

Prabuddha Bharata

or Awakened India



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Prabuddha Bharata

A Monthly Journal of the
Ramakrishna Order

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

Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 97

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No. 1

Divine Wisdom

After every happiness comes misery ; they may be far apart or near. The more advanced the soul, the more quickly does one follow the other. *What we want is neither happiness nor misery.* Both make us forget our true nature ; both are chains, one iron, another gold ; behind both is the Ātman, who knows neither happiness nor misery. These are states and states must ever change ; but the nature of the soul is bliss, peace, unchanging. We have not to get it, we have it ; only wash away the dross and see it.

Stand upon the Self, then only can we truly love the world. Take a very, very high stand ; knowing our universal nature, we must look with perfect calmness upon all the *panorama* of the world. It is but baby's play, and we know that, so cannot be disturbed by it. If the mind is pleased with praise, it will be displeased with blame. All pleasures of the senses or even of the mind are evanescent, but within ourselves is the one true unrelated pleasure, dependent upon nothing. It is perfectly free, it is bliss. *The more our bliss is within, the more spiritual we are.* The pleasure of the Self is what the world calls religion.

The internal universe, the *real*, is infinitely greater than the external, which is only a shadowy projection of the true one. This world is neither true nor untrue, it is the

shadow of truth. "Imagination is the gilded shadow of truth," says the poet.

We enter into creation, and then for us it becomes living. Things are dead in themselves ; only we give them life, and then, like fools, we turn around and are afraid of them, or enjoy them. But be not like certain fisherwomen, who, caught in a storm on their way home from market, took refuge in the house of a florist. They were lodged for the night in a room next to the garden, where the air was full of the fragrance of flowers. In vain did they try to rest, until one of their number suggested that they wet their fish baskets and place them near their heads. Then they all fell into a sound sleep.

The world is our fish basket, we must not depend upon it for enjoyment. Those who do are the *Tāmasas*, or the bound. Then there are the *Rājasas*, or the egotistical, who talk always about "I", "I". They do good work sometimes and may become spiritual. But the highest are the *Sāttvikas*, the introspective, those who live only in the Self. These three qualities, *Tamas*, *Rajas*, and *Sattva*, are in everyone, and different ones predominate at different times.... When this world goes, good and evil go with it ; but when we can transcend this world we get rid of both good and evil and have bliss.

from *Inspired Talks of*
Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda's Exhortation to the Youth

My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions. I have formulated the idea and have given my life to it...They will spread from centre to centre, until we have covered the whole of India.

...I am born to organize these young men; nay, hundreds more in every city are ready to join me; and I want to send them rolling like irresistible waves over India, bringing comfort, morality, religion, education to the doors of the meanest and the most downtrodden. And this, I will do or die.

What we want are some young men who will renounce everything and sacrifice their lives for their country's sake. We should first form their lives and then some real work can be expected.

Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad; then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy. Struggle, struggle, was my motto for the last ten years. Struggle, still say I. When it was all dark, I used to say, struggle; when light is breaking in, I still say, struggle. Be not afraid, my children.

To Our Readers

With the arrival of 1992 *Prabuddha Bharata*, the oldest running monthly Journal of India, is entering its 97th year.

This first issue of 1992 comes as a special number. Many eminent writers in the East and in the West have contributed valuable articles on varied themes, enriching it. We are grateful to them all. During the last year, 1991, writers, scholars, and devotees contributed dissertations, essays, travelogues and other types of articles for the monthly issues. Some have enrolled themselves as life-subscribers of the Journal. Many others have offered donations and help of other kinds, in order to keep the prestigious religio-cultural Journal alive.

Prabuddha Bharata staff wishes to improve the quality, printing and paper of this Journal started under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda in 1896. We hope the general public, especially the lovers of this great country and her precious culture, and the devotees of Swamiji, will come forward in large numbers to help us by enrolling as life, or year-to-year subscribers, by offering donations, and by contributing articles which will help to fulfil Swami Vivekananda's vision of Awakened India.

Prabuddha Bharata wishes all its subscribers, contributors, and admirers a happy, peaceful, and prosperous New Year.

Vivekananda and Kashmir

Kashmir, paradise on earth, (*Bhu-svarga*) the 'Switzerland of India', exercised its wonderful influence on the mind of Vivekananda. Its spiritually vibrant and charged atmosphere not only enabled him to recover his shattered health, but afforded many an occasion for him to plunge into the silent depths of meditation on the universal Spirit—Śiva. He emerged each time possessed of spiritual power and ineffable beatitude. His soul soared to dizzy heights and realizations. His realizations were so sacred and profound that he could hardly communicate them to his Western disciples who accompanied him to Kashmir on his second visit. Though he did not try to describe them in their entirety, the effect of those great experiences of his life could not be concealed.

Those who went with him to Kashmir felt the tangible presence of God in Vivekananda. They watched him and listened to him in speechless wonder. It was said by those who were with him, that Vivekananda manifested his Siva-nature in Kashmir, and that the beautiful land itself was saturated by the presence of the Lord. Later on, Swamiji described to a few of his *Gurubhais* (brother disciples) something of what he saw and felt in Kashmir. Yet, intensely personal as they were, those profound realizations will be forever unknown to others, as indeed will be the Swami's own transcendental nature. After stepping into Kashmir, he realized for the first time that the land was justifiably famous, not only for its scenic splendours, but for its rare and palpable spiritual vibrations. He came to Kashmir as a tourist with his companions touring India, to recoup him-

self after years of hard work in the West. When he returned from the bracing cold and the healthy climate of the valley, it was with due reverence and devotion for the land and the holiness of its culture. This can be seen from his many letters.

For his Western disciples it was an unforgettable pilgrimage. The transforming power of the Swami's divine moods lifted their spirits to a high plane. Nivedita, Sara Bull and Josephine MacLeod were greatly blessed because they lived in the presence of a veritable Śiva in human form. "We have been living and breathing," wrote Sister Nivedita to a friend on October 13, 1898, "in the sunshine of the great religious ideals all these months, and God has been more real to us than common men....He [Swamiji] is all love now." It was in the holy land of the mountains that Swamiji's heart was kindled to dive into the unfathomable Infinite, his true home. It might have been the finale of his great life, but because his earthly mission was not complete he withdrew himself.

It is not that Vivekananda had not seen places of scenic beauty before, during his sojourn in Europe, but in the midst of his strenuous toil as a great religious teacher, those places could not make a great impression on him. The sublimity of the Alpine ranges of Switzerland with their eternal snows and glaciers reminded him, but could not compare with his worship of the Himalayas, and the brief stay at Lucerne and Sass-Fee had often brought disquieting news and letters from India, England and America. The Alps, put him in the mind of his wanderings in India prior to coming to the West, but could not charm him away from his life's mission for long. The divine plan was something else. Switzerland perhaps whetted

his longing to return to India all the more. It was not long before he did so.

The Himalayas and atmosphere of Kashmir have been sanctified and purified for thousands of years by the devotees of Śiva and Umā, and by the *tapasyā* of thousands of *sannyāsins*, joining in the eternal chant of “*Vyom, Vyom, Hara, Hara*” resonating through the rock hills and dales beside swift transparent streams and rivers. They all beacons to the young sage. But Swamiji had to wait after his visit to the Alps for exactly two years to come up to Kashmir. It was a much needed rest and peace he so longed for in the lap of Śiva. His discovery of spiritual wealth of Kashmir during his first visit in 1897 led him once again to spend some time there. This second visit in 1898 lasted from 20th June to 12th October, almost four months.

It is certain that Swamiji not only enjoyed the splendour of the Himalayas and the charm of Srinagar’s valley and lakes, but his extraordinary perceptivity detected the unfailing throb of the powerful undercurrent of spirituality. In his letter to Swami Brahmananda from Srinagar on 13th September 1897 Swamiji wrote: “...Now Kashmir. The excellent accounts you heard of this place are all true. There is no place so beautiful as this ; and the people also are fair and good-looking, though their eyes are not beautiful. But I have also never seen elsewhere village and towns so horribly dirty”.¹

The extreme cold of the climate and the population density in towns and villages resulted in the unsanitary conditions. It was really a baffling contrast to compare the pristine natural beauty of the untouched mountains and lakes to the uncleanness of

the inhabitants. Malaria was a frequent and unwelcome visitor. A little beyond the towns, however, the beauty of the mountains was breathtaking. No doubt it erased any unpleasant impressions of the lower altitudes. Voicing great admiration, Swamiji wrote to Indumati Mitra: “This Kashmir is a veritable heaven on earth. Nowhere else in the world is such a country as this: Mountains and rivers, trees and plants, men and women, beasts and birds—all vie with one another for excellence. I feel a pang at heart not to have visited it so long.”²

Unveiling the spiritual dimension of the place he wrote on 15th September to Swami Shuddhananda, “It is the one land fit for yogis, to my mind.” Himself a yogi par excellence, Swamiji’s thoughts naturally turned in this way. It was with great reluctance that he cut short his first visit and returned to the plains. In great depth of feeling he wrote to Nivedita, “I never felt sorry to leave any country except this paradise on earth.”³

Kashmir has been for milleniums a holy *tīrtha* (objective) of saints and *yogins*, great Sanskrit savants and poets. Its noteworthy contributions in the fields of literature, philosophy, music, historiography, and temple architecture have considerably enriched Indian culture. Over the epochs, three prominent waves of philosophical and religious thoughts before Islam passed over Kashmir: *Śaktī*, or *Devī-pūjā* (worship), Buddhism, and Monistic or *Advaita Vedānta*.

The worship of the Mother Goddess prevailed before the advent of Buddhism. A topographical survey would show that the province was covered over with numerous centres famous for *Śakti-sādhanā*. Legend

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. 8, p. 419.

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 408.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 429.

has it that the great Śankara himself learned *śakti-sādhana* in Kashmir when he visited the Northwest. And here legend says he composed his beautiful hymn to the Divine Mother, *Saundarya Laharī*. Later, the cult of Mother-worship took the concrete form of worship according to *tāntric* principles, perhaps encouraged by the *Vajrayāna* School of Buddhism. Even at present a small number are devoted to the practice of the *tantras*.

Buddhism had a strong hold in Kashmir for nearly a thousand years, since the time of King Asoka (273-232 B.C.). It was in Kashmir that Kanishka (A.D. 78-101) convoked the fourth great council of Buddhist theologians to reconcile the conflicting doctrines that grew into the different schools of Buddhism. In this assembly, called by the King, five hundred sages composed the three commentaries, viz. *Upadeśa Śāstra*, *Vinaya Vibhāsā Śāstra*, and the *Abhi Dharma Vibhāsā Śāstra*. Nāgārjuna, the monk-philosopher, came to Kashmir and began to spread the religion of Buddha. Kalhaṇa, in the 12th century, the great author of *Rājatarāṅginī*, the history of Kashmir, refers to Nāgārjuna's aggressive propagation of Buddhism. It is also mentioned by Varadarāja in the *Śiva-Sūtra-Vārttika*.

Monistic Vedānta was well established even during the heyday of Buddhist strength. Then the decline of Buddhism and the visit of Śankara (A.D. 820) to the region gave a new impetus to the ancient religion of the Vedas. Afterward, incorporating some tenets of *Vedānta*, the *śaktāism* and *Yoga Philosophy*, a distinct thought system known as *Kāśhmīr Śaivism* arose at the beginning of the ninth century.

The monistic Śaivism of Kashmir is called *Trika*. It is so called because it accepts as most important the triad, *Śiva*, *Śaktī*, and

Nara. The *Trika* is primarily based, not on analytical reason, speculations, or on scriptural authority, but on the most direct experience of Reality through rigorous spiritual discipline—the practice of *yoga*. The greatest exponents of Śaivism were *yogins* of high spiritual stature, who had suprasensuous perceptions beyond the orbit of ordinary intellects. The *Trika*, therefore, is not a logically developed dry thought system, but is a rational exposition of a view of Reality obtained primarily through *yogic* intuition, through meditation.

The great writers like Vasugupta, Bhaṭṭa Kallaṭa, Somānanda, Utpalāchārya, and the giant Abhinavagupta, all showed the ways to the realization of the Absolute by the individual in this very life (*jīvan-mukti*). But all the means exhorted by them involved the practice of *yoga*. Being themselves yogis, they emphasized the direct vision of Reality through the Yogic system. Abhinavagupta (A.D. 960) an encyclopaedic thinker, ascetic, and a man of the highest realizations, was looked upon as an incarnation of Patañjali. He was an outstanding representative of Kashmir Śaivism (*Pratyabhijñā* School). He was a prolific writer, his forty-one works are extant, but there is evidence to show that he wrote many more. Apart from philosophical works he commented on other works of literary criticism and dramaturgy. In his book, *Abhinavabhāratī On Nāṭya-Śāstra*, he propounded an irrefutable theory of aesthetics, which has been accepted by almost all subsequent scholars on the subject.

Among the highly advanced mystics and realized yogis, Lāllā, or Lāl Ded (14th century) holds a very high place. A wandering ascetic, she wandered about the country preaching the Yogic doctrines as the best means of final absorption into Śiva—the Supreme. She played a significant role in bridging the hiatus between Hindus and

Muslims and her verses composed in modern Kashmiri left a marvellous influence on her contemporaries. During the long period of Muslim rule, many Sufi mystics—Shah Hamdani and others, and Muslim saints like Shaik Nuruddin, kept the flame of spirituality burning. A school of Sufis call themselves *ṛṣis* (sages), respect and repeat the poems of Lal Ded, and are strict vegetarians. The Muslims call her 'Lal Arifa' and she is described by the Hindus as 'Lāllā Yogīswarī'. Saint Nuruddin is called 'Nanda Ṛṣi (Sage Nanda) by the Hindus. Both of them preached brotherhood and spiritual oneness of mankind.

Kalhana's *Rājatarāṅginī* (River of Kings), an authentic historical chronicle of Kashmir, written before the advent of Muslim rule and subsequent works of lesser value written after the Muslim reign, like *Rājatarāṅginī* by Jonaraj (a sequel to Kalhana's book), *Jainatarāṅginī* by Śrīvara, and *Rājāvalipatāka* by Prajya Bhaṭṭa, and Suka make mention of many famous saints and yogis of Kashmir. Many outstanding literary works of Damodar, Abhinavagupta, Kalhana, Bilhana, Mammata and others, the names of whom are pre-eminent in the history of Sanskrit literature, have earned accolades from scholars. The mystical trend that continued from ancient times up to the medieval period, is still discernible in modern literature of Kashmir. Despite waves of foreign invasions, tyranny, and plundering, the buoyant character of the people and the spiritual impressions in Kashmir are still fresh. The only dark period was the rule of the Afghans, over the period 1748 to 1819. Afghan governors came from Kabul. Their only overweening interest was to plunder wealth and oppress the people. The much sought relief came when Ranajit Singh of Lahore conquered Kashmir in 1819. In 1848, Jammu and Kashmir became one state under the rule of the Dogra Rajput Dynasty from

Jammu. Swamiji, during his first visit to Kashmir, met Maharaja Pertab Singh and his younger brothers, descendants of the Rajput dynasty. The Maharaja recognized the greatness of Vivekananda and requested him to extend his stay in the state.

First Visit:

His stay of three months in Almora, from May to July in 1897, had brought about an appreciable improvement in Swamiji's health. For this, mainly, he had come from Calcutta to the hill station Almora, to spend some quiet weeks in a cooler place. On 2nd August he came down to Bareilly and Ambala. In both these places he spent very busy days and nights talking to people, enlightening them on religious subjects. This, combined with his addresses at public meetings began to tell adversely upon his health. A relapse seemed imminent so he left with the Seviars to go to Dharmashala, a beautiful hill-resort in Punjab. Here his stay of ten days brought about a noticeable improvement. The Seviars persuaded him to spend some days with them in Kashmir before embarking upon work in the Punjab, as during the summer Punjab becomes extremely hot. Swamiji readily consented to this proposal of his devout English disciples, so with his party from Murree, Vivekananda reached Baramulla on 8th September. Capt. Sevier fell ill in Murree, so the Seviars could not accompany Swamiji, much to their disappointment. Even so, Swamiji's entourage, consisting of six persons went up to Srinagar. In a letter to Swami Brahmananda written on 2nd September 1897, Swamiji mentioned: "Niranjan, Latu, Krishnalal, Dinanath, Gupta and Achyut (Achyutananda of the Arya Samaj) are all going to Kashmir with me."

From Baramulla without wasting time he at once started by boat for Srinagar, the

picturesque lovely city situated at an altitude of 5,250 feet, on both banks of the Jhelum. The party reached Srinagar on 10th September and Swamiji stayed as guest of Justice Rishibar Mukherjee. His plan however of spending a quiet life away from the crowds and engagements went awry. The name Vivekananda which had become the dearest to the hearts of Indians, allowed him no respite. His arrival, however much he would have like it to be otherwise, made quite a stir in the city. He was literally beseiged by an unending stream of visitors. The nobility vied with one another to fete him and he spoke often before the pandits of the town and to large and small gatherings.

In between his private and public engagements Swamiji snatched time to visit famous historical places, or retire in the houseboat that the Wazir of Raja Amar Singh (Maharaja's youngest brother) had placed at his disposal. He walked and rode through the bazar, much to the delight of the local people. They watched with admiring and affectionate eyes the majestic figure, the hero on horseback. He listened to vocal and instrumental music of Kashmir. He went by houseboat to Pampur (ancient Padmapura), and to Anantnag where he viewed the historic temple of Vijbera. On foot he walked to the famous temple of the Sun, Martanda, that had been constructed by Lalitāditya Muktapāda, the King of Kashmir in the middle of the eighth century. Here he stayed at the Dharmasāla (rest house for pilgrims) and discoursed to a large gathering of pandits. On 24th September he set out for Achabāl (Akṣayabāl). On the way, at Avantipur, he was shown a temple which according to the local legend, belonged to the time of the Pāṇḍavas. The beauty of its architecture impressed his keen observant eyes and he expressed his view that the temple was more than two thousand years old.

An amusing exchange took place between Swamiji and the simple uneducated Latu Maharaj. When Swamiji made the remark about his estimation of the age of the temple, Latu Maharaj asked Swamiji what might be the basis on which he made the statement. Swamiji responded that he had little time to waste trying to explain it to a person who was so innocent of scholarship as one like him. Swami Adbhutananda, not abashed in the least, shot back, "You are such a great scholar that you are unable to establish your point before even such a great fool as myself!"⁴

Vivekananda also paid a visit to the palace of Maharaja Pertab Singh, but the Maharaja was away in Jammu. But Swamiji was informed that the younger brother of Maharaja, Raja Rama Singh, would be pleased to meet him. Thus in the *Life* we read that "Raja Rama Singh received the Swami with marked cordiality and honour, seating him on a chair, and himself sitting with officials on the floor. The interview lasted two hours. Matters of religion, and the problem of improving the condition of the poor, were discussed. The Raja was deeply impressed, and voiced his desire to help the Swami in carrying out his plan of work."⁵ Swamiji's desire to establish a centre in this 'land of yogis' must have been strengthened by the promise of help assured by the Raja. It was explicit in his letter written to Nivedita from Srinagar on 1st October: "I am trying my best, if I can, to influence the Raja in starting a centre. So much to do here, and the material so hopeful."

⁴ Swami Gambhirananda, *Yuganayak Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1969.) Vol. III, p. 38.

⁵ *The Life of Swami Vivekananda By His Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1981) Vol. I, p. 283.

The invigorating climate of Kashmir and the spectacular beauty of the mountains covered with molten silver, vigorous walks in the flower-decked open fields and his relaxed mood, helped Vivekananda to regain some of his former strength of body to launch into his work in Punjab. The Punjab, it seems, was waiting for his visit with high expectation. While he was away the Seviers were becoming anxious for him to return to Murree. There were matters to consult with him on the selection of a Himalayan site for the Advaita Ashrama. For several reasons, among them being the depletion of his purse of 400 Rupees given him by Captain Sevier, Swamiji returned to Murree by October 8. In many ways it had been a satisfactory tour for Vivekananda. His own discovery of the land of *siddhas* and saints tremendously impressed him. He must have felt an urge to revisit Kashmir in the near future to probe farther its hidden depths. His deep feeling found eloquent expression in his letter to Nivedita: "I shall not try to describe Kashmir to you. Suffice it to say, I never felt sorry to leave any country except this Paradise on earth."⁶

After spending twelve hectic days in Murree and Rawalpindi where he captivated the hearts of thousands, Swamiji was off again to Jammu, a winter capital, a little town on the bank of the river Tavi, in response to an invitation by the Maharaja of Kashmir. He reached Jammu on 21st October as a guest of the state. Next day Swamiji and the Maharaja had a marathon meeting which lasted for four hours. It was a wide ranging discussion they had, touching on numerous subjects. Swamiji's public lecture in Hindi pleased the Maharaja so much that he asked him to deliver another lecture next day. The ruler requested Viveka-

nanda to extend his stay for ten or twelve days and address meetings every other day. Swamiji must have made his intention clear to the Maharaja that he wished to procure a piece of land in his state to start a monastery. He felt it proper to pursue the subject in his next visit to the state. At the time of Swamiji's departure from Jammu, the ruler invited him to be his guest whenever he visited his state. On the whole, Swamiji's first visit to Kashmir was attended with resounding success. People of the state were immensely pleased and proud to have the world famous sannyasin in their midst.

Second Visit:

In June 1898 when Swamiji was staying at Almora with Nivedita, Miss MacLeod, Mrs. Ole Bull and Mrs. Patterson, he heard the shocking news of the death of Goodwin. Great was his bereavement at the loss of his dear disciple. The blow was so hard that once he exclaimed, "As if it would not be one's right and duty to fight such a God and slay him, for killing Goodwin, and Goodwin, if he had lived, could have done so much!"⁷ His tender heart could not bear Almora anymore, where he had received the grievous news and where the memory of his faithful, gentle Goodwin hung on his mind heavily. Improving upon the few lines that had been written by Nivedita on Goodwin, he rewrote the touching poem, "*Requiescat in Pace*".

*Thou helpful one! unselfish e'er on earth,
Ahead! still help with love this world of
strife!*

Vivekananda with his Western disciples started on 11th June 1898 for Kashmir on his second visit. On the way he unrolled for

⁶. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 429.

⁷. Sister Nivedita, *Notes of Some Wanderings* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1913) p. 54.

his companions the panorama of Punjab's chivalrous history, enlightened them on the many aspects of Hinduism, Indian art, tantric cults, the uniqueness of Sri Rama-krishna, and he spoke inspiringly on *Brahma Vidya*, the realization of Brahman. The disciples were deluged with new knowledge, a wealth of new ideas, hitherto unheard. In the words of Nivedita, "...the Swami kept nothing back from his Western disciples when instructing them about his motherland. He told them the worst about his people and their creeds, as well as the best. And he did not hesitate to denounce when denunciation was called for."⁸

The sight of the great mountains infused in Swamiji the thought of Śiva and possessed by it he forgot himself in extolling the sublimity and greatness of Śiva and Umā. He would be aflame with enthusiasm whenever he heard the supernal name of Lord Śiva. It appeared that every cell in body and brain, his every breath was infused with the thought as he uttered the mantra "*Śivoham, Śivoham*". He said of Śiva one day, "He is the great God, calm, beautiful, and silent; and I am His great worshipper."⁹ "...as one drove beside him in a tonga, he would forget all, in the tale of which he never wearied, of Śiva, the Great God, silent, remote, upon the mountains, asking nothing of men but

solitude, and lost in one eternal meditation."¹⁰ After a long search, once, said he, he had discovered the eternal cry uttered by the rivers and waterfalls amongst the mountains, it was '*Vyom, Vyom, Hara, Hara*', names of Śiva. In the Himalayas, the abode of *Mahādeva*, everything is suffused with the spirit of Hara. The strongest wish that often lurked in his mind was to leave his body on the lap of Śiva. It nearly came to pass when he visited the shrine of Amarnath during his four months' stay in Kashmir.

On 20th June the party reached Baramula, or ancient *Vārāhamula*. The legend goes that once when in prehistoric times the vale of Kashmir was occupied by a huge lake, the Divine Boar (*Varāha*) pierced the mountains with its tusks and let the Jhelum go free. Experts also say during the Pleistocene Epoch, the vale of Kashmir was submerged at times by a lake, known as Lake Karewa.

As they entered deeper into the hills, looking on in speechless wonder at the silvery mountain peaks, the beauty of the stately poplars, giant chenar trees, irises in bloom, the happy murmur of myriads of brooks, handsome faces of Kashmiris decked in their colourful dress, working in green fields, the long chequered history of the country and its shifting tides of fortune unfolded before Vivekananda.

8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 357.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

10. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1972) p. 92.

Sri Ramakrishna's Message of Hope *

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

In matters spiritual, people invent all kinds of lame excuses for avoiding practical steps. This will not help to erase the misery in our lives. The more we sit idly, the more we shall suffer in joyless darkness—sounds a note of caution the Revered President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

The Nature of the Bound Soul

Sri Ramakrishna, a great observer of human nature, says that people are mostly running after worldly enjoyments and that their minds are only in the lower levels. He has mentioned at length the condition of men in bondage¹ who are absolutely forgetful of higher life and who remain always busy and satisfied with the lowest kinds of sense enjoyment. They are born in bondage, they remain in bondage and will die in bondage. They have no awareness of anything better than that. They think that it is God who has kept them in this condition and that it is not possible for them to bring about any change. Such statements are often made: "Oh! We are worldly people!" But what do they mean by this 'worldly people'? Who made them worldly? They unfortunately blame God and do not listen to the teachings of the godmen which could lift them up from their unhappy condition. This trend of shirking responsibility is very common.

Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this kind of attitude with a story: A brahmin once made a beautiful garden. One day a cow entered the garden and destroyed many plants. This made the brahmin furious and he gave the

cow such a hard blow on a vital spot that she instantly fell dead. Naturally, the sin of killing the cow came to the brahmin. But the brahmin claimed that it was not really he who was responsible for the cow's death. It was his *hand* that gave the blow, and the hand moves by the power of Indra. (According to Vedanta, each part of the body is controlled by a particular deity.)² So, it was really Indra who killed the cow! The brahmin thus refused to accept the sin and sent it back to Indra. When Sin came to Indra, Indra was taken aback. Learning about the entire incident, Indra himself came to the brahmin in the disguise of an old brahmin and started praising the great beauty of the garden, saying: "I have never before seen such a beautiful garden! Who has planted it?" The brahmin gardener was pleased to hear such praise of the garden so he came forward with the remark, "Sir, I have made the garden." Forgetting about the dead cow, he then asked the disguised Indra to come and see more of the beautiful things inside. At every step they came upon something new and Indra said repeatedly: "Beautiful! Whoever has made it?" The brahmin would

2. एतैरेव [गुणैः] रजोगुणोद्वैतैः पञ्चभूतैर्यथाक्रमेण वाक्पाणि वादवायुवस्थाख्यानि कर्मेन्द्रियाणि जायन्ते । तेषाञ्चक्रमेण बन्हीन्द्र-उपेन्द्र-मृत्यु, प्रजापतयोऽघ्निष्ठातृ देवताः ।

* The essay is based on a talk given by the Revered Swami at Singapor in 1986.

1. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) See pp. 87, 164-65.

'Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra',
Vedānta Paribhāṣā

reply proudly that it was he who was responsible. Gradually they came close to the place where the dead cow was lying. As if shocked, Indra exclaimed: "Who killed the cow?" Realizing his folly all at once, the brahmin kept silent.³ Similarly, we like to claim responsibility for everything good and shirk responsibility for actions which should not have been done by us.

As Sri Ramakrishna says, when fishermen make a trap to catch fish, the fish enter the trap of their own accord and then cannot escape from it. They could come out through the opening by which they entered, but they never find it. Going round and round, they never find the way out. We have ourselves fallen into this kind of bondage, brought on by ourselves. The silkworm weaves its cocoon itself with the silk thread and then does not know how to come out of it. It remains bound, a prisoner in the prison of its own making. "A worm that revels in dirt is happy there," says Sri Ramakrishna. "If you put it in a rice pot it will die."⁴ If we are taken away from our environment and placed in a better condition, we feel miserable. We shall search for the 'dirt' with which we are so familiar. This is the condition of a man of the world, a man in bondage.

The Voice Within

It is said in the *Gītā*: "Amongst thousands of people, there is hardly a rare soul who strives for liberation; and amongst the thousands that are striving, rarely is a man blessed with enlightenment."⁵ This has been

3. *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore,) pp. 66-67.

4. 'M', *The Gospel*, p. 165.

5. मनुष्याणाम् सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।
यतताम् अपि सिद्धानाम् कश्चिन्मांवेत्ति

तत्त्वतः ॥

Bhagavad Gītā, 7:3

true in all times. One sad truth known to everybody is the obvious fact that we have no urge for spiritual life. We can see this in ourselves when we look within, as also around us. We usually say that it is because of our being born in the *kaliyuga* that it is so. But this condition has been prevailing since very ancient times, even from the days of the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*. If only there was that urge for spirituality in us, that would have made us restless, since because we have lost awareness that we have not reached the goal, we do not make efforts. So, we are doomed to lead a life which is absolutely without hunger or thirst for spiritual enlightenment! Fortunately, we are not only 'a few doomed souls'; we are in a very good number. The largest number of people will be of this type, and those who are not so are supposed to be what they call in modern times, 'abnormal'!

There are some blessed souls who do not behave as we do. Their lives charm us. This is because our worldly pursuits do not give us the satisfaction that we are seeking, the satisfaction that we want to derive from sense-enjoyment. Any such enjoyment becomes boring and tasteless when repeated too much. Therefore, any lasting attraction toward enjoyments is impossible. Again, suppose we have all the objects of enjoyment, but a weak body; then the enjoyments will only create more dissatisfaction in us. Or, sometimes we may have a strong body and mind, and every opportunity for enjoyment also. We may experience then the maximum joy that is possible for a human being. But in spite of all these, suppose we remember that these joys will not last forever or that we shall have to quit them one day, leaving them all behind. Can that prospect allow us to be happy? No, it cannot. But, we are asked not to look at those 'dark sides' of life. They say, "Don't be a pessimist; make the most of whatever opportunity

is presented to you." Often that is what our elders advise us. If a boy shows any kind of spiritual leanings, the parents sometimes say, "Oh, you are very precocious. You are unnecessarily bothering yourself with things. If you are thinking of prayer and devotion to God—well, this is not the time. Those things may be attended to in the future. Enjoy life now." The boy receives such instructions from his elders because they have wasted their own lives. And in their advanced years it is not possible for them to change their way of life or their way of thinking. This is how the vicious circle is going on. This is, unfortunately, the trend we are expected to follow in modern times. But even if we follow, there is a small voice within us that occasionally whispers to our consciousness: "My good fellow! What are you doing? You are losing your life's opportunity!"

This small voice is often insistent, and that is why we sometimes try to keep ourselves preoccupied with other things—so that we can avoid hearing it. We feel depressed when we are alone and unoccupied, because we are afraid of that whisper of the inner voice. We try to remain satisfied with the little bits of joy and sorrow that we come across, and thus remain forgetful of the greater things that matter in life. Sri Ramakrishna mentions a man who was fifty years old and was playing cards, as if the time had not yet come for him to think of God.⁶ Thus, we are trying our best to turn a deaf ear to that voice within. But the voice does not stop whispering. This is the greatest gift of God unto poor humanity.

The Messengers of Hope

Yet, the question is often asked, "Is there no way out?" A doubt naturally arises in

our mind, "Are we eternally doomed? Is there no way out of the state of utter damnation?" Sri Ramakrishna and other great enlightened souls come to show us by their lives how we can get out of this bondage.⁷ The world would have been completely dark had not such flashes of light been there, though such flashes of great lives are very rare.

