, "Ramakrishna is the consummation of the two thousand years' spiritual life of three hundred million people" (p. 155). In the same vein, Swami Vivekananda asserts that Ramakrishna "in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life, and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations" (*C.W.*, V, p. 53). Swami Vivekananda dived deep into the ocean of Spirit in all its magnificent beauty. His entire message to humanity was based on his first-hand spiritual realization. This unique capacity gave a halo to his personality and a solid foundation to his mission. His ability to teach from experience commands respect from the world. His fresh, invigorating, practical and and rational message has found a loving place in our minds. What we urgently need today is a scheme of life which is spiritually inspiring, morally ennobling and physically

strength-giving. We need a new gospel of life. Swami Vivekananda gave humanity the lofty message of Vedanta, which addresses human beings as divine. Only this divinity of man can inspire us to find dignity in life and the assurance of bright future possibilities. This noble philosophy of life, based on the solid spiritual experiences of the mystics, when accepted with earnestness and understood in real perspective, will be a new ethos of the people.

Swami Vivekananda, whose singular passion in life was Man—the whole man in all its aspects—gave articulation to his deep feeling in this worshipful attitude:

May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship (*C.W.*, V, p. 37).

He also stated:

All the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his [Ramakrishna's] ideas (*C.W.*, IV, p. 187).

It may be remembered that Swami Vivekananda was moulded by the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, who poured out his pent-up emotion to Mother Kali with the same pathos: "Mother, I do not want Moksha. Let me live in the midst of your created beings and lift them up, try for their liberation" (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). And again he said:

We heard the Master say some times at Dakshineswar that he was not afraid to be born lakhs of times to do good to living beings (*Sri Ramakrishna: The*

Great Master, by Swami Saradananda, p. 871).

However, Swami Vivekananda gave a new direction to philosophy and religion, and made Vedanta a practical system to be espoused by the common people. God-centred philosophy was made man-centred. The system which was confined to a few seekers of Truth began giving the eternal bread of life to the millions. The traditional Vedanta has now become, through new interpretation, a source of inspiration for everyday life, and has been labelled the Neo-Vedantic Movement. Dr. S. C. Chatterjee said, "The main outline of this new Vedanta was given by Sri Ramakrishna, and it was Swami Vivekananda who filled it with elaborate reasoning so as to work up a philosophy proper. It has been very aptly said that Swami Vivekananda is a commentary on Sri Ramakrishna. But the Commentator with his giant intellect and profound understanding made such a distinctive contribution, that his commentary becomes itself a philosophy, just as Shankara's commentary on the Vedanta Sutras is by itself a philosophy" (*Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*, p. 264).

This Neo-Vedantic Movement of Swami Vivekananda not only opened a new and vital chapter of our spiritual life, but also enhanced the prestige of this life-giving system. The very call of Swami Vivekananda, "Back to the Upanishads!", ushered in an era of new vitality and dynamism in Hinduism. The constructive genius of Swami Vivekananda made this new gospel of living a universal, catholic and non-sectarian voice, unlike previous movements that are negative, destructive, condemning and abusive. One of the brilliant landmarks of this progressive and creative message is that it is geared to the all-round happiness of the people, and thus paves the way of

modernism. It bridges the gulf between science, religion and philosophy. Besides all the achievements, it freed Vedanta from lifeless scholastic arguments and the narrow groove of academic discussion in which it lay buried for many centuries. The new Vedanta eschews the abstract reasoning and discussion of mere intellectual faith. It has become a new gospel of work and creative progress, fertilizing every aspect of human life. The life-giving ideas of Vedanta have to be practised in life. Once Swami Vivekananda expressed his deep feeling of sorrow and hope in this way:

Knowledge of the Advaita Vedanta has been hidden too long in caves and forests. It has been given to me to rescue it from its seclusion and to carry it into the midst of family and social life. The drum of the Advaita Vedanta shall be sounded in all places, in the bazaars, from the hill-tops and on the plains (R. Rolland, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 219).

Swamiji wanted us first to bring transformation in our own mind, which will then lead to an awakening of the Soul. As a true reformer, he believed in the enduring benefit of moral and spiritual awakening of people, which alone can bring forth new humane developments among mankind. He found the real source of that true reformation in the philosophy of Advaita. Let human ships float on the bosom of the divine waters of Life. This strong conviction of Soul-consciousness alone will motivate people to go forward. We know that even in India, this blueprint for a new culture based on spiritual life was never presented on a massive scale. The old ideas of philosophy, preoccupied with lifeless academic discussion, never showed any concern for the well-being of the people. Swamiji wanted to place before mankind the powerful idealism of Advaita, to make it a powerful

vehicle of social transformation through spiritual transformation. In his famous letter to Alasinga Perumal, dated February 17, 1896, he gave an outline of his plans:

The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life, out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child can grasp it. This is my life's work (C.W., V, p. 104).

Again, he said, "My ideal, indeed, may be put into a few words, and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life" (C.W., VII, p. 498). Swamiji's four lectures on "Practical Vedanta" given in London, November 1896 together with other lectures, especially his lecture on November 12, 1897 at Lahore, give us a new and hitherto unknown and most comprehensive philosophy of Vedanta for practical life. This is one of his most original and significant contributions to world thought. Advaita has to become a sheet-anchor of world civilization. From the fullness of his loving heart, he went on speaking about its glorious future with vigorous enthusiasm of his tremendous personality. The music of his illumined soul was heard in India, and it went into the very blood-stream of Indian life. In India, Swamiji's thundering lectures were "rousing calls to a sleeping giant, and in the West they were bombshells". They gave a rude shock to the West, stirring the very depths of their souls. His main objective was to recreate society on the basis of a new, "unshakable, unalterable" concept of man: every life is divine. This gave society a new "ethos of the people," giving the glorious opportunity for individual dignity to create a healthy society based on freedom and justice. His entire scheme of

human development was based on this central idea—the divinity of life. He won the heart of the people by his originality, expressing Advaita in novel language and refreshing it with new spiritual vigour.

