

Prabuddha Bharata

or Awakened India



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Prabuddha Bharata

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

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No. 2

Divine Wisdom

Egotism is like a cloud that keeps God hidden from our sight. If by the mercy of the Guru egotism vanishes, God is seen in His full glory. As for instance, you see in the picture that Sri Rama, who is God, is only two or three steps ahead of Lakshmana (the *Jiva*), but Sita (*Māyā*) coming in between the two, prevents Lakshmana from having a view of Rama.

The sun can give heat and light to the whole world, but it can do nothing when the clouds shut out its rays. Similarly, so long as egotism is in the heart, God cannot shine upon it.

If I hold this cloth before me, you cannot see me any more though I am still as near to you as ever. So also, though God is nearer to you than anything else, yet by reason of the screen of egotism you cannot see him.

Q. Sir, why are we so bound? Why cannot we see God?

A. Because the idea of self is the *Māyā* of the soul. It is our egotism that shuts out the light. When this "I" is gone, all difficulty will have vanished. If by God's grace the thought that "I am not the doer" is firmly established in the heart, a man becomes free even in this life. For him there is no more fear.

So long as there is egotism neither self-knowledge (*Jñāna*) nor liberation (*Muktī*) is possible, and there is no cessation of birth and death.

The true nature of the *Jiva* is eternal Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. It is egotism that

has brought about so many *Upādhis* (limiting adjuncts), till he has quite forgotten his own nature.

The nature of the *Jiva* changes with the addition of each *Upādhi*. When a man dresses like a fop, wearing fine black-bordered muslin, the love-songs of Nidhu Bābu spring to his lips. A pair of English boots inflates even a languid man with the delight of vanity—he immediately begins to whistle, and if he has to ascend a flight of stairs, he leaps up from one step to another like a *Sahib* (European). If a man holds a pen in his hand, he will go on scratching carelessly on any paper he can lay hold of.

A *Brāhmana* who was very meek and humble used to come here every now and then. After some time he stopped coming, and we knew nothing of what had happened to him. One day we went over to Konnagore in a boat. As we were getting down from the boat, we saw the *Brāhmana* sitting on the bank of the *Gaṅgā*, where, in the fashion of big folks, he was enjoying the pure air of the river. On seeing me he accosted me in a patronising tone with the words, "Hullo Brahmin! How are you doing now?" At once I noticed a change in his tone and said to Hriday who was with me, "I tell you, Hriday, this man must have come by some riches! Can't you see what a great change has come over him?" And Hriday burst out into a loud laugh.

From *The Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*

Vivekananda and Kashmir

II

A Persian couplet eulogizing the salubrious climate, the cool fresh air of the region, says: "Bring a dead body to Kashmir, it will jump with new life; a roasted bird gets new wings and will flutter in the sky." Such is the magic of this paradise. Tradition says that the present name of Kashmir is derived from the ancient 'Kaśyapmira'. Kalhana's *Rājatarāṅginī* says that in olden times there was a lake and it was occupied by demons. The gods Kaśyapa, Upendra, and Rudra sent by Creator Brahmā, destroyed these demons and established in that place the region of Kashmir. According to *Nilāmata-purāṇa*, Kaśyapa with the help of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva destroyed the demons and established the kingdom of Kashmir. The Nāga king Nīla was the first ruler of the kingdom. Vināyaka Bhaṭṭa, in his commentary on *San̄khyayan̄brāhmaṇa*, says, "Kashmir is the land of Saraswati. People come to Kashmir for learning. (*Prajñā tatarā vadyate kāśmīre kirtyate*). The land of Saraswati, and Saradapitha, were also the other names of Kashmir. During the period of the great Epics, Kashmir was a well known centre of pilgrimage. The *Mahābhārata* says (in *Vanaparva*): "There is a palace of King Takṣak Nag in Kashmir. Those who take a dip in the sacred water of the river Viṣṭa, get all their sins washed away: they attain fruits equal to that of a Vājapeya sacrifice; and thus purified, they reach the state of perfection."¹¹ The *Mahā-*

bhārata also mentions Kashmir as a place famous for horses—*Kāśmīriva turangamī*. Jammu too was famous. "Those who go to Jambumarga and worship the gods, sages, and forefathers there, to them accrue the fruits of a horse-sacrifice, and all their desires are fulfilled." "One who reaches the sacred place of Tanḍulikāśrama in Jammu is freed from all misfortunes and goes to Brahma-loka."¹²

Gonarda, or Gonanda, the king of Kashmir, is referred to in the *Harivaṁṣa Purāṇa*, the oldest Purāṇa. According to it he was the contemporary of the Paṇḍava king, Yudhiṣṭhira of Hastinapura. He was also the friend of Jarāsandha, the powerful ruler of the Magadha kingdom. When Jarasandha attacked and chased Krishna and his family of Yadus out of Mathura, Gonanda went with his army to help his friend. But in the battle he was killed by Balarama. After the death of Gonanda, his son Damodar ascended the throne. Damodar was waiting for an opportunity to avenge the death of his

11. *Mahābhārata, Vanaparva (Tirtha Yatra Parva)* 90 and 91.

काश्मीरेष्वेव नागस्य भवनं तक्षकस्य च ।
वितस्ताख्यमिति ख्यातं सर्वपापप्रमोचनम् ॥
तत्र स्नात्वा नरो नूनं वाजपेयमवान्पुयात् ।
सर्वपापविशुद्धात्मा गच्छेद्य परमां गतिम् ॥

12. *Mahābhārata, Vanaparva (Tirtha Yatra Parva)*, 40 and 42.

जम्बुमार्गं समासाद्य देवर्षिपितृ सेवितम् ।
अश्वमेधमवान्पोति सर्वकामसमन्वितः ॥
जम्बुमार्गदुपावृत्तो गच्छेत् तण्डुलिकाश्रमम् ।
न दुर्गतिमवाप्नोति ब्रह्मलोकं च गच्छति ॥

father at the hands of Balarama, so when Krishna and Balarama attended the royal wedding of the princess of Gandhara, Damodar took a huge army and waylaid them. In the fierce battle Krishna killed Damodar. The pregnant queen, Yaśomati, wife of Damodar, was installed by Krishna as the new ruler of Kashmir. When ministers and others raised some objections, Krishna thus replied, says *Rājatarāṅginī*—

*Kāsmīrah Pārvaṭī tatra rājā jñeyo
Harāṁsajah
Nāvajñeyo sa duṣṭohapi viduṣā
bhūtimiccatā.*

“The women and the kings of Kashmir have special grace of Pārvaṭī and Siva. Even if the kings are found lacking in character, the well-meaning pandits should not hate them.”

At the time of the great *Rājasūya* sacrifice by the Paṇḍavas, the invincible Arjuna conquered Kashmir—

*Tataḥ Kāsmīrkān vīrān kṣatriyān
kṣatriyarsabhah
Vyajaya lohitaṁ caiva maṇḍalair
dasabhissaha.*

In Indian history from earliest times Kashmir always occupied an important place. It was for long a centre of great Sanskrit, Buddhist and Brahminical learning. Hsuan Tsang, the Chinese traveller who visited India in the middle of the seventh century recorded that the people of Kashmir wore leather doublets and clothes of white linen. They were handsome in appearance and loved learning. They were well instructed. The people were both Hindus and Buddhists. Hsuan Tsang wrote that there were about a hundred *Saṅghārāmas* and five thousand monks.

The great scholar Kalhaṇa (A.D. 1148) wrote the authentic history of the region in Sanskrit verse. His much acclaimed historical chronicle. *Rājatarāṅginī*, covers the entire span of Kashmir history from the then known earliest times. Kalhaṇa drew the material for his book from conventional and unconventional sources. He studied the architectural design of the temples, records of land grants, coins, royal family records, and investigated traditional legends and myths. His book, consisting of 7,826 verses, is divided into eight Tarangas or parts. The first part begins with the first king, Gonanda, the enemy of Krishna and Balarama. References are also found to the great Asoka, the Buddhist Kusana rulers, Huvishka, Huskha, and Kanishka. He also mentions the beginning of the Saka era from the date of Kanishka's coronation. The Huna mighty monarchs, Toramana and his son Mihirkula (6th century), are also mentioned. Mihirkula's conquests extended up to Karnataka and Sri Lanka. Kalhaṇa vividly paints Mihirkula as the fierce persecuter of Buddhists, and writes about his tyranny and its sad memories. Part II to part VI of *Rājatarāṅginī* give details of the kings and queens who ruled the land. 52 kings ruled for a period of 1,266 years, from the time of the Kurukṣetra war to king Abhimanyu, the successor of Kanishka in the 1st century A.D. Thirty-one kings reigned after Kanishka for 472 years, till A.D. 550. Sixty-three kings belonging to different dynasties ruled the region for 600 years, till A.D. 1150., the time of *Rājatarāṅginī*'s composition. Part VIII refers to some stormy events and the reign of Jayasimha, a contemporary of the historian. After Kalhaṇa, later historians have recorded the reigns of Muslim rulers for 500 years, starting from A.D. 1342. The Mogul kings, Akbar, Jahangir, and Sahajahan were fascinated by Kashmir and they built many gardens, etc. there. “In Kashmir,” writes Jawaharlal Nehru, “a long continued process

of conversion to Islam had resulted in 95 per cent of the population becoming Moslems, though they retained many of their old Hindu customs."¹³

As Swamiji's party had no servants he took upon himself all the little manual offices, such as going out to hire the houseboats (*Dungas*) and other things. But a man hearing that magical name, 'Vivekananda' offered himself gladly to serve Swamiji, and relieved him of these responsibilities. In three *Dungas* their memorable travel began. The Western pilgrims were in raptures. In the words of Sister Nivedita, "The whole was a symphony in blue and green and white, so exquisitely pure and vivid that for a while the response of the soul to it was almost pain!"¹⁴ When their boats were moored near a village, Vivekananda took the party to a nearby farmstead and introduced them to a handsome elderly Muslim lady, whom he had met in the previous year. They heard her say with pride, "By the grace of Allah, I am a Mussalman." Swamiji was warmly and affectionately received by the whole family.

The period from June 22 to July 15 was memorable for the disciples. They lived in the houseboats on the Jhelum and were enthralled by the company of Swamiji who charmed them with his knowledge of the country and its history. He recalled vividly the memory of the great kings like Kanishka, Buddhism, the conquest of Chenghis Khan, and the religious beliefs of the people. His conversation always culminated in the glorification of Siva. Sometimes so deeply lost he was in his exalted moods that he forgot to have breakfast. He talked one day on the religions imperialism of Asoka, which gave

in to successive waves of Christianity and Islam, each claiming exclusive rights over the conscience of mankind.

Swamiji one day started out for the temple of Kṣhir Bhavani. Not knowing of his desire to be alone, the disciples followed him. But the Muslim boatmen would not allow them to land there with shoes on.... "so thoroughly Hinduistic is the Mohammadanism of Kashmir," wrote Nivedita. In Kashmir, Swamiji composed for the forthcoming issue of *Prabuddha Bhārata* an inspiring poem, "To The Awakened India", with a view to rousing the country and giving encouragement to the new Organ of the monastic Order:

Once more awake!

For sleep it was, not death, to bring thee
life
Anew, and rest to lotus-eyes for visions
Daring yet. The world in need awaits,
O Truth!

No death for Thee!...

They went to visit the Sankarācārya hill, on the top of which stands a temple of Śiva. In ancient times King Gopaditya built the temple of *Jyeṣṭesvar* (Siva) there. The hill is also called Takt-i-Suleiman, the throne of Solomon. Its exquisite beauty and the commanding view it offers—a vast panorama for miles around—drew the exclamation from Swamiji: "Look, what genius the Hindu shows in placing his temples! He always chooses a grand scenic effect! See, the Takt commands the whole of Kashmir. The rock of Hari Parvat rises red out of blue water, like a lion couchant, crowned. And the temple of Martand has the valley at its feet!"¹⁵ He explained to the Western

¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (Distributed by Oxford University Press, India, 1982) p. 267.