Sri Ramakrishna came and made it his aim in life to awaken and enlighten 'sleeping' souls. He made it his goal of life to urge people not to waste their life's opportunity. He went on talking to the world about God and things spiritual. He said with great emphasis that there is a way out of bondage.

Such great souls as Sri Ramakrishna are called Messengers of God, or men through whom God reveals Himself so that men can have easier access to Him. Through the example of such Messengers, people may have a little re-awakening and some among them may change their ways. Jesus said, "I am the Way,"⁸ meaning by this that he was the way through which people could reach God. Sri Ramakrishna says that everything that is said and done by Godmen is for the sake of others.⁹ They want to awaken sleeping souls to struggle and realize their innate divinity. The great men come, show us light and give us instructions about how we can redeem ourselves. They do this not only while they live on the earth, but continue to work for the welfare of humanity even after the dissolution of the body. They remain in the world as a force or power, making people aware of their future goal, the ultimate destination of life, and their inner divinity. They leave a band of workers behind to follow up the work they started

6. 'M', *The Gospel*, p. 165.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

8. *St. John's Gospel, The Bible*, 14:6.

9. Cf. 'M', *The Gospel*, p. 782.

during their physical existence, and that is how the force of good continues. The continuity of both good and evil keeps this world going.

Our Potential Divinity

We have divinity inherent in us. We can never be eternally doomed because the eternal Spirit is undying. This flame within us can never be extinguished. It is always burning there. Divinity is our birthright, however forgetful we may be of it. This has been pointed out in the *Upaniṣad* thus:¹⁰ A miserly man had buried all his wealth underground. The inheritor of that wealth walked over that treasure, but never knew that it was there. So also, we have got all the treasure and yet we are simply walking over it, never knowing that it is there and never trying to discover it.

I often use the illustration of a prince, who lives in a palace, well-protected and sleeping in his mother's lap, and who is dreaming that he is wandering about in a forest and being stalked by a tiger and starts crying. The mother gives the child a nudge and the dream breaks. Then the child sees that it is safely cradled in its mother's arms, and smiles. Shaking off the dream is what is necessary, and hence we are being given rude shocks now and then. Yet, we feel that the sleep is beautiful and peaceful. The shocks and pains have become natural to us. But the merciful Lord knows how to awaken us with rude blows. He has got the nectar and also the thunder. Thunder is to break our dreams, and nectar to make us immortal. We shall receive from God what we are worthy of receiving. We are, as it were, in a bad dream and we have to be

awakened to the Truth, the glorious life that awaits us, the life of the Spirit. That is what is required for us. That is why men of God have to come in our midst and vigorously shake us, so that we can get rid of the bad dream. It is these Godmen who have kept the beacon light burning for us to show us the destination that we have to reach, and the way to reach it. That is what is meant by spiritual life and spiritual men.

In most people there is hardly any real awakening. Real awakening will come only when we cannot live without our communion with God. Feeling the presence of God will become our imperative need. Therefore, real spiritual men are few and far between. For most people God is only a dispenser of good things of the world, and through God they are trying to obtain the things which they have been unable to attain with their own limited capacity. God is not served for His own sake but for the sake of the good things that He will provide. But those who have that awakening cannot live without God. Fish cannot live without water. We cannot live without air. In the same way, life cannot be lived without coming into contact with the essential spiritual content that we have with us all the time. It is for us to discover it, and we can indeed do so provided we follow in the footsteps of the great men left on this earth to guide us.

The Call of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna has clearly stated the guidelines for us. He says, "I have lighted the fire; it is for you to come and enjoy its warmth. I have made the mould; it is for you to come and cast yourself in it. I have cooked the food; it is for you to come and sit near the food placed before you."¹¹

10. हिरण्यनिधिं निहितमक्षेत्रज्ञा उपर्युपरि

सञ्चरन्तो न विन्देयु . . . ।

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 8:3:2.

11. Cf. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*, Trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1983) 1, p. 93.

Everything is there, ready. What is lacking is our earnestness to get the benefit of the great treasure he has left, out of his infinite mercy for us. Sri Ramakrishna gave us detailed instructions as to how to proceed step by step towards the goal. He did not keep anything secret or mysterious which needed to be clarified. It was all made as clear as daylight. We know now what is to be done. But what is lacking is the will, the determination to proceed along the path. We should not delay anymore, for the more we wait, the more we shall suffer from the absence of Light. If the Truth is realized then only it will be there in reality for you. If it is not realized here, then it is a great loss.¹²

As it is discussed in the *Upaniṣads*, there are two things: *śreyas* and *preyas*.¹³ That is, God presents before us the enjoyable things of the world and also the Truth that can liberate us from this life of bondage to sense-enjoyments. It is for us to make our choice. With most of us the choice has been wrong. We have bartered our soul for the sake of trifling mundane joys and have finally come to suffering. It is again assured to us that if we so like, we can get out of this bondage and suffering. But it requires a strong determination on our part to cut asunder the ties and attractions of mundane

12. इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति न चेदिहावेदीन्महती
विनष्टिः ।

Kena Upaniṣad, II. 5.

13. *Katha Upaniṣad*, 1:2:2.

pleasures which overwhelm most of us by their sensuous charms. And once we have been able to bring the light of God into our heart, all darkness of slavery and suffering will disappear.

Sri Ramakrishna says that a room may be kept dark for a thousand years, but as soon as one strikes a match, the darkness disappears.¹⁴ So, thousands of years of ignorance will vanish the very moment we shall strike the 'match of Knowledge'. We shall then have the final illumination, and illumination is our birthright.

Sri Ramakrishna used to call: "Come on! Where are you all? I am waiting for you!"¹⁵ He would stand on top of the roof of the Kuthi building at Dakshineswar and thus call out. That call is still ringing; that insistence still goes on. He is still calling. If we do not listen to his call we are lost. The call will continue forever, and there will be a few who will listen to it and go and place themselves at his feet. Sri Ramakrishna incarnated himself in India, the most spiritual land, in order to show the way to divine Life for the whole world in the present age. His call is continuing and it is up to us to get benefited by that call.

Let us pray that our nightmarish dreams of ignorance may be broken, that we may be freed from this delusion and misery and be awakened to march ahead to the Feet of the Lord!

14. 'M', *The Gospel*, p. 298.

15. Cf., *Ibid.*, p. 934.

The Light Burns *

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

The flaming light is a favourite symbol employed in the Indian scriptures. Not without reasons—elucidates the learned author, a senior monk and spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento in the United States.

The function of light is to remove darkness, in some cases to burn some living or non-living object—just as a moth flying into a blazing light meets its inevitable death. A bright flame brought into a semi-dark area makes the area brighter. This may be called the third function of light, namely to intensify an illumination. There is a fourth function of light, to bring joy into the heart of a poetical or emotional person. Looking at the full moon our mind enjoys the beauty rather than the dispelling of darkness. When we decorate rows of lamps on the 'Divali' night the heart becomes merry. When a devotee lights a worship lamp on the altar he feels inner bliss.

All of these functions of the physical lamp have been used metaphorically in our spiritual life, in the scriptures as also in the teachings of the *r̥sis* and holy men. On the spiritual level the simile of the light is very touching.

"The Light Burns," says St. Tulasidas, in one of his songs.¹ The name of Rama is like a lamp. Our body is the house. The mouth of the body is the door of the house, and the tongue is the threshold. Place the lamp of Rama's name on that threshold all the time. Just the lamp placed on the

threshold lights up the inside and outside of the house. Similarly, the repetition of the Holy name illumines the inside and outside of our body. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, all these evil propensities keep the heart dark. The repetition of the Holy Name makes the heart pure, as also makes the world outside appear imbued with the presence of God. The sky, the air, the sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the hills, the meadows, the ponds, as also all living beings become expressions of the Divine. In one word, the whole of outside nature shines with the light of God—Rama inside and Rama outside.

Bhatṛhari, the writer of *Vairāgya-Śatakam*, in the opening verse of his work says that Lord Śiva is a flame of knowledge shining in the hearts of yogis. In that flame, lust and other evil propensities are burned like moths. The accumulated darkness of past lives is dispelled and spiritual well-being is manifest in ten directions.² Lord Sri Krishna, in the 10th chapter of the *Gītā*, assures the devotee who is sincerely practising contemplation that he will surely receive the Grace of God as a lamp of knowledge burning in his heart and destroying all the darkness of ignorance.³

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1. रामनाममणिदीप धरु जीह देहरि द्वार ।

तुलसी भितर बाहिरेहु जो चाहसि उजिवार ॥

—Tulasidas.

2. लीलादग्धविलीलकामशलभः श्रेयोदशाग्रे स्फुरन्
चेतः सद्मनि योगिनां विजयेत ज्ञानप्रदीपो हरः ।

—*Vairāgya-Śatakam* 1

3. तेषामेवानुकम्पार्थमहमज्ञानजं तमः ।

नाशयाम्यात्मभावस्थो ज्ञानदीपेन भास्वता ॥

—*Bhagavad Gītā*, X. 11.

To look upon God as divine Light is an ancient idea in the religious culture of India. The chosen deity of a spiritual aspirant, like Śiva, Durgā, Nārāyaṇa, Lakṣmī, Rāma or Kṛṣṇa, becomes living by earnest *bhakti*. They then appear as living lights of consciousness. Swami Vivekananda, in his Vesper Prayer to Sri Ramakrishna, uses this expression: "You are the Light of all lights", "Illuminer of the heart's cave." "You are the Dispeller of the darkness of ignorance." In the *Gītā*, Lord Sri Krishna gave Arjuna divine eyes by which he could see his cosmic form. The 12th verse of chapter 11 says, "If in the sky a thousand suns arise simultaneously, the resulting light can be compared to the splendour of that Mighty Being.

The Light Burns

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* calls the true reality of man existing in the cave of his heart 'Abiḥ'—light—the light of the Self, 'Eja'—whatever moves, 'Prāṇāt', whatever is endowed with life, 'Nimiṣaccha', whatever blinks, 'Sadāsat'—whatever is gross or subtle, all 'Samarpitam' is standing in the light of the Self. Though the light of the Self is man's highest truth it cannot be comprehended by our ordinary knowledge. "Param vijñānad yad variṣṭam prajānam" (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.1). When the mind becomes transparent by the practice of regular meditation the distractions and delusions of the mind go away. Then "Tadvijñānena pari-pāśyanti dhirāḥ ānandarūpamāmṛtam yadvibhāti" (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.7). In the heart of discriminating people ('Dhira') arises, 'Vijñānam', the steady vision of consciousness. The experience of consciousness brings overwhelming bliss and immortality. This bliss and immortality not only fills the heart inside but also by 'Vibhāti' spreads on all sides. It fills the entire universe. The aspirant has become Light

and the universe where he exists is also nothing but Light.

The Light Burns

The ṛṣi of the *Kenopaniṣad* realizes that the gorgeous Light, the innermost Self of man, is enabling the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the mind to think and, giving *prāṇa* (life force), the ability to live. Our senses, mind and vitality become immobile if not lighted by the consciousness of the Self. So the enquirer of Truth should deeply ask oneself, 'by whom?', 'by whom?', 'by whom?'; who is it that is enabling the mind to flit and run, whose presence is behind the biological processes in the body; whose power is enabling the tongue to speak?

Our normal intelligence is not adequate to solve this question. Those illumined souls who found the solution without any doubt and experienced immortality here on earth—to them we should go and hear reverently about their finding. We have to cherish unshakable faith and regard for the Vedantic scriptures where their experiences were recorded, and contemplate on the teachings until we really understand the import of the utterances. Neither the physiologist nor the psychologist can give the right answer to the questions 'by Whom?', or 'Who?'. The scope of their knowledge is up to the brain. In the brain we know many complicated activities go on harmoniously. Wherefrom comes the intelligence to guide those activities? Here also the scientists cannot give any clear answer. They would say that is not their province. To enquire about the ultimate mystery of our existence is not necessary for our practical life.

According to *Kena Upaniṣad* man does have an ultimate goal. That is to know his deepest truth—his soul which is of the nature of consciousness. If one can withdraw one's mind from the desires and distractions of

the world and direct it to the pure Self—the quiet spectator at the back of the mind—it is possible that the Spectator will respond. His light will be revealed in our 'buddhi' (understanding). The Spectator is not a myth. He is—always is, without any break. Our senses and mind are active because of His existence. The normal functions of our senses and mind need only a little light. But the *Ātman*—the eternal Spectator, is a big Light which is hidden from our experience because of our outgoing tendencies. A 'sādhaka' (spiritual aspirant), who has been blessed by the vision of the great Light, sees for himself that the *Ātman* is 'pratibodha-viditam' (revealed with every cognition). The *sādhaka* may see, or hear, or taste, or touch, or think—each of these experiences is nothing but the exhibition of that Light. Not only that the Light of the Self is vividly found even outside his body and mind.

"Wise seers turn away from the blind knowledge of this everchanging phenomenal world, see the one indivisible *Sacchidānanda* in all beings and thereby attain immortality."⁴

The Light Burns

"The dark night has become the sunlit bright day. This world of Brahman shines

once for all."⁵ Night will not come any more. The Light that has been found will burn for endless time. The radiance of that Light has spread everywhere. Brahman—the greatest Truth that the Vedas proclaim is but this all-pervading, all-penetrating Light of consciousness. Whatever we see, infer or imagine is the Light of consciousness.

The past, the present, and the future—the three segments of time, have merged in *Mahākāla* (the Great Time), which is one of the names for Śiva—the vast endless physical space has melted into the Consciousness space. Pleasure and pain, virtue and sin, heaven and hell, hope and frustration, fear and fearlessness, good and evil karma, bondage and freedom, all these pairs of opposites have abandoned their duality and shown themselves as one Great Light.

No more is any question, no more any doubt, no more any problem. The mind has died, speech has come to its end. Nothing to achieve, nothing not achieved. Birth has ceased to exist, so also death. There is no more any 'sādhana' (spiritual practice), neither is 'siddhi' (fulfilment). There ...
The Light Burns.

⁴ भूतेषु भूतेषु विचित्य धीराः
प्रेत्यास्माल्लोकादमृता भवन्ति ॥

—*Kena Upaniṣad*, 2.5.

⁵ नक्तमहरेवाभिनिष्यद्यते सकृद्विभातो ह्येवैष
ब्रह्मलोकः ।

—*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VIII. 4.2.

Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood. By truth the path is laid out, the Way of the Gods, on which the seers, whose every desire is satisfied, proceed to the Highest Abode of the True.

—*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*

Visits to Germany and Poland

SWAMI BHAVYANANDA

The author, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, and leader of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in the United Kingdom, points out how the Vedanta groups in eastern Europe, though small in number, pine for the immortal teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

Germany has the oldest Vedanta group in Europe. Swami Yatiswaranandaji was the first resident Swami, and he made a deep impact on a small circle of students who were deeply committed to Vedanta. He travelled extensively in the early 1930's spreading the message of Vedanta. Germany has always been a home of oriental studies, and has produced philosophers and thinkers who admired the Vedanta. Germany and Europe were dazed by the meteoric rise to power of Nazism, challenging the long-established democracies, and these unfortunate circumstances forced the Swami to leave the Continent to migrate to America.

He was responsible for bringing to France Swami Siddheswarananda, who stayed on during the war in unoccupied Southern France. The seeds scattered by the Swami in Germany have germinated and grown slowly, hidden away from public gaze. Some of the students of those days are still alive and cherish the valued memory of contact with the Swami. They have been scattered in different parts, meeting occasionally under the spiritual guidance of Swami Ritajanandaji of Gretz (France).

In recent decades, two more German groups have come into existence: one centred in Dortmund, another in West Berlin. These two groups under local leadership, have been inviting different Swamis to visit them every year. By and large, they function independently of each other. For the last couple of years, they have combined into

a German Vedanta Society, and are hoping the authorities will appreciate the need to send a resident Swami to Germany soon. The Vedanta Society in Holland, which is of comparatively recent origin, has already managed to get a resident Swami. This has raised the hopes of the German students that they will also get a Swami soon.

During my annual travels I conducted a weekend retreat for the German group at Bad-Neuheim, from 5th to 7th April, 1991. Most of the students assembled in a Catholic Retreat House, which has a wonderful spiritual atmosphere. Eighty students were there for the weekend. A Swami from France centre also participated in conducting the weekend. There were lectures and periods of meditation; slides and a video highlighting the Vedanta movement in India were shown. There were also plenty of bhajans, conducted by Swami Veetamohanda of France. All the participants benefited very much by the spiritual atmosphere of the weekend.

Other local engagements and our annual retreats in May and June kept me busy. The most notable event of this period was the enthronement ceremony of the new Archbishop of Canterbury, to which we were invited, along with leaders of different religions. The true spirit of religion is expressing itself on such occasions.

On 6th July, I found myself in Warsaw, Poland, invited by a couple of young people

whom I had met last year on my second visit there. I was received at the airport by Margaret and Arthur. It is really a problem to get through passport control and collecting baggage, but when you meet cheerful friends you forget all the inconveniences. They have their house in the centre of the city, which is very busy and noisy. The house, though small, was very clean and had all amenities. We had a wash, meditated, had a simple supper and went out for a walk in a nearby park. We meditated again before we retired to bed. From talking to them I could see that though they had not read much about Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, they were inspired by whatever they had known or heard. Though communication was difficult, because of language problems, we managed to understand each other. They had taken a lot of trouble to make my stay comfortable, they are both very loving and caring people.

The next day, we spent most of our time talking and understanding one another. We kept our meals very simple and meditated three times a day. Much time was spent in conveying to them the importance of the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta. They were very open and receptive and guileless.

On Monday, 8th July, we started off with meditation at 6:30 a.m. and enjoyed the divine mystical flute and songs from a Yogalied tape, concluding with chanting *Hari Om Ramakrishna*. As none of our old friends had contacted us so far, we decided to take things into our own hands and plan a little. Arthur telephoned the local newspaper to announce my presence in Warsaw, and also arranged an announcement on the radio. At 10 a.m., as already arranged, a family friend took us to Margaret's parents, who live about thirty kilometres away in a small dacha. Her father, who was a director

of a publishing company, retired two years ago, and lives in the country away from all the noise and bustle of city life. Normally, people live in country cottages only during the summer months, but he has chosen to live there throughout the year, making adequate arrangements for a reasonably comfortable life. They are happier to be there than in the centre of the city. As Arthur is not employed, he also lives with them most of the time, helping to look after the smaller houses in the surrounding area. They have their own tube well and grow ample vegetables and fruits. Their lifestyle is very simple and self-sufficient. He seems to get a reasonable pension on which they live. The place is about an hour's journey from Warsaw. The average luxury car in Poland is the smallest Fiat. The friend who took us also has a small dacha in the neighbourhood.

The weather being sweltering, it was nice to be in the open country, sitting most of the time under the trees. We had a simple lunch: *cous-cous* (equivalent of rice), white cheese and tea. After rest we walked in the neighbouring woods. Though the parents were very apprehensive about the person they were meeting, it all ended up in love and friendship. I had carried a few gifts, especially to Mother. They fondly hoped I would come back again next week. Our Fiat rolled as fast as it could and brought us back safely by 8 p.m. We had our usual supper, meditation and rest.

Margaret is a lawyer by profession, but does not practise. She does research for some government organisation. She is also quite happy to live an unostentatious, simple life. She does not appear to be in the rat race. What plans for the future? None. Religion and spiritual ideas? Not clear. They are simple children of simple parents, with transparent honesty and noble character.

In 1939, when Hitler invaded, the parents lived as children in a country occupied in turn by Germany and Russia. Both these ruthless powers used the Polish people as cheap slave labour. Able-bodied young men were taken away to work in their respective countries. Polish parents had to hide their children away from the invaders. When the war started, the Polish army, under the control of the Germans, were used as cannon-fodder. Many were rounded up in concentration camps, also. Seven million Poles and about seven million Jews were killed in Poland. The notorious death camps stand there even today as monuments of cruelty. "Man's inhumanity to man makes the countless thousands mourn."

When the Russians occupied part of the country, they were bent on annihilating the intelligentsia, who were a threat to Communism. Most of them were sent to Siberia to work in coal mines where they perished. Cherishing of nationalist ideals was simply nipped in the bud. The whole country was converted into an industrial complex with no concern for ecology, to supply the needs of Russia. Poland, which was built on an agricultural economy, now turned partially industrial. Food, which was plentiful before, hardly met the needs of people in the changed circumstances. Post-war Poland just kept alive. The Communist Party of Poland, which was subservient to Russia, ruled the country, converting it into a vast concentration camp. When Gorbachev declared *perestroika*, Poland was the first to break away from Russian control. The USSR had its own problems and told Poland to look after itself and not to seek any aid from them.

After initial turmoil, the Communist Party was thrown out. In the recent elections, *Solidarity*, under the leadership of Lech Walesa, has turned over a new leaf. Unfor-

tunately, the leaf is not clean, but soiled. The biggest job the new government has, is to restore the human spirit. Young educated people see no hope for the country. The economy is in ruins; they count the money in dollars, not in their own currency (one dollar = 12,000 lotas). Even for small transactions, money has to be counted in millions. An average office worker gets about a million, which barely meets his needs. Skilled labour does not have enough work. The government seeks help from the industrialised West. Many multi-nationals have moved in, not because of love for the country, but because labour is cheap. They export finished products to the West to make substantial profits. Even in Poland there are capitalists who have willingly collaborated to keep the poor poorer, and the rich richer. Who cares for the poor! Poverty stands out in the cities. The buildings have all deteriorated very much, roads are poorly paved. People are poorly fed. I understand there is no starvation, even in the rural areas. They may not have adequate heating and clothing.

On 9th July, there was some response to our radio and newspaper announcements. A few people came to meet me. Ania, last year's contact and translator contacted us and also gave some telephone numbers of friends interested, who responded by coming to meet me the next evening. About five ladies turned up. One or two had met me last year. I gave them an introductory talk on Vedanta in general. There were many personal questions to be answered. The meeting lasted about three hours. We also sat for meditation for about an hour before the meeting ended. They promised to come and see me next day again. *Thursday, the 11th*. Margaret and Arthur are very idealistic. They had endless questions which I tried to answer as best as I could. We had a smaller gathering in the evening. There

was more understanding and appreciation; the meeting was very fruitful. On 12th evening, we flew to Krakow.

At the airport we had to produce our identification and tickets at every gate. I had a little problem in booking my case, and did not understand why. The employees are very poorly trained. Though it was an internal flight, they checked my passport thoroughly. Even an ordinary citizen has to produce his identity card to buy rail or air tickets. Even on a railway ticket, the number of the card and name and address are written. The old methods still work. Nobody smiles or welcomes you in these public places. Emplaning and deplaning is a tedious ceremony. The flight was smooth. We landed at 9:30 p.m. Many old friends were there waiting. We were driven in great comfort in a BMW. In about forty minutes we were in the same Zen meditation centre where I stayed last year. But they had arranged my stay on the ground floor, in a beautifully decorated, comfortable room. We had a simple supper and retired by 10:30 p.m.

We got up early and had our morning meditation and breakfast. By 9 a.m. our old friends, Halinska and Agniska, and several others arrived. At 10:30 a.m. we went to an ancient seat of learning (thirteenth century) to see the museum and library. The famous astronomer, Copernicus, lived in this place practically all his life. His manuscripts, books, instruments he invented, and other equipments are still there. Paintings of famous scientists of Poland and their works are still enshrined in this library. We returned by 12:30 and had lunch and rest. As we walked back in the morning, we could see the poor condition of the road and buildings. Many parts are in various stages of decay. Pollution has also added to the poor condition of the road and buildings. I understand that drunkenness is a national problem in this

country. They are to be seen on the road, in parks, and everywhere. What is the way out? God alone knows. All the trouble the country has gone through for centuries has caused the common man to lose all initiative and self-effort. The only way out is to rouse themselves to shape their destiny. Selfeffort and self-discipline is the only answer.

In the evening, about twenty/twenty-five friends gathered. I read and commented on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Then many questions were raised and discussed for about two hours. We concluded the meeting with half an hour of meditation and chanting. I was surprised to find three Indians even here. We maintained our morning routine. A couple of students joined us for breakfast. We had a lot of discussions on the future of the country and the role of youth. By about 10:30 a.m., Halinska and other friends arrived. We all went for a long walk on the bank of the river Vistula. Many interesting subjects were discussed. In the evening, again, about thirty people assembled. The meeting took the same form as the previous day. Even after the meeting, quite a few people stayed on and had supper with us. As this was the last evening in Krakow, people came with gifts and flowers. All of them with one voice demanded that I come back again. Here also I had given several books.

15th morning. We got up early, got ready to catch a train at 7:10 a.m. Several friends were there to see us off, including Mr. Tolarski and Halinska. A lot of good feelings and sentiments were expressed. They hope and wish I come back again. By 10:30 a.m. we were in our apartment in Warsaw. In the evening, about half-a-dozen people gathered, so we had our usual meeting and meditation. All of them wanted copies of the tapes of meditation flute and "*Hari Om Ramakrishna.*"

I have invited Margaret and Arthur to visit us in England. A closer contact with us will deepen their faith and friendship. As they are enthusiastic now, this is the time to strengthen our bonds of friendship. They have promised to visit us as soon as possible. Coming back, I also sent a letter of invitation to enable them to get a visa easily.

16th, Tuesday. The last day of my stay during this visit. After the morning routine and breakfast, we went for a walk. We had our simple lunch. About 5 p.m. in the evening about eight people assembled. Yanusz, a friend whom I had met last year, came. He could not come earlier because of some personal problems. He spent the whole evening discussing various things along with others. They all felt somehow they must meet sometimes and strengthen their bonds of friendship and spiritual practices. As a result, they decided to meet every month and spend an hour or two together reading some literature, singing hymns and meditating. Ania, who is a translator, has taken upon herself the responsibility of translating the *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* at every meeting. Yanusz told me the book, *Meditation, By the Monks of the Ramakrishna Order*, is being translated into Polish. He is hopeful of finding a publisher.

They intend to publish a short life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and some booklets of the "*Thus Spake*" series. Before we closed the meeting, a few ladies who had been coming daily raised the question of the possibility of my visiting again next year. God willing, it may be possible. There is a lot of potential to strengthen the spiritual aspirations of the people, and, also, spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. For some time to come we have to find money to travel and, if necessary, subsidize publications. In spite of shortage of money, our friends are willing to meet our expenses when we come to Poland, and have shown a lot of goodwill.

17th, Wednesday. After my routine, we confirmed our air ticket, and went for a little walk. Again, I raised the subject of their visit and discussed the details of travel. I hope this visit will materialise. Yanusz and Beata came about 2:30 p.m. and we all went to the airport. Expressing sentiments of friendship and goodwill, I took leave of them.

On the whole, the visit was fruitful. God willing, these visits may be continued in future.

The Oriental ideal is as necessary for the progress of the human race as is the Occidental, and I think it is more necessary. Machines never made mankind happy and never will make. He who is trying to make us believe this will claim that happiness is in the machine ; but it is always in the mind. That man alone who is the lord of his mind can become happy and none else.

—Swami Vivekananda

An Epitome of Baranagore Math

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

The momentous period when as many as seven direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lived together for a few months in Meerut, incognito and practising tapasya has been relatively little known. The scholar-monk, Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, sheds innovative light on the subject of the monks' early wandering days.

Baranagore Math, used metaphorically, has come to mean a life of austerity and religious self-discipline led by a band of young *sannyāsins*. The mere mention of the name brings to mind the holy life of *Tyāga* and *Tapasyā*. In the Indian tradition *Tyāga* and *Tapasyā* go together; austerity complements renunciation; and together they form the core of asceticism. A *sannyāsin* "is presented and glorified as one who typifies in practice the central *Tyāga* doctrine of Upanishadic philosophy."¹ Nourished on this centuries-old tradition and inspired by the teachings of the Master, the all-renouncing disciples of Sri Ramakrishna after his departure banded together under the roof of a dilapidated house at Baranagore, three kilometres to the south of Dakshineswar temple. This came to be known as the Baranagore Math. The ascetics here were a community given to prayer, meditation and contemplation. Though cenobitism rather than the eremite's aloofness remained the dominant trend of the group, the monks kept contact with the outside world at a minimum. Their Master's life and teachings were for 'the good of the many, the happiness of the many', but its bearing on their lives was not manifest as such yet.

Life at the Baranagore Math was one of extreme material privation, but of spiritual abundance. Recalling in after-years both its

1. Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, 1962, p. 37.

hardships and charms, the leader of the group, Swami Vivekananda exclaimed, "What a strong spirit of dispassion we had in those days! We had no thought even as to whether the world existed or not. ... There were days when the Math was without a grain of food. If some rice was collected by begging, there was no salt to take it with. On some days there would be only rice and salt, but nobody cared for it in the least. We were then being carried away by a tidal wave of spiritual practice. Boiled *bimba* leaves, rice and salt,—this was the menu for a month at a stretch. Oh, those wonderful days! The austerities of that period were enough to dismay supernatural beings, not to speak of men."²

We also have a glimpse of the Math life from the memoirs of Swami Virajananda, who had joined the Math in 1891. He wrote, "The few clothes owned by the monks used to be hung on a rope; there was no box to keep them in. Within the Math, they usually wore a loin cloth, but when going out they used outer garments. Once a month their heads and faces were shaved."³

Such deterrants, however, brought out the inner fire in every inmate of the monastery.

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. IX, pp. 248-49.

3. Swami Shradhananda, *The Story of an Epoch* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1982) pp. 24-25.

They felt an inexorable inner compulsion to proceed towards the goal divine. Filled with ascetic spirit, they devoted themselves day and night to the practice of spiritual disciplines. Sri 'M', the chronicler of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, who occasionally lived in the monastery, felt that the place had "become a veritable Vaikuntha."⁴

The bond due to sharing a common ideal, the vivid memory of the Master's love for them and the pull of love for one another held them together. Possessed with love without expectation of a return, the renunciates dwelt in an ecstasy of spiritual zeal, quite oblivious of time, place and even of body consciousness. The monastic community was woven into a fabric, the strands of which were loosely knit, and the binding factors too, were few. Evidently, in this situation, the monks successfully blended the ideals of personal freedom and monastic brotherhood.

At the ideational level, Baranagore was a sign that the dream of the young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was being fulfilled. But it is true that the spirit of Baranagore stood as a symbol of inspiration for God-seekers in all subsequent times. It was not just a feeling. It became the ideal of the monastic community. It became an argument. It became the touchstone of every subsequent discussion on monastic life. Consequently, it is no wonder that the coming together of half a dozen of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at Meerut in December, 1890 for a few weeks has been described as 'the second Baranagore', 'a miniature Baranagore Math', the subject of our present study.

In fact, it was by mere chance that the seven direct disciples, viz. Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Turiya-

nanda, Swami Saradananda, Swami Advaitananda, Swami Akhandananda, and Swami Kripananda⁵ were brought together, and they lived at Meerut for a few weeks in the last month of 1890 and the first month of 1891. Swami Jnanananda,⁶ joined them towards the end.

What then was the duration of existence of this 'second Baranagore Math'? In Swami Akhandananda's memoirs it is mentioned, "We stayed there for four to five months." (Swami Akhandananda had stayed at Meerut four to five months, but the whole party of the Sannyāsins did not.) Neither Swami Suddhananda's recording that the monks' stay in the garden house extended for four months, nor Pramathanath Basu's claim that Swamiji lived at Meerut for more than three months⁷ is tenable. According to Swami Gambhirananda, the brother disciples lived together for not more than two months.⁸ Nonetheless, the available facts and figures suggest that the second Baranagore Math at Sethji's garden continued for six weeks at the very most.