Swami Vivekananda rescued India from the self-imprisonment of centuries and brought her into the wide world of freedom and life. The dynamic modern world confronted India at every phase of life. This awakened India recognized the necessities and urgencies of modern living. Says Romain Rolland in his *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 316-18:

So India was hauled out of the shifting sands of barren speculation wherein she had been engulfed for centuries, by the hand of one of her own sannyasins; and the result was that the whole reservoir of mysticism, sleeping beneath, broke its bounds and spread by a series of great ripples into action....This "greater India", this new India...is impregnated with the soul of Ramakrishna. The twin star of the Paramahansa and the hero who translated his thought into action, dominates and guides her present destinies. Its warm radiance is the leaven working within the soil of India and fertilizing it.

Swami Vivekananda, being a spiritual teacher of extraordinary character, was able to teach the people the same eternal message of Vedanta for their everyday life. He attempted to project the undivided view of reality that would bridge the gulf between Sacred and Secular, between worship and work, between Jnana and Karma. Hence, Swamiji taught ordinary people that work is worship.

Swamiji's character was brilliantly summed up by Romain Rolland in two words: equilibrium and synthesis. Indeed, he was a great advocate of equilibrium between reason and faith; matter and spirit;

individual and society ; science and religion ; absolute and relative. A champion of the synthetic view of life, Swamiji accepted the unity of matter and spirit. For him, there is no division between Sacred and Secular. This message of synthesis made him a prophet of the age. Work and knowledge were fused together. Swamiji demolished the theory of two aspects of reality—absolute and relative—as this theory was a breeding ground of social injustice. He gave us the unitary vision of life. The impact of that life-giving message has been marvellously articulated by his brilliant disciple, Sister Nivedita :

If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid (C.W., I, Intro., p. xv).

The practical significance of Swamiji's comprehensive view of reality, or unitary vision of reality, made no division between work and worship, sacred and secular. Work at any stage of life, done with the real spirit of service to God as manifested in the world, is the real form of worship. Swamiji tried to revive the unitary vision of life as envisioned in the *Gita* (XVIII. 46).

The Swami threw a flood of light on certain basic tenets of Hinduism. The two doctrines of Karma and Maya proved to be a double noose on the neck of the Hindu race for centuries. These theories practically ruined the nation's life with their deadening fatalism and intellectual bankruptcy. Karma and Maya, like two powerful vampires, were sucking the blood of national life, making

the Hindu race weak, inactive, isolated and fatalistic. By his magnetic personality, dynamic spirit and inspired attitude, Swamiji gave a new insight on these concepts. It was the singular credit of the Swami to have interpreted them in a creative manner, bringing back their original significance and vigour, thereby making a very powerful, fresh vehicle for the dynamic movements of national life. He was able to rejuvenate the national life through his soul-stirring message of robust enthusiasm. To make India well-equipped for her all-round growth, to enable her to discover her hidden potentialities and her glorious past, and to emancipate her mind from pessimism and a narrow mould, Swamiji worked vigorously. The Swami expounded the concept of Karma and rebirth from a rational point of view, bringing in a new and fresh world of joy and creativity. This theory was proved to the hilt to be the very opposite of a negative attitude.

With a rare insight, Swamiji identified the idea of relativity as the substance of Maya, the Hindu Sphinx. God appears as matter due to Maya. Maya creates division ; One appears as many. The world of Maya will persist so long as the mind, which is itself Maya, is not purified through spiritual insight. Maya will lose its charm, its puzzle will be solved, when the mind is made pure. Maya can be transcended.

This saving knowledge, this fresh insight, helped India slowly to liberate her mind from dogmatism and pessimism. "Great convictions are mothers of great deeds," said Swamiji. His fiery lectures from Colombo to Almora and his Letters are the most predominant source of national rejuvenation. Romain Rolland says, "If India today has definitely taken part in the collective action of organized masses, it is due to the initial shock, to the might 'Lazarus, come forth!' of the message from Madras"

(*The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 131). Swamiji's message was like a transfusion of blood coursing through the national vein, quickening its life.

Swamiji was the very embodiment of courage. With a remarkable insight, he equated Courage with Reality and interpreted Courage, Strength or Virility as one of the most distinguishing attributes of Divinity. This is a completely new interpretation, hitherto unknown to India. We know from our study of the Upaniṣads (*Br. U.*, 4.4.25) that the Divine is fearless; hence, Courage stems from that great idea. But the concept of Courage is conspicuously absent from our philosophical system and moral vocabularies. Therefore, the word "courage" is not in vogue in our moral tradition. Swamiji projected before us the concept of dynamic Divinity—rather than static Divinity, which hardly evokes enthusiasm in human minds. It may be remembered that Swamiji made Strength a pivot on which other virtues turn. He said:

It is weakness, says the Vedanta, which is the cause of all misery in this world. Weakness is the one cause of suffering. We become miserable because we are weak. We lie, steal, kill and commit other crimes, because we are weak. We die because we are weak. Where there is nothing to weaken us, there is no death nor sorrow (*C.W.*, II, p. 198).

The *Gita* made courage a central plank to support the moral edifice. In Swamiji's considered opinion, the real message of the Upaniṣads is Strength. He thundered:

If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance: it is the word fearlessness, and the only religion that ought to be taught, is the religion of *fearlessness* (*C.W.*, III, p. 160).