¹⁴ Sister Nivedita, *Notes of Some Wanderings* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1913) p. 86.

¹⁵ *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) p. 363.

pilgrims the innate love of nature of the Hindus, which showed itself in the choice of places of extraordinary beauty for temples, monasteries and monuments.

Sri Aurobindo also said that he felt on the Sankarācārya hill—“a sense of a great infinite Reality.” Maṇḍana Mishra, the great scholar who was defeated in a debate by Sankara, and became his prominent disciple under the name Sureswaracarya, was born in Kashmir. His father Himamrita was the chief priest of the King. Maṇḍana's wife, Bhārati, who was the witness to the momentous debate between her husband and Sankara, conceding victory to Sankara called him “*Sarvajña*”—All-knowing.

*Isānah sarva-vidyānām īśvarah
sarvadehinam
Brahman adhipatiḥ bhāvan sākṣāt
sadasivah.*

“You are the Lord of all kinds of learning. You are the Master of all living beings. You are Brahman, the Lord of creation. You are Siva himself.”

Sankara had heard of *Sarvajñapīṭha*, that such, a seat of learning existed in Kashmir. He, therefore, decided to visit the valley and have a debate with the pandits there. When he arrived at Srinagar he found the learned people already familiar with his name. They had some doubts about his Advaita philosophy, but Acarya's lucid and rational interpretation of Advaita dispelled all their doubts and they installed him on the *Sarvajñapīṭha*, the throne of learning. The story is told that this *Pīṭha* (place) had four doors opening out to four directions. All the doors except the last one were open. That meant that the scholars from three directions, viz. East, West, and North, had come and won the title. But the last one was closed. It was Sankara who came from the South and opened it.

Fascinated by the beauty of Kashmir, the Acarya spent many days visiting places in the valley with his disciples. A story goes that one day, while he was camping on the bank of the river Sindhu, at its source in Kashmir, his disciples began extolling his great intellectual powers. Sankara dipped his stick into the running water of the river and lifted it out. Pointing to the drops of water falling from the end of the stick he told his disciples in all humility that his knowledge could be compared to the little moisture still adhering to the stick. It was infinitesimally small compared with the waters of the ocean. He had explored but little. What remained unexplored was unfathomable.

Amongst Sankara's disciples was a bright young boy. One day on his rounds for alms, he came to the house of a brāhmin woman who had the gift of foretelling the future. Seeing the boy she suddenly had the apprehension that the boy would die at the day's end. She conveyed this foreboding to her mother-in-law. Distressed at this sad portent, the old lady conveyed it to Sankara who was very much surprised. He came to the young lady and they discussed together the science of *Śakti*. The Acarya was highly pleased by her discussion. He gave her a head-dress called *Taranga*. He instructed the boy to engage himself in the worship of Śiva so as to escape his dire fate.¹⁶ It is believed that Sankara composed his famous hymn *Saundarya Lahari*, meaning literally “Waves of Beauty”, at Srinagar after mastering the knowledge of *Śakti-Śāstra* that was current in Kashmir.

On the fourth of July, the American Independence Day, Swamiji surprised his guests by bringing out a small American flag he had prepared for the occasion. Again they

16. S. D. Kulkarni, *Adi Sankara* (Bombay: Sri Bhagavan Vedvyasa Itihasa Sambhodhan Mandira, Publishers, 1987) p. 209.

were delighted when he read out his poem to them, "To the Fourth of July" which he had composed. The poem begins on a grand note:

Behold the dark clouds melt away,
That gathered thick at night, and hung
So like a gloomy pall above the earth ...

As is well known four years later Swamiji laid down his body.

Soon after, on 10th July, Swamiji made an attempt to go up to the holy Cave of Amarnath. He went alone and was determined, but had to turn back because of the melting of glaciers. A few days later the whole party went by their houseboats down the river to Anantnag and found the old temple of Pandrenthan. From Swamiji's lucid descriptions they learned the meaning of the shrine's architectural details, interior decorations, sculpture and other details. Summarizing the Swami's comments, Sister Nivedita wrote: "It was a direct memorial of Buddhism, representing one of the four religious periods into which he had already divided the history of Kashmir: (1) Tree and snake-worship, from which dated all the names of the springs ending in Nāg, as Veernāg, and so on; (2) Buddhism; (3) Hinduism; (4) Mohammedanism. Sculpture, he told us, was the characteristic art of Buddhism, and the sun-medallion or lotus, one of its commonest ornaments."¹⁷ The *Mahābhārata* also mentions the name of King Takṣak Nāg. It appears that the names such as Kesanāg, Seshanāg, Anantanāg and Kunkurnāg, etc., came into existence during the reign of the Karkotaka dynasty which ruled from A.D. 602 to 856. The rulers believed that they were protected by Karkotaka, the mythical serpent. Vivekananda's talk on the similarities between Vedic and

Roman Catholic rituals was superb. Almost the whole of Christian religious form was Āryan, he believed. At Achabal, Swamiji announced his intention to visit the Amarnāth shrine. His highly favoured disciple Nivedita had a rare privilege to accompany him.

The very thought of pilgrimage to Amarnāth transformed the mood of Swamiji. A surge of enthusiasm coursed through his veins. In preparation, he began practising austerities, living on one meal a day, spending most of his time with sadhus, and doing *japa* and meditation. All of the party moved towards the great shrine. It was decided that Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Ole Bull would accompany him as far as Pahalgam and wait there for his return. "There were hundreds of monks," writes Sister Nivedita, "of all orders, with their gerua tents, some no larger than a goodsized umbrella, and amongst these the Swami's influence appeared to be magnetic. The more learned of them swarmed about him at every halting place, filling his tent and remaining absorbed in conversation throughout the hours of daylight."¹⁸ Most of the monks were puzzled by his startling and liberal interpretation of religious ideas. Steeped in orthodoxy as they were, the extent of his sympathies, and his warmth and love for Islam were something almost beyond their comprehension. Even in the West, the priests and orthodox among the Christians failed to understand the religious universalism of Vivekananda's teachings. Prophets of his enormous stature come for the world and not for any particular country or community. Their lives are for the evolution of humankind, global uplift. Vivekananda had to meet some opposition from some of the narrow minded monks because of the presence of his foreign disciples. In deference to their wishes Swamiji

17. *Notes of Some Wanderings*, p. 117.

18. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1972) p. 118.

agreed to move their tents a little distance from the main camp. The Muslim officer, however, and his assistants became so devoted to Swamiji that they requested him to initiate them.

The journey to the great cave of Amarnath was arduous, the ascent steep. At times the path was very precarious and the chill at that high altitude was piercing. At 14,000 feet, on top of the world, amidst snow covered peaks like molten silver, everything was still, permeated by an ineffable silence. In the words of Nivedita, "That night for the first time silence is made perfect. No more the rushing torrent casts a veil of music over the whisper of the pines. Here is indeed a river, but hushed in an icy cradle at our feet."

Bathing at each crossing of the icy streams and clad only in the meagre cloth like other pious pilgrims, Swamiji entered the holy shrine of Śiva, Lord of the Mountains, and prostrated himself. Covered only with holy ashes and wearing only his loincloth, the radiant monk stood before the Lord. That was the rarest ecstatic moment of his life. The mighty son stood in awe before his Almighty Father. What passed between these two divine ones was not for the minds of mortals to know. It was too holy, too transcendental. A profound mystical experience overpowered Vivekananda and he hastily stepped out of the shrine, lest he should leave his mortal body on the lap of Śiva, the Auspicious. The Lord had granted his beloved son a boon, that not until he himself chose to go, would death come to him. "By the grace of Shiva," writes Sister Nivedita, "...possibly, was defeated or fulfilled that presentiment which had haunted him from childhood, that he would meet with death in a Shiva temple amongst the mountains."¹⁹ To his disciple, Sarat Chandra

Chakravarty, who met him within two or three days of his return to Belur Math, Swamiji said, "Since visiting Amarnath I feel as if Shiva is sitting on my head for twenty-four hours and would not come down."²⁰

After returning to the Valley from Amarnath, Swamiji went off in his boat by himself and remained for days in solitude. His disciples noticing a great change had come over him dared not, nor wished to, disturb his spiritually indrawn mood. Not long after, it was learned that Swamiji's desire to establish a centre in Kashmir fell through because the British Resident, Sir Albert Talbot, turned down the proposal. Vivekananda accepted it calmly as the will of the Mother. His mind was always turned towards the Divine Mother. Wherever he turned, he informed his companions, that he was conscious of the presence of the Divine Mother, as if She were a person in the room.²¹ In this tremendous devotional mood of *tapasyā*, he wrote his masterpiece "*Kali The Mother*". The same spiritual mood forced him out, to go once again to Kshir Bhavani, the famous shrine of the Universal Mother. He passed there a week in severe austerities, and worshipped the Mother with offerings of milk, rice and almonds. He also worshipped the little daughter of a Pandit as Umā Kumārī. While at Kshir Bhavani he heard the voice of the Divine Mother, and his whole outlook changed. It was a turning point in his life and once again he became a child surrendering everything to Her. The Mother had told him, "It was She who protects the universe, and everything happens according to Her will." He told his disciple Sarat Chandra, later at Belur Math, "Since

19. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

20. Saratchandra Chakravarti, *Talks With Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) p. 151.

21. *The Master As I Saw Him*, p. 126.

hearing that Divine Voice, I cherish no more plans. The idea of building Maths etc., I have given up ; as Mother wills so it will be."²²

Nivedita wrote to her friend, Mrs. Hammond on October 13: "...He came back, like one transfigured and inspired. I cannot tell you about it. It is too great for words. ...He simply talks like a child, of 'The Mother', but his soul and voice are those of a God. The mingled solemnity and exhilaration of his presence have made me retire to the farthest corner, and just worship in silence all the time."²³

In Amarnath he had the *darśan* of Śiva and touched His feet, and at Kshir Bhavani he had the rarest of mystical visions, and heard the Mother's voice. The impact of these exalted spiritual experiences on his body and mind was tremendous. He wanted to return. In the sacred land of *gandharvas*,

22. *Talks With Swami Vivekananda*, p. 154.

23. *Letters of Nivedita*, edited by Sankari Prasad Basu (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982) p. 24.

yogis and gods, Vivekananda discovered the hidden deeper currents of spirituality. Kashmir is the abode of Śiva and Umā. This sublime truth once again is brought to light by the extraordinary sage Vivekananda, of our time. No power, therefore, on this earth can ever defile the pristine purity of this land. The whole of Kashmir is filled with spiritual vibrations. There might be periods of lull or turmoil, or even upheaval, but the subterranean flow of its eternal spiritual current cannot be disturbed.

The turbulence of human society we are witnessing in the region is superficial and passing. Everyone has to pay homage to Truth and Divinity. Humankind, however varied its differences may be, is one human family. The Truth that shines through human nature will surely shine for the welfare of all. Where there is oneness, there is life ; whereas separation is death. There are sure signs that the world is moving towards unity. The Divine Mother is the Protectress of the universe. All is Her play. What the plan of the Cosmic Mind is only a Vivekananda can know.

Before Swamiji made his pilgrimage to Amarnath, someone asked him, "Sir, what would we do when we see the strong oppress the weak?" He at once replied, "Why, thrash the strong, of course!" "Even forgiveness," he said on a similar occasion, "if weak and passive, is not true! Fight is better. *Forgive* when you could bring legions of angels to an easy victory. ..." "For the householder, self-defence!"