The gathering of the Swamis was not preplanned. Neither did they make a programme for living together for any length of time. Circumstances simply brought them together. In any case, it may be safely concluded that it was their sharing of a common ideal and love for one another that was responsible for the wandering monks' coming together for those few weeks. Unless one is acquainted with the story of their

5. Blessed by Sri Ramakrishna, Vaikunthanath Sanyal, a resident of 20, Bosepara Lane, Bagbazar Street, took *sannyasa* and came to be known as Swami Kripananda. Later he gave up *sannyasa* and led a married life but maintained close contact with Swami Saradananda throughout his life.

6. Popularly known as Daksha Maharaj.

7. Pramathanath Basu, *Swami Vivekananda* (Bengali), 1329 B.S., Vol. I, p. 223.

8. Swami Gambhirananda, *Yuganayak Vivekananda* (Bengali), Vol. I, 2nd ed. p. 291.

4. Sri 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942) p. 1000.

separate previous wanderings it will be difficult to appreciate how and why they met in Meerut. And unless one knows the then mental frame of the sannyasins, and particularly that of Swami Vivekananda, their leader, it would perhaps be impossible to appraise the wonderful community life that sprang up there.

Though India is dotted with temples, mosques and churches, Meerut was not an accredited place of pilgrimage in those days or later. But its geographic location helped it to turn into an important road and rail junction in course of time. For that reason mainly itinerant monks used to pass through Meerut.

If however, Meerut was not a place of great attraction for the monks, the Himalaya with the Ganga flowing by the foothills certainly was. Much though the leader had urged his monastic brothers to keep together at Baranagore, some of them strayed away from the community and took to itinerant life. The Himalayas and the Ganga were their great attraction. Strange enough, the leader too became restless. He too decided to break free from the golden chain of attachment to monastery and brother disciples; and finally left Calcutta in the middle of July 1890. An experienced traveller in the Himalayas, Swami Akhandananda accompanied him.

Swami Saradananda and his friend Vaikunthanath Sanyal, who after *sannyāsa* assumed the name of Swami Kripananda, were staying at Almora. Learning that Narendranath and Gangadhar had come to Varanasi, they wrote a letter on the 23rd August, which partly read: "We are anxious to see you both....Pray, be good enough to come up here as early as possible. At least grant this favour to our request." This just shows how deeply attached they were to one another.

From Swami Akhandananda's letter dated 14th November 1890, addressed to Pramadas Mitra of Varanasi, it is learnt that Swami Vivekananda and he had reached Nainital⁹ en route to Almora. They met Swami Saradananda and Swami Kripananda in the garden of Amba Dutt in Almora. After a brief stay of about a week all of them left for Garhwal on the 5th September. In the bosom of the Himalayas, Garhwal is proud of its peaks, the principal ones being Nanda Devi, Triśul and Badrinath (23, 320 ft.). The last named shelters the renowned temple of Badrinath, at a lower altitude, one of the four '*dhamas*' (abodes of God). But as the road to Badrinath was barred by a Government notification, the party had to drop the idea of visiting the celebrated shrine.

To follow their subsequent movements we quote from a letter of Swami Akhandananda, dated 14th November 1890:

...As revered brother (Swamiji) did not find Almora as the place of his choice, we four left it in search of a suitable spot on the bank of the Bhagirathi. I contracted some dangerous disease on my way. On way to Badrikashrama at Karnaprayag as I had fever I was forced to take rest for three days. Therefrom we proceeded towards Srinagar. At one *chati* (inn) Sri Narendranath too had fever. After three days' suffering we walked down five to six miles to a pilgrims' shelter, although we both had become terribly weak. Being overwhelmed by high fever, we took *kaviraji* medicine arranged by the munsiff.¹⁰ The latter arranged for our travel to Srinagar in a dandi. The medicine brought some immediate relief, however. There at

⁹. Swami Saradananda's letter dated 5.9.1890 reveals that Narendra and Gangadhar reached Almora on the 29th or 30th August, '90.

¹⁰. He was Badri Dutt Joshi, the Sadar Amin of Garhwal.

Srinagar we comfortably lived for more than a fortnight.¹¹ ...As the desire for visiting the Bhagirathi rose up, the monks hurriedly walked down to Tihri on foot¹² ...on the way a physician examined my chest, and detecting the onset of bronchitis, advised me to move to Dehradun for proper treatment. ...Therefrom we all hastened to Dehradun. The civil surgeon of Dehradun, Dr. Maclaren, examined my chest. He too diagnosed bronchitis. He advised me to leave the hilly region of Uttar Pradesh and go down to the plains. ...At Dehradun we were five in number. On our way down, we met our Swami Turiyananda at Rajpur. The latter finally came down to Dehradun to join us. ...As it was settled that I shall have to go down to the plains, Narendranath, Sarat and Turiyananda left for Rishikesh. Only Sanyal Mahashay stayed with me.

From the memoirs of Swami Akhandananda, it is further gathered that a pleader of Dehradun, Pandit Ananda Narayan, took charge of the Swami's treatment and helped him in every possible way. Thereafter Swami Akhandananda lost contact¹³ with Narendranath and others. A few days later Swami Kripananda, alias Sanyal Mahashay,

also left for Rishikesh, leaving Swami Akhandananda alone.

Though a few days' rest, good diet and medicine helped Swami Akhandananda to regain physical strength to some extent, yet his progress was far from satisfactory. At the physician's suggestion he resolved to consult Dr. Govinda Basu at Allahabad. His brother disciples knew of his tentative plan to journey to Allahabad before they had departed. As it turned out, Swami Akhandananda went to Saharanpur on his way to Allahabad, and there his host, Banku-behari Chatterjee, a pleader, advised him to go to Meerut instead, where he could see Dr. Trailokyanath Ghosh,¹⁴ the Assistant Civil Surgeon. With a letter of introduction from Sri Chatterjee, the Swami then started for Meerut. On his arrival in the third week of October he again got himself examined physically. The experienced medical practitioner, Dr. Ghosh, looked into the patient's complaint of chest pain and detected a palpitation in the heart.¹⁵ Swami Akhandananda stayed on with Dr. Ghosh for a month and a half.

T. N. Ghosh was popular for his large-heartedness and liberality, and had earned the title of *Rai Bahadur*. About him, one of his contemporaries, Kedarnath Bandyo-

11. *From Holy Wanderings to Service of God in Man*, (p. 27) claims that the party stayed at Srinagar, Garhwal "for a month and a half". But circumstantial evidence suggests that the period of their stay was not more than a fortnight. On their way the three took lessons on the Upanishads from Swami Vivekananda., (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1979).

12. Swami Vivekananda liked the place. He wanted to settle down for a long meditation. Raghunath Bhattacharya, the Diwan of the State, selected a site for him at the confluence of the Ganga and the Bhilaganga. But Swami Akhandananda fell ill once again and Swamiji had to give up his idea of seriously doing spiritual practices.

13. Swami Akhandananda's letter dated 20-11-1890 addressed to P.D. Mitra.

14. Born in 1841 at Chandannagore, Trailokyanath had his medical education in Calcutta and served the Government dispensary at Meerut for twentythree years. Dr. Moyer, Civil Surgeon of Meerut, wrote of him, "His service would be invaluable in the performance of operations and the treatment of surgical cases. He is much more experienced in such work than perhaps 99 per cent of the whole Army Medical Service." Closely associated with all kinds of cultural and philanthropic institutions, Trailokyanath was a leading citizen and was respected by people of all walks of life. (Jnanendramohan Das, *Banger Bahirey Bangali* (Bengali), Vol. I, 1332 B.S., pp. 274-76).

15. Swami Akhandananda's letter dated 14-11-1890 addressed to P.D. Mitra.

padhyay, wrote: "The local people and even the elite considered him a *Dhanvantari*, physician of heaven, and revered him as a divine personage. His qualities and conduct endeared him to one and all. Everybody felt obliged to honour his requests, if any. His influence helped the resident Bengalis to prosper."¹⁶ The present address of the premises he occupied is 179 Abu Lane, Meerut.

Located 57.6 Kms northeast of Delhi, 40 Kms west of the Ganga, and 46 Kms east of the Jamuna, Meerut is an ancient town. In the Mahābhārata period it was known as Hastinapur. Legends claim further that it was the capital of Maudanab, the royal father of Ravana's wife Mandodari. Dotted with temples of gods and goddesses the city was invaded by the Moghuls in 1017 A.D., and in 1191 A.D. when Muhammad Ghorī occupied it, its temples were either desecrated or destroyed. Later during the British rule a cantonment was established in 1806, which was reinforced after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. In the last quarter of the last century, it was a fast growing industrial centre with large-scale and small-scale industries. It was particularly known for manufacture of scissors, razors, and musical instruments, etc. Several government establishments in the city attracted job-seekers from other provinces, particularly Bengal.

Swami Vivekananda and his brother disciples, Swami Turiyananda and Swami Saradananda had settled themselves in a hut, close to the temple of Chandeshwar Madhav at Rishikesh. It was a lovely spot at the foot of the Himalayas in the broad valley half-circled by the Ganga. Traditionally considered holy, this place has been sanctified by monks over thousands of years. Naturally it was Swamiji's desire to plunge

himself into meditation and spiritual practices here, but hardly had he arrived than he fell grievously ill. One day his condition grew much worse, his pulse sank low, his body became cold. The brother disciples despaired, not knowing what to do for him. Then providentially, while Swamiji was lying unconscious, a sadhu came to them and gave some medicine, putting it into the mouth of Swamiji. Before long he regained consciousness and said in a feeble voice, "Cheer up, my boys, I will not die." Slowly he began to recuperate.

In the meantime, Raghunath Bhattacharya, the Diwan of Tehri State, on his way to Ajmer, came to see Swamiji and suggested that Swamiji should go to a certain Hakim in Delhi. Sri Bhattacharya gave Swamiji a letter of introduction and also gave the monks some money for repair of their hut. As soon as Swamiji could walk, the party proceeded towards Saharanpur on the road to Delhi. They came to find out here that Swami Brahmananda was living all alone in a *jhupri*¹⁷ at Kankhal engaged in arduous spiritual practices. The meeting of the brother disciple at Kankhal was joyous. But Swami Brahmananda became much worried because of Swamiji's poor health. At Swamiji's request, Brahmananda joined the party and they went on to Saharanpur. They stayed with Bankubehari Chatterjee, who gave them the news of Swami Akhandananda's being at Meerut. Since Swami Brahmananda especially was anxious to meet with Swami Akhandananda, the party moved to Meerut.¹⁸

Swami Akhandananda was by this time recovering his health under the treatment of Dr. Ghosh. As Meerut was experiencing severe cold he had thought of going to Puri

16. Kedarnath Bandyopadhyaya, *Smritikatha* (Bengali), pp. 3-4.

17. A primitive hut made of tiger grass.

18. *From Holy Wanderings to Service of God in Man*, pp. 29-30.

in the south, but had finally given up the idea. In a letter of 20th November 1890, he wrote to P. D. Mitra, "Large-hearted and liberal minded, all his (Dr. Ghosh's) brothers take loving care of me. In fact, they spare no pains to make me comfortable." By nature exuberant, Swami Akhandananda wanted to be more active and more contemplative too than his weak health would permit, but in his leisure hours he regaled the members of the Ghosh family and visitors with tales about his wanderings and travel in Tibet, and his reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna, and Swamiji.

About this time Swami Akhandananda came in contact with Yagneswar Mukhopadhyay, who later came to be known as Swami Jnanananda after sannyasa. He gained sudden fame as a leader of the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal, which was holding a conference in Delhi in the month of November. At Yajneswar's invitation¹⁹, Swami Akhandananda participated in the proceedings of the Mahamandal. On his return to Meerut he wrote to P. D. Mitra, "Yesterday, on the sixth day, I have come back from Delhi...The conference organized by the Bharata Dharma Mahamandal came off with eclat and enthusiasm. But as the weather was very bad I could not stay there long." Actually, as a result of this trip he suffered a relapse.²⁰ So though at times he was seized with a longing to return to the Himalayas, he was not able. From a second letter dated 5th December 1890 to Shri Mitra, it is learnt that none of the brother disciples had reached Meerut till then.

19. Later Yajneswar Mukherjee paid a visit to Alambazar Math one winter evening and narrated about Swamiji and others. Mahendranath Dutta, *Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir Jivaner Ghatanavali* (Bengali), Vol II, 3rd end., p. 51.

20. His two letters, one addressed to Swami Shivananda and another to P.D. Mitra.

One winter evening at about eight, as Swami Akhandananda was reading a holy scripture to the elder brother of Dr. Ghosh, all the Swamis—Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda and Kripananda, suddenly appeared at Dr. Ghosh's house. According to the Bengali biography it was at the end of autumn, after *Kālīpūjā*²¹ 11th November (26th Kartick, 1890). (Other evidence, circumstantial in character, however, suggests that it was after 5th December that they came.) But it was a glad reunion. Particularly joyous it was for Akhandananda to meet his hero Swamiji, however unhappy he must have been to see Swamiji's emaciated condition. He remarked in one of his letters, "I had never seen him so sickly; he was worn to a shadow. It seemed he had not yet recovered from the terrible illness he had at Rishikesh." It was perhaps on the next day that Yagneswar Babu and one Hindi-speaking Seth came in a carriage to visit Swamiji and the others. It is of interest, and noteworthy, that when Swamiji heard that Yagneswar Babu had met Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji at once came forward to touch his feet—though he was prevented from doing so by Sri Yagneswar Babu. Swamiji had a delightful conversation with Sethji. It was decided that he would stay with Dr. Ghosh along with Swami Akhandananda for rest and medical treatment. The other Swamis put up with Yajneswar Mukherjee.

A tonic prescribed by Dr. Ghosh helped Swamiji to regain his strength rapidly. Soon his remarkable appearance, encyclopaedic knowledge and musical talent began to attract people from all over the city. In the large family of Dr. Ghosh itself, Swamiji was always the centre of attention. Members of the family, young and old, sought his company. The two young daughters of Dr.

21. Pramathanath Basu, *Swami Vivekananda* (Bengali), Vol. I, p. 218.

Ghosh—humorously nicknamed ‘Nikasā Māsi’ and ‘Śurpanakhā Māsi’ by Swamiji, remembered him.²² Dr. Ghosh’s youngest brother, Prasannakumar, tried to draw Swamiji into some disputation, but the disappointed Prasannakumar one day remarked, “I see Swamiji is a tanker of knowledge.”²³ One day Swamiji consoled him saying, “You remember Sri Ramakrishna, he will fulfil all your wants.” Strange enough, Prasannakumar one night dreamt of Sri Ramakrishna besmeared in dirt approaching him dancing and saying, “You take me on your lap.” Prasannakumar refused, and Sri Ramakrishna disappeared. On hearing this dream account, Swami observed, “You will be late in finding an entry into the realm of Thakur.”²⁴

After about a fortnight Swamiji and Swami Akhandananda accepted the invitation of Sethji and shifted their residence to his garden house, where Swami Brahmananda, Swami Turiyananda and Swami Kripananda also joined them. Swamiji was taking medicine still. Down with malarial fever, Swami Saradananda stayed back in the house of Yajneswar Mukherjee, but he too was able to join them soon. Eventually, thus, the natural urge of the monastic brother disciples to live together took over, which, quite possibly, is why a temporary monastery could emerge. It is a paradox that the monks had left the Baranagore Math in search of greater solitude and they now showed signs of giving in to the strong spirit of fraternity. By a strange coincidence about this time Swami Advaitananda, who was wandering in that

region joined them.²⁵ Thus there came together seven disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, forming a temporary Math, as it were, in Sethji’s garden house.

Sethji was no other than Lala Nanda Ram Gupta, a landlord. His only son Kishori Jwala Prasad Gupta was then a young boy. Situated at 259 Ram Bagh in the city of Meerut, and sprawling over thirty bighas of land (23,000 square meters), the garden house was a quiet place in sylvan surroundings. In the midst of trees, shrubs, and plants, some in bud and blossom, stood the one-storeyed house. It stretched north to south, with a number of rooms, a long portico, and had five arcades supported on fluted and tapered columns. The style of construction was Moghul. In the southwest corner of the compound stood a servants’ quarters.

To the eastern side of the house at about sixty feet lay a gorgeous *hamam* (bathing pool) measuring 131 by 120 feet. It had descending flights of steps all round. On the four corners of the *hamam* there are four *kiosks*, small pavilion-like turrets. Each is octagonal, having an arch on each face resting on tapering fluted columns, nearly twelve feet in diameter and about sixteen feet above ground level. The roof was flat as the cupola and the spherical dome or *gombad* missing. The *kiosks* served as dressing places after bathing or as sitting places for quiet reflection and musing.²⁶

But now the place looks desolate, the *hamam* is empty of water, the land looks parched, some additions to the once beautiful building look like ugly appendages. One of

²². Swami Purnatmananda (Ed.), *Smritir Aloy Swamiji* (Bengali), p. 290.

²³. Diary of Swami Suddhananda.

²⁴. Brahmachari Praneshkumar (Ed.), *Mahatma Devendranath* (Bengali), p. 182.

Sri Ramakrishna’s disciple Devendranath Majumdar visited Meerut in September 1907 and met Prasannakumar.

²⁵. According to Swami Suddhananda’s diary, Swami Advaitananda lived in some place other than the garden house.

²⁶. Swami Shuddharupananda of Belur Math helped to prepare the architectural notes on the few structures around the garden house.

the *kiosks* has been completely closed. Only three old trees, a banyan, a peepal and a palm stand as mute witnesses of the once glorious days when Swami Vivekananda with his brother monks lived there. Nonetheless, this garden is unlike any other place in Meerut ; here devotion and prayers sanctified the place, and here spiritual fragrance filled the atmosphere.

The garden house is situated on the eastern side of the city railway station. The race course is to the northeast at a distance of 1.7 Kms and the military parade ground eastward about 200 meters. The Shiva Temple, the starting point of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, is 2.5 Kms northeastward. Dr. Ghosh's house, the point of reference in the present narrative was 3.6 Kms from the garden house.²⁷

Swamiji and his brother disciples were doubtless pleased to have the quiet garden house and its beautiful surroundings. Though Meerut was unusually cold that year,²⁸ the dry, invigorating climate is healthy. Both Swamiji and Swami Akhandananda became free from physical troubles. Swami Saradananda also overcame his impairment to health and malarial fever. In the mornings on some days Swamiji would take strolls in the cantonment area. Some days the monks would walk to the parade ground and witness the sports and games of the military. Or it can be surmised that on some evenings the monks may have gathered around a fire of logs lighted on the premises and meditated. There were evenings when Swamiji would enthuse his brother monks by singing the favourite songs of Sri Ramakrishna and

all of them sang together. Always they would reminisce on their days with the Master at Dakshineswar, and Cossipore, and recount their varied experiences while wandering freely in the mode of traditional sannyasins. All of their experiences doubtless opened before them fresh insights into the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. The ever fresh vision of Swamiji, of the Ramakrishna ideal, consolidated their spirit of brotherhood further.

As could be expected Swamiji, as the leader of the group, set the tune of the monastery life. More than anything else his very presence infused strength and life into the brotherhood. The stillness of the garden was disturbed only at times perhaps by the rustling of leaves in the wind, sparrows chirping, the call of nightjar, or the occasional passing of a train. Doubtless they were all aflame with the zeal to realize God and find a way to fulfil Sri Ramakrishna's divine mission on earth, just as they had always been for the many months since the Master's passing. Just as at the Baranagore Math itself, they cared little for the colourful life of the sense world around them and devoted the maximum of their time to prayer, meditation, japam and chanting of the scriptures, and devotional songs. When not so occupied they studied the world's holy scriptures, and Sanskrit and English literature in general. It is written that in afternoons Swamiji used to read with the brother disciples *The Mṛcchakatika*, *The Abhijnana-Śakuntala*, *The Kumarasambhava*, *The Meghduta*, the famous plays of Śudraka and Kalidasa and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and other scriptures.

News of the monks staying in the city spread quickly, and many educated people began to come. Deeply impressed by Swamiji's personality and versatile genius, they came frequently and in numbers. Some came for spiritual instruction and others for

27. Swami Samatananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Ashrama, Meerut, furnished all information about the garden house. Swami Gokulananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, helped the writer in various ways.

28. Swami Turiyananda's letter dated 19th December 1915, addressed to Swami Premananda.

scholarly discussion. One of the visitors was Kalipada Basu, a renowned lawyer of the city. Associated with various public welfare activities, Kalipada served the Layola Library of Meerut as its Honorary Secretary and it made remarkable advancement.²⁹ The library still exists and its name is 'Tilak Pustakalaya and Vachanalaya'. Close to the clock-tower, *Ghantaghar*, the Library's foundation was laid by H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught on 6th February 1882. In the library hall one finds even now pictures of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Kalipada Bose among others. A great lover of learning, Kalipada was charmed by Swamiji's erudition and scholarship. One day he invited Swamiji and Swami Akhandananda to his house for lunch.

It is known that Swami Akhandananda used to bring books from the Layola Library two kilometers away. Once Swamiji began reading *The Works of Sir John Lubbock*. He finished one volume in a couple of days and returned it to the library the next, and so on with the other volumes. Presuming that the Swami was merely browsing through the volumes, the librarian once hinted that the Swami could not be reading thoroughly. On hearing it, Swamiji presented himself to the librarian and said, "Sir, you may ask me any question, I am prepared to answer."³⁰ The librarian asked him questions till he was satisfied that Swamiji had really mastered them all. On the way back, a wonderstruck Akhandananda asked Swamiji to tell his secret. Swamiji replied, "I never read a book word by word; I read sentence by sentence, sometimes even paragraph by paragraph, in a sort of kaleidoscopic fashion."

One day Swami Akhandananda brought to the garden house an Afghan gentleman,

a *Sardar* and a relative of the Amir Abdar Rahaman of Afghanistan. Having found a refuge in Meerut the Sardar was living there quietly. He had made acquaintance with Swami Akhandananda. Coming to see Swamiji, he performed ablutions as one does before visiting a mosque, and brought fruits and sweets worth one rupee. He met Swamiji several times and on every occasion he acted in the same way. They talked together in Urdu, one day discussing the life of the well-known Fakir of Swat, Ābud by name. On one of his visits the Sardar gave money so that the monks could prepare *pilau*, a tasteful rice preparation.³¹

The Swamis used to cook for themselves. Dr. Ghosh would supply provisions for them once a week. Swamiji himself was an adept in cooking and taught his brother disciples the art. To entertain them one day, particularly Swami Turiyananda, Swamiji himself went to the market, made some purchases and prepared some delicious dishes.³²

Reminiscing two decades and a half later, Swami Turiyananda disclosed how zealously he had treasured the memory of his Meerut experiences. He wrote to Swami Premnanda on 19th December 1915:

...Among memories of Meerut, one particular time is fresh in our minds still. After his serious illness at Rishikesh, Swamiji, whose memory evokes true piety, regained his normal health. We could enjoy his company for about six months.³³ During our travels we met

31. *Ibid.*, According to Mahendranath Dntta, the Afghan gentleman supplied the ingredients for preparing pilau. (vide, *Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir Jivaner Ghatanavali* (Bengali), Vol. II, 3rd end., p. 169).

32. Swami Suddhananda's diary.

33. Swami Turiyananda met Swamiji and others at Rajpur on 13th October 1890. He finally separated from Swamiji in the early part of March 1891. Thus the two were together for about 5 months or so.

29. Jnanendramohan Das, *Banger Bahjrey Bangalee* (Bengali), Vol. I, p. 276.

30. Swami Suddhananda's diary.

Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) at Kankhal...It is well-nigh impossible to express the happiness our stay in Meerut brought to us. During those days Swamiji taught us everything, right from mending a pair of shoes to chanting the Holy *Chandi*. On the one hand he would read out and explain to us the Vedanta, the Upanishads, Sanskrit dramas, etc., and on the other, he would teach us how to cook *pilau*, *kalia*, etc. Surely you can imagine what more he did with us! One day he cooked, I shall always remember. It was somewhat similar to the preparation of a dish of *Magur* fish at the Math. Do you remember the *magur* soup? Can anyone forget it? This was almost like that. He was cooking *pilau*, *kalia*, etc. and got the idea of preparing *shish-kabab*.³⁴ He wanted to prepare something, specially for Hari Bhai. But no thin iron rod could be found. This could not deter Swamiji however. In front of us there were peach trees. Taking a few thin branches from one tree, he skewered meat on each one and roasted the lot to make kabab. Oh, how tasty was the dish!³⁵ As we praised him for the preparation, he made us eat the whole of it. He himself did not taste a single bite. When we pleaded with him to try one piece at least, he simply said that he had taken such dishes enough; that by feeding us he was feeling exceedingly happy. He coaxed us to eat the entire quantity. Just see! Though a small incident it remains deeply implanted in my memory. We named the dish *lathi-kabab*! His infinite love and deep concern for us—listening to his story-telling, strolling in

his company—all these are still vivid in my memory. From here, Swamiji went away all alone...His reminiscences are our life's companion. It is the subject of our meditation, it inspires our telling the beads (*Japa*), and it fills our conversation.³⁶

As the group life coalesced more and more centreing round Swamiji, he sensed that he was getting entangled in the *māyā* of his brother disciples. Once again the call of a wandering monk's life began to haunt him. He had not left the Baranagore Math, he argued within himself, to return to a similar life in a surreptitious way. He became impatient to resume his mendicant's life. One day he articulated his ideas and feelings. He told his brother disciples that he would be leaving them in order to live the life of a solitary monk. However, much they tried to dissuade him they could not change his resolve. Even Swami Akhandananda's strong desire to accompany him (saying that it was just for his sake that he had cancelled his earlier plans to visit Central Asia) failed to move him. He was determined to wander incognito and practise spiritual disciplines. Swami Akhandananda's persistent clinging to Swamiji only annoyed him. The fire of *vairāgya* (renunciation) that coursed through Swamiji's veins flared, and he knew that the attachment he felt for his brother disciples was but a bondage which he must shear. Swamiji got a railway ticket purchased and left for Delhi.³⁷ This was in the last part of January 1891.

Puzzled over the leader's departure, the monks planned to abandon the temporary monastery at Sethji's garden house, when most unexpectedly there appeared Swami

³⁴. A meat preparation.

³⁵. A strict vegetarian, Swami Turiyananda quietly swallowed the non-vegetarian dish, as it was prepared and given by Swamiji himself. (*Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir Jivaner Ghatanavali*, Vol. II. p. 167).

³⁶. A Bengali letter of Swami Turiyananda written from Almora.

³⁷. Swami Suddhananda's diary.

Jnanananda.³⁸ In fact, he arrived there just two days after Swamiji's leaving. Then about eight days later, in the company of Swami Advaitananda left for the *Kumbhasnan* at Hardwar. Swami Saradananda started for Etawah in the company of Swami Kripananda, and the remaining three, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Turiyananda, and Swami Akhandananda drifted slowly towards Delhi. When they reached Delhi after some ten days, they discovered that Swamiji was residing at the house of one merchant, Shyamaldas, and was moving about visiting historical sites in and around Delhi. Swamiji expressed gladness to see them, for the moment, but sternly warned them not to follow him. The four brother disciples lived in Delhi for about a month.³⁹ Swamiji continued to stay with Shyamaldas and the other three in a separate place. One day Swamiji started for Alwar,⁴⁰ but without divulging

his destination, and soon the three others left for Ghaziabad. In a few days more, Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda went to the Punjab and Swami Akhandananda left for Vrindavan.

Seven monks, the boy disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, had gathered round Swami Vivekananda at Meerut and the moment the leader left them, the gathering dissolved. But during the short while they lived together—though in changed circumstances, the spirit and momentum of the Baranagore Math revived. As in the past, the abiding spirit of renunciation of the world to live only for Truth and God alone, inspired them. Though not strictly conforming in all outward expressions of the image of traditional monks depending on alms from the *chhatra*, their austere life and spiritual thought was on an even keel with the past. Fast maturing, with the vision of the Master's life and the austerities of the Baranagore Math behind them, the young monks came out into the greater world of general society and association of other monks—essentially to seek a way to fulfil the divine mission on earth of Sri Ramakrishna. The spirit of Baranagore Math was with them everywhere. Meerut was in a sense a revival. History still lives in the hidden impressions of Sethji's garden-house. The scenes are easily brought up by one who is sensitive to stand quietly and look with the heart over the holy landscape.

³⁸. Swami Jnanananda was also known as Daksha Maharaj. A member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, he visited Sri Ramakrishna many a time. As he was good-natured, Swamiji invested him with *sannyasa* at Baranagore Math. Wrote Swami Akhandananda, "At Meerut I found him perfectly sane. From Meerut, he, with Swami Advaitananda, went to Hardwar to join the *Kumbha*. Three or four months after this, Jnanananda came to Vrindavan stark mad. I was then at Vrindavan...Jnanananda was at last found dead on a footpath in Calcutta." (*From Holy Wanderings...*, pp. 113-14).

³⁹. Swami Turiyananda's letter dated 19-12-1915.

⁴⁰. In a letter dated 22nd Phalgun (5th March 1891) addressed to P.D. Mitra, Swami Shivananda wrote, "I have already written to you what I learnt about Narendra Babaji...About four or five days

back Sannyal has written another letter saying that Narendra has gone towards Alwar State." (*Sri Sri Mahapurushjir Patra*, Belur Math). It seems Swamiji left Delhi by the middle of February 1891.

Japa: Repetition of A Sacred Word

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

The sacred name of God has an immense potency. Every religion has realized its transforming power. An indepth scientific study of Japa and its practice is given here by the learned author, who is spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York.

THE MEANING OF JAPA

Japa is the spiritual practice of repeating a sacred word that is an indicator of the Divine. Such a sacred word can be a verse, a short prayer, a phrase, or a mystic syllable. The purpose of the repetition is to gather the mind for devotion and concentration. The practice of japa to invoke Godconsciousness is as old as religion itself. Faith in the purifying and transforming power of such sacred words as the holy names of God is a vital part of all religious traditions. These holy names can be called "key words." Every religion has its key words which inspire its followers. These words are charged with the power of holiness because many saints and prophets attained to God-consciousness by chanting or repeating them. When a seeker repeats such a word with faith and fervor, it releases the power of holiness which fills the seeker's mind with devotion and then leads it to concentration, absorption, and illumination. Japa is the most concentrated form of prayer. As Sri Ramakrishna says: "The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in samadhi."¹ By the word "sandhya," Sri Ramakrishna meant ceremonial worship and prayer, which are often elaborate. "Gayatri," which begins and ends with the sacred word Om, is the concentrated prayer of the Vedas

which says: "Om. We meditate on the effulgence of that Supreme Divine Being, the creator of the world planes—earth, heaven, and interspaces. May that Divine Being direct our intelligence. Om." Om is the seed word of all prayer, in which concentrated prayer becomes most condensed. The repetition of Om merges in silence. Japa gradually culminates in meditation. For maintaining a constant remembrance of God, japa has many advantages over other methods. The practices of meditation and ceremonial worship require disciplined will, fixed posture, faith, and effort. The practice of japa, on the other hand, needs only effort. Even when the repetition of a sacred word is merely mechanical, its healing, transforming, and purifying effect is certain. Also, practicing japa does not require any special posture, time, place, formality, or environment. It can be practiced under all circumstances. Saint Kabir says: "Repeat the holy name of God in every breath, because you never know which will be your last breath."