Newton, as the story goes, discovered the law of gravitation in the fall of an apple, a commonplace fact of experience. Likewise, Swamiji discovered a great mine of strength from our scriptures, which were studied exclusively for gaining freedom from the realm of Maya. The celebrated verse of the *Gita* (II. 3), according to Swamiji, gives us the essence of the book. Strangely, this great idea, this most inspiring concept contained in that famous verse never received any attention from the known commentators in this regard. Weakness stems from ignorance of our own divinity. The antidote is strength, which is within us all. Hence, Swamiji gave Strength a special place in the lofty scheme for national growth. He was quite vocal about the great role of Strength in shaping the destiny of a nation. When this insight is discussed in philosophy and a powerful philosophical concept of Courage is conceived, this idea of Strength will be accepted as a moral virtue which is now lacking. It was Swamiji's novel idea to use strength both as a moral quality and as a philosophical concept. Swamiji's humanism is, therefore, based on a very solid rock of pragmatism with Strength as its keynote: "The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new gospel" (*The Master as I Saw Him*, by Sister Nivedita, p. 170). This is indeed a new and unique charter of growth. The new era of progress needs new concepts of ethics and morality. Strength that emanates from Soul-consciousness will be the source of morality.

Swami Vivekananda's scheme of social service is based on love. The sure test of real and genuine love is purity, freedom, calmness and happiness. Atman being the only source of bliss (*Pancadasi*, 1.8), it is the most coveted thing for all. Love is divine and therefore indivisible, infinite and nondual. It is one with the Supreme Reality.

Unfortunately, this great potential factor in our lives was never harnessed before. In this modern age, Swamiji drew our attention to it and used it as a powerful tool for the social welfare programme he launched. "It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teachings on the great Vedantic truths of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of this Universe" (C.W., III, p. 194), he said. In his concept of the religion of service, Swamiji asked people to serve Man as God. This loving attitude is conspicuously absent from a religion equated with dogmas, doctrines, rites and rituals. "Religion is being and becoming, it is realization" (C.W., II, p. 143). Again he says, "Religion is the greatest motive power for realizing that infinite energy which is the birth-right and nature of every man" (C.W., II, p. 97). Swamiji infused the powerful element of love into religion, making it no longer a "lifeless mockery".

The dearest object of Swamiji's loving adoration is Man. His mission is Man-centred; Man is the central pillar of his philosophical edifice. Swamiji naturally raised the dignity, divinity, mystery and worth of Man to the pinnacle of divine excellence. When he spoke of expressing the divinity within, he pointed to God within each of us. It is not the divine of Semitic religion, seen mainly as external. Swamiji saw each soul struggling to manifest its innate divinity, power and glory.

Reason looms large in Swamiji's philosophical discussion. In his scheme of rationalistic religion, or the philosophy of religion, Swamiji does not posit an external God, or even God immanent in Nature. The modern rationalist will deny such postulations. None, however, can deny his

own existence, his own being and the obvious feeling of his own existence, his "is-ness". It is not empirical consciousness; it is Pure Consciousness. Therefore, Swamiji satisfies the rationalist with the rationale of religion, that he is Existence itself.

Swami Vivekananda discovered from Advaita Vedanta itself the real source of human happiness. This superhuman genius can be seen in his new scheme of practical Vedanta. It was indeed a very difficult task of great magnitude and complexity. Again, it was not the subtle discussion of an academician; it gave millions the bread of life, and tens of thousands of all nations dedicated themselves to implement it. There lies the practical success. Swamiji gave Vedanta a new depth and a new dimension by asserting its tremendous potentiality to create a social revolution leading to the well-being of the masses.

Swamiji laid down a strong foundation for all-round progress based on practical Vedanta, which is going to be the "ethos of the people" everywhere, in future. Practical Vedanta can be applied to realize his new definition of religion, of existential philosophy, and of Man. Swamiji combined Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Yoga, to give us an integrated view of life based on such a harmonious balance. He was a staunch Advaitist, yet his brilliant analysis, his rational arguments, and his catholic temper are all very fresh in the field of Vedanta. Truly it has been said, "Vivekananda performed the extraordinary feat of breathing life into the purely static monism of Shankara" (*Hinduism*, by R. Zaehner, p. 168). Really, Swamiji was "the inaugurator of the Neo-Vedantic Movement in India"

Vivekananda's Perceptions of Indian Women

DR. SATISH K. KAPOOR

To Vivekananda, women were all personifications of the Divine Mother, and from this transcendental perspective he worked for their uplift. The learned author's lucid exposition covers Swamiji's warm-glowing thoughts on this burning theme of our time. Dr. Kapoor, who has to his credit a number of books and articles, teaches History at the Lyllapur Khalsa College, Jalandhar City, Punjab.

Swami Vivekananda did not regard women as mere flesh and bone with biotic potential, but as embodiments of Śakti, the Primordial Energy of the Universe, at the root of all existence. He was deeply chagrined to note women becoming anatomical showpieces, or as mere coveted objects protected and confined within the four walls of homes, or bereft of intellectual and psychomotor ability, prone to the betrayal of trust, or as emotional windbags likely to be deflated at the slightest prick. But, he taught, they are the salt of the earth, nay, the earth itself, for they give humanity its earthly forms, nourish and endow it with character, charm and dignity, all at the tremendous personal sacrifice that Divinity assumes when It accepts the corporeal limitations and the role of motherhood.