Japa: Repetition of A Sacred Word

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

METHODS OF JAPA

Methods of performing japa are many and they vary from tradition to tradition. The methods generally considered to be orthodox are the following: (i) *Vāchika Japa*, (ii) *Upāmsu Japa*, (iii) *Mānasa Japa*, (iv) *Likhita Japa*, (v) *Akhanda Japa*, (vi) *Ajapā Japa*, (vii) *Japa at six centres of consciousness*, and (viii) *Purascharana*.

(i) **VACHIKA JAPA.** By this method, the seeker repeats the sacred word audibly.

(ii) **UPAMSU JAPA.** This is the method of repeating the sacred word semi-audibly by moving only the tongue and lips.

(iii) **MANASA JAPA.** In this method the sacred word is repeated mentally without allowing the tongue and lips to move. According to *Manu Samhita*, vachika japa is considered ten times superior to ceremonial worship, upamsu japa is ten times superior to vachika japa, and manasa japa is ten times superior to upamsu japa. Manasa japa, though considered best, is not recommended for those who lack the necessary concentration and alertness of mind. For them, the first two varieties are regarded as beneficial.

(iv) **LIKHITA JAPA.** Following this method, the seeker, instead of repeating the sacred word verbally or mentally, writes the word continuously, or for a fixed number of times.

(v) **AKHANDA JAPA.** This is the method of repeating a sacred word a specific number of times without a break, or for a fixed period of time, such as from sunrise to

sunset. Akhanda japa is often performed rhythmically and congregationally.

(vi) **AJAPA JAPA.** In this method, japa is performed by repeating the sacred word mentally at all times and with every breath.

(vii) **JAPA AT SIX CENTRES OF CONSCIOUSNESS.** There is another method in which the seeker performs japa at the six centres of consciousness, also known as lotuses. The locations of these six centres within us, from the lowest to the highest, are: at the organ of evacuation, near the organ of generation, in the region of the navel, in the heart, in the throat, and between the eyebrows. The seeker begins his japa by concentrating on the lowest centre and gradually begins to move upward from centre to centre, finally rising above the six centres to reach the crown of the head where the individual consciousness comes in contact with the Universal Consciousness. He comes down following the reverse order and then repeats the process again.

(viii) **PURASCHARANA.** Purascharana is the ritualistic way of performing japa as part of a spiritual vow. In this vow the seeker performs japa a certain number of times every day methodically increasing or decreasing the number of repetitions. He may begin on the first day after the full moon by repeating the sacred word 1,000 times. The next day he repeats the word 2,000 times and the next day 3,000 times, thus increasing the number until the day of the full moon when he reaches 15,000. From the day after the full moon he begins to reduce the number by

1,000 each day, finally coming down to 1,000 at the next new moon. The seeker may continue such practice over a period of one, two or three years, as his spiritual teacher directs. As part of purascharana the seeker is required to perform certain special religious duties such as alms-giving, and so forth. Additional practice of japa is considered a substitute for such duties.

According to the *Yoginihridaya Tantra*, places appropriate for the practice of purascharana are: a riverbank; a mountain cave; the confluence of a river and the ocean; the ground beneath a bilwa, asvattha, or amalaki tree, or near a tulasi plant; a forest; a temple; a holy shrine; or one's own home. The seeker who takes such a vow to practice japa for a certain period should use only kusa grass as his bed, must not indulge in the enjoyment of music, must not bathe in warm water, and must not worship any deity other than his Chosen Ideal. There are six major views of Tantra regarding the directions for the practice of purascharana. According to the *Kulārṇava Tantra*, purascharana consists of performing japa, along with ceremonial worship and fire sacrifice, three times daily, at dawn, midday, and evening, for a fixed period. The number of repetitions is to be gradually increased each day. The *Mundamālā Tantra* gives a second view, according to which purascharana is a vow to perform japa continuously for a fixed period of time, keeping the number of repetitions the same each day. A third view says that purascharana is a vow to perform japa during the periods of solar or lunar eclipses. Japa should start when the eclipse begins and continue until it ends. The seeker is required to fast and repeat the sacred word either standing waist deep in a river that falls into the ocean, or sitting in a sacred spot after bathing in some holy water. A fourth view describes purascharana as a vow to repeat the sacred word continuously from

sunrise to sunset for a specific number of days, or to perform japa one thousand times daily from the eighth day of one dark fortnight to the eighth day of the next. *Shāradā-tilaka*, another text of Tantra, gives us the fifth view that says purascharana is a vow to repeat the sacred word 1,200,000 times. According to a sixth view, the nature of the seeker's sacred word determines the number of repetitions in the practice of purascharana. For example, there is one particular sacred word, representing the Divine Mother Bhuvaneshwari, which requires 3,200,000 repetitions and 320,000 fire sacrifices. That is to say, if the seeker daily repeats the sacred word ten thousand times and performs fire sacrifice one thousand times, for three hundred twenty days, then his purascharana becomes complete. The essence of all the views regarding the practice of purascharana is that the sacred word should be repeated a great number of times without a break, with concentration and devotion.

PRACTICE OF JAPA

Japa does not require any special preparations or formal observances. It can be practiced under all conditions, anywhere and at any time. Yet this does not mean that japa is just mechanical repetition of a sacred word without thought or feeling. Success in japa depends neither upon the method of practice nor upon the number of repetitions, but upon repeating the sacred word with whole-souled devotion. Devotion becomes whole-souled when our speech, mind and soul all join in the repetition. Devotion brings spontaneous concentration, which culminates in absorption. Japa gradually merges in meditation. But devotion, in order to grow, must be rooted in the mind and for the development of roots, orthodox observances and habits, as enjoined by the sacred texts, are vital in the beginning. Such observances and habits are needed for two

reasons. First, they help invoke the spiritual mood, and second, they give the practice depth. Without the spiritual mood, japa becomes dry and mechanical; and without depth, it becomes casual and superficial. Emphasizing the necessity of ceremonial observances, Sri Ramakrishna says: "When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya (ceremonial practice of japa and meditation) any more. Then only will you have the right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rama or Hari, or even simply Om."⁹

Regarding special observances in the practice of japa, the sacred texts of Vedanta, Tantra, and Yoga give us specific guidelines. These are with regard to: (i) *Environment*, (ii) *Posture*, (iii) *Place*, (iv) *Keeping a fixed time*, (v) *Way of articulation*, (vi) *Keeping count of the number of repetitions*, (vii) *Seat*, (viii) *Pace of repetition*, (ix) *Alertness of mind*, (x) *Reflection on the meaning*, (xi) *Loyalty to the sacred word*, and (xii) *Adherence to a fixed centre of consciousness*.

(i) **ENVIRONMENT.** Japa is to be practised secretly and in solitude. A sacred text says: "Gifts given without being made public, knowledge acquired without vanity, and japa done in secrecy, will be infinitely potent in their results."¹⁰ The sacred word which the seeker receives from the teacher at the time of his initiation is very personal to him. He must not speak of it to anybody except his

teacher. The purpose of keeping it secret is not for any occult or mystical reason but in order to let it sink deeper and deeper into the seeker's consciousness. It is secret because it is most sacred.

(ii) **POSTURE.** Seated posture with straight back and crossed legs is considered favorable for the practice of japa. Following are testimonials of the sacred texts in regard to posture. According to the *Prapancasāra*, "One should have a light stomach and should have had sound sleep before sitting for japa and meditation, on a proper seat, in a clean spot, with eyes closed and facing east. Let him sit straight with the palms of his hands placed in the lap, right over left, well-stretched, with his mind and senses alert and calm, and think that he is a harmonious and undistracted agent performing the act of japa and meditation. The aspirant must not be nodding his head or exposing his teeth, and must repeat the sacred word distinctly and clearly."¹¹ Bhāradvāja says that "japa is adversely affected by spitting, yawning, getting angry, feeling sleepy or hungry, as well as by inadvertence and seeing low and sinful people."¹² Brihaspati maintains that "while doing japa one should not be pacing about, laughing, looking at someone, leaning on a wall, talking, having the head covered, placing one foot or hand over the other, allowing the mind to wander, or uttering the sacred word aloud so that others may hear."¹³ The *Smritichandrikā* says, "Japa and other religious practices done while running, standing, or doing some other activity are fruitless."¹⁴

Japa is practised either with eyes closed or half-closed, or with eyes open. With eyes

9. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984) p. 77.

10. Quoted in *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, trans. by Swami Tyagishananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1972) p. 181.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

closed or half-closed, the seeker keeps his mind focused on the form or symbol of his Ishtam (Chosen Ideal) within his heart as he repeats his sacred word. Following this method, the seeker may choose to mentally offer a flower to his Ishtam each time he repeats the sacred word. With eyes open, the seeker is advised to fix his gaze on the form of his Ishtam, outside and in front of him, while he repeats his sacred word. He should think that his Ishtam is seated before him, looking toward him, pleased to hear his repetition and anxious to shower His grace on him. Distractions in japa are quite common in the beginning. They are due to the resistance of the mind, which is by nature restless and outgoing. As a way of overcoming distractions, Sri Ramakrishna advises the seeker to think that his mind is tied to the feet of his chosen form of the Divine with a silken thread and thus to repeat his sacred word.

(iii) PLACE. Japa can be practiced at any place. Yet, there are places that are considered especially beneficial for the practice of japa because of their holy associations and vibrations. These are temples or holy shrines, places of sacred memory, or any other place where japa has been performed by many seekers of God over a long period. Also considered auspicious are holy places of pilgrimage, and places associated with the life of the seeker's Ishtam. It is said that the presiding Deity of the sacred place, being pleased by the seeker's earnest practice of japa, destroys the impurities of his mind. The places which are considered unfavorable for japa are those where people are averse to thinking of God, where holy men are not honoured, where charity and austerities are not practised, and which are inhabited by ferocious animals.

(iv) KEEPING A FIXED TIME. According to the sacred texts, japa is to be performed

regularly, at fixed hours. By so doing, one develops a strong modification of mind for doing japa at those hours. Regularity helps develop a rhythm in our body and mind. If we take our meals at fixed times everyday, our body will feel the need for food at those times. If we go to sleep daily at a fixed time our body will feel the need for sleep at that time. So it is with the practice of japa. Being habituated to perform japa at certain hours, our mind will feel the need and inclination to repeat the sacred word at those times. Scrupulous adherence to maintaining fixed hours strengthens our willpower and hastens our spiritual progress. The most auspicious hours for the practice of japa are the four quarters of the day: the hour preceding daybreak; midday; the junction of the day and night; and midnight. The sacred texts maintain that at those times nature becomes tranquil. Our body and mind, being part of nature, are influenced by that tranquillity, and thus are in a favorable state for spiritual practices. There are also certain special days regarded as auspicious for the practice of japa: the full moon day, the new moon day, the eighth and eleventh days of both dark and bright fortnights, and the days of the special annual worships of the various Divine manifestations.

(v) WAY OF ARTICULATION. The sacred texts maintain that in japa the sacred word must be correctly articulated. That is to say, all three aspects of our being—body, mind, and soul—should join harmoniously in the utterance. It is a common experience that while the lips utter, the mind does not join in. Even when the mind and lips utter together, the soul does not take part. But, when all three unite, the sacred word is found to rise up from the deepest layers of our being. At that stage, the vibration of the sacred word is felt in all the levels of our conscious-

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Reflections on the Meaning of Sri Ramakrishna for Women

ANN MYREN

(Continued from the previous issue)

At Jayrambati she took care of her family. Why, we might ask, did she choose this way of life rather than maintaining herself at Kamarpukur or going to Calcutta and living with the devotees who could take care of her? We have already seen that by leaving Kamarpukur she removed herself from carping villagers. In Jayrambati she was known and loved. A second answer is that she needed the freedom of her own village to carry out her spiritual mission. It is improbable that she would have either the position and necessary freedom in Kamarpukur. A third reason for her returning to her village is that her mission could find expression in the life of a woman who *managed* a household. If she lived with devotees or at Kamarpukur, she would always be dependent. She would never have had the independence necessary to carry out her spiritual charge.