SACRED WORDS IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Every religious tradition recognizes the efficacy of japa and prescribes its practice to its followers as part of their devotional exercises. The language, methodology, and the word may vary from one tradition to another, but the spirit remains the same. The Psalms of the Old Testament say: "Let them

¹. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984) p. 465.

also that love thy name be joyful in thee.”² “Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name.”³ “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.”⁴ “Make a joyful noise unto God, all the earth! Sing forth the glory of his name: Make his praise glorious.”⁵ In Christianity, the most sacred word is “Jesus”. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the sacred phrase “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me” has been used since the days of the Desert Fathers in the early centuries of the Christian era. In Catholicism, the sacred words “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” and the Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father, who art in heaven...”) are chanted and repeated regularly. In Judaism, one of the best known prayers is “Barukh Attah Adonai” (Blessed art Thou, O Lord). Other sacred words in Judaism are “Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonoai Ehad” (Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One) and “Adonai, Adonai, El Rahum ve-Hannun” (Lord, Lord, merciful and compassionate). Some of the sacred words used for repetition in Buddhism are: “Namu-myo-ho-ren-Go-kyo” (Glory to the sutra of the lotus of Truth), “Namo Amida butsu” (Salutation to Buddha of infinite light), and “Om mani padme hum” (Om jewel in the lotus of the heart). In the tradition of Islam some of the sacred words used in prayer are: “Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim” (In the name of Allah, the merciful and compassionate), “Allakhir Akbar” (God is Great), and “Allah” (God). In Sufism, repeating the name of Allah or Ali is an important practice, often accompanied by breath control. According to Hinduism, God is one but His forms are many. The Supreme

Brahman, which is beyond all name and form, assumes different forms for the fulfillment of the spiritual aspirations of the different seekers. The Bhagavad Gita says: “Whatever may be the form a devotee seeks to worship with faith—in that form alone I make his faith unwavering.”⁶ So sacred words in the Hindu tradition are various. Some are indicators of the transcendental aspect of the Divine, and some, of Its personal aspects. Important sacred words indicating the transcendental aspect are: the Vedic word Om; the Gayatri mantra; the four Mahavakyas or great Vedic sayings (the four Vedic sayings are: “Prajnanam Brahma” or Brahman is Consciousness, “Aham Brahmasmi” or I am Brahman, “Tat Tvam Asi” or That Thou Art, “Ayam Atma Brahma” or this self is Brahman); “Om Sacchidanandam Brahma” (Brahman is Consciousness, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute) or “Om Sacchidekam Brahma” (Brahman is Reality, Consciousness and One without a second). Some of the sacred words which are indicators of the personal aspects of the Divine are: “Om Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram” (Salutation to Lord Ram, Victory to Lord Ram); “Namah Sivaya” (Salutation to Lord Shiva); and “Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare” (Salutation to Lord Krishna who draws us to Him). The seeker may choose any one of these sacred words for the practice of japa.

JAPA IN THE TRADITIONS OF YOGA, VEDANTA, AND TANTRA

The Traditions of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra consider the practice of japa to be the most effective way of invoking spiritual concentration of mind. The purifying power

2. *Psalms* (5.11).

3. *Ibid.*, (29.2).

4. *Ibid.*, (34.3,4).

5. *Ibid.*, (66.1-3).

6. *The Bhagavad Gita*, (VII. 21), trans. by Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1979) p. 192.

of japa cannot be over-emphasized. Japa is practiced either as part of mystic worship or as an independent spiritual practice. The Bhagavad Gita extols japa as the best form of mystic worship. In the sacred texts of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra, japa is accorded a place next to meditation. Vedanta prescribes different modes of worship for different seekers: first is worship of the Divine through symbols and images; higher than this is japa; higher than japa is meditation; and the highest is the realization 'I am He.' Maintaining an unwavering awareness (in thought, word, and action) that everything is Brahman, or God, is the highest form of worship. Those who are not able to dwell on that height are advised to meditate on Brahman or on some form of personal God. Those who find meditation difficult are advised to practice japa. Worship through symbols and rituals is suggested for those who are not able to concentrate on japa.

The sacred word or mystic syllable used in japa is known by the Sanskrit word "mantra." The word mantra literally means, "that which, when repeated with reflection upon its meaning, gives liberation and saves the seeker." The mantra is the sound-equivalent of the Divine; the external image or symbol is the material form of the mantra. The sound-vibration is the very first manifestation of the Divine and nearest to It. Tantra regards vibration and illumination as two parallel manifestations of the same cosmic energy, and teaches that both lead to realization of the Divine. It is the sound-vibration created by utterance of the mantra that enables the seeker to attain to the blessed state of God-realization. The mantra and the Deity, the name and the named, are one and the same. According to Tantra, the mantras are not mere words coined and popularized by some persons. Tantra maintains that any and every word cannot be a mantra. Mantras are mystic words of concentrated thought endowed with great spiri-

tual potency which were revealed to the seers and saints in their hour of illumination. Often they saw these mantras in flashes of light or heard them reverberating in space. To the novice, the vibration created by the utterance of a mantra is merely a physical sound and the mantra itself nothing but a word. But to the adept, the mantra is the bestower of illumination. Illumination remains hidden in the mantra like an oak tree in an acorn. To the unilluminated, a mantra and its japa may appear as meaningless jargon. But then, to the uninformed, the same is true concerning the formulas, equations and notations used by the physicist, mathematician, or chemist. The formula $E = mc^2$ would make no more sense to the ignorant than would a mantra, for example, "Om" or "Hring", to the uninitiated. Tantra claims that mantras have power, that the Deities invoked are responsive, and that illumination is real. A mantra that has its root in Sanskrit cannot be translated into any other language as this would cause it to lose its power. Different mantras represent different aspects of the same Supreme Godhead. Some are indicators of the transcendental aspect of the Godhead and some of Its personal aspects. Each mantra is thus a seed word, or a code of a specific aspect of the Divine. As the personality of an individual is the expanded version of a particular genetic code, so in the same way, the spiritual realization that results from the repetition of a particular mantra is the manifested version of that mantra.

The mantra used by the seeker in the practice of japa is generally imparted by the spiritual teacher after charging it with spiritual power. The saving power of the mantra is not in the word itself, but in the spiritual power transmitted to it. This transmission of spiritual power is known as "mantra-chaitanya." It makes the mantra a potent force, alive with spiritual consciousness.

The mode of mantra initiation varies depending upon the spiritual heredity and competence of the teacher, and also upon the fitness of the seeker. Mantra initiation is often given with the use of elaborate ceremonies and rituals. But these formalities become secondary where the teacher is competent and the mantra is an awakened one. When such a mantra is repeated by a seeker with faith and fervor, it releases a purifying power that is tangible and transforming. About mantra and mantra-chaitanya, Swami Vivekananda says the following: "The Mantra-Shastris (upholders of the Mantra theory) believe that some words have been handed down through a succession of teachers and disciples, and the mere utterance of them will lead to some form of realization. There are two different meanings of the word Mantra-Chaitanya. According to some, if you practise the repetition of a certain Mantra, you will see the Ishta-Devata who is the object or deity of that Mantra. But according to others, the word means that if you practise the repetition of a certain Mantra received from a Guru not competent, you will have to perform certain ceremonials by which that Mantra will become Chetana or living, and then its repetition will be successful. Different Mantras, when they are thus 'living', show different signs, but the general sign is that one will be able to repeat it for a long time without feeling any strain and that his mind will very soon be concentrated."⁷

THE PHILOSOPHY OF JAPA

The Ultimate Reality, according to the sacred texts of Vedanta, is all-pervading pure Consciousness, designated by the word Brahman. Brahman has two aspects:

transcendent and immanent. The universe of beings and things is the dynamic manifestation of Brahman. This manifestation begins with sound vibration, and Vedanta regards the sacred word Om as the first, or primordial, sound. Om stands for both the transcendent and the immanent aspects of Brahman. From Om are derived all possible sounds a human being can utter. The Vedic seers described this primordial sound as Nada-Brahman, or Brahman in the form of sound. It is also known as Anahata Dhvani, or the uninterrupted sound of the universe. Only the purified and concentrated mind can hear this subtle sound within. The Pythagorean mystics of ancient Greece termed this sound the "Music of the spheres." Sound is not merely what is audible. It has four aspects: gross, subtle, causal, and primordial. What we hear is the gross form of the sound. In its subtle form sound is an impulse of electrical energy; in its causal form it is a thought-wave; and in its primordial form it is cosmic vibration, Nada-Brahman, or Om. Regarding Om, the Katha Upanishad says: "The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires."⁸ Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Aphorisms, describes Om as Iswara, or God, and states that constant repetition of Om removes all obstacles in the spiritual path and leads to Self-realization. Om, thus, is the mother of all sounds, all words, and all mantras. All other sounds and mantras are only the diverse and differentiated expressions of Om, the Nada-Brahman.

7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*: Vol. VII (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1969) p. 407-8.

8. *The Upanishads*: Vol. I, (*Katha Upanishad*, I. ii. 15,16), trans. by Swami Nikhilananda, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1990) p. 138-9.

As the spiritual seeker utters a sacred word, he makes a sound. Following the trail of that sound, he finally arrives at the source of all sound. The sound of the mantra becomes the vehicle to reach Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

The idea that God speaks the word and thus causes the universe to appear, is shared by all major religions except Jainism and Buddhism. In Genesis one finds: "God said: 'Let there be light,' and there was light." This suggests that the Word preceded creation. The Fourth Gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The ancient Greek philosophers designated the creative process as Logos (the Word). The Stoics identified Logos with their concept of God. To the ancient Jews, the world was created by "the Word of the Lord." The later Jewish Philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, described this Word as the "Breath of God" and referred to it as Logos. The Vedas (the earliest of the world's religious texts) long before declared: "In the beginning was Brahman; second to Brahman was the Word, and the Word is Brahman." The uttered word, the thought process behind it, the thought by itself, the individual consciousness behind the thought, and the universal consciousness behind the individual consciousness are all interconnected. In Vedanta, this idea is expressed in the doctrine of sphota, which is the elaboration of the Vedic statement, "All this is verily Brahman." According to Vedanta, the essence of everything is Brahman, the absolute Pure Consciousness. The diversities of the universe exist only in name and form. The sphota is Nada-Brahman, the first manifestation of Brahman in time and space, in the form of sound vibration. Brahman first becomes conditioned as sphota and then evolves into the more concrete, diverse universe. The sphota is the material of all

ideas and words, yet it is not itself any particular idea or word. If all the peculiarities which distinguish each word or idea from every other word or idea be removed, then what would remain is the sphota. Sphota is the Word behind all words, and it originates in Brahman. The sacred word Om stands for that sphota. The doctrine of sphota suggests that the sound of any particular word is a distant echo of the primordial sound, Nada-Brahman. The idea or thought denoted by a name always goes with that name. There is a correlation between the name and the form, the feeling and the object of feeling, the perception and the object perceived. When a name is uttered, there arises in the mind a modification which is the counterpart of the named object. As it is true with every name, so it is with a holy name. By repeating a sacred word, the mind takes the form of the Divine indicated by that word, and by continuous repetition the mind becomes one with the Divine form, and is rendered pure.

The practice of japa is related to our breathing process. Vedanta maintains that creation is a process of manifestation and non-manifestation, evolution and involution. The universe of name and form comes into being, endures for a length of time, and then dissolves into its causal state. Manifestation of the universe into gross forms is what is known as evolution and its return to the causal state of non-manifestation, involution. Only that which was involved can become evolved. This eternal process of involution and evolution has been described by the Upanishads as the inbreathing and outbreathing of Brahman. The breath of each living being is the very same cosmic breath that pulsates in the universe. Thus our breath is a reminder of our identity with Brahman, the Supreme Self, which is the Self of all beings. According to Vedanta, this is expres-

sed by the Sanskrit mantra "Soham," or "I am He." As we inhale, we make the sound "so," and as we exhale, "ham." At the rate of fifteen times per minute, which is the average rate of breathing, each person is unconsciously repeating the mantra Soham 21, 600 times daily.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF JAPA

It is a universal experience that words have power. Words influence our thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and responses. The technique of arousing enthusiasm, courage, and concentration by use of certain words is a common practice in political campaigns, military training, and modern-day advertising. It is the same technique that is used as a spiritual practice to invoke God-consciousness. Persistent and systematic repetition of a sacred word can awaken our latent spiritual urges, transform our character, and enable us to get established in spiritual consciousness. The process of thinking, Vedanta says, is a form of silent speaking. When we perceive a certain object through our senses, our mind unconsciously repeats the name of the object. Japa is the reverse process. When we repeat a sacred word consciously, that which is indicated by the word flashes in the mirror of our mind. Repetition of the word creates vibrations within us, and these vibrations continue to resonate in the layers of our consciousness even long after we have stopped uttering the word. This is known as molecular vibration. The first utterance of the word causes the initial vibration and each subsequent repetition reinforces and integrates all the previous vibrations.

Japa helps the seeker to develop a relish for the sacred word which he utters. The relish in the name of God is a sure sign of spiritual progress. This relish is much more than a passing sentiment or a temporary

emotion. It is a state of God-consciousness that is deep and transforming. The mind develops a liking for anything on which it consciously dwells and about which it repeatedly thinks, hears, and speaks. The basic theory of audio-visual advertising is an illustration of this principle. By repeatedly presenting before us the sounds and images of a particular object, the advertiser seeks to instill in our mind a desire for that object. The key element in such advertising is the repetition.

Japa takes us nearer and nearer to God, and finally brings us face to face with Him. Psychologically speaking, as we repeat the name of an object, we move closer and closer to that object. With the first repetition, an impression of the object is created in the mind. When the impression is made to recur, the mind develops an unconscious liking for the object. In time, with continued repetition, this liking grows into attachment. As the attachment deepens, there arises a strong desire to possess the object. Following the same process, repetition of a holy name eventually leads us to God, the source of all holiness.

Japa is an effective means of achieving purification of mind. Thoughts which are contrary to our spiritual goal and distracting to our mind are not just passing ideas. They have their deep roots, known in the Yoga and Vedanta systems as "samskaras." Samskaras are the deposits of the countless repetitions of thoughts, words, and actions that have formed into subconscious habits. Such samskaras, or seeds of thoughts, cannot be repressed or rationalized. They are to be sublimated or transcended. Repetition of one and the same holy name, or sacred word, done methodically and uninterruptedly over a long period with devotion, creates a

(Continued on page 55)

Reflections on the Meaning of Sri Ramakrishna for Women

ANN MYREN

(Continued from the previous issue)

From 1872 onwards Sri Sarada Devi had great spiritual power. Later on in her life she told some of her disciples that they did not have to do anything to attain liberation. Sometimes she indicated who she really was, as she did to Shivaram, her nephew, and Jnan. Jnan was often very troublesome. One day when he was at Jayrambati he picked up the cat and threw it over the wall because it had stolen some food. According to Sarada Devi, to steal food was the cat's nature. So she instructed Jnan to cook something for the cat and also to stop beating cats. She said, 'For even in them am I.'²⁰ That certainly is an admission that she was the Universal Mother. At other times she spoke of herself as the Divine Mother, herself. For example, her nephew, Shivaram, who after the Master's death accompanied her from Kamarpukur to Jayrambati, asked her who she was. She did not answer him. Then he said he would go no further until she answered. She replied that she was a woman, his aunt. Shivaram would not budge and she said at last, 'People say, I am Kali.' Then Shivaram said, 'Kali? Truly so?' The Mother said, 'Yes.'²¹ This is just one of several recorded instances of her admission to being the Divine Mother, Kali.

So vast, so great were Sarada Devi's powers that she was looked upon by many as the Divine Mother, Kali, herself. When her spiritual ministry began she took the

attitude that all powers were in her own hands; she forgave sins. She talked and behaved as if she were the Mother of the Universe by forgiving sins and granting liberation. She was, in fact, the first woman in recorded history who could be called a universal saviour of humankind.²² Of course, her devotees did not always think of that side of her, but more often thought of her as their own mother. No matter how she was viewed, she had a kind of dignity, a presence, a stately bearing which everyone recognized.

Sarada Devi is a new archetype because of her spiritual power. What does this pre-
sage for women? First, woman will know herself as Spirit. She will undertake spiritual practice regardless of her walk in life. She will work to realize the divine, to manifest the divine and to realize the ultimate truth. At one level this may take the form of a single practice such as trying to be unselfish and at another level it may mean a life of strict and total renunciation, but at every level she will assert that her very being is Spirit. A second characteristic of this archetype is the manifestation of the qualities of mother. Unselfishness, tenderness, compassion, love, kindness—all of the qualities which are exemplified in Sarada Devi will be the qualities which women will work to have. Immediately one can see objections

20. Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 362.

21. *Ibid.*, 431.

22. Swami Ashokananda, "Holy Mother's One hundredth Birthday Celebration", Devotee's notes of the lecture, 27 December 1953, Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco.

from many women. How then, they will ask, can we work in the world and not be crushed? The answer is that a third practice will have to be undertaken to make the mind steady, the practice of detachment, that is, renunciation.

Like all of the great spiritual practices, detachment can be practised at every level of life and in every circumstance. In spiritual life two practices go hand in hand, the practice of affirming the reality of the Spirit and the practice of detachment. Each fuels the other. As a woman's sense of spiritual identity grows so will her detachment, and conversely as her detachment grows so will her sense of spiritual identity. These two practices free a person from the ever-entangling lower self and make the mind steady, able to handle with poise any problem or decision which arises. The effect of these practices is the development of a powerful, and fearless woman, who, whether she is a mother, a woman working outside the home or both, will discharge her duties with steady mindedness, energy and excellence. And it must be mentioned that all of these hardwon virtues are accompanied by a sense of joy and freedom; that is one effect of spiritual detachment. Although the archetypic Sarada Devi always preserved a modest demeanour, her kindness, power, and fearlessness were evident and, at the same time, she was always full of joy, merriment, happiness, and the bliss of Sacchidananda.

Sarada Devi returned to Jayrambati after a stay in Dakshineswar of about a year and a half. During this time her father had died and the family had become very poor, having lost the income from his priestly duties.²³ A few months after his death in April 1874, Sarada Devi once again went to stay with her husband at Dakshineswar. During this stay two very significant features of the

Master's and Sarada Devi's relationship were clarified. First, Sarada had wondered about the place of children in her life. She wanted a child. The Hindu culture places great emphasis on having a son and considers the status of a woman without a son to be low. This question was in her mind when she saw the Master on this visit to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna knew what she was thinking and said:

Why do you worry? I shall leave you such jewels of children as one can hardly get even if one performs the severest of austerity, to the extent of cutting off one's head. You will find in the end so many children calling you 'mother', that you will be unable to manage them all.²⁴

This prophetic statement of the Master's was literally fulfilled when Sarada's mission developed and thousands of spiritual seekers came to her. People of all kinds came, great and small, good and bad, noble and ignoble—all came to her and all called her mother.

There is a second very important feature of the relationship of the Master to Sarada Devi. The Master one day had asked Sarada Devi if she had come to drag him down into the world. She answered that she had come to help him in his own spiritual mission. Sri Ramakrishna had already disclosed his attitude toward Sarada Devi on her previous visit to Dakshineswar. One day Sarada Devi was massaging the Master's feet when she asked him what he thought of her. He replied,

The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the mother who has given birth to this body and is now living in the concert-room, and She again is massaging

23. Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, 46.

24. Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 126.

my feet at this moment. Verily I always look upon you as the visible representation of the Blissful Mother.²⁵

We can see from these words that in Sri Ramakrishna's mind a physical relationship with his wife was not possible.

One might ask if there was to be no physical relationship and no children why did Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi marry? The obvious answer is that the Master adhered to the cultural norms of the times, and by so doing he pleased his mother. Does this seem like a motive worthy of such a great spiritual being as the Master? No. Furthermore, he had taken *sannyasa*, which exempted him from marriage. In fact, a married *sannyasin* is a cultural anomaly.

There are at least two answers to the question of why they married. First, Sarada Devi absolutely could not have had a spiritual mission of such great scope had she not married. It was unthinkable in the culture of the times for a single woman to become so important and well-known, even though her renown grew out of her spiritual ministry. Given the culture, there was no place for such a very great woman in nineteenth-century Bengal. The second reason for this marriage was that it exemplified a new model of marriage for a new age. If the world is to change, to become less materialistic and more spiritual, then married people will be called upon to lead spiritual lives. This may be the main reason Sri Ramakrishna married Sri Sarada Devi—to demonstrate an ideal state of marriage to the world, that is, renunciation in the married state. The marriage of the Master and Sri Sarada Devi was uncompromisingly free from sense desires, a union in which both persons could

fully pursue the Truth without the presence of any other desires.²⁶

We can see by their lives that both Sarada Devi and the Master were ideal householders. They both cared for and took care of all of their relatives, and conversely the members of both of their families treated them with genuine family affection and love. The lesson: marriage can be a state wherein both husband and wife can attain high spiritual realization and yet remain householders.

In the religious myths of India there are two 'heroic' couples who are householders. Even this most human and necessary state is included in the elevated activities of the gods and goddesses. These divine pairs Parvati-Shiva and Sita-Rama illustrate this fundamental human condition, that of being householders, and thereby give it divine status. Quite possibly Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi and their ideal marriage will join the pantheon of gods and goddesses of India. However, given the communications of the twentieth centuries, it seems likely that their marriage will be well-known far beyond the boundaries of India and will be accepted universally as a model marriage, signifying spiritual attainment and renunciation.

The setting for this unusual marriage which was based on renunciation, was primarily Dakshineswar, although Sarada Devi attended the Master in both Shyampukur and Cossipore when the Master moved to those places at the end of his life. Altogether Sarada Devi spent about ten years at Dakshineswar and the other two places, making occasional trips to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati.²⁷ While she was living in the Nahabat, the music tower at Dakshineswar,

25. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 6th ed. (Mayavati, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1948), 251.

26. Ann Myren, "The Prophet and the New Order," *The Vedanta Kesari* 78 (January 1991): 18.

27. Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, 45.

she observed strict purdah as was customary in Calcutta. For Sarada Devi this meant that she remained veiled before the Master, that she generally kept out of the public eye, making it necessary for her to bathe before four o'clock in the morning. Originally there was no bathroom at the Nahabat, but after Yogin-Ma complained, some minor improvements were made.²⁸ However, Sarada Devi suffered physically from all this 'forced confinement'. And also from the fact that she did not have sufficient privacy to answer the calls of nature during the day, forcing her to wait until evening, a situation which resulted in intestinal trouble.²⁹

After her first visit to Dakshineswar in 1872, Sarada Devi lived in the Nahabat. The Nahabat was about seventy-five feet north of the Master's room. In this small music tower on the first floor lived Chandramani, Sri Ramakrishna's mother. Sarada Devi lived on the ground floor sometimes with Lakshmi Devi, and at other times with women devotees. The total inside space of the room was about fifty square feet, but there was also a small verandah around the room which added a little more space. Sarada Devi had her kitchen under the staircase that led to the first floor room where Chandramani lived. All in all, it was extremely close quarters, and Sarada Devi herself later commented on the discomfort.³⁰

But strangely, Sarada Devi remembered this time as the best period of her life.³¹ How could this be? Imagine the joy, unsurpassable joy, of living close to someone who is totally absorbed in Divinity, who lives in *bhava*, who recognizes every person he sees as Divinity itself, whose constant mood is bliss, who literally is never seen in

a sad mood, who is the well-spring of joy, who dances in joy, teases in joy, whose very appearance shines with Divinity and around whom the deepest calm wells forth, moving one into the timeless, soothing the mind, erasing the pains and sorrows of life, and who makes the unattainable, the far-off Divine, alive and immediate—one's very own. Words just touch the surface; we must use our creative imagination to grasp the feeling of Sarada Devi's life and the ambient mood around and about Sri Ramakrishna. Add to this holy atmosphere the capacity of Sarada Devi to meditate, to raise her mind, to feel deeply and directly the divinity of her Master, and husband, and we get a faint glimpse of why this was the best period of her life. When there are no barriers between two people, when both are completely selfless, love becomes oneness.

Sarada Devi loved the Master so profoundly that words cannot begin to convey the magnitude of her love. And for the Master's part, the same can be said about his love of Sarada Devi. To each one the other was Kali, the Divine Mother. They called each other Kali, and when the Master died, Sarada Devi said, 'Mother! O Kali! What have I done that you have departed leaving me alone in the world.' Years later Sarada Devi told a disciple that she always looked upon the Master as Mother Kali.³² They did not consider each other to be symbols of the Divine Mother, rather they were, in fact, two Divine beings seeing and knowing the totality of Divine love in each other. Months would go by when Sarada Devi did not see the Master other than through a hole poked in the bamboo screen which surrounded the porch of the Nahabat.

And yet, this great love persisted throughout their lives with Sri Ramakrishna watching over her, seeing that her life did not

28. Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 76.

29. Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, 57.

30. Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 74.

31. Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, 56.

32. *Ibid.*, 93.

become too great a burden for her to bear. He sought to ease the conditions of purdah, as he was aware that such confinement could affect a woman adversely. He suggested diversions such as strolling around the grounds, listening to the *kirtan* from the Nahabat and visiting a neighbour. He was careful not to impose on her and guarded her free time so that she could have some rest. If Sarada Devi became ill, the Master became extremely anxious. And because he was concerned about her future, he gave some money to Balam Bose to set aside so that she would have an income when he died. Gauri Ma said about them, "Those two sometimes did not see each other for six months together, in spite of being only about seventy-five feet apart, how deep indeed was their love for each other!"³³

There was also another side to the Master's care of Sarada Devi. One day he said to Hriday that she was an incarnation of the Goddess Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning. Sarasvati loves ornaments and he knew that Sarada Devi too loved beautiful things, so he had two expensive gold bracelets made for her. She wore them and was very pleased by their beauty, and probably very satisfied, knowing that the Master had them made especially for her. For her part, Sarada Devi expressed her love for him by attending to his needs, waiting on him, preparing his meals and taking them to him, massaging his feet, rubbing oil on his body, cleaning his room, and countless other personal services. For Sarada Devi, the Master was a veritable living God, and for the Master, Sarada Devi was the Goddess whom he adored. If we could fathom the love between this God and Goddess, an infinite universe of divine love would open up to us.

Something must be said about Sarada Devi living in purdah. In the city of Cal-

cutta the practice of keeping women secluded was very strict. Village life was a little freer. Although Sarada Devi was very active at Dakshineswar, she did not mix with men other than servants and the young boys who were sent to help her in some task. She lived among women. She was not free to move about the temple compound during the busy part of the day. If she did take a stroll, it was in privacy and with another woman. What would the effects of this kind of life be? First, it was a *tapasya*, an austerity. She herself said this and she counteracted the strictness of this enclosed life by visiting Kamarpukur and Jayrambati once in a while.

However, her world was not the outside world, but was the internal world of God. She had a long day filled with japa, meditation, and service to Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees. As a result of this spiritual concentration, she developed strength and independence. Today these two qualities, which are the quest of many women, are sought in the outside world rather than in their own internal worlds. Too much dependence on the outside world for developing traits of character is not healthy or realistic. By virtue of discipline Sarada Devi became independent and strong. Following the Master's words, she used her natural modesty to advantage. The Master said, 'modesty is their [woman's] forte.'³⁴ Sarada Devi's modesty reinforced her natural strength and independence because she never needed to rely on the outside world for self-respect, or the trait that is currently called self-esteem. Her sense of herself was independent from the world's judgements. She was self-assured, but modest, firm, knowing, never passive, but not self-assertive in the sense of being aggressive.

Sarada Devi observed purdah as did all

³³. Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 80.

³⁴. *Ibid.*, 111.

the women of the higher classes. Women, although restricted to the inner apartments of the household, had each other for company and spent their leisure time in 'cards and gossip, in which friends, foes, relatives and neighbours, and servants thump and bump against every point of the scandal compass', so wrote an observer in 1869.³⁵ Clearly this is a man's point of view, but there is, no doubt, some truth in his observation. Close quarters, limited access to the outside world, limited education—all constricted a women's world to a complex web of social interaction which became an end in itself. In contrast, Sarada Devi's purdah was the ground for the development of tremendous character, the mainstay of spiritual life. It was a great *tapasya*.

From the conditions of her life and her spiritual practice, Sarada Devi developed into a very strong, spiritual woman at Dakshineswar. She needed this strength to face what lay ahead—the Master's death. The Master became ill with cancer of the throat in 1885, and toward the end of the year he was moved to Shyampukur and then to Cossipore where he could receive the best care. Sarada Devi went to both places in order to care for him. Finally, in August of 1886 he entered *mahasamadhi*. But before the Master departed this world, he indicated at least three times at Cossipore that Sarada Devi would have an important role in carrying on his work. In one conversation, already referred to, the Master said to Sarada Devi, 'You will have to do

many things.'³⁶ A second time he indicated her role in the work when he said, 'Look at the people of Calcutta; they are like worms squirming in darkness. You must bring light to them.'³⁷ The third time he sang a song. 'What a burden I am bearing! Whom shall I explain it to? Only the bearer knows his burden: how can others know?' Then he said to her, 'This is not my burden alone. You too, shall have to share it.'³⁶ With the Master gone, it was now up to Sri Sarada Devi to determine how her share of the burden would be carried on.

These statements of the Master's, and no doubt others of a similar character, must have gone deep into the mind and heart of Sarada Devi. She must have wondered how the fulfillment of the Master's words would come about. She was, as we know, not only prayerful, but a master of meditation. Perhaps gradually it came to her that she had a great work to perform, that there would be disciples, that she would teach, that she would show the way to many people, and that she would lead, from one point of view, a most ordinary family life while she carried on her ministry. Or perhaps this knowledge came in a flash of intuition. Whichever way it came, there was a long period from 1886 to 1898, twelve years, before she actively took up her mission. Perhaps this was a period of gestation in which she herself had to work out the answers to certain problems.

Two weeks after the Master's *mahasamadhi*, Sarada Devi went on a pilgrimage, arranged by Balaram Bose, with several women and young male disciples of the Master, to Vrindaban where she stayed for about a year. The first thing Sarada Devi had to resolve was her grief. She said that

35. Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 15. Quoted from "Female Occupations in Bengal", by Girish Chunder Ghose, a paper read to Bengal Social Science Association on 30 January 1868. Reprinted in B. Dutt Gupta, *Sociology in India* (Calcutta, 1972), Appendix V, 53.

36. Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, 91.

37. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

her 'sorrow became unbearable'.³⁹ This sorrow was relieved somewhat when Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her one night and said, 'Why are you crying so much? Here I am. Where have I gone? It is just a change from one room to another—isn't that so?'⁴⁰ At this time she had repeated visions of the Master so that slowly her grief was somewhat assuaged. A very important fact was made clear during this period. That is, Sarada Devi and the Master were one. We have an actual observation from Swami Yogananda in which he said that during a very deep samadhi, '...Holy Mother forgot her own separate existence and behaved just like the Master, feeling her oneness with him.'⁴¹ And yet another very prophetic event took place while Sarada Devi was at Vrindaban. She made her first disciple. It seems that the Master appeared before her one day and asked her to give formal initiation to Swami Yogananda. He even told her what mantra to give. Swami Yogananda also had a similar vision, so there was certainty in his mind as to the authenticity of Sarada Devi's initiation.⁴²

In the year spent at Vrindaban three important things happened to Sarada Devi: her grief was decidedly lessened, it became evident to a few persons that the Master and Sarada Devi were one, and Sarada Devi gave her first formal initiation. However, there remained some problems which Sarada Devi had to solve: where would she live, how would she live, with whom would she live, and what would be the character and shape of her spiritual ministry. During the period of 1886-1898 these questions were answered.