Far from concurring also with the concept of perpetual battle between the male and the female as propounded by some Western feminists, Swami Vivekananda argued that their roles are complementary, and not at odds with each other. Neither male nor female is superior. Vivekananda's views in this respect were shaped by the *Advaita Vedānta*, which rests on the praxis: "*Ekam evādvitīyam—One Essence and no other.*" Metaphysically speaking, the innate gender differences derive from the same Reality; *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* coalesce like the *Yin* and the *Yang*, or *Śiva* and *Śakti*. The apparent manifestations only reveal the

Reality in varied forms. As Vivekananda wrote: "It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedānta declares that one and the same conscious Self is present in all beings."¹

Yet this should not be taken to indicate that Swami Vivekananda was unaware of the fundamental differences that exist between male and female psychology and physiology, as pointed out later by Havelock Ellis, Van de Velde, Sigmund Freud, C. J. Jung and Alfred Adler. Instead of harping on the equality of the sexes merely on the idealistic plane, he adduced the argument of 'the perfect balance' and harmony in nature to prove that the living beings, though carved from the same matter, are cast in varied moulds to perform different types of functions, and thus each holds a unique position in the cosmological order. "When you are judging men and women, judge them by the standard of their respective greatness. One cannot be in the other's shoes," he suggested.² To describe women as inferior because they are unable to cope with the physical strength of men, is to use a false standard to judge their potential.

If man can boast of his muscular power, woman can rely on her innate patience and

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1969) Vol. 3, p. 214.

2. *Ibid.* Vol. 2, p. 26. (1968 edition)

ability to forbear; if he is ingenious, she is the energy at his back; if he is vociferous, she is the silent power of influence and suggestion—the meaningful twinkle in her eye and other gestures convey messages far profounder than any other communications. When man operates at the sensory level, she makes use of her extrasensory perception. What man discovers through reason she knows already through faith. The ruggedness of man is contained by her purity and selflessness. Man's strength is his weakness, but woman's weakness is her strength, on the gross physical level. As Swami Vivekananda put it: "Each is equally good in his or her own way. What man can bring up a child with such patience, endurance and love as the woman can? The one has developed the power of doing; the other the power of suffering. If woman cannot act, neither can man suffer."³

Woman is both *Mahā-māyā* and *Mahā-śakti*, and holds the key to the world. In her power as *Avidyāmāyā* she deludes; as *Mahā-śakti* or *Vidyāmāyā* She becomes the pathway to realisation. Like Sri Ramakrishna his spiritual preceptor, Vivekananda believed that all women are manifestations of the Universal Mother, and therefore should be regarded by man in a very pure way, as mothers.⁴ "Mother, in one form Thou art in the street, and in another form Thou art the Universe. I salute Thee Mother, I salute Thee."⁵ Swami Vivekananda was of the view with the sage Yajnavalkya that the essential nature of woman is *pavitram*, ever-pure—they acquire purity from the gods—Soma, sweet speech, from the Gandharva, and perfect purity from Agni, which cleanses all.⁶ It is, therefore,

3. *Ibid.*

4. Vide, *The Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, n.d.) pp. 140-42.

5. *Complete Works* (1966), Vol. 4, p. 176.

not surprising that he expressed sympathy even for the fallen women who put their bodies to unworthy use under the pressure of circumstances. "I have to sneer at the woman walking in the street because society wants it! She, my Saviour, she whose street-walking is the cause of the chastity of other women."⁷

The supreme ideal of woman as mother had such an appeal to Swami Vivekananda that he justified even the Mother-worship of the Tantras, in its purer form, unlike other nineteenth century reformers like Ram Mohun Roy and Swami Dayananda. When a disciple questioned him on this issue he unequivocally observed that he had denounced only the corrupt and horrible practices that had come to be associated with the Tantric practices. "I never objected to the worship of women who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, whose external manifestations, appealing to the senses have maddened men but whose internal manifestations such as knowledge, devotion, discrimination and dispassion make man omniscient, of unfailing purpose, and a knower of Brahman..."⁸

In her role of mother, a woman not only undergoes the ordeal of maternity but also faces daunting problems nurturing her children. Motherhood is as much an assertion of a woman's creative power as the pinnacle of her glory. The *Smṛtikāras* declared that the father is a hundred times more venerable than the teacher, but the mother is a thousand times more venerable than even the father.⁹ It was this age-old

6. Wasudeo Laxman Sastri Pansikar (Ed.), *Yajnavalkya Smṛti* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1926) Vol. 1, p. 71..

7. *Complete Works* (1966), p. 34.

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 215-16.

9. See, for example, *Manu Smṛti*, II, 145; *Yajnavalkya Smṛti*, I, 35.

Indian ideal which was emphasised again and again by Swami Vivekananda in his speeches and writings.

The Ideal denotes a standard of perfection or excellence, worthy to be achieved. Vivekananda was of the view that each nation stands for an ideal which it is striving towards. "To understand a nation you must first understand its ideal, for each nation refuses to be judged by any other standard."¹⁰ The Mother, being the epitome of love, service and sacrifice, has always commanded respect in the Indian society. "In India, the Mother is the centre of the family and our highest ideal," he said in one of his lectures at Brooklyn. "She is to us the representative of God, as God is the Mother of the universe....Our God is both personal and absolute; the absolute is male, the personal, female. And thus it comes that we now say: 'The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle.'"¹¹