Jayrambati remained one of Sarada Devi's homes for the rest of her life. But although she loved the freedom of life in her own village, she often visited Calcutta where she lived with devotees. In Calcutta she did not have her own residence until the Udbodhan was ready for her in 1909. On her visit to Calcutta in 1893 one of the places she stayed was Nilambar Babu's house located just a short walk away from Belur Math. It was here at Nilambar Babu's house that two very important events took place.

The first important event for Sri Sarada Devi was the *Panchatapa* or Austerity of Five

Fires. On the roof of the house, four fires of dried cow-dung were lighted about six or seven feet apart, forming a square. The fifth was the sun. Performance of this ritual required that the participants, Sarada Devi and Yogin Ma, bathe in the Ganga, enter into the centre of the square of fires and meditate from sunrise until sunset. The ritual was continued for seven consecutive days. The purpose was to assuage Sarada Devi's 'inner fire', the awful pain she felt from the loss of the Master. It did help some, but later in her life she explained that she did it for the devotees who could not practise austerities.⁴⁴

The second important event was a vision of Sarada Devi's. One moonlit night she was sitting on the steps to the Ganga when she saw Sri Ramakrishna come from behind her and go quickly into the Ganga where his body dissolved in the waters of the river. Then suddenly Naren appeared, crying 'Victory unto Ramakrishna'. Scooping water up in his hands, Swamiji began to sprinkle it on the men and women who were gathered around. Immediately they were liberated.⁴⁵ This vision affirmed the central fact of Sarada Devi's life, that the Master had a cosmic purpose, and that she too had a purpose. Further, it affirmed the fact that Swamiji had an all-important place in the Master's work. She saw in the vision what the Master expected from his beloved Naren, Swami

44. Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, 110-11.

45. *Ibid.*, 110.

Vivekananda. Perhaps this is one reason that Sarada Devi's mission which began in the mid-1890's did not get fully underway until after 1902, the year of Swamiji's death.

During the early 1890's Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, the young men, were mostly out wandering all over India. Sarada Devi knew only a few of them very well, so they did not pay much attention to her nor did she expect any. However, Naren was well aware of her. Before he went to America he showed his great reverence for Sarada Devi by asking for blessings which she gave readily. Her knowledge from her vision of Naren's role in the work certainly gave her a deep understanding of the way the work would unfold. On his part, Swamiji was aware of the material circumstances of Sri Sarada Devi and had a keen insight into the role she was to play in the work. In 1894 Swamiji wrote from America to Swami Shivananda:

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. ... Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world. ... Hence it is her math that I want first. ...⁴⁶

The prophet Vivekananda did understand the 'wonderful significance' of Sri Sarada Devi, born to revive Śakti, the feminine principle of creation, the dynamic or creative power present in all women. It is from this principle that all the richness of the universe, its variety, energy and attractiveness, flows. This Śakti when awakened can become a

46. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986), 181.

new creative force for the good of all humanity. Swamiji realized the necessity of establishing a women's math where Sri Sarada Devi could train women for the upliftment of India. He continued, explaining the need of Śakti for the regeneration not only of India but of the world. In his letter he said:

Without the grace of Shakti nothing is accomplished. What do I find in America and Europe?—the worship of Shakti, the worship of Power. Yet they worship Her ignorantly through sense-gratification. Imagine, then, what a lot of good they will achieve who will worship Her with all purity, in *Sattvika* spirit, looking upon her as mother!⁴⁷

Here we see on what a scale Swamiji envisioned his mission by including the West where 'Power' is already worshipped. But this sense-based worship of the West must be given a new turn and become pure or *sattvika*. Śakti must be looked upon as mother, that is loved, respected and given a place of honour. This is unquestionably why he relied on the women in America for help with his mission. He both understood their full potential and helped them to take advantage of it, entrusting them with his work. He continued:

I am coming to understand things clearer every day, my insight is opening out more and more. Hence we must first build a math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons—can you understand this?... To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me.... In this terrible winter I am lecturing from

47. *Ibid.*, 181.

place to place and fighting against odds, so that funds may be collected for Mother's math.⁴⁸

Why is Mother's grace more valuable than Father's? Because it is the feminine power, Śakti, which will change and reinvigorate the world. At this time Swami Vivekananda certainly had the Mother on his mind, and had the intention of establishing a women's math before a men's. Women who renounced the world to live in a women's math could become a force for inspiration and change, helping women direct their spiritual power for the good of humanity. However, it did not happen that way. The women's math, Ramakrishna Sarada Math, was not established until 1954. And, incidentally, women established it. Further, another recent phenomenon has occurred in the last three decades. The energy of women to reform, which was awakened in the nineteenth century, has reasserted itself. Today women all over the world have begun to use their power in all manner of ways to improve family, community and nation.

Exactly how can we understand this Śakti? What is it in its essence? In what way was it known by the Master? And how did Sri Sarada Devi manifest Śakti? First, we must review an experience the Master had of this feminine creative power. Sister Nivedita gave this account:

Ramakrishna used to see a long white thread proceeding out of himself. At the end would be a mass of light. This mass would open, and within it he would see Mother with a *vina*. Then She would begin to play; and as She played, he would see the music turning into birds, animals and worlds and arrange themselves. Then She would stop playing and

they would all disappear. The light would grow less and less distinct till it was just a luminous mass, the string would grow shorter and shorter, and the whole would be absorbed into himself again.⁴⁹

It is generally believed that the goddess in this vision is Saraswati because she played the *vina*, which is Saraswati's instrument. It is through sound, *śabda-brahman*, that the creation of forms takes place—in this vision from the sounds of the *vina*. When Saraswati played the *vina*, the sounds of her notes created worlds.

Once the Master referred to Sarada Devi as Saraswati. He told Golap Ma, 'She (Mother) is Sarada, Saraswati; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people would come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people would come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes.'⁵⁰ Another time the Master said, 'She is the communicator of knowledge, she is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run? She is my Śakti (power).'⁵¹

There are several points here that need exploration and clarification. But first, we must nail down the powers and characteristics of the goddess Saraswati. Saraswati's dominant trait is her association with speech. Speech is central to the power of creation. The word precedes creation. It is through speech that the mantra is brought to life in order to evoke the deity. Speech allows for the transmission of ideas, thought, and know-

49. Eastern and Western Admirers, 3rd ed., *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), 278.

50. Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 114. The author notes that Sarada or Sharada means Saraswati.

51. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, 181-2.

ledge among individuals. Saraswati is also identified with intellect, the power of memory, the power of knowledge, the power of forming ideas, and intelligence. Besides all of these capacities, which allow for the development of culture, she also has a primordial or absolute nature. She is seen as Mother of the world, as one whose form is power or Śakti, who contains all forms within herself.⁵² This is how Sri Ramakrishna saw her in his vision—as the creatrix of the universe, manifesting her power through sound by the creation of forms.

Sri Ramakrishna clearly stated that Sarada Devi is Saraswati. If one is tempted to say that this was simply metaphorical speech then the whole reality of the Master's union of the subjective with the objective—the vision was 'absorbed in himself'—of pervasive divinity, can not be supported. We would have to conclude that all of his divine experiences, his visions, his internal knowledge were metaphorical, more or less poetical knowledge, which did not come from experience, but was a product of his imagination. The experience of Absolute Reality is what is important to us. It is this experience in the Master's life that draws us to him, his grounding in Divinity, his total absorption in Divinity. We must conclude that Sri Sarada Devi was, in fact, Saraswati, and that she had in full measure the powers and attributes of the goddess. And as we have seen from the description of the goddess Saraswati, one of her major attributes was the power of knowledge.

Sri Sarada Devi was, according to the Master, his Śakti, that is the embodiment of power. Śakti also embodies knowledge, for there could be no creation without knowledge. We see the demonstration of knowledge in

both the Master's life and the life of Sri Sarada Devi. The Master could with a touch, word, or glance give knowledge. He could impart the full knowledge of Brahman or give in smaller measure, just the right impetus to put a devotee on the way to God. The word 'knowledge' in this case means the living reality of the Spirit and should not be confused with concepts, abstractions, philosophies, or the understanding of the four yogas. It was experience of the Real he gave. At times it was immediate experience, as in the case of Swami Vivekananda when he had *nirvikalpa samadhi*. Or at other times he gave 'seed' knowledge by means of a mantra to be used to awaken the divinity within. It is knowledge that brings us to the highest Reality, whether a person follows the path of emotion, knowledge, action, or control of the mind.

Sri Sarada Devi also embodied knowledge. As mentioned before, she received the fruits of all of the Master's spiritual practices when he performed the worship of *Sodāṣī*. All of his knowledge from his extensive practices entered into her very being and became her knowledge. When Sri Ramakrishna called her Saraswati, he knew whereof he spoke. He was stating clearly the fact that she was divinity herself, endowed with the power of knowledge. When she was initiating a person, the *līṭā* to be given appeared to her in no time at all. She knew intuitively which mantra to give. She frequently anticipated the devotee's wish for initiation or a particular blessing. She knew who should touch her and who should not. And with regard to her power, she could forgive all sins and grant liberation. Sometimes she told devotees who came to her that they did not have to do anything to gain liberation. She would do it all. She had overflowing power! We know her more by her actions than words; she rarely admitted to anyone her divine nature. But she took the attitude as if all

52. David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 61-2.

powers were within her hands. And wonderfully and strangely, all of this power, this saving knowledge, was in a mother-heart. Sri Sarada Devi is the mother, the mother of all, even of the cat.

There were times when Sarada Devi's mother-heart was tested, not only by devotees, although they too could be difficult, but also by her own family. She gathered her family into her great heart. It seems that she need not have had the burden of such a difficult family, afflicted with greed, insanity, violence and aberrant behaviour. It sounds quite modern, doesn't it? She could have lived exclusively with her devotees, never stretching out her hand to anyone, and keeping her financial independence from the income which the Master had arranged for from the paddy at Kamarpukur and from an investment Balaram Bose had made. Later she received some money from Sara Bull. But when she made the decision to leave Kamarpukur for Jayrambati, two conditions of her life were settled. She committed herself to caring for her family. In fact, she really entered into a new life, in which she would be the dominant figure. And she set the stage for an unlikely family drama which would have obvious significance for the late twentieth century and centuries thereafter.

Although Shyamasundari, Sarada Devi's mother, lived until 1906 and was the matriarch, Sarada Devi was really head of the family. Her brothers had lived with other relatives after their father's death, but they returned to their ancestral home to live with Sarada Devi, their older sister. Having raised her brothers, she had the influence over them which comes from being the eldest. Also we must consider her personality. Although she is often reported to have been treated like an ordinary person by her family, one cannot help but think that with her steady-mindedness, and her wonderful detachment, that

she frequently must have been perceived as a very powerful woman. The facts, however, do not always support this conclusion. For example, when her mother asked her who she really was, she gave no clue. Obviously, her mother had some inkling about Sarada Devi's origins from an unusual experience she had before Sarada Devi's birth. But Sarada Devi would not make any comment about her origins. And when Shyamasundari declared that she wanted her to be her daughter in a future life, Sarada Devi objected on the grounds that she did not want to raise her mother's children again. It seems that Sarada Devi never disclosed her spiritual power to her family in a straightforward way, but she did initiate some of them. Her authority came from her ability to manage the family and solve the problems that such a discordant group could create, and from her everyday conduct and bearing rather than from recognition of her spiritual power. Had her family truly understood her, they certainly would have acted differently, we hope.