After the pilgrimage to Vrindaban, Sarada Devi went to live in Kamarpukur, her husband's village. Here she faced severe poverty because of the very low status of a widow in Bengali society. The Master's family had little regard for her. She lost her very small income from the Dakshineswar temple, and lived on the edge of starvation. There was much criticism of her by the villagers who disapproved of her wearing bracelets, and the red border on her white cloth. It was from the Master's instruction given in a vision that she retained her bracelets, an act which was regarded as very improper for a widow. But the villagers were so vociferous in their criticism about the bracelets that eventually she removed them.⁴³ The Master had cautioned her about accepting any kind of financial support, even from the devotees. Here at Kamarpukur the poverty of her life created a natural sadhana, namely, to remain resolutely independent. Things improved for her after the first year or so. She was given her rightful income from paddy in Kamarpukur, which Sri Ramakrishna had arranged for, and she was accepted somewhat by the villagers. But even though she was strong and independent, she was not happy because the village was filled with painful memories of the Master. These are the obvious reasons why she left Kamarpukur and moved to Jayrambati. But there may be one more reason which is not usually suggested. That is, she made the move because of her force of character which made it possible for her to make a choice. In Bengal choice was an action usually denied to widows; their lives were filled with many social rules, dictating their behaviour.

39. Ibid., 95.

40. Ibid., 96.

41. Ibid., 97.

42. Ibid., 99.

(to be concluded)

43. Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 151.

Swami Vivekananda's Imitation of Christ

PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

Swamiji was not only an ardent adorer of Christ, but he fully manifested in his life Christ-qualities, writes the author a nun of the Sarada Convent, Vedanta Society of Southern California, at Santa Barbara.

On Monday, September 11, 1893, Swami Vivekananda delivered his opening address at the Chicago, World's Parliament of Religions, achieving instant fame as an expounder of Vedanta and a charismatic spiritual leader.

Two years later, after a herculean spiritual ministry of classes, lectures, private interviews, growing correspondence, and writings the "Hindoo" Swami, whose name had become a nationwide household word, yearned to retire long enough from public life to spiritually train a few sincere seekers. Miss Dutcher provided her cottage for seven weeks at Thousand Island Park for this purpose. Was it a coincidence that a band of just twelve students came there to sit at the feet of this world teacher? Was it by chance that on that day in June when the Swami began his instructions, he first opened the Bible to the Book of John, saying that since his students were Christian, it seemed appropriate to begin with the Christian scriptures? And was it by accident that one rainy night shortly thereafter, a knock was heard at the cottage door? Miss Dutcher opened it to find two ladies who had travelled all the way from Detroit, Michigan, where they had first heard Swami Vivekananda lecture. Swamiji was called to the door. The rest is history:

He came down the stairs to the little parlour, and the young women, overwhelmed in his presence, forgot all their rehearsed speeches. The words tumbled

out: "We have come to you just as we would go to Jesus if he were still on the earth and ask him to teach us."

"He greeted us so sweetly!" one of them was to write to a friend. "It was like a benediction." And he said, "If only I possessed the power of the Christ to set you free now!"¹

But as his mission unfolded in the West, Swami Vivekananda was to exercise such a striking resemblance to the Nazarene, that his disciples called him "the King" and "the Prophet"—epithets deserving one who possessed his bearing, beauty and Christlike power.

Swami Vivekananda had a natural affinity for Westerners. His deep devotion to Christ brought the West a conception of Christ that revitalized Christianity. It embodied one of the Swami's greatest teachings of religious universality and real breadth of Hinduism. For the West, there was no greater instrument of conversion than this covenant of love.

However, even to a world teacher such as Vivekananda, that love did not come easily. In 1897 upon his return to Bengal, Swamiji admitted to his countrymen: "No one ever landed on English soil with more hatred in his heart for a race than I did for the

1. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: The World Teacher* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), Vol. 3, p. 143.

English....; but the more I lived among them, ... the more I loved them..."² Mr. Eric Hammond, a member of the London Vedanta Society, witnessed this love at work:

On his arrival in London, Swami Vivekananda was welcomed in the quiet, thoughtful, semi-calculating way to which Londoners generally habituate themselves. Perhaps the missionary, everywhere, is met by an atmosphere not exactly antagonistic, but, at the best, doubtful.

Mr. Hammond continued:

At the close of his address, a white-haired and well known philosopher said to the Swami, "You have spoken splendidly sir, and I thank you heartily, but you have told us nothing new." The lecturer's sonorous tones rang through the room in reply: "Sir, I have told you the Truth. That, the Truth, is as old as the immeorial hills, as old as humanity, as old as the creation, as old as the great God. If I have told you in such words as will make you think, make you live up to your thinking, do I not do well in telling it?" The murmur of "Hear!" "Hear!" and the louder clapping of hands showed how completely the Swami had carried his audience with him. One lady present on that occasion, and on many more, said: "I have attended church services regularly all my life. Their monotony and lack of vitality had made them barren and distasteful. I went to them because others went and one hates to be peculiar. Since I heard the Swami, light has flooded into religion. It is real; it lives; it has a new glad meaning and is altogether transformed for me."³

What was the secret of Swamiji's devotion to Christ? What was its special power that could make Christianity live for others? The secret lay in a book so precious, that the Swami carried it, as one of his sole posses-

sions, throughout India: *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis. "To obtain Bhakti," Swamiji once told his Madras students before departing for the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, "seek the company of holy men who have Bhakti, and read books like the Gita and *The Imitation of Christ*."⁴ He further exhorted, in a letter to a friend, written August 7, 1889:

I am mailing you, sir, a book named *The Imitation of Christ* written by a Christian Sannyasin. It is a wonderful book. One is astonished to find that such renunciation, Vairagya, and Dasya-Bhakti have existed even among the Christians. Probably you may have read this book before; if not, it will give me the greatest pleasure if you will kindly read it.⁵

It was not only the book's contents, but its very title that revealed Swami Vivekananda's message of strength to the Western world. In his lecture "Christ, the Messenger," delivered in Los Angeles, 1900, Swamiji released the tidal wave of this great teaching to the world at large:

Think not that you are trampled upon and tyrannised over, never be trampled upon, never be troubled, never be killed. You are all Sons of God, immortal spirit. "Know," [Jesus] declared, "the kingdom of heaven is within you." "I and my Father are one." Dare you stand up and say, not only that "I am the Son of God", but I shall also find in my heart of hearts that "I and my Father are one"?⁶

2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*; Advaita Ashrama, ed.; Fifth Edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981), Vol. II, p. 220.

3. Ibid, pp. 100-1.

4. Advaita Ashrama, ed., *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, "Notes Taken Down in Madras, 1892-93." Mayavati Memorial Edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1872), Vol. VI, p. 123.

5. Ibid, "Epistles," p. 209.

6. *The Complete Works*, Vol. VII, p. 65.

Step by step, Swamiji guided his students up the ladder of spiritual life to the rooftop. Realization was paramount to this man of God. "See Christ," Swamiji explained, "then you will be a Christian. All else is talk; the less talking the better."⁷ For Swamiji, the ends were also the means: "God became Christ," Swamiji explained to his students at Thousand Island Park, "to show man his true nature, that we too are God."

We are human coverings over the Divine; but as the divine man, Christ and we are one.

The Trinitarian Christ is elevated above us; the Unitarian Christ is merely a moral man, neither can help us. The Christ who is the Incarnation of God, who has not forgotten his divinity, that Christ can help us, in Him there is no imperfection.⁸

Swamiji's gospel of the imitation of Christ was to explode upon Christianity.

But though Swami Vivekananda extolled this practice, he never condoned blind imitation. To drive this point home, Swamiji once asserted: "Buddhas and Christs do more harm than good—for mankind is trying to imitate them instead of developing its own character."⁹ This aspect of the Swami's teaching challenged his Western students. Gurudas, who met Swamiji in America, described the reception of one such lesson in his article "Swami Vivekananda's Mission to the West":

There is a sect in America that teaches that because Jesus healed the sick, to use one's mental power for healing diseases is the true mission in life. And then came

Swamiji and he told them the story of his own master, how during illness one of his followers had suggested that he heal himself through his own mental efforts. The master had listened. But later he said: "How mean to take one's mind away from Mother to direct it towards this filthy body!" And Swamiji concluded with the startling remark: "Jesus would have been greater had he not used his powers."

Gurudas continued his story:

To some of his hearers, especially to hidebound church members, such remarks were shocking. ... But those who were really sincere. ... to these there was food for thought. And the very startling effect of the words helped them to lift their minds out of the old rut of thinking.¹⁰

Many of the liberal churches and progressive clubs at which Swami Vivekananda spoke were of the Social Gospel persuasion. The Social Gospel was humanitarianism, a reform movement to bring about social and moral regeneration. One of the most renowned propounders of this movement was the Congregational pastor, Reverend Charles M. Sheldon, who wrote the telling book *In His Steps: What Would Christ Do?* In February 1900, Mr. Sheldon publicized the idea of editing a newspaper "as Christ would edit it," and according to Marie Louise Burke's research:

The following month he actually assumed for a week the editorship of Kansas's *Topeka Capital*, filling its columns with denunciations of, among other things, trusts and the liquor traffic.¹¹

7. "Inspired Talks," p. 65.

8. Ibid, p. 4.

9. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: A New Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1987), Vol. V, p. 300.

10. *Prabuddha Bharata* (April 1918), p. 85.

11. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda and His Second Visit to the West* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973), p. 467.

For "good works" such as this came Swamiji's rebuff two months later: "You Christians," the Swami thundered in his lecture "The Practice of Religion," delivered at Alameda, California, "have you found nothing else in the Bible than working for fellow creatures, building hospitals?"

Here stands a shopkeeper and says how Jesus would have kept the shop! Jesus would neither have kept a saloon, nor a shop, nor have edited a newspaper. That sort of practical religion is good, not bad, but it is just kindergarten religion. It leads nowhere.¹²

Then the Swami lay before his audience the difference between good karma and karma yoga. "What is the practical religion you are thinking of," Swamiji cried:

Lord help us! "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." ... Good works, when you do them with a pure mind. ... [s]erve as worship of the Lord Himself in the poor, the miserable, the weak. That done, the result is secondary. That sort of work, done without any thought of gain, benefits the soul. And even as such is the kingdom of heaven.¹³

Swami Vivekananda did not mince words in distinguishing between Christ and Christianity. Before reading his famous paper on Hinduism, at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, Swamiji rebuked the Parliament:

We who have come from the East, have sat here day after day and have been told in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because Christian nations are the most prosperous. ... We look back into history and see. ... Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the

throats of its fellow men. At such a price the Hindoo will not have prosperity. I have sat here today and I have heard the height of intolerance. ... Blood and the sword are not for the Hindu, whose religion is based on the law of love.¹⁴

Not satisfied with boldly disarming Christians, Swamiji stormed the Church fortress and there bodily, as it were, carried Christ outside. Again and again, the Swami beseeched his Western audience to put Christ in his proper historical context—not one that was overlaid by narrowness and bigotry. "My view of the great Prophet of Nazareth would be from the standpoint of the Orient," Swamiji asserted.¹⁵ He then explained the principle behind this practice and, in so doing, he divulged the deeper mysteries of spiritual life. To realize God—whether in the form of Buddha, Krishna, or Christ—the Swami taught his Western students to meditate on His *līlā*. Once a distinguished clergyman approached Swamiji after the Parliament of Religions, with the query how he, a Hindu, could understand the Christ Ideal so well. "Why, Jesus was an Oriental!" Swamiji replied. "It is therefore natural that we Orientals should understand him truly and readily."¹⁶

Swami Vivekananda did not hesitate to expose the West's error in building a faith based on illusion—of creating a mirage in a spiritual desert. In his lecture "Christ the Messenger," Swamiji described Christ the Oriental with such feeling, he virtually brought the Nazarene's background to life with colours, smells, and sounds. "With all your attempts to paint him with blue eyes and yellow hair," the Swami admonished:

12. *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 239.

13. *Op. cit.*, pp. 238-9.

14. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 431.

15. *The Complete Works*, "Christ the Messenger," Vol. IV, p. 142.

16. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 462.

The Nazarene was still an Oriental. All the similes, the imageries, in which the Bible is written—the scene, the locations, the attitudes, the groups, the poetry, and symbol—speak to you of the Orient: of the bright sky, of the heat of the sun, of the desert, of the thirsty men and animals; of men and women coming with pitchers on their heads to fill them at the wells; of the flocks of the ploughmen, of the cultivation that is going on around; of the water—mill and wheel, of the mill-pond, of the millstones. All these are to be seen today in Asia.¹⁷

By the same token, Swamiji made it very clear to his Western audience that faith in Jesus Christ does not rest upon his historicity. Though the Swami himself had doubted the historical Jesus, he accepted Christ's divine *lila* by honouring the Christian ideal and imitating Christ. "It does not matter at all," Swamiji said in his Payne's Hall lecture,

whether the New Testament was written within five hundred years of his birth, nor does it matter even, how much of that life is true. But there is something behind it, something we want to imitate. ... There must have been a nucleus, a tremendous power that came down, a marvellous manifestation of spiritual power—and of that we are speaking.¹⁸

Perhaps, the greatest teaching Swami Vivekananda gave the Western world came at Thousand Island Park, to his band of twelve students. "The Absolute cannot be worshipped," the Swami taught:

so we must worship a manifestation, such a one as has our nature. Jesus had our nature; he became the Christ; so can we, and so *must* we. Christ and Buddha were the names of a state to be attained;

Jesus and Gautama were the persons to manifest it.¹⁹

At Thousand Island Park, Swami Vivekananda imparted Christ's teaching: "I and my Father are one." But to the world at large he bestowed a living example of that teaching. The Christ qualities Swamiji most admired were the virtues *he* unconsciously possessed, and in describing them, he divulged his own inner nature.

Perhaps, Christ's most remarkable trait, as Swamiji saw it, was his total absence of any body sense. "Do you think that, that Man had any physical ideas in him?" Swamiji challenged his audience in his lecture "Christ, the Messenger."

Do you think that, this mass of light, this God and not-man, came down to earth, to be the brother of animals? And yet people make him preach all sorts of things. He had no sex ideas! He was a soul! Nothing but a soul—just working a body for the good of humanity; and that was all his relation to the body.²⁰

Before his lecture on "Christ, the Messenger," Swamiji had not been well. "When he rose to go to the platform," Christina Albers, a member of the audience, remembered,

it seemed an effort on his part. He walked with a heavy gait. I noticed that his eyelids were swollen, and he looked like one who suffers pain. He stood for a while in silence before he spoke, and I saw a change. His countenance brightened, and I thought his very features different now.

17. *The Complete Works*, "Christ the Messenger," Vol. IV, p. 142.

18. *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

19. *The Complete Works*, "Inspired Talks," Vol. VII, p. 29.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

"He began to speak," Miss Albers continued, and there was a transformation. The soul-force of the great man became visible. I felt the tremendous force of his speech—words that were felt more than they were heard. I was drawn into a sea of being, of feelings of a higher existence, from which it seemed almost like pain to emerge when the lecture was finished. And then those eyes, how wonderful! They were like shooting stars—lights shooting forth from them in constant flashes.²¹

Coupled with Christ's absence of body consciousness, was his utter purity. At Thousand Island Park, Swami Vivekananda boldly asserted:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This sentence alone would save mankind if all books and prophets were lost. This purity of heart will bring the vision of God.²²

Christine Greenstidel, who was later to become Sister Christine of the Ramakrishna Order, recalled in her memoirs the Swami's teaching of chastity at Thousand Island Park. "This subject always stirred him deeply," she remembered:

Walking up and down the room, getting more and more excited, he would stop before someone as if there were no one else in the room. "Don't you see," he would say eagerly, "there is a reason why chastity is insisted on in all monastic orders? Spiritual giants are produced only where the vow of chastity is observed. Don't you see there must be a reason?"²³

21. *The Second Visit*, p. 347.

22. *The Complete Works*, "Inspired Talks," Vol. VII, p. 103.

23. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, pp. 34-5.

Sister Christine recalled what Swamiji said:

The Roman Catholic Church has produced great saints, St. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa, the two Catherines and many others. The Protestant Church has produced no one of spiritual rank equal to them. There is a connection between great spirituality and chastity. The explanation is that these men and women have through prayer and meditation transmuted the most powerful force in the body into spiritual energy. In India this is well understood and yogis do it consciously. The force so transmuted is called Ojas and is stored up in the brain. It has been lifted from the lowest centre of the Kundalini—the Muladhara—to the highest.²⁴

The Swami exhorted his band of disciples, "The man who has no temper has nothing to control. I want a few, five or six, who are in the flower of their youth." ...²⁵

A God-man is crowned, as it were, with divine attributes, welded together in gold. The attributes of Christ which Swamiji extolled most were no exception. In a special sense, they were each inseparable. "How can you make a spirit pure?" the Swami queried in "Christ, the Messenger." "By renunciation" was his reply.²⁶ This spiritual attribute was a recurring theme in Swamiji's public lectures and in his own private life.

Once on Christmas day, in 1896, Swami Vivekananda, along with Captain and Mrs. Sevier, his two faithful English disciples, attended the High Mass at St. Peter's Cathedral, in Rome. During the elaborate and imposing ritual, Swamiji grew restless and whispered to the Seviars:

Why all this pageantry and ostentatious show? Can it be possible that the Church that practises such display, pomp, and gorgeous ceremonial is really the follower

24. *Ibid*, p. 35.

25. *Ibid*, p. 35.

26. *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 149.

of the lowly Jesus who had nowhere to lay his head?²⁷

Swamiji never failed to show his disciples the difference between theology and spirituality—and, in this case, between Christianity and Christ's teachings.

Swamiji gave the teaching of renunciation to monastics and householders alike, and along with it he bestowed the confidence in Self to ultimately achieve its aim. In an October 5, 1899 letter to Mrs. George Hale, the Swami wrote one of his strongest appeals for the life of renunciation. "My dear Mother Church," he affectionately addressed Mrs. Hale:

The world is evil—and will ever remain so. It is its nature, and can not be changed. ... Such is truth—the wisdom therefore is in renunciation, that is—to make the Lord our all in all. Be a true Christian, Mother—like Christ renounce everything and let the heart & soul & body belong to Him & Him alone. All this nonsense which people have built round Christ's name is not his teaching. He taught to renounce, He never says the world is an enjoyable place—And your time has come to get rid of all vanities even the love of children & husband and think of the Lord and Him alone.²⁸

"What is meant by renunciation?" Swamiji asked a Western audience:

That there is only one ideal in morality: unselfishness. Be selfless. The ideal is perfect unselfishness. When a man is struck on the right cheek, he turns the left also. When a man's coat is carried off, he gives away his cloak also.²⁹

This was Swamiji's Christ—without body consciousness, pure, all-renouncing, and self-

sacrificing. It seemed natural to Swamiji to extoll and emulate Christ's unselfishness. That he came to the West to set into motion a revitalized universal religion, willingly suffering hardship, indignity, and a "cyclonic" schedule of lectures and classes, is one of the greatest accolades of his unselfishness. And that this Gargantuan task broke his health and shortened his life is a sacrifice that strangely resembles that of Christ's. In a July 9, 1897 letter to Mary Hale, Swamiji candidly discussed the criticism of his enemies—a poignant cross he bore in America. "Except your family," Swamiji wrote, referring to the Hales.

Mrs. Bagley, the Leggetts, and a few other kind persons, who else has been kind to me? Who came forward to help me work out my ideas? I had to work till I am at death's door and *had to spend nearly the whole of my best energies in America*, so that they might learn to be broader and more spiritual! ... Dear, dear Mary, do not be afraid for me. ... The world is big, very big, and there must be some place for me, even if the "Yankees rage".³⁰

In the same letter, the Swami divulged a selfless love for his country focused in one idea that had been constantly burning in his brain: "to start the machine for elevating the Indian masses."

For this purpose, the Ramakrishna Mission was founded on May 1, 1897. In this mission he felt he had achieved some success—but not without suffering the misunderstandings and criticisms of even his own brother-disciples.

One day a young Indian gentleman from the Bengal Theosophical Society spoke up:

27. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 156.

28. *New Discoveries*, Vol. 5, p. 136.

29. *The Complete Works*, "Christ the Messenger," Vol. IV, p. 149.

30. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 268.

“Swamiji, I frequent various sects but cannot decide what is the Truth.” Swamiji affectionately replied, “My boy, have no fear. I was also once in the same state. Tell me what instructions you have received from different faiths and how you have followed them.” The boy explained how, according to the instruction of one preacher, he had practiced much worship and prayer, but had achieved no peace of mind. Then someone else had advised him to make the mind void at the time of meditation. He had struggled hard to accomplish this also, but to no avail. “Sir,” the young man pleaded, “when I sit for meditation, shutting the door of my room and closing my eyes for as long as I can, I cannot find peace of mind. What is the way?” “My boy,” said the Swami in a voice full of sympathy,

if you take my word, you will first of all have to open the door of your room and look around instead of closing your eyes. There are hundreds of poor and helpless people in the neighbourhood of your house; them you have to serve to the best of your ability. He who is ill and has no one to look after him, for him you will have to get medicine and diet and nurse him; he who has nothing to eat, you will have to feed him; he who is ignorant, you will have to teach him. ... My advice to you is that, if you want peace of mind, you will have to serve others.³¹

We cannot help but be struck by the similarity between Swamiji's instruction to this youth and Christ's teaching to his disciples, on the mount of Olives:

... Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you have done *it* unto one of the least of

these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. ...

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.³²

Another time, in April 1897, shortly after Swami Vivekananda had returned from his triumph in the West, a learned pandit who was the editor of a well-known periodical, came with two friends to visit the Swami. His purpose was to discuss abstruse philosophy with Swamiji, whom he considered a man of knowledge. But when the Swami heard that one of the pandit's friends was Punjabi, he immediately launched into a discussion on the social needs of the Punjab province—food and education—until finally, when it was time for the visitors to leave, the Punjabi openly regretted: “Sir, we came to see you with great expectations of hearing a fine spiritual discourse. But instead, our conversation has dwelt only on commonplace matters. Alas, our day has passed in vain!”

The swami at once became grave and said, “Sir, so long as even a dog of my country remains without food, to feed and take care of him is my religion, and anything else is either non-religion or false religion!” All three visitors were struck dumb by the Swami's reply.³³

Years later when recounting this incident, the pandit said that “those words burnt into his soul and made him realize, as he had

³². Matthew 25: 42-3.

³³. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, pp. 439-40.

³¹. *Ibid*, pp. 229-30.

never done before, what true patriotism was."³⁴

In his July 9, 1897 letter to Mary Hale, Swamiji laid bare the depth of his love for mankind, the galvanizing force behind his Christlike spirit of self-sacrifice. As the recipient of this letter, Mary Hale was undoubtedly blessed, but those of us who read and reread these words Swamiji penned to her, cannot help but also feel the loving touch of this great swami's compassion for all: "I feel my task is done," Swamiji wrote:

³⁴. Ibid, p. 440.

at best three or four years more of life is left. I have lost all wish for my salvation. I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing for certain that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep without caring what will be next. And 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 especial object of my worship.³⁵

³⁵. Ibid, p. 269.

JAPA: REPETITION OF A SACRED WORD

(Continued from page 39)

strong counter-samskara of holiness. This counter-samskara of holiness first neutralizes the samskaras of worldliness and then overcomes them.

Japa is prescribed by the sacred texts of Vedanta for the control of speech, which is the first step toward concentration and meditation. Such control is not just outward silence. Even when a person is outwardly silent, there continues a monologue within. Repetition of the sacred word keeps the mind occupied with one thought and paves the

way for the practice of internal silence. Japa is the supporting practice of meditation. The state of meditation cannot be reached all of a sudden. To attain to that state requires invoking of the mood, ingathering of the mind, and uninterrupted concentration, and these are achieved through japa. Meditation is an extension of japa. Japa is meditation with breaks, while meditation is japa without breaks. Absorption in japa leads to absorption in meditation.

(to be concluded)

The Photographs of Holy Mother

PIJUSH KANTI ROY

The author, Sri P. K. Roy of Delhi, has collected with diligence interesting facts and circumstances about how the first few photographs of the Holy Mother were taken.

The advent of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, took place in the middle of the nineteenth century on December 22, 1853 for the welfare of the world. By now her pictures and statues are being worshipped in almost every part of the globe, wherever Sri Ramakrishna is known, especially in millions of homes in India, and in foreign lands as well. In the Holy Mother's most well known photograph she is seen sitting on a fur asana with her two arms resting on her lap, head partly covered by her sari and with her long black hair gracefully covering her bare right shoulder. She is wearing the gold bracelets the Master had made for her. Her luminous beautiful face radiates divine love and affection for all living beings of the world.

The Holy Mother first came to Dakshineswar in March of 1872, when she was slightly more than eighteen years old. She came to see Sri Ramakrishna whom she heard had been ailing. After being received graciously by the Master she took up her residence in the tiny ground floor room of the music tower (*nahabat*) about seventy-five feet north of Sri Ramakrishna's own room. Having been brought up in the rural Jayrambati village atmosphere she was naturally very simple and shy in nature. The very incarnation of purity, she was worshipped by her sannyāsi husband as *Shoḍaśī*, the youthful Divine Mother of the Universe soon after she came to Dakshineswar. So shy and retiring was she that hardly anyone even knew of her presence these four months, not

to speak of seeing her. After the worship of *Shoḍaśī*, and being assured by the perfect health and divine graciousness of her husband, she returned to Jayrambati and did not again come to Dakshineswar until about two years later in 1874. Long after, of course, she made five more visits to Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, staying with him for varying lengths of time in the years 1877, 1881, 1884, and 1885. The last time she stayed with the Master at Shyampukur and Cossipore until his passing away in 1886. Even then she was not well known among the wider circle of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees. But soon, owing to her spiritual eminence and the divine trust laid upon her shoulders by the Master, she became the spiritual leader of numerous uncounted devotees and the band of monks soon to become well known as the Ramakrishna Order. Upon Holy Mother's becoming thereafter more widely known to the world, her many disciples and devotees began to crave her likeness in photographs for their personal keeping and worship.

In those days, barring one or two professional photo studios in the Chowringhee locality of Calcutta, and one each in Radhabazar, Old Court House Street and Cornwallis Street in the central part of the city, there were none elsewhere. Taking photographs was in those days also mostly confined to the wealthy classes. It was a luxury and a costly proposition too. This accounts in part for the difficulty with which the first photos of the Holy Mother could be taken. The

three famous portraits that had been taken of Sri Ramakrishna during the period 1879 to 1883 were the result of long persevering efforts by some of his devotees and disciples who had the means to make the complicated arrangements and pay for them.

In the prevailing rigid social order in those days also, particularly as women seldom came out in public without veils over their heads and faces, the idea of taking photographs of the Holy Mother seemed hardly possible to anyone, however, they ardently wished for it. Again, to summon a cameraman from Chowringhee or Radhabazar for this purpose was practically beyond the means of most middle class people.

Yet, ninety-four years ago the now famous photograph of the Holy Mother was taken. It was made at the residence of Sister Nivedita at 10/2 Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta.¹ How it was proposed and planned and brought to fulfilment is an interesting subject and the main discussion of this paper.

How the famed photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was made as he sat in deep *samādhi* on the veranda at Dakshineswar is known to all. The proposal to have a similarly arranged photo of the Holy Mother first came from Mrs. Sara Ole Bull² in 1898, twelve years after the *mahāsamādhi* of Sri Ramakrishna. Mrs. Ole Bull was a faithful disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Shortly after his return to India from the West in December 1897, Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Bull, and Miss Josephine MacLeod³ came to India for the first time, in the early part of 1898. Swami Vivekananda brought these women

disciples of his to visit the Holy Mother and receive her blessings on March 17, 1898. With what expectation and eagerness they looked forward to this meeting with Sri Sarada Devi can hardly be described, but only imagined. Mrs. Ole Bull, who belonged to a very respectable and rich American family, later wrote to Professor Max Muller: "We are the first foreigners to have received permission to see Sarada Devi, the widow of Sri Ramakrishna."⁴ It was at this time that Mrs. Bull expressed her earnest desire to take a photograph of Holy Mother to America to remember her by and for the purpose of her constant meditation and worship. Despite her initial hesitation, Holy Mother finally yielded to the proposal of Mrs. Bull, but subject to a condition which was somewhat daunting to the latter. Swami Gambhirananda writes:

In 1898 when Mrs. Bull proposed to have the Mother photographed, the latter became reluctant to put off the veil from her face before a male photographer out of shyness, and did not agree in the first instance. But later on, due to Mrs. Bull's earnest prayer, she gave her consent ... *if only a woman photographer could be brought for the purpose...* When a woman photographer could not be arranged, she readily agreed to have an European male photographer brought as it was almost a routine affair in European countries to have ladies photographed by male cameramen. Thus when the English photographer came, Holy Mother did not hesitate to cast away her shyness and sat calmly for the photograph.⁵

To the question why a woman photographer could not be requisitioned for taking the photo of the Holy Mother, when quite a good number of professional women, like Ms. E. Mayer, Ms. Bibi Wince, Ms. Sarojini Ghosh and others were available at that time in Calcutta, it may be said that it was pro-

1. *Sri Sarada Devi: A Biography in Pictures* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1988) p. 106.

2. *Sri Sri Mayer Kathā* (Bengali) Vol. II (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1961) p. 50.

3. *Satarūpe Sārādā* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1985) p. 320.

4. *Ibid.* p. 321.

5. Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Mā Sārādā Devī* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1369) p. 335.

bably due to the fact that Mrs. Ole Bull was not well acquainted with Calcutta and had no information about lady photographers in the city. However it may have been, it seems to have been at the instance of the Mother that the English photographer, Mr. Harrington, was summoned at the rented house of Sister Nivedita and the picture was taken. It was in November 1898 when Holy Mother was forty-five. For this first photo of Holy Mother, Mrs. Ole Bull must be remembered with deep gratitude, because it was due to her initiative that the divine presence of the Mother could be captured so beautifully for posterity.

Actually, two exposures were taken by the cameraman, one following the other after a short interval. For the first photo, Nivedita and Golap-Ma attended to arranging the hair and clothes of the Mother according to their own taste. For a while the Mother, out of shyness, could not look straight into the face of the cameraman or the camera. She bent her head a little downwards, and looking downward, there she remained. As there seemed to be no alternative, the cameraman took this pose of the Mother as his first exposure. Immediately after, Holy Mother glanced up, inquiring—"Is it over?" The alert photographer seized the golden opportunity and immediately got the second exposure effectively, the Mother's best known 'worshipped pose'. But there is a doubt about this version of the story—or rather, there may be more to add.

According to the technical procedure that had to be followed with the early cameras, after taking one exposure on the chemically coated glass negative, before a second exposure could be made, the negative had to be taken out of the camera and replaced by an unused one. For this a little time was required. Also it will be noticed that Holy Mother's clothing is slightly altered in

her second photo. During the time while the camera was being prepared for the second shot, Mrs. Bull and others must have observed that no part of the Mother's feet had been visible for the camera in the first exposure. After obtaining her consent, Mrs. Bull must have arranged the Mother's sari in such a way as to make a little of her feet visible. With this improvement in the subject and the cameraman having had time to complete his preparations, the taking of the second photograph was quickly accomplished. Another slightly different version is recorded by Brahmachari Akshaya Chaitanya, a disciple of the Holy Mother, in his book *Śrī Śrī Sārada Devī*. He writes that he was personally told by Golap-Ma that Mrs. Bull *requested* Holy Mother to sit for one more exposure since the little further arrangement of her clothing was necessary.⁶

While a detailed description is available in Sri M's *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in regard to the taking of the Master's first and second photographs, regrettably no such authentic material was written down regarding the photos of Holy Mother. As a result, one has to rely on different opinions and hearsay accounts. Further, it goes without saying, that nothing definite is known about the particular spot in the double-storied building at Bosepara Lane—whether on the open veranda or on the roof-top, where the photographs have been taken. In those days the old fashioned cameras were not equipped with flash accessories so the cameramen had necessarily to depend on the outside sunlight. One has, therefore, to conclude that the Holy Mother's photographs must have been taken somewhere in an open space or on the roof-top where there was plenty of light.