In another speech at Pasadena, California he emphasised the aforesaid ideal again: "Now the ideal woman in India is the mother, first, and the mother last. The word 'woman' calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called Mother."¹² That was not the case in the West where the sensual aspects of a woman's personality were given precedence over her inner virtues. "In the West, the woman is the wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there—as the wife,"¹³ he noted with great concern, for woman is not just her physical self, an object to be devoured by men for 'simple nervous satisfaction' or 'brute enjoyment of the body'.¹⁴ The soul

is sexless,¹⁵ and woman, representing the energy aspect of the Lord, cannot be viewed in an insular way, in her physical dimension alone. "Ay! the Hindu mind fears all those ideals which say that the flesh must cling unto the flesh. No, no! Woman, thou shall not be coupled with anything connected with the flesh. The *name* has been called holy once and for ever; for what name is there which no lust can ever approach, no carnality ever come near than the one word, mother? That is the ideal in India."¹⁶

Linked to motherhood is wifehood. The Indian wife practices self-purification through fasts, prayers and penances before conceiving a baby. The conjugal union marks "the greatest prayer between man and wife, the prayer that is going to bring into the world another soul fraught with a tremendous power for good or for evil."¹⁷ Swami Vivekananda was convinced that pre-natal influences determine the psychology of children, and that those who were conceived by chance, in moments of coarse passion, or in unholy circumstances, were sure to prove 'a curse to humanity'.¹⁸ These children may be 'veritable demons—burning, murdering, robbing, stealing, drinking' or doing similar hideous acts.¹⁹ The Swami approved of the Indian eugenics tradition which prescribed the couple's performing certain religious rites in association with *garbhadhāna* (conception), *pumsavana* (getting a virtuous child), *simanta* (worship of the expectant mother), and *jātakarman* (birth ceremonies) in order to beget babies of merit.

This should not imply that Swami Vivekananda regarded the ceremonies related

10. *Complete Works* (1964), Vol. 3, p. 214.

11. *Brooklyn Standard Union*, July 21, 1895.

12. *Complete Works*, (1964), Vol. 8, p. 57.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

15. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 176.

16. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 58.

17. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 61.

18. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 60.

19. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 59-60, 62.

with marriage and births as a *sine qua non* for the total development of women. He was aware that *brahmavādinis* or nuns co-existed as *sadyovadhus* or housewives in times of yore, but later, when social customs became rigid, the institution of marriage became somewhat compulsory. Marriage was meant only for the weak, he said.²⁰ His idea to establish a woman's monastery was aimed at creating a class of *brahmachārinis* who were so fired 'with the strength of that virtue of chastity' as to die for a cause that was dear to them.²¹ He was sore with Jesus as he had not assigned woman an equal place with men. "Women did everything for him, yet none was made an apostle."²² He also disapproved of the act of Lord Buddha in placing the *Bhikṣuṇī Sanghas* under the supervision of the male monks.²³

The ideal woman of Swami Vivekananda's conception was the one who combined in her the purity and chastity of Sita and Damayanti, the saintly disposition of *brahmavādinis* like Vachaknavi, Vadva, Pratitheyi and Vishavavara, the intellectual acumen of Gargi and Sulabha, the spiritual powers of Savitri and Anusuya, and the physical strength and courage of Lakshmi Bai, the queen of Jhansi.²⁴

The realm of the *ideal* is in the subjective world; that of the *real*, in the objective. The former is ostensible in nature and relates to the future; the latter is authentic and caters to the present. The *ideal* is important for it is like a goal to be attained;

20. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 65.

21. *Ibid.*, (1970), Vol. 5, p. 343.

22. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 28.

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 230

24. References to the ideal woman of Swami Vivekananda's conception are found throughout the *Complete Works*. See, for example, Vol. 8, p. 198; Vol. 5, pp. 231, 342.

the *real* has value as it forms the bedrock of any future development. Although Swami Vivekananda put forth the idealistic conception of Indian woman before western audiences, he was not ignorant about their problems and needs. He often recalled that women, during the early Vedic period, enjoyed a high social status, and had access to the holy scriptures. "Why shall not the women have the same privileges now?" he asked. "What has happened once can happen again. History repeats itself."²⁵

Swami Vivekananda's concern for the plight of the Indian women is evident from a letter he wrote to Haripada Mitra from Chicago on December 28, 1893:

"Oh, how free they (the American women) are! It is they who control social and civic duties...and in our country, women cannot be safely allowed to walk in the streets! ...Here men treat their women as well as can be desired, and hence they are so prosperous, so learned, so energetic. But why is it that we are slavish, miserable and dead? The answer is obvious."²⁶

He quoted Manu to show that gods blessed those families where women were happy and well-treated.

"Can you better the condition of your women? Then there will be hope for your well-being. Otherwise, you will remain as backward as now."

Swami Vivekananda regretted that the Indian women have been 'trained in helplessness, servile dependence on others', and so they were good only 'to weep their eyes out at the slightest approach of a mishap or danger'.²⁷ They had become oblivious of the fact that they were *śaktis*, carrying a huge reservoir of inner strength, which if put to use, could change the face of mankind. He exhorted them to acquire a heroic spirit,

25. *Complete Works* (1970), Vol. 7, pp. 214-15.

26. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, pp. 25-27.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

and to learn even the self-defence techniques.²⁸ They too, like men, should have muscles of iron and nerves of steel, besides being pure in word and deed.