The characters in this drama were her relatives who at times numbered as many as twenty. Until 1909 the whole family lived in the ancestral home. Then in 1909 the property was divided among the three brothers, Prasanna, Kalikumar, and Barada. Because of the argumentative nature of the brothers, it was necessary for Swami Saradananda to oversee the division of the property. Even with the Swami's even-handedness, Prasanna and Kalikumar had a scuffle over the disposition of the family papers. When it came to the property, Prasanna, the eldest, received the ancestral home where Sarada Devi then lived.⁵³ She along with her immediate charges continued to live mainly at Prasanna's, when she was in Jayrambati, until 1916 when her own new house was

53. Gambhirananda, *Sri Sarada Devi*, 228-9.

finished. When she finally moved into her own house, she had fewer of her family living with her, but by that time there were many more devotees as well as monks who visited her.

Sarada Devi's youngest brother, Abhay-charan or Abhay, was dearest to her heart. He married, became a doctor, fathered a daughter born posthumously, and died in 1899 at a young age. But before he died, he had made Sarada Devi promise him that she would take care of his wife, Surabala. She had an unhappy childhood; her mother had died when Surabala was a child. When she grew up she was not very strong mentally, and gradually she became unbalanced. A scare from an encounter with a thief in Sarada Devi's kitchen destroyed her remaining mental stability, and from that time on she was really insane.⁵⁴ Early in 1900 Surabala gave birth to a child named Radharani or Radhu. Sarada Devi, of course, fulfilled her promise to Abhay and looked after the mother and child. But not without unbelievable trouble. Years later, when Radhu had become addicted to her opium medicine, Surabala accused Sarada Devi of encouraging the opium habit. In anger she picked up a stick of firewood to attack Sarada Devi, who called for help. A disciple came and snatched the stick away from Surabala before she could hit her.⁵⁵ Not only was Surabala unbalanced, but so was her daughter, Radhu. But as Sarada Devi knew, they all had their parts to play. But how did this drama begin?

It so happened that one day at Jayram-bati, Sarada Devi asked the Master why she should keep her body any more. Then suddenly she had a vision of a girl about ten years old, dressed in a red cloth. Sri Rama-

krishna appeared immediately and said that Sarada Devi should take the child as her support and that many spiritual seekers would come to her. Later on she recognized the child in the vision as her niece, Radhu.⁵⁶ Surabala really could not take care of Radhu by herself. To help Surabala and the child, a nurse was engaged and then Sarada Devi felt free enough to go and stay in Calcutta. But there she had a vision of the child being treated carelessly by her mother, so she returned to Jayrambati.⁵⁷ The plot thickened when one day she saw Radhu crawling in the dust behind her mother, picking up a few grains of puffed rice while her mother, stark mad, came across the courtyard. Seeing the awful plight of the child whose father was dead and whose mother was insane, Sarada Devi rushed to pick her up. Immediately, Sri Ramakrishna appeared and said, 'This is the girl you saw before. Take her support. She is Yogamaya.'⁵⁸

Sri Sarada Devi's Yogamaya, Radhu, did successfully perform her part in the drama of keeping Sarada Devi on this earth. She did not do it with grace, but with the words and actions of a mad person, with violence, insults, and later with the additional burden of a baby son. When Radhu was young, she was attractive—innocent and sweet. But as she grew up, she developed into a physically weak, mentally retarded person. She treated Sarada Devi in a dreadful way. Besides being rude and insulting, she was disobedient and even would curse Sarada Devi.⁵⁹

Radhu was married at the age of twelve to Manmatha Chatterjee, a young man of fifteen. She did not want to stay with his family, so she and her husband stayed most of the time with Sarada Devi. It was some

54. Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, 124.

55. *Ibid.*, 126.

56. *Ibid.*, 137.

57. *Ibid.*, 138.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*, 140.

years later that, after the birth of her child, Radhu became addicted to opium. One time when she came to Sarada Devi with the intention of getting opium, Sarada Devi scolded her. Radhu responded by throwing a large eggplant at Sarada Devi, hitting her painfully hard on the back. Throughout this time devotees used to wonder at Sarada Devi's absorbing interest in Radhu; often they thought she was much too attached to her niece. But when questioned by her puzzled devotees, Sarada Devi said that she could withdraw her mind in a moment. We must remember that she had divine knowledge, the source of perfect detachment. And she did finally withdraw her mind from Radhu when she was nearing the end of her life.

Sarada Devi went on several pilgrimages at different times in her life, but she lived a lot of her life in Calcutta. Mainly, she would go home to Jayrambati in order to get away from the confinement of city life. At first she stayed with devotees in Calcutta, but in 1909 Udbodhan was ready for her, and at last she had a home of her own. Here she had women attendants and several members of her family living with her.

As far back as 1898 her mission had begun to develop, but when Swami Vivekananda died in 1902, she became better known and hundreds of people began to want her *darshan*, if not initiation. All kinds of people came to her—the poor and rich, sinners and saints, young and old, girls and wives, husbands and sons, criminals and the lawabiding, the highly qualified and unqualified, cast offs from Belur as well as those whose spiritual practices were incorrect. Nivedita said, quoting Swami Vivekananda, 'Never forget! the word is, Woman and the People.'⁶⁰ The same can be said about Sri

Sarada Devi. The masses came, women came, men came, monastics came, and Western women came. All who came sought grace, the liberating power. Sarada Devi had that power and like the Master could transmit it to others. But her glory was renunciation, her perfect detachment. She was true in all her actions to the Master's words, 'Renunciation is the special message of the age.'⁶¹

It is now clear that for several reasons Sri Sarada Devi is the archetypic woman for the new age. First, her relationship with her husband was a perfect partnership. Second, she lived her life as most women do, taking care of a family. But she made this most common task of womankind into a spiritual path, a sadhana. By her detachment rooted in knowledge of the Real, she was able to serve selflessly all who came to her. Third, she had unlimited spiritual power which indicates the real potentiality of woman. By emulating Sarada Devi's life, women can arouse śakti and become a force for the regeneration of the world. Fourth, she showed us how a woman, who in nineteenth century Bengal was considered a dependent, could remain absolutely free, and could be perfectly independent. We see by her life that independence, which is the quest of modern woman, is based not solely on freedom from social restraints. Character plays a significant part in independence as it does in detachment. Sarada Devi's whole life was one of renunciation. That is why she was able to love all selflessly. And finally, we must remember that Sri Sarada Devi was joyous, happy, full of humour and fun. Deep in her heart was a pitcher of joy, a well-spring of bliss. Is not this what we all are secretly searching for, the essence of love and joy?

^{60.} *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1967), 193.

^{61.} Gambhirananda, *Shri Sarada Devi*, 463.

We have seen the breadth and depth of the Master's teaching of Sri Sarada Devi. We have some idea of Sarada Devi's own spiritual dimensions. But when we look at these two great masters of spiritual life, we cannot discern their exact relationship. Where did one begin and the other leave off? Does the apparent difference between them belong only to this world? This mysterious relationship was captured by the sage Jnanadeva:

Since the husband is seen in her and her

existence means the husband only, it is not possible to distinguish between the two.⁶²

Can we separate the wave from the ocean when we search the shining open sea?

(concluded)

^{62.} Sri Jnanadeva's *Amritanubhava*, trans., Ramchandra Keshav Bhagwat (Madras: Samata Books, 1985), 10.

JAPA: REPETITION OF A SACRED WORD

(Continued from page 92)

ness, and japa becomes the most absorbing and enlightening spiritual practice. Correctness of articulation is reached by three stages. At the first stage, the utterance is physical. The sacred word is chanted by the tongue, lips and throat. At the second stage, the sacred word is repeated primarily by the mind, with the tongue, lips and throat serving a secondary role. At the third stage, the soul joins the body and mind, assuming the primary role, and the body and mind vibrate in harmony with the soul. Each mantra, or sacred word, has a distinct structure of sound and metre, and when repeated correctly it rouses in the seeker a particular set of vibrations, revealing that aspect

of the Godhead indicated by the sacred word. If repeated improperly, or incorrectly, the desired result does not follow and the spiritual progress of the seeker is impeded. Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, says: "The Mantra must be correctly repeated. An incorrect utterance delays progress. A woman had for a part of her Mantra the word 'Rukmini-nāthāya.' But she would repeat it as 'Ruku.' This impeded her progress. But she got the correct Mantra afterwards through His grace."¹⁵

(to be concluded)

^{15.} *Spiritual Talks* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968) p. 10.

The Unique Space-Time and Historical Sense of The Hindus *

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

The sages and savants of India possessed a sense of the vast canvas of universal history. They viewed the national life in all its aspects, specially in the cosmic context oriented to the ultimate purpose of divinizing mankind. The erudite author, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, reveals his deep study in this scholarly paper.

I. Introduction

*Nārāyaṇaḥ paro'vyaktāt, aṇḍam
avyakta-sambhavam ;
Aṇḍasyāntaḥ tu ime lokāḥ, saptadvīpā
ca medinī.*

[Narayana, the Supreme Being, 'the indwelling Reality in all entities and beings', *paraḥ*, transcends the *Avyakta*, the unmanifested *Prakṛti* or Proto Nature; the *Aṇḍa* (*Brahmāṇḍa*), the manifested Cosmic Universe, emerges from the *Avyakta*. *Tu, ime Lokāḥ*, all these Cosmic Worlds (Fourteen World Planes), including our empirical universe, and the *Medinī* (Earth), with its *Sapta-dvīpā* (Seven Islands or Continents), are located *Aṇḍasya-antah*, within the *Aṇḍa*.]

Every civilized nation tries to preserve the memory of the past events of its life. It seeks to draw inspiration from it to mould its present and future in terms of its conceptions of the universe, this world, man, and his goal in life. Hence there happen to be differences in their points of view, and the relative importance paid by them to the various events. As such, one should not expect everywhere the same concept of

history which a particular nation or civilization cherishes. There will also be certainly differences in the way of presentation of the events by a writer of history according to what appeals to him and to the nation or civilization to which he belongs, in terms of its ideals and goals.¹ It is the irrational hol-

1. This is evident if we review the various works on history written by Western and Muslim authors. Even in the well known work, 'The Outline of History' by H.G. Wells, who tries to be liberal and objective, we find how unwittingly the Western point of view predominates. Highly disproportionate treatment of the Western and Eastern topics is clearly evident. Whereas minor details of Western events and culture and literature are given importance and blown up out of proportion, even important happenings which have affected humanity as a whole or large sections of it in the East find very little mention, or even no mention at all. In regard to India, Buddhism and Asoka find some place, but no other great King or Emperor of India of the past and their achievements find any mention, nor does the South-East Asian empire of the Hindus. There is no mention of the great *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* and of the vast Sanskrit literature. Neither is there any mention of Kautilya, Aryabhatta, Acharya Sankara of the ancients or of Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Tagore or Mahatma Gandhi or Aurobindo (at least in the later editions of the book some of these could be included). The history and culture of one-fifth of humanity is sorely ignored, because the West was ignorant of it. And whatever is presented is afflicted with the Western view point, beliefs, and preconcep-

* 'Hindus'—In this article means the people of Hindu-desha (India) or Bhārat, viz. the Vedic people, the Jains, and the Buddhists, etc., whose outlook on life as well as their systems of thought originated and flourished in the cultural milieu of this ancient land.

ding on to one's own criteria and view-point that gives rise to wrong notions and perverse judgements about other civilizations and their history.

We find such wrong notions and perversions in the histories of India written by most of the Western and Muslim authors and also by those Indian and other scholars who have been misled by their Western education, and by Western notions and values, being uprooted from their own cultural moorings, bereft of the capacity for original thinking. These types of misjudgements and misrepresentations are not confined merely to what is called 'history', but are very pervasive in their scope, denigrating the entire national life of several hundred millions of intelligent people running into thousands of years. This is evident in their judgements on every aspect of the Hindu society and its culture—its arts and literature, its sciences, its religion and philosophy, etc., which form an integral part of a nation's history, which is its national biography. As a result the national mind loses faith in its own ideals and values and is deprived of its individuality. Bereft of initiative, enthusiasm and hope, it becomes confused and depressed. Fortunately, there have been some, both in the East and West, with a broad and liberal vision, who have been free from prejudice and possessed the capacity to understand greatness everywhere in any garb; and such have paid high tributes to India's greatness and its illustrious past glory.

tions, such as the myth of the Aryan race and their invasion of India, etc. And these are presented in such a way, as if they are gospel truths. If we affix the adjective 'Western' to most of the works written by Western authors, or by those under their spell, in regard to the history of the world, history of science, or art, etc., they will find some justification, East then forming only its insignificant appendage.