With the taking of these two photographs, another exposure was taken of Holy Mother

6. *Satarūpe Sārada*, p. 796.

seated possibly on the same seat that day, facing Sister Nivedita and looking at her. Nivedita appears in this picture vibrant with love and serenity and happiness being in the Mother's close proximity. For a long time—from 1898 to 1952, none in India had any idea that this photo existed. It was lost and unknown to the disciples and devotees. And even, in the minds of many, after its discovery there was some amount of misconception about it. Some doubted for a long time, even then, whether it was a true and original photo of Holy Mother and Sister Nivedita together, or whether it might not be a composite made by an ingenious camera buff. The erroneous impression that this joint-photograph might be the clever trick of someone was removed by some research and a paper published by Swami Vidyatmananda (*Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1965). The Swami wrote:

I have some personal knowledge about the third photo taken on the same occasion. This is the picture showing Holy Mother and Nivedita facing each other. I have heard several times in India that this is a faked picture. Holy Mother and Nivedita, it is claimed, never actually were photographed together; someone simply pasted together separate likenesses of each, then re-photographed the composite. Such is not the case. Until twelve years ago, this third pose was unknown. In coming to India in 1952 I passed through England, staying a while there at the home of the Earl of Sandwich, whose first wife was related to Swami Vivekananda's American friends, the Leggetts.⁷ In Lord Sandwich's house, the second Lady Sandwich found an old, original

7. *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1965, p. 117.

The eighth Earl of Sandwich was Mr. George Montague. His first wife, Alberta, was the first Lady Sandwich, daughter of Mrs. Betty Leggett, and niece of Josephine MacLeod.

In a letter of Sister Nivedita to her friend Mrs. Eric Hammond, it is clear that Nivedita distributed many copies of Holy Mother's photographs, including the one of herself with Holy Mother. She gave a hint to Mrs. Hammond that the photographs of Holy Mother were not for

print of this Holy Mother-Nivedita picture. She gave it to me to take to India, saying she, at least, had not seen it before and perhaps it was not well known. It proved to be more than merely not well known. When I reached Belur Math, I handed the print to Swami Shankarananda. He was amazed and delighted. "This has never been seen before!" he exclaimed. "We had no idea of the existence of any such photo." All the prints now in existence are descendants of this original, brought directly from Lord Sandwich's house to Swami Shankarananda.

This third photograph was published for the first time in the *Udbodhan* (Bengali journal of the Ramakrishna Order) in 1952. More about the three photographs is found written in a letter of Sister Nivedita to Mrs. Ole Bull and Miss MacLeod (January 5, 1899):

By next week's post I send to London 10 photographs of her (Mother). The two negatives are to be 40 Rs. and expenses, 3.40 Rs.—total Rs. 43.40 and my proof and negative cost nothing. So unless you write to the contrary, we shall keep the 3 negatives here.⁸

From this it becomes clear that Mrs. Ole Bull herself probably was responsible for all the arrangements concerning the Mother's three photos. Another additional mention of the third photo, which indicates its early existence, is in a letter from the Holy Mother (written in Bengali) from Jayrambati (April 5, 1900), to Sister Nivedita. Holy Mother wrote: "Whenever I look at the photograph of yours and fix my gaze on it, I seem to feel as if you are with us."⁹

all and sundry. Mrs. Hammond or Nivedita herself probably, therefore, gave a copy of the Holy Mother-Nivedita photograph to Betty Leggett or to Mrs. Leggett's daughter, the first Lady Sandwich. All were devotees or admirers of Swami Vivekananda. (See *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Editor, Sankari Prasad Basu (Calcutta: Nababharat Pubs., 1982).

8. *Ibid.*, *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, p. 37.

9. *Śatarūpe Sārada*, p. 151.

Much later, in September 1910, Swami Arupananda, showing one of the photographs of the Mother that had been printed recently, asked her whether it was a good likeness or not. In reply the Mother said, "It is a good picture, but I was stouter before it was taken. Yogen (Swami Yogananda) was very ill at that time. Worrying about him I became emaciated. I was very unhappy then. ...Mrs. Sara Bull took this photograph. At first I did not agree to it; but she insisted and said, 'Mother, I shall take this picture to America and worship it.'¹⁰

Besides the above-mentioned three photographs during the Holy Mother's lifetime, many professionals and amateurs took her pictures over the years, in different rural backgrounds and with various of her relatives and disciples, both in Calcutta and Jayrambati. It has never been possible to obtain the names of all those photographers. The names so far identified are Mr. Harrington, Brahmachari Ganendra, Swami Satyakam, Vandike, Shri B. Dutta and Dr. Basiswar Sen. They took photos of the Holy Mother at different times in the years 1898, 1905, 1909, 1913, 1918, and 1920.

Swami Ishanananda, a disciple and attendant of Holy Mother, once said to the present author that when devotees from far and near used to come to Jayrambati or Koalpara to have a glimpse of the Holy Mother, some of them with the Mother's permission used to take her photographs—sometimes on a veranda strewn with straw, or standing in the courtyard of her house, or outside the family grainery. Photos were also taken of the Mother as she was engaged in worship, or dressing vegetables or even while she was taking her meals. Many of

these have appeared in print in different books and collections. In *Holy Mother's Birth Centenary Souvenir*, published by Belur Math in 1955, twenty-four such photos can be seen. In December, 1988 the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati has, however, published a book entitled *Sri Sarada Devi—A Biography in Pictures*. All the available pictures of the Mother have found place there. Apart from this, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta has recently published in Bengali a similar volume entitled *Śrī Śrī Mā Sārādā Devī Alokechitre Jivan Kathā*.

Holy Mother's initiated disciple, Manada Shankar Das Gupta, has said in his book *Śrī Mā Sārādāmanī Devī* that the Mother's last departure from her birthplace Jayrambati, on her way to Calcutta, was on February 24, 1920, and *en route* she halted at the home of Sureswar Sen (Sureswar Bhavan) at Vishnupur, from Feb. 25th noon till the 27th noon.¹¹ Availing of the opportunity, Sureswar's younger brother Basiswar photographed the Holy Mother as she was taking her noon meal on the veranda of the house, along with Nalini, Nandarani, Jamini, Maku, and Manda. This was the last photo to be taken of Holy Mother during her lifetime.

On return to Calcutta, Holy Mother remained in her mortal frame for only five months more. Despite her ill-health she initiated many people. Only two more photos were taken, but those were after her passing away. Of these two, one is single and the other a group photo. In the first, the Mother is lying in state in her room on the Udbodhan first floor. Her body is covered with flowers and garlands, only her feet and face are exposed. White sandal-paste

10. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1984) p. 96.; *Śatarūpe Sārādā*, p. 796.

11. Manada Sankar Das Gupta, *Śrī Śrī Mā Sārādāmanī Devī* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Vijaya and Santwana Das Gupta, 1390) pp. 444-46.

is smeared on the forehead. The group photo shows the Mother's figure as in the first photo, but with numerous disciples, attendants and monks standing near her. For the sake of sentiment these two heart-rending photos are seldom seen or published. The photographer is not known.

From the model of the 'worshipped' photograph, the second portrait discussed here, only a few marble statues have been sculptured up to this time. One life size marble image in Jayrambati located at the spot of the Mother's birthplace was consecrated on April 8, 1954. There are two more beautiful marble statues sculptured by the well known artists G. Paul & Sons of Calcutta, one each in the old temple of the Ramakrishna Mission at Bombay, and in the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education in Mysore. Another, a bronze bust of the Mother cast by the famous sculptress Malvina Hoffman is in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York City.

While Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna worshipped his own photograph with bel leaves and flowers in the presence of the Holy Mother on the ground floor room of the Nahabat in Dakshineswar, the Holy Mother inaugurated the worship of her own photograph at the Koalpara Ramakrishna Yogashrama.¹² Once at Koalpara she declared in the presence of all: "I will install Sri Ramakrishna here."¹³ So saying, writes Swami Ishanananda, "after hurriedly taking her bath, Holy Mother touched the two photographs—Sri Ramakrishna's and her own to her forehead and got them placed side by side on the small worship throne and worshipped them with flowers and sandal

paste."¹⁴ From that time onwards the worship of these photographs has been continuing in the Ashrama.

Do these photographs of Holy Mother really reflect her complete personality? Swami Saradeshananda, and others who served the Mother as her personal attendants, all indicated that Holy Mother was an exalted personality, that it is very hard to capture the infinite with a finite medium, whether it be with words or by photographs, or even by the power of one's imagination. Swami Saradeshananda wrote the following:

There were and are many who have had the opportunity of seeing the palms of the Mother's hands to be reddish. The soles of her feet too were red just like the tinge of land-lotus—something which only a few fortunate ones noticed through her grace, when she was in good health. The thick mass of long hair on her head was smooth, black and glistening, the strands being like fine silk threads which had a tendency of becoming slightly curly at the tips. Her nose, set on her well proportioned face, was very attractive. Her serene gaze always showered compassion on the hearts of all. The broad shining forehead and cheerful countenance would at once fill one with a sense of peace and calmness. Her complexion which was fair with a tinge of brown had been bright at first, but had faded towards the end.¹⁵

The direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the Mother herself did not view the pictures merely as symbols. To them the photographs were living and spiritually vibrant. Holy Mother was of the firm conviction that the body and the 'shadow'—*chāyā* and *kāyā* are the same and non-different.¹⁶

14. *Ibid.*

15. Swami Saradeshananda, "The Holy Mother: Reminiscences" *Vedanta Kesari*, April, 1979. p. 127.

16. *Śrī Śrī Māyer Kathā*, p. 58.

12. *Śrī Śrī Māyer Kathā* Vol. II, p. 51.

13. *Mātrī Sānnidhye* (Bengali), p. 17.

Vivekananda, The Divine Child

DOROTHY MADISON

Vivekananda was a unique Divine Child of the Universal Mother, and by Her grace he lived, fought, and revelled for the good of the world. As a boy he was full of merriment and fun. As a young man on the world stage, he was a roaring lion delivering his message. The gifted writer, of Alameda, California, USA, is an ardent follower of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in the U.S. for more than five decades.

Except for stony, root-bound hearts, everybody loves a child. And why not? It is easy to love these innocents, so genuinely themselves. Minus manners and common sense as they are—Nature's God flows through them without a hitch. And just as easily He flows through the occasional mini-monster so good at raising hell. Even so, this tiny limb of Satan excites real, if cautious, affection, just as baby hyenas and gorillas, because it *is* little, fresh from God, and helplessly itself.

How much greater, then, must be the love and sheer delight inspired by the cosmic Child who brightens scripture, myth, epics, and folklore? Some of these children—the Christ Child, the Child Krishna, and the Child Rama, are divine beings through and through from day one. Others, like Heracles in his crib and Siegfried in his, are the semi-divine heroes whose streak of divinity erupts before they can walk or talk. Whatever the circumstances of their childhood, these divine infants—foundlings, heroes, waifs, and princes—command love and devotion. Now, to this youthful cluster, certain child-enthusiasts among Vivekananda's following have consigned him, their eternal boy, immortal child, infant hero. To Sara Bull, for instance, he was the Baby Vivekananda, arching his back in his mother's lap.

As the old Romans said, there is no arguing about tastes. People like what they

like. Yet—O ye gods!—how can it be that of all the sides of the cosmically-endowed Vivekananda, a person able to add two-plus-two centres on the boy, the child, nay the “muling, puking” infant? What has happened to Vivekananda the Hero-sage or God-man prophet or Warrior-saint, and all the rest? At the very least, Vivekananda should be credited with a consummate manliness, generous, grounded in spirituality, and of intense intellectual and redemptive power. Not so, says the devotee, you must go deeper. In his private, personal, holy depths Swamiji is a child; hang the rest.

To this conundrum Swamiji himself gave an answer of sorts in a letter to the Maharaja of Khetri. He wrote that “man finds nothing in that which does not echo back the heart-beats of his special love in life.”¹ In a very general sense this means that some people cannot help preferring children to saints, sages, and prophets just as cormorants cannot help preferring fish to fruit. When, therefore, child-centred persons discern in Swamiji's personality the magical child, a child he remains forever. End of story.

Such intense love for the young may be caused by one or more conditions, endemic in the child-lover. The most familiar of these

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981), 230.

is the maternal instinct, rooted in God and nature. The power of this drive needs no comment except, perhaps, to mention that womanly women of all backgrounds grow dotty over babies and small children. Second, a certain fraction of the population have become, by whatever means, psychologically predisposed toward youth, and do all in their power to remain youngsters, even in old age. They do not always know why they behave this way—perhaps their childhood was golden, unlike everything since. Third, another portion of humanity seek the company of the young, shying away from the old, fat, and successful, because their own will-to-achieve never got off the ground. These unlucky child-lovers suffer from “inert inspiration.” Last, an elusive, exceedingly small company of child-lovers, known as *Paramahamsas*, the men and women who have realized their oneness with the Absolute, have a special love for children. Swamiji himself belonged to this class, as did his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna’s wife Sri Sarada Devi, and other members of this supremely holy circle.

With this last species of child-lover, the child suddenly takes on gravity. Consider! These small fry, these brainless five-year-old babies—companions of earth’s highest, wisest, and holiest! This is no small thing. But it has a suspect, slightly smarmy side, as if a tiny field mouse speaks for the animal kingdom. In all honesty, such an idea is against commonsense. Everybody knows that like attracts like and a gem mingles with gems. In the same way a sage prefers the company of sages, or ought to, just as hemp-smokers prefer hemp-smokers, and thieves thieves. Surely, Sri Ramakrishna’s words, “a man seeks the company that agrees with his own nature,”² does not mean that an

Agastya, a Dattātreya, or a Nāgārjuna enjoyed the companionship of infant hellions more than they did a fellow sage’s?

At this point we are driven to consider what it is about the child that attracts the sage. Our authority is unquestionably Sri Ramakrishna who, of all *Paramahamsas*, understood sages and children best. The psychological basis of his position is four-fold: One, after a person realizes God, he becomes like a child. Two, he becomes like a child because one always takes on the nature of the object meditated upon. Three, the nature of God is like a child’s. Four, both God and child are beyond the control of the three *gunas* (principles, qualities)—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (wisdom, activity, and inertia). For example, “As a child builds up his toy house and then breaks it down, so God acts while creating, preserving, and destroying the universe.”³ As a kind of afterthought, Sri Ramakrishna added, “That is why paramahamsas keep five or ten children with them, that they may assume their nature.”⁴

Obviously, it is too early to judge whether Swamiji’s inner child fulfills Sri Ramakrishna’s four requisites. All that can be ascertained so far is that Swamiji sure enough realized God. But to what extent his nature became like God’s, that is, the nature of a child, remains to be seen. But that Swamiji moved with clouds of children, learning child-behaviour, is not supported by Vivekananda literature. We *do* know that Swamiji once or twice declared himself still to be the boy sitting under Dakshineswar’s banyan, listening to his Master talk. We also know that children tended to adore him, that he treated them as equals, joining in their games such as ring-around-the-rosy, looking

2. Swami Nikhilananda, trans. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1969), 176.

3. Nikhilananda, *Gospel*, 176.

4. *Ibid.*

at their picture books, and listening to their views.⁵

But this, on the whole, rather exiguous revelation of a child-Vivekananda means little at this point, since the surface has barely been scratched. Besides, the one historically established fact, namely, Swamiji's realization of God, which was such a perfect, ever-present event throughout his short life, makes anything possible. Furthermore, Sri Ramakrishna's list of the ins and outs of child behavior is so rich and thoroughly enchanting that the wayward, multiform, highly volatile, deeply tranquil, immovable Vivekananda just might pass muster as a five-year-old. Let us see.

The child as Sri Ramakrishna saw him—henceforward referred to as the Child—is not an altogether human child. To the ordinary parent or big sister or anyone at all who works with children, the Ramakrishna Child comes straight out of Never-Never Land. For one thing, like Peter Pan, the boy who wouldn't grow up, the Child is a heart-stealer. This comes as no surprise, since Sri Ramakrishna himself was a heart-stealer beyond compare. He seemed, indeed, to be a light-filled, joyous, madly attractive apparition of Divinity, never completely disjoined from the infinite Divine mass. Bobbing and flashing in this personal-impersonal sea of Ramakrishna enchantment, his traits and behaviours continue to penetrate the toughest hides, taking souls by stealth and by storm. Clearly, from any standpoint the Ramakrishna Child is bound to prove unusual. He is, after all, the five-year-old heart-stealer that Sri Ramakrishna himself once was, stealing hearts in his village-kingdom.

Among the Child's behaviours no single one so disconcerts the ordered mind as the Child's rudderless, aimless, capricious ways. When he is not eating, sleeping, or pestering his mother, all he does is play. Even his short, serious spells are part of his playing. He builds a house for two hours with great concentration, then knocks it down without a pang. He hugs his toy one minute, throws it away the next. He sees a grasshopper and goes chasing after it. He is a regular little madman whom the whole world endures, yet there is nothing the matter with him that time will not cure. True enough. But what is so disconcerting about this aimlessness of the Child is not the vagaries, but that elderly sages of the Paramahansa class behave this way, as does God Himself! And so also, apparently, did Swami Vivekananda. But about that, more later on.

Luckily, even though the Child exists under the shadow of aimlessness—without purpose, without capacity to observe himself, with no visible *modus operandi*, except to react to passing stimuli—his sheaf of remaining traits and behaviours saves him from idiocy. Indeed, all the deadly faults that he does *not* have are enough to make him an angel. For example, he is without hatred, pride, shame, or vanity. He is not attached to anything or anybody except his mother, without whom he cannot breathe. He is extremely impatient, does not dither trying to make up his mind, but acts immediately. He makes no distinctions about high and low, the pure and impure, the holy and unholy; differences between men and women mean nothing to him. Free from guile, he believes everything people tell him.

Undoubtedly, the Child's freedom from clouds of passion and darkness means that joy and sunlight are his natural companions. The Child is "always blissful," as Sri Ramakrishna said, and a stranger to woe. This

5. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries*, 6 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1987), 5: 253.

does not mean that the Child is one big smile all day long. Certainly not. He has his quarrels, fights, and tears, but for one minute only. The next minute he makes up, grief forgotten. This lightning ability to forgive and forget is part of his natural condition, free and unbound. As mentioned earlier, like all paramahamsas, including Swamiji, the Child is entirely free from the triple strands of bondage. Thus, in his quarreling and fighting, the Child's show of *tamas* is a mere flash in the pan. So also with his show of *sattva* or *rajas*—all sporadic, passing, and innocent.

Often the Child tends to be a little daredevil—like a monkey, according to Sri Ramakrishna. Let him fall a hundred times, he keeps on trying to run, jump, climb, throw, sneak, steal, break, wander, and play. But alas, two things make the Child afraid: the World, and being left alone. This double fear of the Child gives rise to odd speculations: does *God* fear the world? do the paramahamsas and sages? did Swamiji? did all of them fear being left by themselves? We know that Swamiji had no such fears. These questions will have to wait, perhaps forever, because this account must end on a cheerful note. Therefore, most happily it can be said that the Child is a wildly generous little person, and one who delights in being silly—absolutely, genuinely silly—and enjoys *knowing* that he is being silly. By extension, however, these silliness episodes, like the Child's fits of fear, cast God and His Holy Ones into a rather strange light.

Be that as it may, it is now time to find out, by using the many traits and behaviours of the Child as index, whether the child-nature of Swami Vivekananda is up to snuff, for surely, as a *bona fide* paramahamsa, he must have a child's nature somewhere. Parenthetically, the greatest drawback to his Child-classification is that he obviously was—first things first—a very great and heroic

man, full-grown and of staggering character and achievement. He was *not* afraid of anything. He could not have done what he did, had he been fainting from fear of the world. Neither did he dread being left alone. To sit solitarily in Himalayan seclusion was his idea of heaven on earth, never, alas, to be achieved.

Alongside Swamiji's fearlessness loomed his monomania to slap a doped populace awake. For such gumption and drive, so contrary to the aimless set of the Child, he had the Divine Ones to thank. He was their instrument, their vehicle, voice, fighter, slave, and devotee, precious beyond human reckoning. Never was an embodied being so closely watched or artfully supervised as he. Although he may have shouted from time to time that he was born free, and even managed surreptitious dips into the Absolute, he could not walk north, south, east, or west without their tacit approval. Unquestionably, they found him difficult, even dangerous, to handle; they had to respect his right to be himself with his stolen *samadhis* and lonely wanderings. But they would allow him to go only so far, and then stop him in his tracks. This independent slave of God spent his entire vital resources trying to raise his fellow humans to the freedom and equality awaiting them in the Self. Paramahamsa or not, he was a savior.

Still, another trait of the Child was wanting in Swamiji—he was not heedlessly blissful all the time. True enough, at the core of his personality where, as it were, bay and inlet blend with ocean, he was certainly not without the bliss of Being. But, at the purely human levels on which he had to operate according to his Master's scenario, he was forced to undergo intense, prolonged suffering of every kind from every quarter for every reason. He was, in short, an infinitely beset man, more or less at the mercy of a loving God, whose impossibly

arduous agenda he had to carry out. There was simply no chance for him to have roses, roses, all the way. Read his life, his letters, and Sister Nivedita. It is all there—this paramahansa did not romp aimlessly around the clock. But it is true that occasionally, when he ducked into his native Absolute, he averred from its invisible boundary-line that all this that we behold is but play—that nothing in this world means anything at all, a la Alice in Wonderland.

Except for these three—aimlessness, fear, and mindless bliss—all the other traits and behaviours of the Child showed up in Swamiji. Certainly he liked to play and have fun. He loved to banter, tease, make faces, mimic, tell jokes, play jokes, and go to see comedies at which he nearly died laughing. One man, who went to a play with him in Los Angeles, said that “he had never seen anyone laugh so hard or so much.”⁶ And Swamiji himself wrote to Mrs. Hale, “We went to see the *Charley’s Aunt*. I nearly killed myself with laughing.”⁷ He also loved to try his hand at new things, tell old stories, spin yarns, write kidding letters, and talk silly. His laughing jags and tendency to rag others and fool, especially in the company of his brother disciples, startled the young, but intoxicated the old at whom it was generally aimed. On the other hand, he could fly into a rage with this same cast of characters, reduce one or two of them to jelly, cool off, repair the damage, and restore peace—all within an hour or so.

Even more than the Child, Swamiji was a daredevil from the word go. His whole life can be interpreted as one big dare. Indeed, most of his deeds could only have been done, not by patient trying, but by tremendous daring. This fact lands him squarely in the young hero class, and he was,

in truth, Sri Ramakrishna’s own short-lived hero. “My hero,” “my Śuka,” the Master called him.

This daring of Swamiji’s was matched by a chronic generosity, likewise out of control. Without a modicum of good sense he gave away all kinds of things, from lump sums of cash, to pipes, hookahs, staffs, trunks, blankets, and watches. Whichever of his things people happened to admire, want, or need, he gave them. In Madras, for example, he gave away the money raised for his first trip to America ; it had to be raised a second time. During another wild moment he was going to sell Belur Math and give the proceeds to the poor. He was watched like a hawk.

Detachment, another of Swamiji’s major Child behaviours, was on a scale with his daring and generosity. Like Arjuna with his bow *Gāndīva*, his swiftness to slay the pleasant in favour of the good protected him as long as he walked the earth. Nobody and nothing could touch him, catch him, snare him, corner him, buy him, pin him down, or enslave him except, possibly, the ranged forces of omnipotent Divinity, whose anointed instrument he was. Not even his mother, that most adored, brooded-over, and indispensable centre of his childhood world, was able to get her noose around his neck. He renounced her along with all the finest joys, rewards, and amenities civilized society had to offer. Then, having thrown his desires into the flames, many were the times thereafter he simply walked away from honours, wealth, power, and love. It is not too much to say that his power to detach himself from his successes, failures, friends, disciples, India, America, and creation itself, what to speak of the caves, peaks, trees, rivers, and beloved faces that sweetened his life, was the power of the Great God Himself, as he danced in the fires of *pralaya*. To repeat, like Shiva, like the Child, like

6. *Burke, New Discoveries*, 5: 207.

7. *Ibid.*, 2: 123.

the aimless paramahansa, he was gloriously free from bondage; *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* buzzed aimlessly around his head.

To finish off this litany of the Child in Swamiji, two traits, impatience and lack of hesitation, need little comment. Even though in a mood of dejection he may have praised the worm patiently working away unseen, in more normal states he wanted to see results. For instance, he could not bear to wait for the Golden Age—it was already here. Fools do not have to wait days, months, years, lives, for *mukti*—you are free now. “Don’t seek for Him, just see Him.”⁸ And so forth. To be sure, like every person short on patience, Swamiji tried to practise it—“patience, purity, and perseverance” was his motto for Americans and others with short attention spans—but he never fully “learned” it. And as for the Child’s lack of hesitation, Swamiji had about a second’s worth. He dived in and did things on the spot or saw to it that they got done. This breakneck habit of his explains why his disciple, the young Mr. J. J. Goodwin, who lost both temper and patience while striving to improve the *Brahmavadin* in low-keyed Madras, declared that Swamiji was “not a Hindu—as Hindus go.”⁹

With the Child’s remaining constellation of negatives Swamiji had no trouble at all. Being a spiritual democrat whose eye saw sameness everywhere, he had no truck with hierarchy—God’s, man’s, or nature’s. He simply set aside the convulsing differences between high and low, caste and outcaste, pure and impure, holy and unholy, rich and poor, etc. Indeed, it can be said that his living with kings, brahmins, pariahs, and *mlecchas*, as was his habit, and having

perceived the same One-only Self in all of them, he had no room for pride, vanity, shame, hate, guile, or making much of the unlikenesses between man and woman. What a balm to jumpy, jittery humanity!

Balm or no balm, the question is, do we now have a Child-Vivekananda? Is that to be our final reading of this most unlikely, unexpected, and complicated knower of God? Right off three new factors must be taken into consideration. First, in respect to Sri Ramakrishna, of all people, Swamiji did not feel the least bit like a child. In fact, quite the contrary. His words to Sister Nivedita on this score leave no doubt:

I never look up to Him in that way—my feeling about Him is rather peculiar—I always think of Him as my Child—You know He always depended on me, as the strongest of the whole lot, and at the very end—when he was nearly at the last, He put his arms about my shoulders and said “This is a hero!”¹⁰

Second, Sri Ramakrishna said that besides acting like a child, paramahansas may also act like a madman, a ghou, and “an inert thing.”¹¹ These states Swamiji bypassed but, three, he *did* behave according to two other paramahansa demeanours mentioned by Sri Ramakrishna, namely, a boy’s demeanour, and a young man’s. Referring to his own behaviour, Sri Ramakrishna said, “When I give instruction I feel like a young man. Then there is my boyishness, like a boy twelve or thirteen years old. I want to be frivolous. That is why I joke and make merry with the youngsters.”¹² He said the same thing about any paramahansa in general: “As a boy he is very light-hearted.

8. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986), 7: 29.

9. Burke, *New Discoveries*, 4: 496.

10. Sankari Prasad Basu, ed., *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Nababharat publishers, 1982), 1: 50.

11. Nikhilananda, *Gospel*, 265.

12. *Ibid.*, 594.

He may use frivolous language. As a young man he is a roaring lion while teaching others."¹³

On the basis of the Master's words it now becomes clear that Swamiji's role as world-teacher in the scheme of things tallies exactly with Sri Ramakrishna's "young man," roaring like a lion. Likewise, Swamiji's non-teaching behaviour was very often indistinguishable from a thirteen-year-old boy's. That is to say, he often could not keep himself from reverting to a boy's awful inanities. Two examples of this unanchored frame of mind should serve. Once, in San Francisco a nervous Theosophist (later elected president of San Francisco's Vedanta Society) telephoned Swamiji to come right over and save her from noxious elementals (subhuman nature spirits). Swamiji, who happened to be cooking, replied, "No. You come over here. Bring the elementals and we will fry them for dinner!"¹⁴ The second incident happened at Belur Math. As his hapless disciple described it:

Swamiji cooked certain dishes, one of which was prepared with vermicelli. When the disciple, who partook of it, asked Swamiji what it was, he replied, "It is a few English earthworms which I have brought dried from London." This created laughter among those present at the expense of the disciple.¹⁵

One never knew with Swamiji when the boy in him would break out.

Even though Swamiji rarely, if ever, reverted to five-year-old conduct, it is clear that every one of the Child's sublime freedoms was percolating in and through his

paramahansa essence. We may conclude, therefore, that while his Master manifested at one time or another all aspects of paramahansa behaviour, Swamiji shot through the human universe, a terrific uplifting force, chiefly in the mood of a lion roaring.

At this point it is not out of order to observe that both the Master and Swamiji seem to belong to an altogether different species of sage from those depicted in the holy books. The scriptural sages, or *rishis*, among whom existed a hierarchy as rigid as the descending orders of angels, swore awful curses, reduced the unwary to ashes, were overcome by lust, and often on bad terms with each other. In contrast, Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji walked away boyishly free from all such adult torments. But by no stretch of the imagination should this be taken to mean that they were unable to petrify, if needs be, anybody they wanted to. Indeed, they could. If it be conceded that one of them was *Ívara* and the other *Maheśvara*, nothing more need be said on this subject. But if we refuse to fly that high, preferring to categorize them more modestly as modern day sages, prophets, charismatic holy men, or paramahansas, even so they could be terrifying. Thus, when Sri Ramakrishna for any reason grew either grave or excited, the world of his devotees wobbled and their hearts stopped. When Swamiji flew into one of his destructive modes—ditto. In short, no paramahansa can ever be a jellyfish. Even that king of humility, Nag Mahashaya, Sri Ramakrishna's greatest and unimaginably self-abnegating householder disciple, and a paramahansa into the bargain, gave a man a good beating with the poor fellow's own slipper. But the scary sides of the Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji must not be overstated. Like Kali Herself, this Master and disciple were endlessly benign. As a matter of fact, the

13. Ibid., 541.

14. Marie Louise Burke, "Early Days at Shanti Ashrama" (*Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 83, May, 1978), 211.

15. *CW*, 1986, vol. 7; 224.

soundless moods of Sri Ramakrishna and the furious ones of Swamiji were on a par with the fugitive moods of the Child, no more lasting and no more threatening.