Unlike contemporary social reformers, Swami Vivekananda did not lay all social evils, including those which degraded the status of women, at the door of religion.²⁹ "I claim that no destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society, and that this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because religion has not been applied to society as it should have been."³⁰ It may be noted that Swami Vivekananda's concept of religion was not confined to books and dogmas; it was practical to the core, and aimed not only at self-development but also at the welfare of mankind. "I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth," he once wrote.³¹ The core of religion lay in freedom; freedom was man's real nature, and the moment he realised *It*, he was filled with tremendous power to break the shackles of slavery, whatever be its nature. Religion could also restore one to the centre of one's being, make one rise above sex-distinctions and inculcate the quality of fearlessness, so essential for challenging the forces of oppression.³²

Swami Vivekananda was aware that a number of historical and socio-economic factors such as the influx of foreign invaders, the predominance of priestly classes, the rigidity of social system, the scurrilous comments on women in the post-Vedic literature, the appearance of the cult of *devadasis*, the growing incidence of cases of *sati* and infanticide, etc., had led to a decline in the position of women. But he thought that the most important factor which hampered their progress was that they were deprived of the right kind of education.³³ By education, he did not mean the stuffing of mind with information or pedantic ideas, but a system by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and which helps one to stand on one's own feet.³⁴ He regarded religion as the innermost core of education, as it alone could enable one to realise one's inherent divinity.³⁵ "Educate, Educate," he exhorted his disciples. "Than this there is no other way"—*Nāryah panthā vidyate ayanāya*.³⁶ He told them to inspire girl students by narrating to them the stories of Sita, Savitri, Lilavati, Khana and others, and inculcate in them the virtue of selflessness. He further suggested that they must be taught the rudiments of science, arts, house-keeping, cooking, sewing, etc., but they must not be allowed to read novels, as these might pollute their minds.³⁷ Besides, they ought to learn drawing, modelling, painting and other fine arts, fruit-modelling with hardened milk, painting, photography, the cutting of designs on paper, gold and silver filigree, and embroidery. "See that everyone knows something by which she can earn a living in case of need."³⁸

28. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

29. *The Indian Social Reformer*, December 8, 1894.

30. Swami Vivekananda to Alasinga, September 19, 1894 in *The Complete Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 47-48.

31. *Ibid.*, S. V. to Alasinga, October 27, 1894; p. 50.

32. For this aspect see, Swami Vivekananda's lectures on Jnana Yoga and Practical Vedanta, especially "The Necessity of Religion", "The Real Nature of Man", "Maya and Freedom", "The Real and the Apparent Man", and *The Atman: Its Bondage and Freedom* as contained in *The Complete Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 57-358.

33. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 231.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

36. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, (1968), p. 494.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 493-94.

38. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, (1964), pp. 274-75.

Swami Vivekananda believed that women could excel in all fields of human activity, if treated at par with men, and given proper education and training. He rejected the idea that they were incompetent to take up intellectual or spiritual pursuits. "In what scripture do you find statements that women are not competent for knowledge and devotion?" he asked. His regret was that men have turned them into 'mere manufacturing machines'.³⁹

As Swami Vivekananda regarded liberty as the first condition of growth,⁴⁰ he did not claim that he could solve the problems of women at his own level.⁴¹ Rather, he wanted them to think for themselves, to diagnose the malady afflicting their social position, and to come forward to root it out. Women need not depend on the crutches of men or suffer from inferiority complex. They should also not try to imitate men in all walks of life. On the other hand, men too should not be allowed to unduly meddle in women's affairs. Castigating the role of contemporary social reformers he observed: "Who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off! O tyrants, attempting to think that you can do anything for anyone! Hands off! ...You cannot help anyone, you can only serve..."⁴²

39. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, (1969), pp. 274-75.

40. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3 (1970), p. 246.

41. In one of his lectures delivered at the Shakespeare Club in Pasadena, California, on January 18, 1900, Swami Vivekananda admitted in all humility: "Although I have more opportunity than many other men to know women in general, from my position and my occupation as a preacher, continuously travelling from one place to another...still it would be hazardous on my part to assert that I know everything about the women of India." See *The Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 55.

42. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 246.

Abominable social customs like *sati* and child marriage appeared to Swami Vivekananda as the fossilized forms of irrational beliefs and he condemned them in the strongest terms. "What expression of devotedness to a husband is there by forcing a widow to commit *sati*?" he asked. "Why make people do virtuous deeds by teaching superstitions? I say, liberate, undo the shackles of people as much as you can."⁴³ He, however, argued that the inhuman practice of *sati* had nothing to do with religion as such, and must not be viewed that way. It was born of superstition, glorified by the priestly classes for their own advantage, and meekly followed by the people who were led to believe that it had a religious sanction. The custom of child marriage was no less reprehensible and could not be justified on moral or social grounds. Child marriages led to an increase in the number of child widows as sometimes the difference between a man and his child-bride was so great that she became a widow in her teens, and without adequate means to sustain herself led a miserable life in accordance with the injunctions laid down by the early Hindu law-givers, and the accretions which came to be associated with them with the passage of time. Child marriages also deprived them of education and turned them into mothers when they were not even physically prepared for that role. He expressed his anguish to Haripada Mitra in a letter dated December 28, 1893: "We are very regular in marrying our girls at eleven years of age lest they should become corrupt and immoral. What does our Manu enjoin? 'Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons.' As sons should be married after observing *brahmacharya* up to the thirtieth year, so daughters also must observe *brahmacharya* and be educated

43. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, (1970), p. 224.

by their parents. But what are we actually doing?"⁴⁴

Swami Vivekananda regretted that parents in India regarded the female children as liabilities and married them off at the earliest. The Sanskrit word for daughter, *duhita*, meaning 'milkmaid' was distorted later; it then came to mean, "she who milks away all the milk of the family."⁴⁵ Swami Vivekananda complimented the British government for passing the Age of Consent Bill which prohibited a man, under the threat of penalty, to marry a girlchild below twelve. But he took the orthodoxy to task for raising a great hue and cry against it saying, "Alas! our religion is lost," as if their real religion consisted in making a girl a mother at the age of twelve or thirteen. So the rulers also naturally think, 'Goodness Gracious! What a religion is theirs!'"⁴⁶