However, often such misjudgements occur unwittingly because the author is born and nurtured in a different cultural milieu, and his views and judgements, with his limited and superficial knowledge, are unconsciously and naturally coloured and conditioned by the author's upbringing.² So it is very difficult to objectively judge another civilization with a different cultural context, and with different values in life. But, if to such a natural deficiency and difficulty prejudices and political and other motivations are joined, then there will be deliberate misrepresentation to denigrate the nation or country about whom he/she writes. Among the Eastern countries who came under alien political subjection and about whom such prejudicial histories have been propagated, India and Hindu civilization has been a conspicuous victim of such writing in a very systematic manner, openly or in a subtle way, on a large scale for about the past

2. "There can be no doubt that actual historical evolution followed only one course," says Macaulay, writing on 'History', "but on account of meagre and imperfect materials now available, ancient history is liable to be reconstructed differently by historians working even with the best of motives. No history can present us the whole truth. Some events must be presented on a large scale, others diminished; the great majority will be lost in the dimness of the horizon. A history in which every particular incident may be true, may on the whole be false." (Pp. 8,9,34).

"Our knowledge of any past event is always incomplete, probably inaccurate, beclouded by ambivalent evidence and biased historians, and perhaps distorted by our own patriotic or religious partisanship. Most history is guessing and the rest is prejudice. Even race, creed or class betrays his secret predilections in his choice of materials and in the nuance of his adjectives." (*Lessons of History*, p. 12; Will & Ariel Durant).

(Both the above quoted by K. N. Kapoor in his '*Dawn of Indian History*', New Delhi, 1990; pp. 1-2).

thousand years.³ Its own scattered national records have been destroyed mostly by vandalism of the alien invaders and conquerors, and also to some extent by time, especially due to the disturbed and disruptive conditions and vicissitudes. This has led to denationalization and loss of national individuality and utter lack of faith in the national mind in regard to its great cultural foundations and the glorious national goal.⁴

Those who understand and know the cultural ethos, the versatile genius, and insightful long traditions of this ancient and great country, and have a knowledge of its grand conceptions of space, time, and history, find that the sages and savants of India possessed a sense of a vast canvas of universal history. They had a marvellous and comprehensive plan for national life in all its varied aspects, in the cosmic context, oriented to the supreme goal of divinizing mankind. But the general idea propagated by the detractors is that the Hindus did not have a sense of history, nor any originality. They were vile

3. Even an advanced thinker like Jawahar Lal Nehru, who was a great admirer of the Western Culture, was constrained to say that "the history of India that he learnt was largely wrong and distorted and written by people who looked down upon our country." (*Glimpses of World History*, p. 9).

"These authors, coming as they do from nations of recent growth, and writing this history with motives other than cultural, which in some cases are apparently racial and prejudicial to the correct elucidation of the past history of India, cannot acquire testimony for historical veracity or cultural sympathy." (*The Cradle of History*, p. 3; quoted in *Western Indologist*, p. 13) (K. N. Kapoor, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 58-59).

4. Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter dated 19th March 1894 from Chicago, "We as a nation have lost our individuality, and that is the cause of all mischief in India." On his return to India, in his lecture on "*The Future of India*" at Madras in February 1897, he pointed out the drawbacks of the system of education current in India.

and superstitious, and whatever worthwhile was there was all borrowed from others.⁵

5. Dr. R. C. Majumdar writes, "The political history of India, even of ancient times, has been almost invariably viewed through the spectacle [s] of [the] eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. ... To these historians 'Oriental despotism' is an article of faith that colours their whole outlook. Some have also inherited the classical idea that wisdom and enlightenment are always a sort of monopoly of the West, and the East, comparatively as backward as she is today, must have acquired all the elements of higher culture from the West." (*History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. I — '*The Vedic Age*', p. 39; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1951).

Regarding the historical sense of the Indians, Dr. Mazumdar states: "The deficiency (of historical records) is all the more strange as there are indications that the ancient Indians did not lack in historical sense. This is proved by the carefully preserved lists of teachers in various Vedic texts, as well as in the writings of the Buddhists, Jains, and other religions sects. That this spirit also extended to the political field is shown not only by the songs and poems in praise of kings and heroes referred to in Vedic literature, but also by the practice of reciting eulogies of kings and royal families on ceremonial occasions. Even so late as the seventh century A.D., Hiuen Tsang noticed that each province in India had its own official for maintaining written records in which were mentioned good and evil events, with calamities and fortunate occurrences. That this practice continued for centuries after Hiuen Tsang is proved by a large number of local chronicles and the preambles in old land-grants which record the genealogies of royal families, sometimes for several generations." (*Ibid.*, p. 47ff.). "The existence of historical chronicles in Kashmir, Gujarat, Sind, and Nepal supports the presumption that the archives of different states, as a rule, contained such royal chronicles, as stated by Hiuen Tsang. These chronicles, unless raised to the status of a literary work of the type of *Rāja-tarangini*, or included in pretentious or sacred works like the Puraṇas, are not likely to long survive the fortunes of the dynasty whose history they recorded. This probably accounts for their general destruction, though a few have been preserved in outlying places, like Kashmir, Gujarat, Nepal, and Assam." (*Ibid.*, p. 51).

In recent times, besides several others, Swami Vivekananda and Bal Gangadhar Tilak were prominent among the former type who had an insight into the national ethos. Swami Vivekananda was keenly aware not only of the great genius of India, but also of the tremendous harm that has been and is being done to the national mind of India by the wrong and perverted teaching of Indian life and history. He emphasized that Indians of understanding would write their own histories in the modern context, but in their own way, based on their vast literature such as the Vedas, Itihāsas, Purānas, etc. and the ancient traditions that have come down to us as to their interpretation.

India is not a dead country like the ancient Egypt, Sumer, and other Mesopotamian civilizations, and Greece and Rome, etc. for others to write about it in the way they want. It is a living country and people, with living traditions, and the ancient inspiration is coursing in their veins; such alone know the value and significance of the various ideas

"We may thus presume that neither historical sense nor historical material was altogether wanting in ancient India. What was lacking was either the enthusiasm or the ability to weave the scattered raw materials into a critical historical text with a proper literary setting"... (Ibid., p. 48).

We may point out here that the real reason for this was neither 'lack of enthusiasm or ability', but the fact that the Hindus did not think in terms of a national history, but of the history of Man as such. They did not develop a parochial nation-state idea, but strove for the evolution of a universal human culture and values (*puruṣārtha*-s). The Hindus did not claim any superiority or monopoly to themselves or to their religious and political ideas, but always upheld the supremacy of *Satya* (Truth/Reality) and *Dharma* (Application of Truth in life and society), wherever found in harmony with reason and experience. (See F.N. No. 14). They have preserved for thousands of years the Vedas, Purānas, etc. under very difficult situations, which fact is a concrete proof of this.

and ideals and events in Indian national life and can truly interpret them. Those who depend on mere philology entirely miss it, as can be seen from the works of dry scholars who write on the Vedas and other Hindu topics, forgetting the fact that all the Hindu sages and savants, and even brilliant geniuses like the Acharya Sankara, pay very high tributes to the Vedas as the source of national life and held them in high esteem. They find and relish the delicious mangoes of the tree of the Vedas, while the others see only the tree out of season and count old leaves. They do not find even the flowers, let alone the delicious fruits.⁶

Emphasizing the need to write a systematic history in the modern context by competent Indians themselves, Swami Vivekananda has said:

A nation that has no history of its own has nothing in this world. Do you believe that one who has such faith and pride as to feel, 'I come of noble descent', can ever turn out to be bad? How could that be? That faith in himself could curb his actions and feelings, so much so, that he would rather die than commit wrong. So a national history keeps a nation well-restrained and does not allow it to sink so low. Oh, I know you will say, 'But we have not such a history.' No, there is not any, according to those who

6. In regard to mere dry philologists and scholars, who are not conversant with the living traditions, Acharya Sankara has aptly remarked in his *Gītā-Bhāṣya*: "A person not well versed in the traditional understanding and interpretation of the texts, should be ignored even though he be a scholar of all the scriptures." (*A-sampradāyavit sarva-sāstravid-api, mūrkhavad-eva upekṣaṇīyah.*) We may also point out that merely seeing the bricks, cement, and other building materials, will not enable one to conceive of the nature of the building and its purpose and its architectural beauty. As B. G. Tilak points out, "But no etymological or philological analysis can help us in thoroughly understanding a passage (or culture) which contains ideas and sentiments foreign or unfamiliar to us."

think like you. Neither is there any, according to your big university scholars; and so also to those who after having travelled through the West in great rush, come back dressed in European style and assert, 'We have nothing, we are barbarians'. ... (But) we have our own history exactly as it ought to have been for us. Will that history be made extinct by shutting our eyes and crying, 'Alas! we have no history'? Those who have eyes to see will find a luminous history there and on the strength of that history, they know that the nation is alive. But that history has to be re-written. It should be restated, suited to the understanding and ways of thinking which our men have acquired in the present age through Western education. (*Complete Works*, Vol. V, page 365).

He further added, pointing out the nature of the present histories of India written by Westerners and their followers:

Study Sanskrit, and along with it study Western sciences as well. Learn accuracy, my boys! Study and labour so that time will come when you can put your history on a scientific basis. For, now Indian history is disorganized. The histories of our country written by English writers cannot but be weakening to our minds, for they tell only of our down-fall. How can foreigners, who understand very little of our manners and customs, or of our religion and philosophy, write faithful and unbiased histories of India? Naturally, many false notions and wrong inferences have found their way into them. Nevertheless, they have shown us the way how to proceed making researches into our ancient history. *Now it is for us to strike out an independent path of historical research for ourselves*, to study the Vedas and Puranas and the ancient annals (*Itihasas*) of India, and from them to make it your life's work ('*Tapasyā*' or disciplined endeavour) to write accurate, sympathetic, and soul-inspiring histories of the land. It is for Indians to write Indian history. Therefore, set yourselves to the task of rescuing our lost and hidden treasures from oblivion. Even as one whose child has been lost does not rest until one has found it, so do you never cease to labour until you have revived the glorious past of India in the consciousness of the people. That will be true national education, and with its advancement, a true national spirit will be awakened! (*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1974 ed., pp. 213-14).

And why should we study the past? What is its importance? Vivekananda declared:

It is out of the past that the future has to be moulded; it is the past that becomes the future. Therefore the more the Hindus study their past, the more glorious will be their future, and whoever tries to bring the past to the door of everyone is a benefactor of his nation. (*Complete Works*, Vol. IV, page 324).

"*The Random Dictionary of the English Language* defines history as 'a continuous, systematic narrative of past events, as relating to a particular people, country, period, person, etc., usually written in a chronological order in respect of important or unusual events.' The modern concept of history, however, is that it is a record of political, social, economical, religious and cultural activities of the people inhabiting a country." (*Dawn of Indian History*, K. N. Kapoor, page 1). In the Hindu view, history must be the history of Man, may be in different regions, within the framework of the manifestation of the entire universe of Space-Time-Causation, and it must be a record of the various activities and efforts of mankind to express its inner potentiality in the milieu of a variegated society in its external life, and inwardly to realize the source of its own being and sustenance and inner potentiality. Achieving a balance between these two aspects, individually and collectively, is the goal of history of mankind. The modern histories are only scrappy records of the doings of sections of mankind and their rulers here and there, prompted by instincts and passions, and without any inner guidance or direction or purposive relationship to a before or an after, except perhaps the diabolic ambition of establishing the hegemony of one nation and its ideas and ideals over others by wars of conquest or otherwise.