A much truer touchstone by which to gauge these two God-men, grasp their relationship, and sample at this distance the open, infinite, and endlessly enchanting ambience they created around themselves, has nothing to do with moods. It has to do, rather, with the great vision seen by the Master before he ever set eyes on Swamiji. It so happened that once, while in *samadhi*, the Master beheld in the farthest reaches of the Absolute seven sages of indescribable sanctity. Next, he saw a Divine Child take shape out of the surrounding emptiness, move toward one of the sages and, clasping him around the neck, rouse him from meditation. The sage "fixed his unmoving, half-open gaze upon that wonderful child," who was plainly the darling of his heart. The child said, "I am going down. You too must come with me." By his look the sage signaled his willingness, and slipped back into *samadhi*, still gazing at the child. Suddenly, the Master noticed a "fragment" of the sage's body and mind falling to earth in the form of light. Referring to this experience later on, he said, "No sooner had I seen Naren than I recognized him to be that sage."¹⁶

From this vision it is now clear why Swamiji looked upon the Master as his child. Indeed, the mood of father seemed a very natural one with him. His most accomplished child, and indeed the one who understood him best and would, as he said, stand by him, even unto going to Hell with him, was Sister Nivedita, his spirited "daughter." Likewise, the boys and young men

whom he instructed he regarded as his own. Once he rebuked a brother disciple for trying to save him from his inquisitive disciples, saying, "Keep your regulations of Ayurvedic treatment outside. These are my children; and if my body goes in teaching them, I don't care."¹⁷

All this is not to say that Swamiji never felt himself to be a child. Most certainly, he could never have felt like a motherless child, since women by the dozen were all set to baby him, beginning and ending with his own mother. But even with her he was a fractious child. The infrequent times he howled for his mother, both the divine and the human, was, as he said, when he had a bellyache. Nonetheless, he did experience genuinely yearning moments, as when he went to his mother after his return from the West, laid his head on her lap, and said, "Mother, feed me with thine hands and make me grow!"¹⁸ Then again, he addressed many women as "mother," but two of these mothers he really meant. One was Mrs. Hale, his saviour in Chicago who, taking him into the bosom of her family, looked after him in every possible way. The other was Mrs. Ole Bull, whom he loved, cherished, and trusted as much as he did his own mother. She was the one person to whom he handed over his work, when he himself could not be present or thought he was on the point of breakdown or death. For this reason he gave her *sannyasa*, greatly relieving his anxieties. Sara Bull, that calmest, most elegant, and preachy of mothers, never betrayed the divine trust so desperately laid upon her, never once mentioned her *sannyasa* to a soul, and never ceased to honour and adore her paramahansa son.

16. Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 1: 80-1.

17. *CW*, 1986, 7: 224-5.

18. Sailendra Nath Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols. (Madras: Vivekananda Prakashan Kendra, 1976), 2: 910.

Lest this talk of mother-dependency seem to cover Swamiji's ruddy strength with maudlin mist, we must turn at once to Kāli, the Divine Mother in whose keeping he lived, fought, and revelled. This Divine Mother is the Goddess of whom all goddesses whatever are parts, aspects, and emanations. In the intervals between creations She is "the Formless One, Mahā-Kāli, the Great Power...one with Mahā-Kāla, the Absolute."¹⁹ During periods of creation She is, of course, exceedingly active, identified with every fact of the human condition from clean to dirty, great to small, hare to tortoise, etc. Despite being everywhere at once, as well as being all-knowing and all-powerful, She has an individuality, with its own edge, essence, and flavour. Right here flags must be run up and trumpets sounded! Be ye warned. Flowing deep beneath Mother's personal sea of irresistible loveliness, powerful currents are at work—Her desire to play, to get Her own way, to keep the game going, and Her teeming, mind-boggling bliss. Sri Ramakrishna, who knew these currents well, described the situation to Keshab while on a boat ride in the middle of the Ganga:

The Divine Mother is always playful and sportive. The universe is her play. She is self-willed and must always have Her own way. She is full of bliss. She gives freedom to one out of a hundred thousand. ... She wants to continue playing with Her created beings. ... Her pleasure is in continuing the game.²⁰

As for Kāli's personality, it is of an indescribable richness and beauty. Entrancing in its loveliness, sweetness, silken vastness, and soothing, strangely liberating coolness, it is interpenetrated by jollity, fun, and rollicking laughter, and made real, immediate, and precious by the warm, intimate, overpower-

ing security of matchless mother-love. What more can be said about this charming, infinitely adorable Mother of Us All, except that one way or another, we love Her madly, as did Her child, Vīvekananda.

Warmth, love, and charm notwithstanding, there remains a slightly menacing side to Kāli's intoxicating person which causes many of Her children to talk softly or not at all. Still others tend to draw the line at blood. Such devotees cannot forget, for example, a vision Sri Ramakrishna described to M. at the Shyampukur house:

Do you know what I saw just now? A divine form—a vision of the Divine Mother. She had a child in Her womb. She gave birth to it and the next instant began to swallow it, and as much of it as went into Her mouth became void. It was revealed to me that everything is void. The Divine Mother said to me, as it were: "Come confusion! Come delusion! Come!"²¹

While the import of such a vision might drive some toward heroic heights, the majority cling to the Mother and hope for the best.

Such was not the case with Swamiji, a fearless, roaring-lion paramahansa with other fish to fry. As he explained during an interview in London, his job in life was to seek out and work with individual men and women, make them strong, teach them they were divine, and get them to become conscious of the Divinity within them.²² But this clean, simple, infinite aim was beset by all the heartbreaks of battle. Practically everything that could go against him, did so, at some time or other. In the midst of one of these nasty little set-to's he wrote to Mrs. Bull:

19. Nikhilananda, *Gospel*, 135.

20. *Ibid.*, 136-37.

21. *Ibid.*, 870.

22. *CW*, 1979, 5: 187-8.

Don't think I give in a moment. Lord bless you ; if the Lord has made me his hack to work and die on the streets, let Him have it. ... Victory unto the Guru! Yes, let the world come, the hells come, the gods come, let Mother come, I fight and do not give in. *Ravana* (a demon king) got his release in three births by fighting the Lord Himself! It is glorious to fight Mother.²³

Now, nobody has ever said that Swamiji was not game. He stood, sword in hand, ready and willing to fight all comers, including Chandikā, the Divine Mother, "gruesome and yelping like a hundred jackals."²⁴ This is not to say that he always triumphed. Alas, he did not. Many were the wounds he suffered as She smote him hip and thigh. But win, lose, or draw, he never ran away from a fight. On the other hand, there were short spells in his life, both East and West, when all the fight went out of him as he drifted "languidly in the warm heart of the river."²⁵ At such times he became the infant, the child, the boy—not turbulent, but content simply to let things happen. In these Mother-moods he said such things as, "Moths like me die by the thousand every instant. Her work goes on all the same... Alone and drifting about in the will-current of the Mother has been my whole life."²⁶ Although words like these suggest gentle melancholy, he declared he was happy and learning to be detached.

At still other times Swamiji's happiness left no doubt at all, and knew no bounds. He became quite wild with joy—sheer, divine, causeless joy, and lost himself in

Kāli's madness to play. What he must have experienced at such times exceeds even the most phantasmagoric imagination. The two of them, Kāli and Her mad Child, Swamiji, running through the universe in mad play is something only paramahamsas can take in. He himself always insisted—when he was in a condition to speak at all—that everybody in this universe truly does nothing but play.²⁷

As the motive of creation, play is not a new concept. From the days of India's pioneer paramahamsas this idea has been treated by philosophers and religionists. Indeed, by following the steps of reason, metaphysicians from Sankara the Advaitin to Thomas Aquinas the Scholastic have concluded that the universe could have been conceived only out of the spirit of play, that is, out of God's overflowing joy. The wonder of Swamiji, in this respect, is that he did not write it all down in a tidy tome or swoon his life away in transcendental play. No. He did something much crazier, something beyond belief in self-regarding circles. He brazenly sought out common, ordinary people in India, America, and England, and let them know that all their troubles and sorrows and sufferings were but play—that "this world is a circus ring in which we are the clowns tumbling."²⁸

At this distance from Swamiji and his supercharged atmosphere, it seems a wonder that he was not tarred and feathered in the good old Bostonian way, and ridden out of town on a rail. As it was, he admitted that he had emptied halls. End-of-the-century Americans, soaked in sentiments such as Longfellow's "Life is real! Life is earnest!" could not be expected to cheer Swamiji's perorations on life as the aimless play of God. Yet this was part and parcel of his highest, starkest message—the one he had

23. *CW*, 1978, 6: 421.

24. Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 64.

25. Vivekananda, *Letters*, 423.

26. *Ibid.*, 421.

27. *CW*, 1984, 3: 94.

28. Burke, *New Discoveries*, 6: 156.

made up his mind in India to give to "the man in the street" so that all people everywhere could hear and know the real truth about themselves, nature, and God.

In San Francisco, forever notable for being the city in which Swamiji fired his most unrelievedly truthful broadsides against spiritual sloth and bestial sensuality, he said:

Who cares for good and evil? Play! God Almighty plays. That is all....You are the almighty God playing....You know your real nature. You are the king and play you are a beggar....It is all fun. Know it and play. That is all there is to it. Then practise it. The whole universe is a vast play. All is good because all is fun. This star comes and crashes with our earth, and we are all dead. You only think fun the little things that delight your senses!

Who is born and who dies? you are having fun, playing with worlds and all that. You keep this body as long as you like. If you do not like it, do not have it. The Infinite is the Real; the finite is the play. You are the infinite body and the finite body in one. Know it! But knowledge will not make any difference; the play will go on....

What is the end and aim of life? None, because I know that I am the Infinite. If you are beggars, you can have aims. I have no aims, no want, no purpose. I come to your country, and lecture—just for fun. No other meaning. What meaning can be there?....

There is another side to it. I have kept it in reserve. I am the man who is going to be hanged. I am all the wicked. I am getting punished in hells. That also is fun. This is the goal of philosophy to know that I am the Infinite. Aims,

motives, purposes, and duties live in the background....²⁹

Now this galloping play-proneness exhibited by Swamiji as he tried to rouse the lazy lions of San Francisco, shows him at his teaching peak—or twin peaks—since he was not only the young-man paramahansa roaring like a lion, but also the giddy twelve-year old, having a barrel of fun. How neat to tell these fool Divinities, all of them the same Infinite Self, that it is great fun when a star smashes our earth and all of us are dead!

Be that as it may, the big question is whether this tremendous message-giving of Swamiji's, this uncovering the unadorned, unsentimentalized truths about the actual human predicament, snare, run-around, dead-fall, etc., to "the man in the street," goes against the essential genius of the basic Paramahansa-Child. No, most emphatically it does not. If anything, it fulfills and builds upon it. Categorically, without the Child's jarringly bone-clean purity, sincerity, and truthfulness as the bedrock of his character, there simply could not have been any Swamiji. No way at all. The bald fact is that the traits of the Paramahansa-Child are God's own traits, and as such, forever serve as the basic traits of every fully-illuminated knower of God.

The Child-nature, gloriously free from the faculty to scheme, calculate, manipulate, dissemble, conspire, and contrive, is eternal and unchanging, and the nearest possible approximation to the One-without-a-Second, this side of the Absolute. Although this proposition seems odd, considering that Sri Ramakrishna and Kāli themselves manipulated Swamiji into carrying out their plans, it must be kept in mind that they plotted and planned in a spirit of pure play. The game

²⁹. *CW*, 1983, 2: 470-2.

had to go on in the direction they wanted, and Swamiji played the part of the cat's paw, so to speak.

All this Swamiji understood. When he was in the mood, he played like one possessed; when he was not, it was another story. But never, never, could he ever outplay them. His highest teachings, especially the ones he gave in California, illustrate one kind of effort he made to outwit the Divine Ones at their own game. He revealed the divine secret that all this is nothing but divine play. In this too he did not succeed, for who, out of the five billions on this earth, dares to take the lion-roaring young man at his word, and behave accordingly? Not even in San Francisco, India, or England, is there such a one. No. Human beings tend to take themselves too seriously.

What Swamiji took seriously was not himself, God knows, but his work. So fierce, concentrated, and consuming was the energy he expended on it, that in the end it cost him his life. He neither joked about it, nor was it a plaything he could mindlessly abandon. As he confessed to Sister Nivedita a few days before he died, "You know the WORK is always my weak point! When I think that might come to an end, I am all undone!"³⁰

Swamiji's passion for his work enabled him to do something no one else could do for the bedevilled family of man. In working for their good, decency, happiness, dignity, for their fearlessness in the days and nights of peril, and for their waking up into the consciousness of Self, God, and Divinity everywhere, he stamped human life and its unquiet state with the stamp of supreme value. Thereafter, people need doubt no longer that life has importance, that their existences are precious, that all of them are,

³⁰. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1930), 483.

in very truth, fearfully and wonderfully made, inseparably one with God, and capable of realizing this eternal oneness. Swamiji, the young lion roaring, worked himself to death trying to make them understand these truths about themselves, and by his life and excellent death, proved his point.

As it was, Swamiji could not hold himself apart from the populace, because he already had two strikes against him. First, as he told Mrs. Hansbrough in San Francisco, "I have fallen in love with man"³¹ And that was bound to happen because, second, he was himself the actual embodiment of man. "I am *man* incarnate," he once declared.³² Indeed, Sri Ramakrishna, in his first meetings with Swamiji long before, had said he was Nara Narayana, that is, God in His aspect of man, and had addressed him as Narayana.³³ Now, whether or not this eternal identity of Swamiji with the human race militates against Swamiji as the paramahansa Child seems of little consequence, since Swamiji was man, the whole of humanity, in all its human states and stages from infancy to senescence. Nonetheless, from this high vantage point, having come all this way from the hills and dales of infancy, childhood, and play, to the crags and peaks of manhood, heroism, and work, it can be said that Swamiji was indubitably a man, a prince among men, who served his Master as no one else could. Who but a man could have said,

If but a thorn pricks the foot of one who has surrendered oneself to Sri Ramakrishna, it makes my bones ache....It is that unlearned Brahmin who has bought this body of mine for ever.³⁴

³¹. Burke, *New Discoveries*, 6: 79.

³². Swami Ashokananda, *Meditation, Ecstasy, and Illumination*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990), 128.

³³. Nikhilananda, *Gospel*, 985.

³⁴. *CW*, 1978, 6: 347.

Unpublished Letters

From Frank Alexander to Mrs. Betty Leggett

Thursday
June 15, 1911

My dear Mrs. Leggett :

By this time the shadows of Musjids and great palaces and latticed marble and quaint, huge temples dedicated to the myriad pantheon of Hinduism have receded, giving place to the more familiar environments of London. Still, I am sure, there are some indelible impressions with you of this land of Swamiji. Little by little I am beginning to understand. The cumbrous walls that separate, almost impassably, the thought and life and social instincts of the Orient from the Occident are tottering here and there at my insistent demand, and through the crevices thus made I am glimpsing something of That Great Life from Whose Loins came Vivekananda.

You must come here again, yes, and live in the Hindu quarter. Then you will hear wonderful chants that resound through the voices of devotees at early morning and at evening time. It has been my great privilege to forget, for the time being, that I am of the West. I am living with the sons of Sadananda, in true Hindu fashion. Across the way, possibly you will remember, is a clash what might be called "a mansion" for India. At 6 o'clock in the morning the chant to the honor and praise of Lord Sri Krishna commences. He is worshipped with incense and with flowers. The devotees sit about in silence, their souls sunk into the profound depths of That Life to which the comings and goings of mortal

life are incidental. Either in deep meditation do they sit, like images wrought in bronze, or else, with the clapping of hands and with ecstasy of soul the name of the Lord floats, with the appeal of an intense consciousness of the life of the Lord, upon their high tenor voices.

It would seem almost incredible that the masses of India have a consciousness of the prodigious height of Advaita thought. Yet, it is true. The same devotee who will sing of the "Ocean of the Sweetness of the Lord", will also chant the great hymns of the founder of the Advaita philosophy, Sri Sankaracharya. These hymns thrill you with the actual sensation of the vanity and paltriness of life. You actually become conscious of the fact that the world is a marketplace where men scramble for toys and trinkets. One of these hymns is "Mohamudgar", or "The Hammer of Delusion", by which a man is reminded of the illusion of life and the spell it throws over the soul of man, barring him from an intimate consciousness of the Self-sufficiency of the soul and of its divinity. Then there is another, the "Nirvanashataka", or "The Six Stanzas of Nirvana". In the words of this hymn the challenge is made by the composer to the world, telling it that the real individuality is neither the body nor mind, that it is neither bound by the physical limitations of the mind, such as desire and fear and the remaining qualities that blind man to his innate greatness and strength.

The common beggar can sing you a song with this type of thought. But you should see the beggar-singers, I mean the minstrels, for such they should be called, who come

to your door and for so many farthings, will tell you in song all of the overwhelming love that Sri Krishna had for Radha, meanwhile accompanying the song with that sensuous and yet not sensuous dance of the Orient which, you remember, we saw in Delhi. Not long ago, there came to this house a mite of a boy dressed like Radha, with strings of gold dots painted on his brown figure, and wearing bracelets and jingling anklets. With him was his father bearded like a Mohammedan, with a wonderful basso. He was an excellent player of the Vina. Then the song commenced with a series of shrill soprano notes, followed by the deep, penetrating voice of the man. And there they sang and the boy danced, and the song became more and more intense, and the dance grew wild in fervor, and the excitement grew in all of us that watched and heard, and also in the performers. And all this, again, in the court-yard of an Indian house and in such an atmosphere of informality that could never be understood in the unromantic West.

I have been to Mayavati. Your letter was forwarded to me at that place. I walked the sixty miles from the railroad to the quiet retreat of the ashrama; then I came down again. Now I am soon returning there. Soon I mean to take my bowl in hand, put on my "gerrua" and with my mountain-staff enter into the real Indian world. I must do this. How can I escape the call to lose myself from the dull, heavy, trade-spirit of this age? If I do not do this actually, at least I shall have so fitted myself that the Indian world will come to me. "If Mohammed can't go to the mountains, then the mountains will have to come to Mohammed."

I am very grateful to you for your kind letter. It brought back most pleasant asso-

ciations; not that I had forgotten; it made them intensely vivid.

Always in my devotion to Him,
I am
Alexander

(I suppose you might add "The Vagabond", for such am I and will be until I have seen and realized him. Then I will have come Home.)

There is a song concerning Swamiji here. One of the stanzas, translated, reads: "Who are you O greatest among the Sages, You, who attack the great mountains of learning with the intensity of the Lion among the lions."

My best remembrances both to yourself and dear Miss MacLeod.

From Mrs. J. C. Bose to Mrs. Wilson
(Nivedita's sister)

Ray Villa
Darjeeling
18th October 1911

My dear Mrs. Wilson,

Peace be to her soul! And God be with us all for otherwise, we are helpless. What we dreaded has taken place, and our beloved is at rest. All her sufferings are at an end—that is a consolation.

Yes, she did suffer—but never a moan did we hear—never did she say anything, only when asked by me repeatedly, she said she was in pain. Never for a moment did I think that such a calamity could overtake us. What! She must get well. There was no question of her not getting well. What would happen if she left us? What would happen to her work? Surely, God did not

mean to be so cruel, but there it was. We were helpless, dear Mrs. Milson, what fools we are, we cannot keep our dear ones alive try as much as we can. The best doctor's skill we had, but what did it do? Nothing. The thing was, that her constitution was quite ruined by her last year's suffering and the disease attacked her in all its strength. She fought hard, we fought hard, but it all came to an end on the morning of the 13th. At 2:30 in the night, I went to her and she told me in a hushed voice as she was getting very weak. She told me that "The boat was sinking, but she will see the sun rise." Then I understood that the end was near. From that time she refused all nourishments and medicine. I tried to give her oxygen inhalation, but she would have none. "Take it away," she said, as if she knew. From the first she seemed to know, for she talked of death, now and then. As I wrote to you in my last, she had diarrhoea which she tried to suppress, only when it turned to dysentery after four days that she told us, and at once we were careful, and had her under treatment. Altogether she suffered a fortnight. The first day she took to bed she told me she would die. But I told her that we all feel like that when we are ill. Then again, when she saw she was not improving, she told me it would be much easier to die. Then I told her that when we are weak, we feel we cannot make effort to get well and that she must not give up. Later on, when she was getting weaker, she asked me to tell her frankly. "Let there be no hiding," she said, "and don't try to prolong." This was the last she said about death, four days before she left us. We told her, that the only thing we were afraid of, was her weakness.

She had no strength, dear Mrs. Wilson, her heart was weak from the 7th. As soon as we saw danger, we wanted to take her

to Calcutta in an invalid carriage. Everything was ready, but the doctor said he did not dare, as her heart might fail anytime.

She talked of her work all the time—how her school is to continue—and she talked of Christine. She hoped that Christine would direct her work. We would have loved to have Christine with us during her illness, but Christine was at Mayavati, and though she had started it was too late. Poor Christine!

My husband read to her every day during her illness. Things she loved to hear, and she enjoyed it to the last. The last evening, he had omitted something from the passage he was reading, as he felt it deeply. She at once noticed it, and my husband had to read it over again. The morning before he was reading a letter to her and he was so much overpowered that he was choking. I tried to restrain him but she said, "Don't check him, let him give in to his feeling." She met us every time with a smile in her face, and how glad she was to have us with her. Oh! She was so patient and so bright all the time. You do not know how it hurts me to write of her as one who is no more. She is with us in spirit I am sure, though God has cruelly removed her from our sight. How she loved her little nieces even during her illness. In the beginning she told me how touched she was to have a welcome from them when she went there, and how good of you to have kept up that love in the children, so that she always knew she had a welcome in your home.

Please inform your mother and sister-in-law.

More in my next,

Ever yours lovingly,
Abala Bose

A part of this letter has appeared in *Vedanta Kesari* June 1990 issue.

News and Reports

THE 82nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Synopsis of the Governing Body's Report for 1990-91

The meeting was held at Belur Math on Sunday the 22nd December, 1991 at 3-30 p.m. Swami Bhuteshananda, President of the Ramakrishna Mission was the chairman of the proceedings.

Amidst the important developments during the year, the opening of a new centre at Haarlem (Netherlands), the inauguration of a water treatment plant at Belur Math for making Ganges water potable, the construction of 17 low-cost dwelling houses along with a community centre for a small aboriginal tribe in Bihar and the rehabilitation projects initiated in Andhra Pradesh under which the construction of 200 cyclone-proof houses and 4 shelter house-cum-community centres have been undertaken, deserve special mention.

Relief and Rehabilitation: In the year under report the Ramakrishna Mission did extensive relief and rehabilitation work spending a sum of Rs. 52.45 lakhs. Besides, relief articles worth about Rs. 14.10 lakhs were distributed.

Welfare Activity: The Mission spent a sum of about Rs. 61.61 lakhs by way of help to poor students, patients and aged and destitute men and women.

Medical Service: The Mission did commendable work through its 9 hospitals and 79 dispensaries including mobile ones. It served nearly 43 lakh patients spending a sum of about Rs. 6.87 crores.

Educational Activities: True to tradition the academic results of our educational institutions were excellent. The Mission conducted 760 educational institutions which had a total students' strength of 1,02,952. A sum of Rs. 23.69 crores was spent for this purpose.

Rural and Tribal Welfare Work: The Mission did extensive work in several rural

and tribal areas of the country involving an expenditure of about Rs. 2.29 crores.

Foreign Work: Our foreign centres were mainly engaged in spiritual ministrations.

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur the Mission and Math had 79 and 76 branches respectively, in India and abroad.

EARTHQUAKE RELIEF BY RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AT UTTARKASHI, U.P. (HIMALAYAS)

Report of activities and Appeal for funds

Ramakrishna Mission is conducting earthquake relief in some of the worst-affected villages within a radius of 100 Km. around Uttarkashi. 5 M.T. of rice, 10 M.T. of other provisions, 400 sets of utensils, 1500 blankets, 1000 pcs. of woollen garments, 30,000 pcs. of assorted clothings, 500 pairs of shoes, 200 tents and 500 tarpaulins have already been distributed (according to the report received in the 1st week of December '91). Besides, medical relief work is also being conducted along with distribution of free medicines among the quake-affected families belonging to 41 villages situated at heights ranging from 4500 ft. to 11,500 ft. spread over a vast area.

Braving extreme hardship in the rugged mountainer terrain, the area of operation, presently under very low temperature, our monks, *brahmacharins*, and volunteers are still continuing their *seva* to bring comfort and solace to the affected people.

Swami Gahanananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission has appealed to the large-hearted public for their help and co-operation. Donation by A/c. payee cheque/draft/M.O. in favour of — 'Ramakrishna Mission' may be sent to the General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah, 711 202. The woollen blankets and tarpaulins may be sent to him or directly to the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal-249 408.

REVIEWS & NOTICES

TANTINE : THE LIFE OF JOSEPHINE MACLEOD, Friend of Swami Vivekananda, by Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana. Published by Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta 700 076, 1990. 339 pages Rs 125 (\$ 25.00)

To those conversant with Swami Vivekananda's life, Josephine MacLeod should not be an unfamiliar name, and she would be deeply offended if one were to ask "Who?". MACLEOD, she would announce clearly and proudly. The book under review is an absorbing biography of this tall, aristocratic lady with a commanding personality, who would declare she was Vivekananda's friend and not his disciple.

Her life became a mission, a mission to serve the cause that was dear to her Friend, whom she referred to in her letters as "the Prophet". Asked how best she could serve the cause, he commanded her to love India. Love she did, and her soul expanded to encompass not only India but the entire humanity.

She grieved very much the loss of Swamiji for two years, until one day she read Maeterlinck: "If you have ever known anyone worthwhile in your life, why weep? Why not live the great experience?" For the next forty-five years, till her own glorious death at the age of ninety-one, she lived the experience—which was superlatively great. She was always on the go, "Like a whirling dervish...round and round the world, with her eyes fixed on Vivekananda within her heart."

She helped in many ways the newly established Vedanta Societies in the West, and also the incipient Ramakrishna Math in Calcutta to come out of the unpleasant situations created by the British government. She encouraged Nivedita to write her Master's biography, and was instrumental in the publication of Vivekananda's talks on the *Yogas*, and *Inspired Talks*. It was due to her encouragement that Swamiji's works and biography were translated into French. Romain Rolland got interested in Ramakrishna and Vivekananda through her, although he found it difficult to note down

her conversations "...because of her non-stop jumping from one topic to another"; but he likened her to a bee, carrying life-giving pollen from one flower to another.

Miss MacLeod met most of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Premananda said, "She is our very own." She played innocent pranks on Brahmananda, sat unhesitatingly on Saradananda's bed, and demanded birthday gifts from Swami Shivananda. The second generation of monks of the Ramakrishna Order in the West received her help in so many ways. Starting from Paramananda, she knew them all—names that evoke a joyous thrill in admirers of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Joe met great Indians of the time, including Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi. She believed that as long as India continued to produce spiritual personalities, She would never die. "There is no hope in the politics of aggression and expansion, but the politics of self-restraints, thinking no evil, ...has saved India from chaos," she wrote.

She spent the last few months of her life at the Vedanta Society in Hollywood, and died just as she would have liked to, alone and peacefully. She knew how to embrace Death. "Readiness is All! And not to hang on to a body worn out or diseased. The permanent is already within us. ...I would like to die away from family or friends, for death is, must be, a great experience," she wrote in a letter.

This book gives an exciting account of a remarkable woman who never lost courage or self-confidence, whose energy, zeal and dedication were unbounded, whose religion was to learn and to whom life and death were great experiences. The book is profusely illustrated with photographs of Miss MacLeod, and of people and places associated with her.

It is fitting that this well-written book has been published by the Sri Sarada Math, for Miss MacLeod had a very high opinion

of Indian Women. She spoke of them as superior to men, "having dignity, self-abnegation and always being active."

Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao
Hyderabad

WORDS LUMINATE OF SWAMI SADASHIVANANDA, Edited by S. K. GANGULY. Published by Dr. Shobha Mukherji, 139 APR Colony, Katanga, Narmada Road, Jabalpur, 482-001; 1990. pages 121; Rs. 36/-.

This book is a compilation of the discourses delivered by Swami Sadashivananda. The Swami was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. The discourses, mostly given in Bengali, and sometimes in Hindi, were first published in Bengali. To cater to a larger readership the Editor, the late S. K. Ganguly, translated them into English.

The Swami's discourses were informal and are not very lengthy. They were delivered at different times in different places and to different groups of devotees, therefore covering a wide field of subject matter. Reading through the book one feels that he is listening to a realized soul, something the Swami himself acknowledged. (p. 28).

The Swami has in simple style explained the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the 'tub of dye' (p. 4), and of the man cheated by the pious goldsmiths (p. 32). Likewise in a simple manner he explains why God cannot be attained by one with desires—since in truth, there is nothing but God, how can one desire any thing else besides God? (p. 5) Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna are familiar with the term '*bhāva mukha*', but all may not know what exactly it means. This is explained on page 70.

Unfortunately, the English translation leaves much to be desired. Although a page

of *Errata* has been given at the end of the book there are many printing mistakes. Nonetheless we are thankful to the Editor, Sailendra Kumar Ganguly, for making available the illuminating words of a great soul.

Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao

SOME GUIDELINES TOWARDS THE GOAL SUPREME, by Swami Gokulananda. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. 160 pages, Rs. 10.00 (Deluxe edition, Rs. 15.00)

This small book must be read, and possessed, by every sincere spiritual aspirant. Many sadhakas are known to lose their initial interest and enthusiasm and become slack in their sadhana—once again prey to worldly attractions. Constant reference to this book will, like a road map in the hands of a traveller, tell us whether we are proceeding in the right direction or whether we have taken a diversion.

The book discusses the inner call, obstacles and aids to spiritual life, annihilation of the ego, and the value of self control, which is the key to self-realisation.

Being a collection of eleven discourses given by the author, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the Swami quotes profusely from the Bhagavad Gita and Viveka Chudamani to illustrate his points. There is an error on p. 99 which we hope will be corrected in future editions, the translation given for verse 327 of Viveka Chudamani actually pertains to verse 328.

Swami Tapasyanandaji of Madras Math has written the Foreword.

Dr. Kamala Jaya Rao
Hyderabad

FOR SEEKERS OF SPIRITUALITY

MASTER : "Girindra Ghosh of Pathuria-ghata once remarked, 'Since you cannot get rid of your passions—your lust, your anger, and so on—give them a new direction. Instead of desiring worldly pleasures, desire God. Have intercourse with Brahman. If you cannot get rid of anger, then change its direction. Assume the tamasic attitude of bhakti, and say : 'What ? I have repeated the hallowed name of Durga, and shall I not be liberated ? How can I be a sinner any more ? How can I be bound any more ?' If you cannot get rid of temptation, direct it toward God. Be infatuated with God's beauty. If you cannot get rid of pride, then be proud to say that you are the servant of God, you are the child of God. Thus turn the six passions toward God."

DEVOTEE : "It is very hard to control the sense-organs. They are like horses it is necessary to prevent them from seeing at all."

MASTER : "A man need not fear anything if but once he receives the grace of God, if but once he obtains the vision of God, if but once he attains Self-Knowledge. Then the six passions cannot do him any harm.

"Eternally perfect souls like Narada and Prahlada did not have to take the trouble to put blinkers on their eyes. The child who holds his father's hand, while walking along the narrow balk in the paddy-field, may loosen his hold in a moment of carelessness and slip into the ditch. But it is quite different if the father holds the child's hand. Then the child never falls into the ditch."

DEVOTEE : "But it is not proper for a father to hold his child by the hand."

MASTER : "It is not quite like that. Great sages have childlike natures. Before God they are always like children. They

have no pride. Their strength is the strength of God, the strength of their Father. They have nothing to call their own. They are firmly convinced of that."

DEVOTEE : "Can you make a horse move forward without first covering his eyes with blinkers ? Can one realize God without first controlling the passions ?"

MASTER : "What you say is according to the path of discrimination. It is known as jnana yoga. Through that path, too, one attains God. The jnanis say that an aspirant must first of all purify his heart. First he needs spiritual exercises ; then he will attain knowledge.

"But God can also be realized through the path of devotion. Once the devotee develops love for the Lotus Feet of God and enjoys the singing of His name and attributes, he does not have to make a special effort to restrain his senses. For such a devotee the sense-organs come under control, of themselves.