As regards the question of the remarriage of widows, Swami Vivekananda stuck to the ancient Indian belief that 're-marrying is not remarriage', as it is bereft of natural charm and grace. But he did not, like Manu or Vatsyayana, dub it as wrong or sinful; nor, like Raja Ram Mohun Roy or Swami Dayananda, make it a chief plank of his reform movement. He emphasised the virtues of chastity, fidelity and self-control, and regarded the obsession of contemporary reformers with the issue of remarriage of widows, as utterly meaningless: "I have yet to see a nation whose fate is determined by the number of husbands their widows get..."⁴⁷ Besides, the problem had different dimensions in different societies. "In India, our reformers cry and preach against the evils of enforced widowhood. In the West,

non-marriage is the great evil. Help the unmarried on one side; they are suffering. Help the widows on the other; they are suffering. It is like chronic rheumatism: you drive it from the head and it goes to the body; you drive it from there, and it goes to the feet."⁴⁸ Swami Vivekananda also disapproved of granting freedom to men and women in matters of marriage, as in the West.

His concern for women extended beyond the borders of his motherland. "What nation in the world has not ill treated its women?" he asked during the course of a lecture in Boston.⁴⁹ They were once grouped with property and real estate, and were denied the basic human rights. In Europe or America, a man could marry a woman for her money, and after capturing her dollars could kick her out.⁵⁰ Women have "suffered for aeons" and that has given them "infinite patience and perseverance."⁵¹ If inhuman practices like *sati* and infanticide were practised in India, the christian church in the West burnt old women at the stake.⁵²

Vivekananda's glorification of the Indian women in the West stemmed partly from his patriotic zeal, and partly from his feeling that the position of women in other countries was no better. Thus while he wrote to Alasinga, his Indian disciple, that American women had far better educational opportunities than could be conceived of by the majority of the Hindu women,⁵³ he thundered before an American audience thus: "It is a strange fact that Oxford and Cambridge are closed to women today; so are Harvard and Yale, but Calcutta Univer-

44. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

45. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8 (1964), p. 66.

46. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 341.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

48. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, (1968), pp. 93-94.

49. *The Boston Herald*, May 15, 1894.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 95.

52. *The Detroit Tribune*, April 1, 1894.

53. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 24.

sity opened its doors to women more than twenty years ago.”⁵⁴

One of the tasks of Swami Vivekananda in the West was to remove the gross misconceptions about the Indian women—for example, that all female children were thrown before crocodiles in the rivers, or that all widows were burnt to death. Although he never tried to rule out isolated instances in this regard, he did not quite appreciate the role of christian missionaries blowing them up out of proportion.⁵⁵ Alluding to the Ramabai Circle of Brooklyn which had been painting a horrible picture of Indian child-widows to collect funds, he once said: “Your foreign-born ladies are always crying over the hardships of the Hindu woman and never care for the hardships of the Hindu man”...and when someone asserted that the girl children in India are all married to old men, he asked, “And what do the young men do ?”⁵⁸

While in India, Swami Vivekananda exhorted women to be bold and active,

54. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 69.

55. For this aspect see Satish K. Kapoor, *Cultural Contact and Fusion: Swami Vivekananda in the West, 1893-96.* (Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1987) pp. 349-53.

56. *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 70. For a study of Swami Vivekananda's relations with the Ramabai Circle of Brooklyn see, Satish K. Kapoor, pp. 368-81.

courageous and self-sufficient, and acquire the ability to take initiatives like their western counterparts. But he did not, at the same time, want them to be vain, prurient, temperamental or materialistic.⁵⁷ They were not to profess the ideals of the male world, but to grow strictly in terms of their own nature, and follow the dictates of their own being. They were to develop a strong character so as to become the catalysts of social change. Although he once wrote to Sister Nivedita that “India cannot yet produce great women” and that “she must borrow them from other nations”,⁵⁸ he was sure that the situation would change for the better. “Society is like the earth that patiently bears incessant molestations ; but she wakes up one day, however long that may be in coming, and the force of the shaking tremors of that awakening hurls off to a distance the accumulated dirt of self-seeking meanness piled up during millions of patient and silent years.”⁵⁹

57. The American women were “devotees of novels and balls”, he once observed in a lecture in Detroit. *Detroit Free Press*, March 12, 1894. On another occasion he remarked: “The girls of India would die if they, like American girls, were obliged to expose half their bodies to the vulgar gaze of young men.” *The Detroit Evening News*, March 25, 1894.

58. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 507.

59. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 463-64.

Pray to the Divine Mother, begging Her to give you unswerving Love and adamant faith.

Sri Ramakrishna

REVIEWS & NOTICES

THE AGE OF IMPERIAL UNITY (Vol. II, of THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE INDIAN PEOPLE), Edited by R. C. Majumdar, A. D. Pusalkar, and A. K. Majumdar. Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay. (6th edition, 1990). 735 pages ; Rs. 230/-.

While Volume I in this series threw valuable light on the Vedic Age, the present volume covers the period roughly from the seventh century B.C. to A.D. 320, taking in its gamut a number of political, social and religious events which built up the fabric of Indian society and brought it into contact with the outside world.