(Continued on page 112)

Scientific Symbolism in Hindu Mythology

DR. S. K. BALASUBRAMANIAN

To discard Indian mythology as mere imaginative storytelling would be to cast away treasures. Through mythology comes revealed to the unsophisticated mind deep truths of philosophy and spirituality—maybe even truths of scientific nature, suggests the author, who is of Pune, Maharashtra.

The rationalism of the Hindu philosophers has been much acclaimed, but Hindu worship attracted a lot of criticism in the past as being 'pagan', 'animistic', and based on 'blind faith'. The great number of religious beliefs grounded in hidden or long-forgotten truths, and the conflicting claims made by competing denominations even led many Hindus of so-called 'rationalist bent' to look upon their religion with derision. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the rationale behind the Hindu worship of the many deities, and to understand also the symbolism, if any, behind the concept of diverse gods.

We have attempted a strictly materialistic interpretation of the concepts underlying the belief in a variety of gods. We have also tried to compare the Hindu gods to the scientific beliefs, and to find a parallel between these two systems of thought—namely, the religio-mystic and the scientific-materialistic. Some of the similarities, as we see, are striking and lend a new insight into Hindu theology. Such studies were not adequate in early attempts because science had yet to reach maturity. The scientific theories for which parallels have been sought in theology are, in many cases, less than fifty years old.

By 'science' we mean the systematic body of knowledge acquired by the controlled study of cause-effect relationships. Intuition does play a part in the scientific method of study, but is subject to experimental veri-

fication. This restricts science to the study of proximate causes only.

Mythology is theology made easy through the narration of stories, fictional or anecdotal. Intuition plays a major part in theology, and conclusions cannot be verified easily. The faithful depend largely upon the experience of a few demonstrably honest individuals. Thus, theology deals with the primal cause, far removed from the observed effect. The relationship is not readily obvious.

Herein lies the so called 'conflict' between theology and science. The latter is concerned with only proximal cause-effect relationship and the former the Primal cause. Scientists turn agnostic and even atheistic because by their training they are not inclined to look beyond their noses, as it were. The conflict between religion and science need not be, if the intuitive results of theology are shown to correspond with the rigorously deduced theories of science. This, in short, is our purpose.

The Ultimate Reality is our starting point and we correlate it to the origin of life and its evolution on earth. Brahman is conceived as the transcendental entity that represents the ultimate singular source of the universe. It cannot be realized by the limited capacity of the human senses and intelligence. As science deals with the tangible realities that are within the realm of the realizable, the ultimate reality, that is Brahman, is not

relevant to the scientist, though it is the most important objective for the philosophers and the mystics. It is the process in which this reality manifests itself, and these manifestations that are important to science. They are regarded as falling within the realm of science.

“OM TAT SAT”—‘OM is the reality’—is the description of the reality that is Brahman. OM is also called *Nāda-Brahman*, the sound of Brahman, the Primal Word that pervades the entire universe. Such a background ‘noise’ is indeed one of the consequences of the theory of the ‘big bang’ origin of the universe. It has also been experimentally observed.

The Hindus believe that the Ultimate Reality manifests Itself in the form of a trinity of Godhead: Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. Amongst these, Brahmā is considered the creator, the *Prajāpati*, from whom all life emanates. He is the phenomenal manifestation of the ultimate reality. He has control over space and time, he is Space-Time. He is the four dimensional aspect of reality. He is four-headed, the four heads representing the four dimensions in space-time. Brahmā is the equivalent of the four dimensional space-time continuum of science. He is depicted as orange coloured, the colour of energy.

Brahmā is seen seated on a lotus. Einsteinian space is curved, like a saddle. Perhaps a lotus petal is also a relevant simile for the curvature of space. The lotus flower with many layers of petals would give the impression of several coexisting four dimensional continua—an exciting prospect of study for futuristic science! Brahmā thus stands as the symbol of the entire universe of science. He is the origin of all life, the *Prajāpati*.

Viṣṇu has a fetal relationship to Brahmā. He is depicted as *Padmanābha*—having a

lotus in the navel. The lotus stem is the umbilical connection between the space-time and life on earth. The implication of the *Padmanābha* image is that all life is derived from the space-time continuum and that there is an integral connection between life on earth and space. In contrast to Brahmā, Viṣṇu has only transitory control of time. He is the ‘*Tribhuvanavapuṣa*’—the celestial Being with the three worlds as his body. The three worlds, in the popular imagination, are the worlds above and below our own; the heavens above, the nether world, and the terrestrial world. In actuality, the three worlds are the three axes of co-ordinate geometry—the *x*, *y*, and the *z* axes.

The ancient symbol of the *swastika* is the simplest representation of the three axes in the two-dimensional plane. The limbs spreading out stand for the *z*-axis. The Hindu *swastika* has a clockwise arrangement of limbs. (The Nazis, according with their perversity, wrote the *swastika* the reverse way).

The three limbs of the *Devanagari* ॐ also stand for the three dimensions of space, and the superscript (*Chandra-bindu*) is the universal humming ‘sound of the spheres’.

The three-dimensionality of space was the theme of the story of the *Vāmana Avatara* (Dwarf Incarnation) of Viṣṇu. When Vāmana demanded as much land as he could cover with three paces from King Mahabali, as measured by his dwarf feet, he meant to thus acquire the entire material part of the universe. Without understanding this, Mahabali readily agreed. Then Vāmana grew in size and covered in two paces the entire two-dimensional kingdom of Mahabali, the earth, the solar system and the galaxies. However big the universe may seem to man, all the constituents of space are two-dimensional. Man is just a cardboard cutout in this

vastness. Vāmana's third step was not necessary.

Significantly, Viṣṇu's colour is blue-black, the blackness of outer space and the blueness of the terrestrial sky. He is the three dimensional Reality. He lives in the ocean of 'milk', the dark space rendered milky white by the brilliant galaxies.

Padmanābha is the fetus of life. He is the master of life, its controller and regulator. He has magisterial powers and rewards and punishes. He establishes the divine rule of *dharma* on earth. He is the divine edict and he destroys evil. He incarnates himself to protect good and to destroy evil. He guides the evolution of life and is the evolution. He is mighty and powerful and excellent. He has a human face, significant for human welfare on earth.

Padmanābha is life's embryo floating in the amniotic fluid of space on a bed formed by the coiled five-headed snake, Ananta. The term *ananta* means endless—endless indeed are the varieties of life-forms he represents.

Snakes are considered as objects of worship, symbolizing energy. They are worshipped for their supposed ability to confer fertility on barren women. They are involved in the propagation of life. Every Hindu is familiar with the stone carved image of the intertwined snakes under a Peepul tree. The rising coils of the two snakes is how modern molecular biologists designate the double helix of the DNA molecule. The DNA and the RNA are the twin templates of life. The former carries the genetic code and the latter the code for protein synthesis. Both are equally important for life and are the foundation of life on earth. Though they are composed of a few billion units, they are derived from just five organic bases.

Three of the bases are common to both and one is exclusive to each. The five heads of Ananta stand for the five bases, the snake itself representing the DNA-RNA helices.

The snake in the story of Adam and Eve has the same meaning. It is the genetic compulsion and the assertion of the DNA-RNA system in their drive for self propagation. The Hindu imagery is the happier of the two.

Thus, *Padmanābha* is the complete essence of life, the origin, the code and the process of life. The unity of all life is shown by depicting *Padmanābha* as the *Caturbhuja*, the four-armed god.

Viṣṇu is not so much four-armed as six-limbed. There are two major streams of life: the vertebrate and the invertebrate. The vertebrates represent the higher forms of life. They are more evolved and are more intelligent. Man is at the peak of vertebrate evolution. The invertebrate forms of life, on the other hand, are older and have proved their durability by surviving for hundreds of millions of years. In contrast, human life is less than a million years old. The vertebrates are characterised by having four limbs whereas the invertebrates have a greater number. The most common invertebrates along with the ant and the cockroach have six limbs. Thus, Viṣṇu's human shape and six limbs stand for the common origin of both forms of animal life. The belief in the universality and divine origin of all life is the basis of the Hindu worship of the various animals. The worship is an explicit acceptance of the singular origin of all animal life.

The primordial god *Ardhanārīśvara*, or Śiva, the half-man, half-woman Deity, represents the transition from the primitive asexual cellular stage of life to the separation of the sexes as an efficient method of

gene-scrambling for faster evolution. Śiva is the third god of the Hindu Trinity. He has a unique position. He is not material, but Knowledge. He is the awareness of Brahman, the appreciation of the Ultimate Reality. He is the relevance of the Ultimate to the human condition and he is objective. He is the scholar, the inventor and the invention. He is the loner in search of truth, and he is truth. Social life has no meaning for Him. Śiva is beyond. He transcends social good and evil, He is detached. He is not a phenomenon. He is a product of the content of the human mind. He is the mind. He is the process which liberates the human mind, the Liberator and the Liberation. But the attributes of Śiva cannot be contained within any form recognizable or traceable to human conceptualizing. He is therefore, worshipped as the Formless, in the *linga* (symbol). Knowledge, like Śiva, is dimensionless and colourless. Śiva has no magisterial powers or royal prerogatives. He has no social content. He is Pure, Transcendent being, and lives in the colourless transparent regions of the icy Himalayas. The very holy symbols of Śiva, the *lingas* are ideally made from quartz, the *spatika*.

Śiva has three eyes. The third is the one of Knowledge. He could send forth powerful bursts of energy from this eye. The third eye is suspected in the birds and the humans also. It is not an anatomical organ, but a sensor, sensitive to magnetism or to infra-red radiation.

We have seen how the unperceivable reality of Brahman had been translated into recognizable divine characters. The father of all the worlds, Brahmā, the closest of the gods to the Ultimate, is the least worshipped of all. He is far too isolated from day-to-day life. Śiva is the god for the seekers and seers. The most relevant in daily life is Viṣṇu, however, and he is rightly the most worshipful of all the gods.

How does Brahman manifest Itself as the phenomenal universe, the Earth, planets and Sun? Or, is our objective reality an illusion that is Māyā? It is our feeling that the observed world is real, as real as can be, there is no illusion in it. The illusion exists in the limitations of our perceptions, in our inability to conceive the total reality. Reality is too limitless to be comprehended by our sense organs and mind. Human mind is limited, a conditioned instrument fitted with safety devices, fences and fire tenders, to ensure the survival of the species in a hostile and competitive environment. These very protective devices that enable the mind to focus on the relevant by filtering out the minute details or the incomprehensible, keep us in darkness. Brahman is the subjective Reality, no doubt, but it is not given to the ordinary human being the power to penetrate all the coverings of darkness (*ajñāna*) covering Him. Human mind, bound up by egotism, desires and aversions, thus limited, cannot know Brahman the Subject-Knower deep within. The seers, however, say that our mind can be liberated from the shackles of the environment and from the prison of the cranium and sense organs, and can be trained to realize the unitary source.

It is through the *pañchabhūta*-s that the Brahman translates Itself into the gross world that we see around us. The *pañchabhūta*-s are the five elemental materials that the Hindus analyse as the constituent building blocks of the whole material universe. They are discussed in the *Sāṃkhya* of the ancient philosopher Kapila. These are subtle elements, not perceived by our gross sense organs, called *space*, *wind*, *light*, *water* and *earth*. While they are not the space, wind, light, etc. that we know with our senses, they do correspond to our gross elements, and may sometimes be referred to when we find mention of the ether, solar or cosmic winds in the plasma state of matter, and so

on. By subtle evolution these fine elements combine to form the world of gross material elements as we know it. The philosophy of the Vedas wherein the *pañchabhūta-s* are mentioned, explained by the sage Kapila, occupy a place of central importance in Hindu thought.