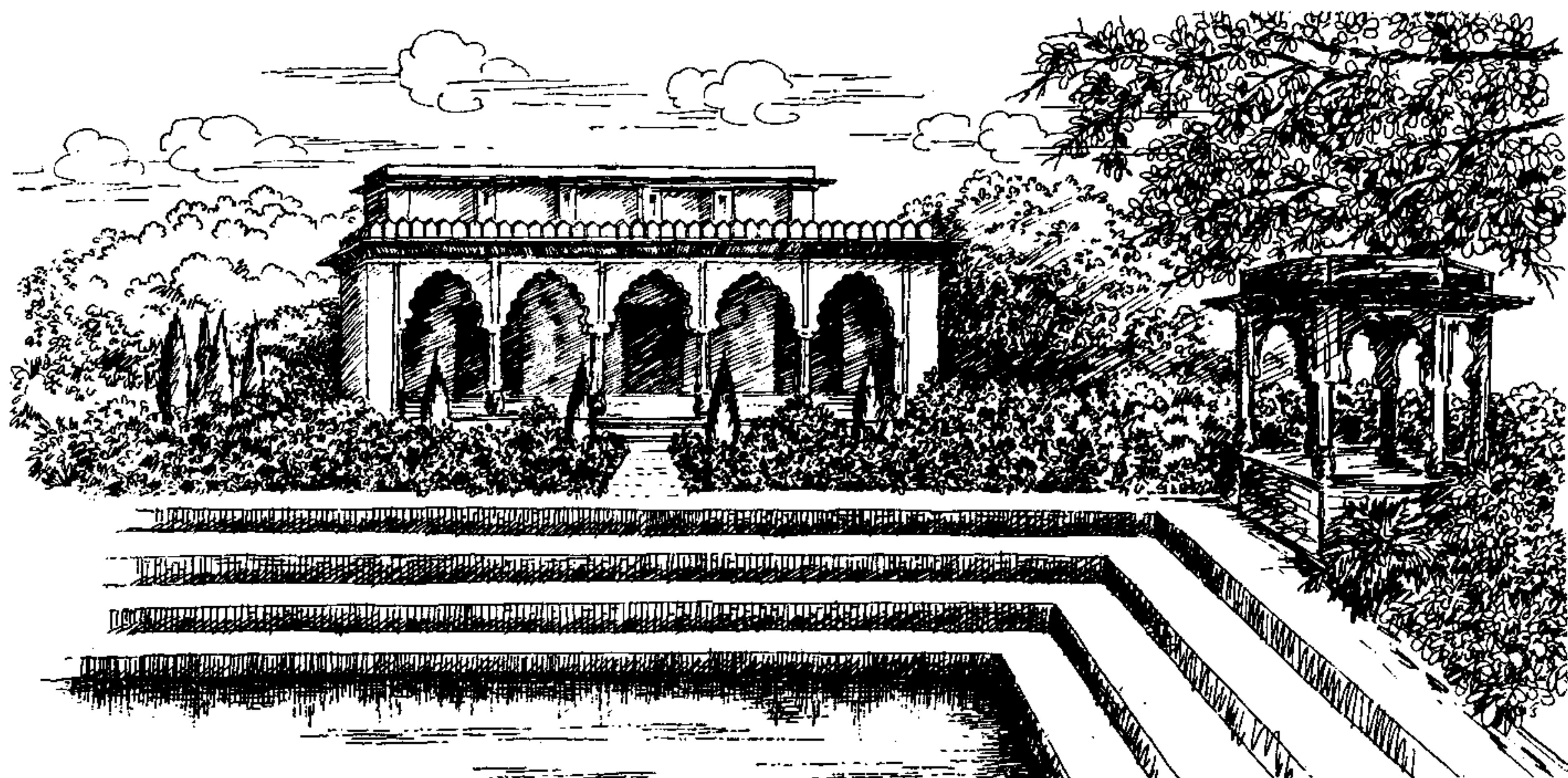
"Suppose a man has just lost his son and is mourning his death. Can he be in a mood to quarrel with others that very day, or enjoy a feast in the house of a friend ? Can he, that very day, show his pride before others or enjoy sense pleasures ?

"If a moth discovers light, can it remain in darkness any longer ?"

DEVOTEE : (*with a smile*) : "Of course it cannot. It would rather fly into the flame and perish."

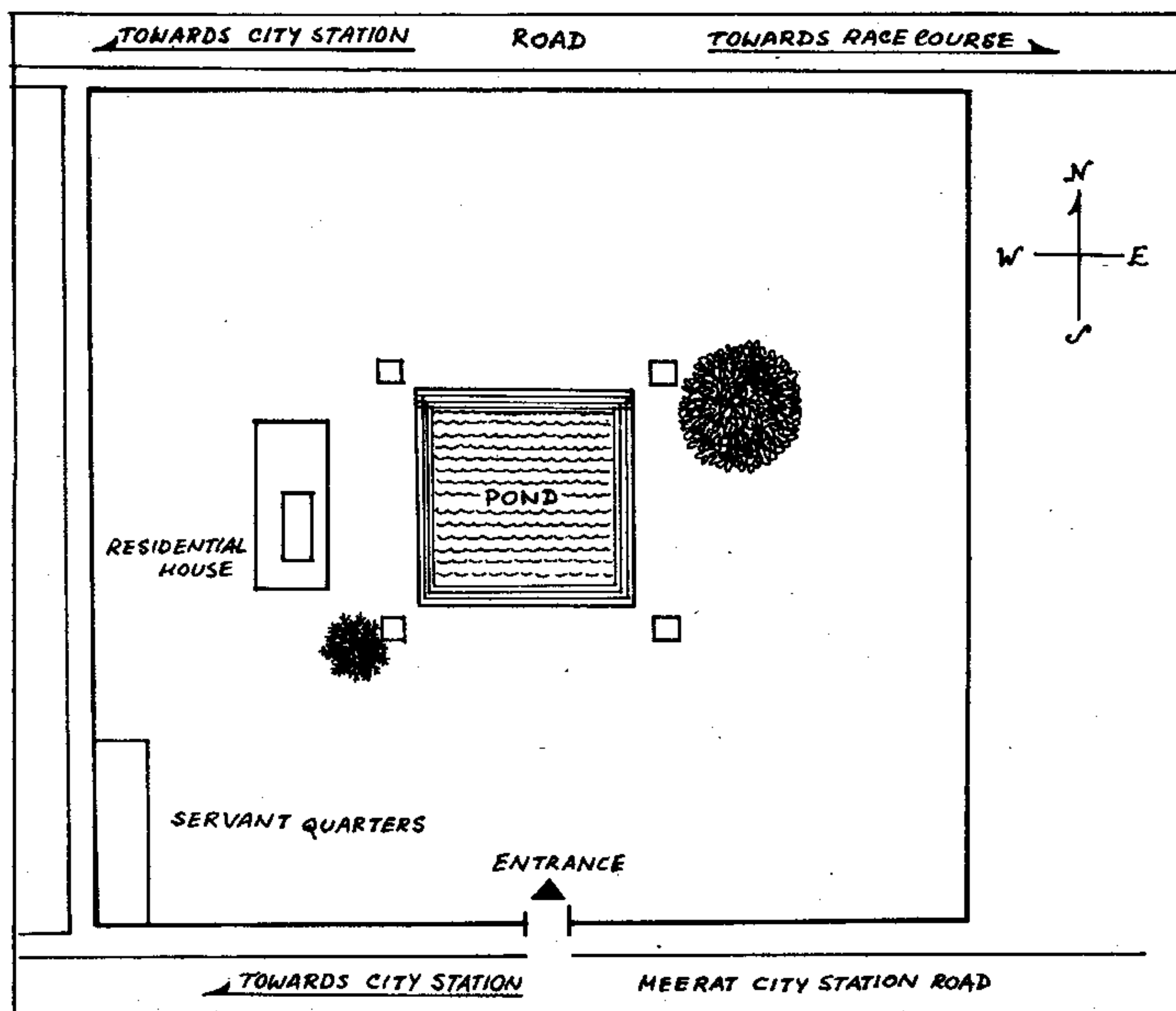
MASTER : "Oh no, that's not so. A lover of God does not burn himself to death, like a moth. The light to which he rushes is like the light of a gem. That light is brilliant, no doubt, but it is also cooling and soothing. That light does not scorch his body, it gives him joy and peace.

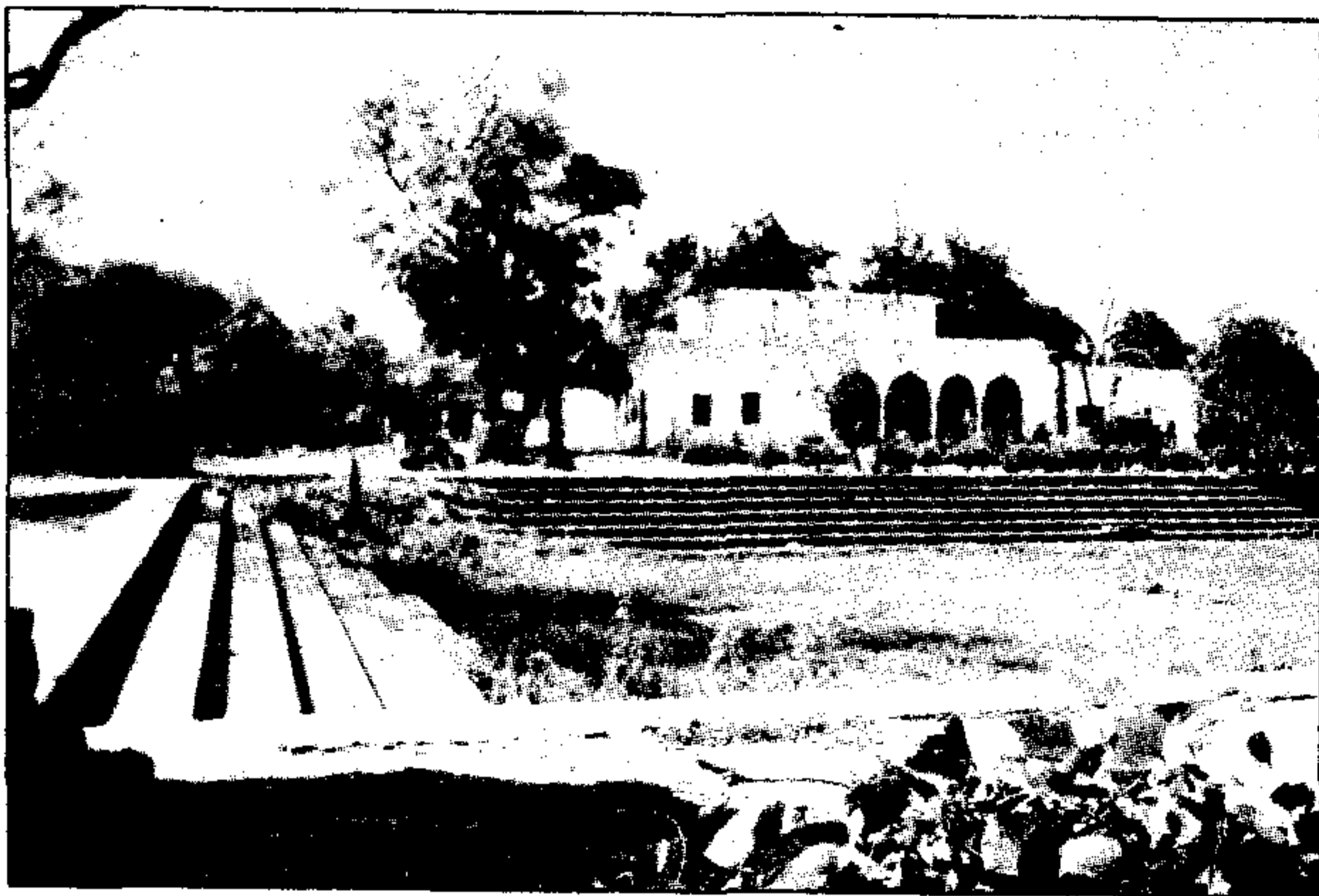
from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna



A front view of the then garden house in front of the hamam.

Artist : Bimal Sen





A view of the hamam.

A view of the house
and the hamam in
Sethji's garden



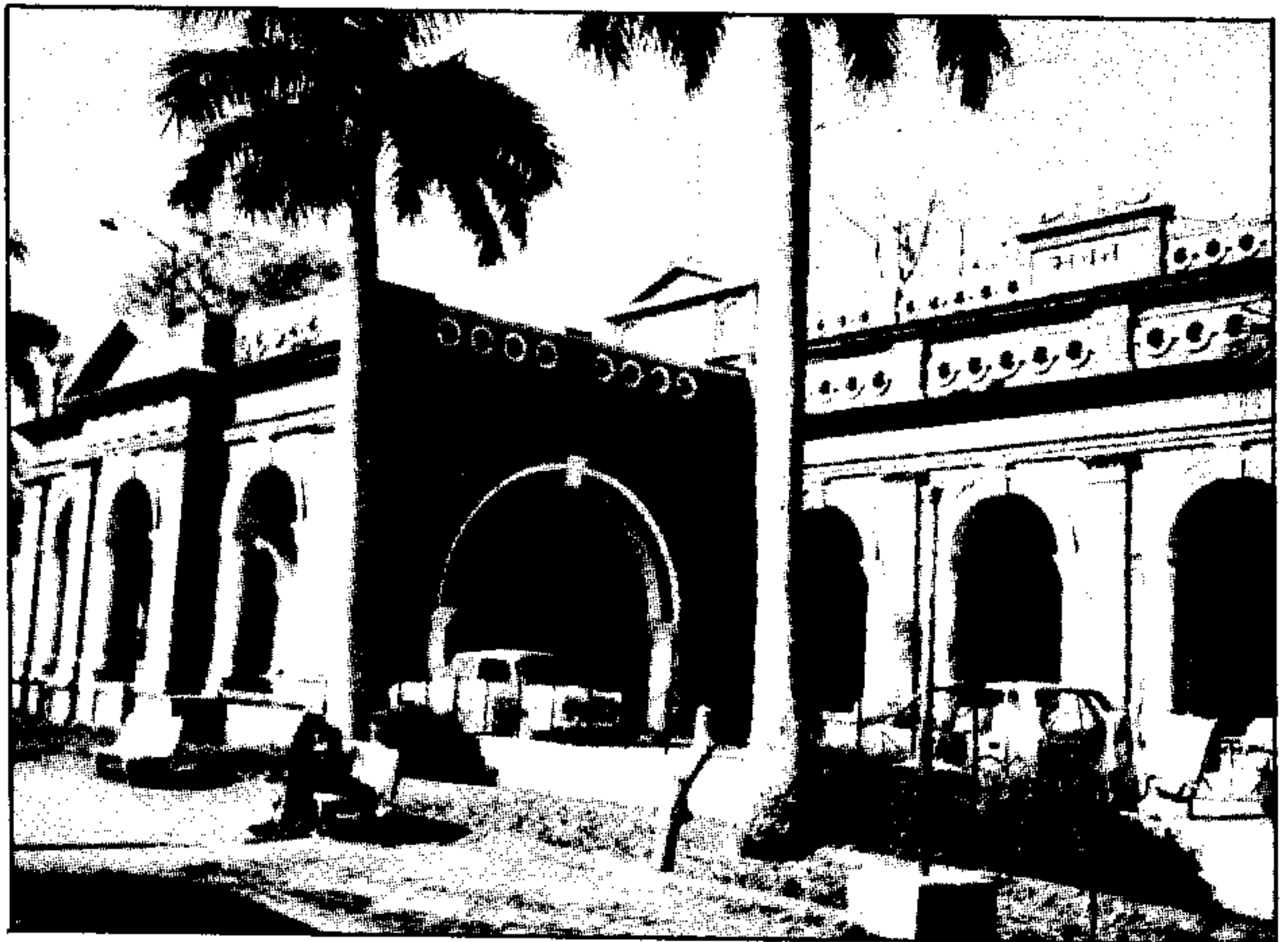
A present view of the hamam.





Town Hall Library

A view of the
Town Hall Library

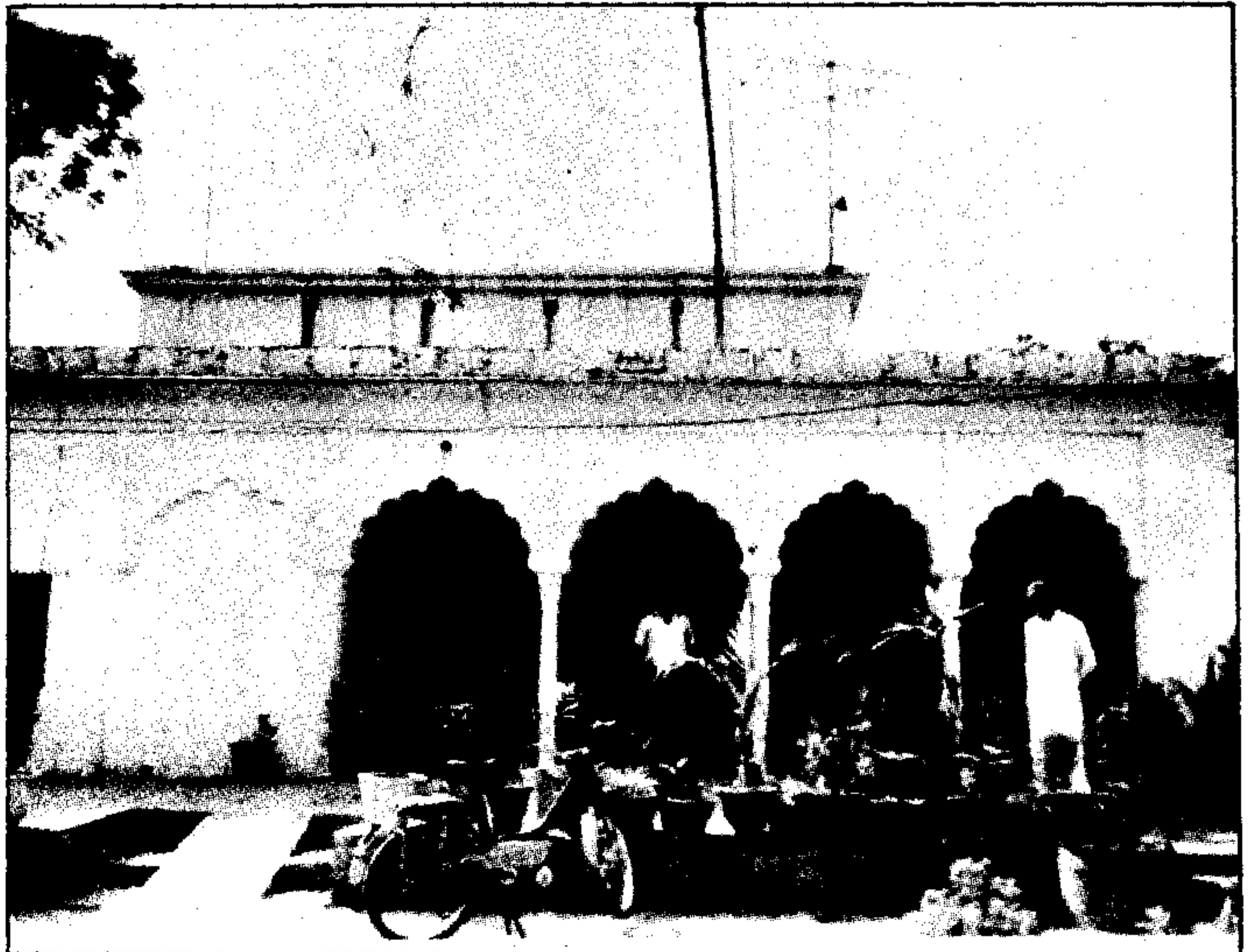


Swamiji's picture
inside the reading room
of the Library



Dr. Trailokyanath Ghosh.

Front view of
the Sethji's building
where Swamiji and
his brother-disciple
lived



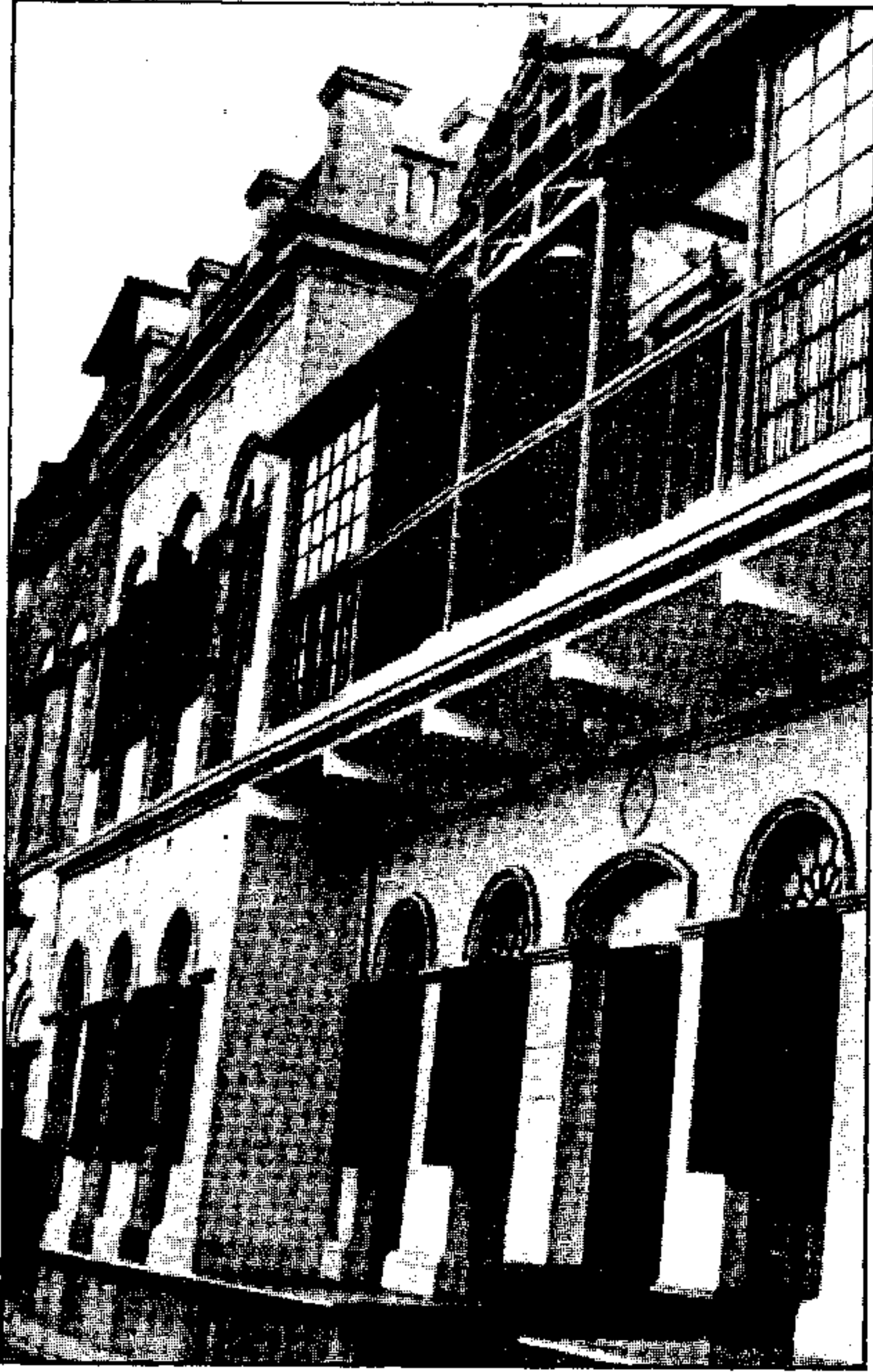


First photograph

Second photograph

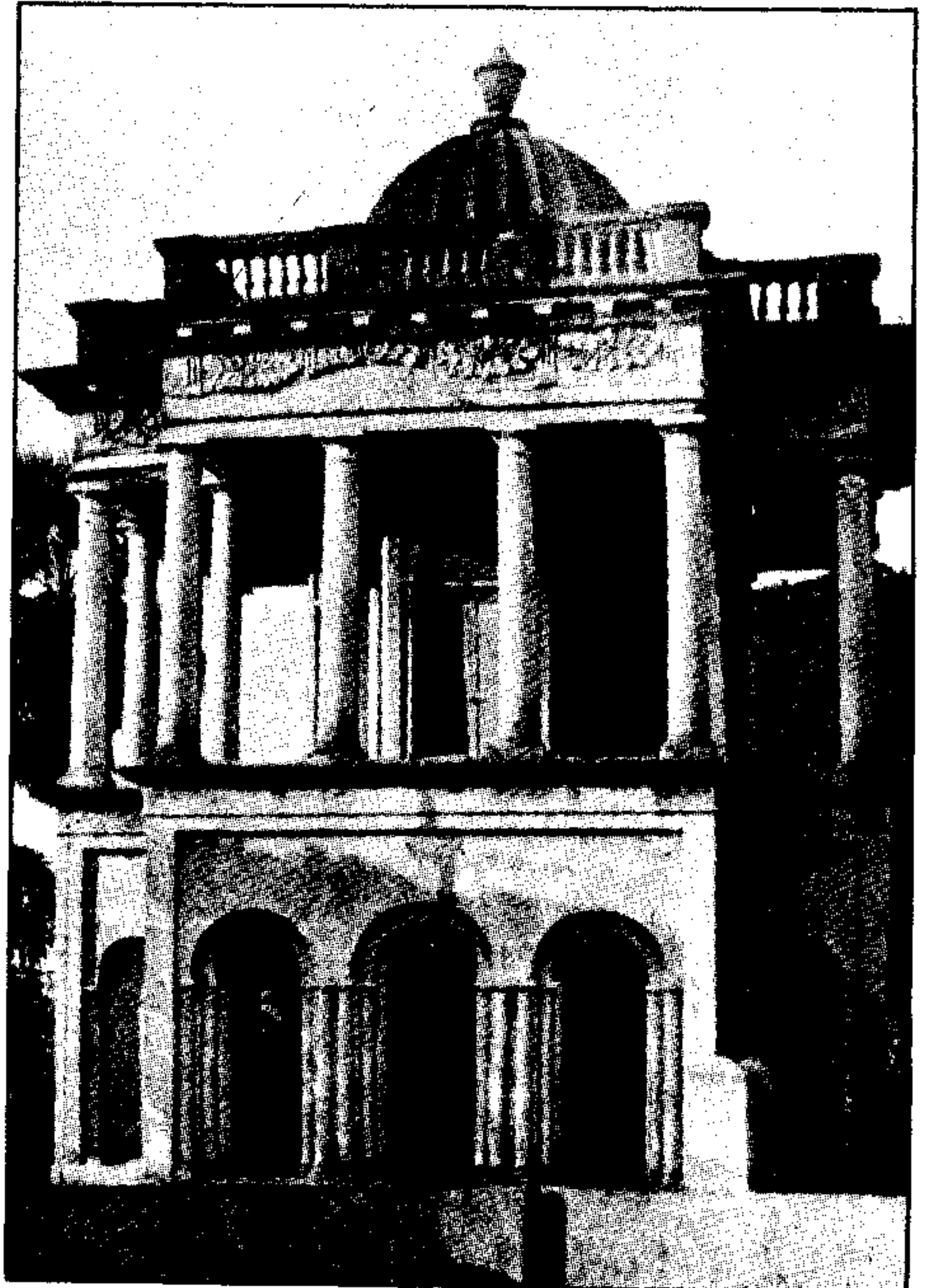


Holy Mother
with Sister Nivedita
— Third photograph

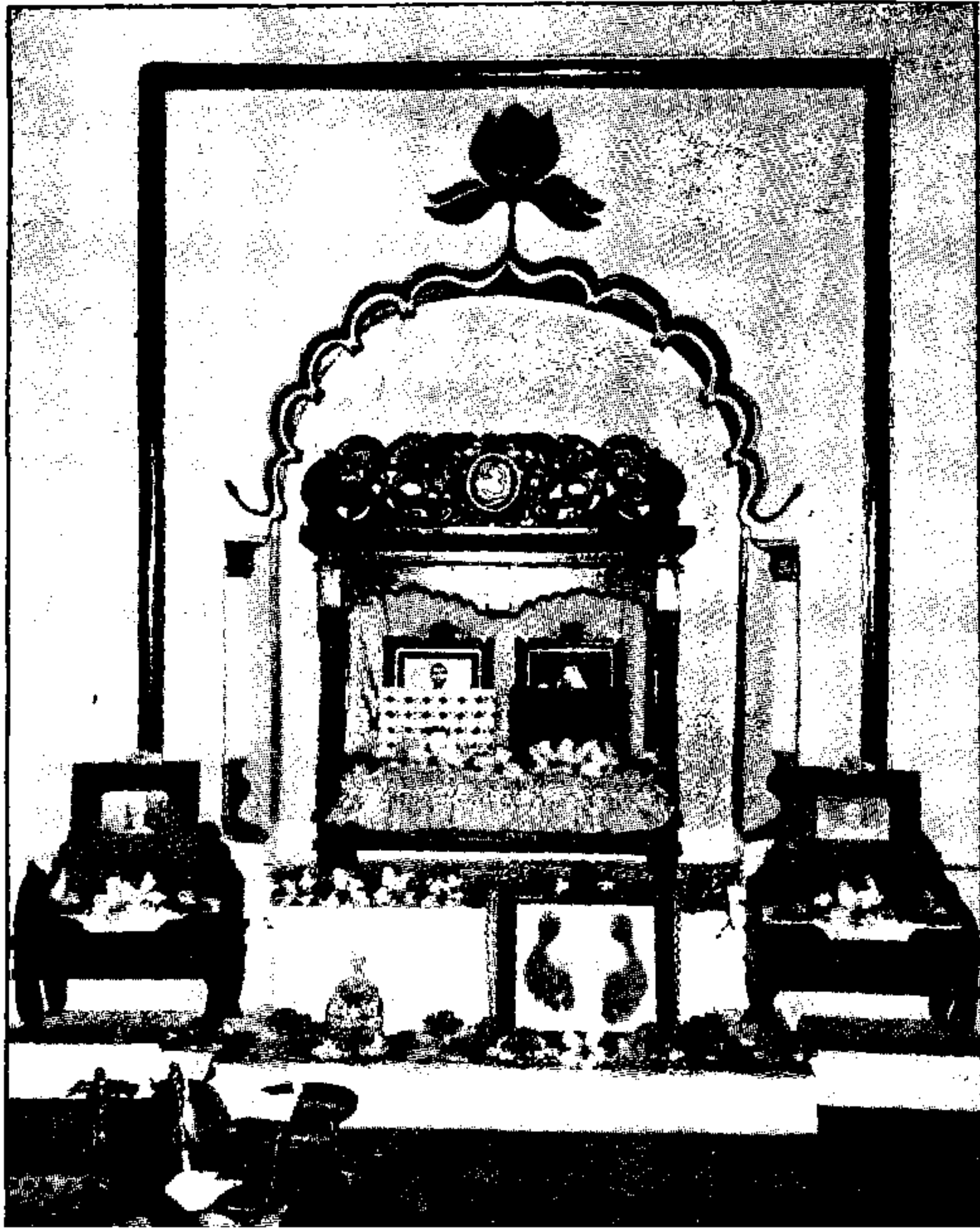


II

- I The Udbodhan Office.
- II 10/2 Bosepara Lane.
In this house the Mother's first photograph was taken.
- III Nahabat, the music tower in the temple garden of Dakshineswar.



III



The inside view of the shrine of Koalpara Ashrama. The Holy Mother installed Sri Ramakrishna's photo in the shrine along with that of her own.



Last photo of the Holy Mother (at Vishnupur)