India ceased to be a geographical expression and became a unified political entity with the rise and expansion of Magadha, from a tiny principality in South Bihar, to a vast kingdom extending its sway from beyond the Hindukush to the Assam Hills ; and from Kashmir to Mysore, during the Mauryan period. The causes of Magadha's success lay as much in its advantageous geographical position and large iron deposits as in the quality of its rulers—their military prowess and their zeal to conquer. Chapters I—VI describe the saga of the Magadhan Empire, from the times of Bimbisara and Ajatasatru, to that of the Nanda and Mauryan rulers. In the process, important aspects, such as the plight of sixteen *mahajanapadas*, situated north of the Vindhyas, and the history of their struggle for supremacy ; the dates of Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira and King Ashoka ; the Iranian and Macedonian invasions ; Mauryan administration and social life ; and the factors and forces leading to the collapse of the Magadhan Empire, have been taken up in a detailed manner.

The roles of the Sakas (Scythians), the Pahlavas (Parthians), and the Indo-Greeks in Indian history has been a subject of perennial interest to historians. Chapters VII and VIII delineate it in a succinct way. The fall of the Yavanas in Bactria, in north-western India, and in Afghanistan did not cut them off from Indian politics, as argued by D. C. Sarkar. The services of qualified

Yavanas were gladly accepted by the Scytho-Parthians and later by the Kushanas, who supplanted them. (Ch. IX) The Kushanas, a branch of the famous Yueh Chi tribe, provided not only a stable rule after the fall of the Mauryas, but also witnessed the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, the development of Shaivism, and its allied cult of Kartikeya, the Gandhara School of Art and much literary activity, as evidenced in the works of Ashvaghosha and Nagarjuna.

The origin of the Vikrama Samvat (58 B.C.) and the Saka Era (A.D. 78) forms the theme of Ch. X. It is followed by a detailed description of the later Kushana republics and monarchical states, like Arjunayanas, Malavas, Yaudheyas, and Nagas ; the Saka Satraps of Western India, the Satavahans of the upper Deccan, the Chedis of Kalinga, the Vakatakas, Abhirs, Bodhis, Ikshvakus and Brihatphalayanans. (Chs. XI-XV)

But the best part of the Volume are the chapters on the Brahmanical and Dravidian languages and literatures, political theories and institutions (as described in the *Mahabharata*, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, *Smritis*—Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narada, and Brihaspati—and Tamil epics, such as *Silappadikam*, *Manimekhalai* and *Jivakachintamani*), Hindu law and legal institutions rooted in the *Dharmashastras*, and the growth of religious and philosophical schools. The cultural and colonial expansion of India has also been meticulously explained.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan deserves appreciation for bringing out this sixth edition of Vol. II of the *History and Culture of the Indian People*. It is encyclopaedic in nature, and unmatched in content and style. The very fact that the text, first released in 1951, has fruitfully survived for four decades, and holds promise even today, despite the plethora of new literature in the field, shows that those who conceived this vast project were no ordinary minds, and indeed, possessed a keen insight.

Dr. Satish K. Kapoor
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FOR SEEKERS OF SPIRITUALITY

DEVOTEE: "We have made Sri Ramakrishna our life's ideal, trying to shape our lives according to his ideas. We pray for your help in this matter. You are one of Sri Ramakrishna's foremost disciples. Please give us some light."

MAHAPURUSHJI (Swami Shivananda): "My child, you are blessed that you have made Sri Ramakrishna your life's ideal. He is certainly the Lord of this age. Whoever takes refuge in him is bound to prosper. I bless you with all my heart so that you may gain in strength and become blessed. May you attain the consummation of your life's ideal! Then the light to which you referred, my child, will come from within. The more you try to enter within, reaching the inner and inmost recesses of your heart, the greater the light you will receive. Light cannot be found anywhere outside. It is all within. The Mother, the Embodiment of Light, is within every heart. She is within me; She is within you. She is everywhere from Brahma to the smallest insect, in the movable and the immovable. Pray to Mahamaya, the First-born. She holds the key in Her hands. The realm of light will be opened to you if She graciously unlocks the door. That Primordial Energy, who is Consciousness Itself and regulates everything, is the creator of the mind, intellect, ego and the like. She alone is the source of the entire universe. We have all come from that Mother and will eventually merge in Her. *'From This are born life, mind, all the senses, ether, air, fire, water and earth which is the support of everything.'*

"That Primordial Energy, the power of Brahman, is beyond the reach of this mind and intellect of ours. She manifests Herself in a pure mind. Man cannot reach or understand Her through spiritual practice. She is self-luminous: it is Her consciousness

that makes this world conscious. *'The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, not to speak of this fire! He shining, everything else shines after Him; by His light all these are lighted.'* You hold on to that Mother: She is within yourself. It is She who will open the way to the light.

DEVOTEE: "Please tell us a little of what you learned by your lifelong spiritual practice and open the way to light by blessing us."

MAHAPURUSHJI (affectionately): "I told you, my child, this light is within yourself. Dive deep within and you will discover the light." (Then the Swami quoted a few lines from a couple of songs Sri Ramakrishna used to sing.)—*'Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the ocean of God's beauty! If you descend to the uttermost depths, there you will find the gem of love'* and *'Stay by yourself, O mind! Why wander here and there? Look within—in the inner chamber of your heart—And you will find, right there, whatever you desire.'* Then he said.

"With the passing of the days this conviction is becoming firmly established in me. There is no other way than this. Everything is within. That is why I say, my child, seek in the inner chamber of your heart. That is the essence of all teachings. Be resigned to the Mother. Pray to Her earnestly, crying like a child, and you will discover the light. Whenever we asked the Master, he told us also: *'Pray sincerely to the Mother, and She will straighten the path.'* He gave us this advice again and again. I too, tell you, my child: cry and pray, *'Mother, reveal Thyself to me.'* You will see that the blissful Mother will give you joy and peace. She will certainly do so."

*from The Spiritual Talks of
Swami Shivananda*