The Hindus postulated that light comes out of wind, that is, energy comes out of the plasma state of matter. In other words, matter and energy are interconvertible. This indeed is a basic tenet of modern science, that mass and energy are interconvertible. The hydrogen bomb is a practical demonstration of it. It requires the high temperature plasma produced in a nuclear explosion to turn matter into energy. The controlled conversion is a theoretical possibility, but is still to be realized. The *Pañchabhūta* concept goes beyond science and postulates an integral relationship between the states of matter, energy and space, giving a much larger role for space than is realized so far.

In the early eighties, Mr. Parmanand Tiwari, an engineer at the Tarapur atomic power station, predicted that space could yield energy. His thinking received experimental support at M.I.T. in the U.S.A., and was later verified at Tarapur. Mr. Tiwari was awarded a large monetary prize in Germany for his work. The implications of his report are not yet clear.

Evolution is the cornerstone of Hindu theology. Life, originating in the womb of Brahmā, takes shape as the fetus *Viṣṇu-Padmanābha*, supported by the DNA-RNA *ananta* in the amniotic environment of the three dimensional space. Passing the cellular stage of asexual reproduction and the separation of the sexes for rapid transmission of favourable mutation, represented as the mythological *Ardhanārīśvara*, it evolves into the glorious image of the *Viṣṇu-Caturbhuja*,

representing the lower forms of life and the apex of evolution, the human being.

The Hindus' ten incarnations, the *daś-avatars*, have long been recognized to correspond to the Darwinian tradition. The earliest *avatars* (before the advent of humans) start in the ocean as the mammalian or oviparous fish, and the amphibian tortoise, and progress through the land animal (the boar), to *Nṛsimha* (the *homoerectus*), and then to *Vāmana*, the underdeveloped humanoid dwarf. The later *avatars* represent human evolution.

Recent discoveries in science suggest a similar evolution. Life perhaps originated in outer space in simple molecular forms such as methane, formaldehyde and ammonia, and were introduced onto earth either by colliding comets or falling asteroid meteorites. Starting as simple cellular life in the seas or the clays of the earth, life then progressively advanced into marine animals, invertebrates and vertebrates. Darwin's theory postulates a biological continuum in which the primitive forms develop greater and greater sophistication and complexity to facilitate their survival and at the same time provide for the rise of newer species.

Hindu theology goes deeper than is so far realized. The *Gītā* devotes an entire chapter to the divine manifestations on earth. God manifested Himself as Viṣṇu amongst the Adityas, as Sankara amongst the Rudras, as Kubera amongst the Rakṣasas, and as Skanda amongst the generals. Krishna goes on to enumerate the preeminent among the animals as divine manifestations: God is Uchchaiśravas amongst the horses, Airavata amongst the elephants, Vasuki amongst serpents, and Ananta amongst the snakes, the lion amongst the beasts, Garuḍa amongst the birds and the shark amongst the fishes. Finally Sri Krishna asserts: "Whatever being

there is that is endowed with greatness. prosperity or power, there is a divine manifestation. Not merely 'survival of the fittest', but the most extraordinary in each species is considered the divine manifestation. Creative excellence, in short, is divine.

The story of the Sun god is an example of the endearing manner in which scientific truths have been presented as imaginative fiction. The sun is supposed to ride the skies around the earth in a chariot drawn by seven horses. He also circumambulates a mythical mountain called Meru. The seven horses are easily understood as the seven colours of the solar spectrum.

Surya, the sun, was married to the daughter of the divine architect, Viśvakarma. She bore him the sons Manu and Yama, and the daughter Yamuna. After the initial romance of their union, the new bride found the brilliance of the sun unbearable and returned to her father. He advised her that a woman's place was with her husband and sent her back. In desperation she created from her shadow an exact replica of herself.

The shadow, called *Chaya* in Sanskrit, went to live with the sun. The duplicity was detected in time, and the sun set out in search of his wife. He found her roaming the earth as a mare and begged her to return to his home again. She prayed for a reduction in his brilliance. With the consent of the sun, Viśvakarma cut out an eighth part of his brilliance and the sun with reduced energy happily lived with his wife and her shadow.

The important aspects of the story are the existence of a shadow as a wife of the sun and the reduction in his brilliance. Both of these have a deep significance.

The outer planets Uranus and Neptune display strange behaviour in their orbits

around the sun. As they move away from the sun, they decelerate in their orbits up to some distance and then start accelerating again. To the nodal point they decelerate, they accelerate again under the sun's gravitational effect. This phenomenon led to the postulate that there should be an object of great gravitational attraction lying beyond the known solar system, but which is still close enough to exert the observed effect. The initial search of the outer reaches of the solar system led to the discovery of the ninth planet Pluto. But Pluto was too small to have the tremendous effect of slowing the more massive planets Uranus and Neptune on their courses. Now, therefore, it is believed there must be a massive blackhole lying outside the solar system which is responsible for the cantankerous behaviour of the two outer planets.

Theoretically, the blackholes are end-products of massive collapses of stars which have consumed all their energy. The size of a star determines its fate. A star about the size of our sun burns up all its stock of hydrogen in about twenty billion years and starts expanding, devouring all the planets, and then finally explodes, throwing debris out into space. A star three times as massive as our sun however, does not explode after the initial expansion but shrinking under the influence of its own gravity and collapses to a small size. These small objects are called white dwarfs. When the star is five times or more massive than our sun, the collapse proceeds beyond the white dwarf stage. The gravity is now so great that all matter in the neighbourhood is also swallowed by the star. Such a powerful gravitational object does not allow even light to escape from it. Hence the nomenclature 'blackhole'. Though not visible because no light emanates from them, blackholes are detected by powerful bursts of radio waves that are emitted by the devoured matter at the edge of the blackhole.

It is tantalizing to imagine that Chaya, the shadowy second wife of the sun, is actually a blackhole arising from a dead binary twin of the sun!

Earth is surrounded by a layer of ozone which cuts out the ultraviolet part of the solar radiation and protects life on earth. Life could not exist on earth if the filtration of ultraviolet light did not take place. The ozone envelope is the shield for life.

The sun has nine planets. The ninth planet was discovered only about sixty years back. The Hindus have been talking of *navāgraha* (the ninth planet) since ancient times.

In this paper we have restricted discussion to correlations that look beyond question. There are more stories in the *Purānas*, (post-

Vedic scriptures) which could be related to the discoveries of science with some imaginative interpretation. But they may also be questioned as 'subjective' or 'convenient deductions'.

Finally, we have to address the all-important question: If the ancient Hindus could anticipate the scientific discoveries, what does their mythology represent? Either it may be only a lingering memory of an old civilization long-disappeared, or it could be positive proof that truths—even scientific truths—can be intuitively perceived *a priori*. If so, science of the future may attach more importance to intuitive perception than it has done up to now. This would seem to be a likelihood. Such a possibility would have tremendous significance for future human development.

THE UNIQUE SPACE-TIME AND HISTORICAL SENSE OF THE HINDUS

(Continued from page 105)

It is gratifying to note that so far as global history is concerned, in some measure, the present day conceptions of history are gradually veering round to the Hindu point of view. National history must be primarily in the context of the history of man and his growth in different fields of life and the broadening of his mental and spiritual vision. It must be the history of the people, and should not be confined to the mere chronological gathering of dates and names of royalties and their conquests and defeats in

wars, and other political and socio-economic events. According to the celebrated historian Prof. Arnold Toynbee, who wrote several volumes on *The Study of History*, "a civilization rather than the traditional nation-state ought to be the unit for study of history." We can further expand the concept to embrace the history of Man as such in its various expressions in the context of the origin of man and his goal,

(To be concluded)

Two Songs of Swami Vivekananda

PRANABANANDA BANDYOPADHYAY

In this short essay, the author, of West Bengal, depicts the Advaitic vision behind two outstanding poems of Swamiji.

The two songs of Swami Vivekananda—“*The Song of the Free*” and “*The Song of the Sannyasin*”, express and explore in inimitable language the mystery of the ‘I’. The reason why these two poems are chosen for this essay is accounted for by the fact that they, more than other poems of Swamiji, attempt at bringing out the ‘I’ in terms of poetry which emanates from the direct springs of spiritual realization. Both the poems rip open the mask of delusion of the mystery of the ‘I’ in surcharged lyrical emotion solemnized by intensely realized spiritual vision. Both the poems illuminate in sublimely effusive language the ‘unspotted essence’¹ which is referred to by Sidney in *A Defence of Poetry*. It is a language which is fraught with the potentiality of poetry in its truest sense. Poetry and philosophy have been rolled into one.

The first of the two poems was written on 15th February, 1895 to Miss Hale as a sequel to his letter of first February, 1895 wherein Swamiji gave vent to his position in fiery language which hurt her slightly. The poem came out to mollify her feelings, but Swamiji did not inch away from his position. Be that as it may, “*The Song of the Free*” proclaims with vigour and vitality the irresistible impulse of the sannyasin to attain his goal—the highest spiritual realization of the oneness of the individual ‘I’ with the universal ‘I’. In fact, both are One. ‘All nature’ is forever trying to crush this ‘I’,

the perennial ‘I’ with her traditional trappings. But He remains as fixed as ever in His aim to reach the goal. He is not to be lured by the appurtenances of the world. He is not an angel, nor does He have any human or animal attribute. He is neither body nor mind. He is genderless. He is above all books because books cannot describe Him or His nature. His nature is that He is one with Him. “I am He.” This is the great mystery unveiled by the poet at the highest pitch of realization. The existence of the ‘I’ is unquestionable. The ‘I’ forever exists: “I was, I am, and I will be!” Swamiji writes in the sixth stanza. The ‘I’ cannot be tethered by anything terrestrial. Even the solar system cannot hold this ‘I’ within its periphery. The ‘I’ transcends all limits, the domain of this world or of stardom. The ‘I’ also surpasses Time. For, all these—however beautiful, grand and glorious—have their existence in living and dying in a bond—the bond of causation. Even mind with all its moorings is entangled by the tentacles of dreams and thoughts of myriad nature. The worst or best thoughts, the whiff of wonder and romance, the emerald embellishments of the world hold the mind in thrall, contaminate it and accordingly the mind is swayed this way or that, sometimes it is found to be careening between brilliance and darkness. This outer crust of the universe consisting of the vast pageantry of shows born of cause and effect, space and time, is not the real ‘I’. The real ‘I’ is beyond all sense, all thought; nay, the ‘I’ is the Witness of the Universe, the One embracing all with love. The one binding principle

1. Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, Ed. Jan Van Dorsten (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966) p. 59.

They raise us from the doldrums, and sustain our being to the quietude and joy of spiritual enlightenment. In both the poems the dignity of the subject is matched and carried to perfection by the peizing of each word in just proportion. This is the kind of poetry which has been termed by Sri Aurobindo as *mantric* poetry. Sri Aurozindo says in *The Future Poetry*, "The privilege of the poet is to go beyond and discover that more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance, in which there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountain-heads of the spirit within us."⁶

6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1985) p. 15.

Swamiji's esemplastic imagination was in full play at the time of composition of these two poems. The Daedalian desiderata of poetry as formulated by Sri Aurobindo, the "highest intensity of rhythmic movement", the "highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought-substance, of style", and "the highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth",⁷ have been carried to perfection in the two Songs. The grandest theme has been executed in the perfect style. Swamiji once said of his great Master, "The artistic faculty was highly developed in our Lord, Sri Ramakrishna, and he used to say that without this faculty none can be truly spiritual."⁸ Swami Vivekananda has revealed himself as a great spiritual artist in his poems.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. V, p. 259.

Swami Vivekananda composed a Sanskrit poem and sent it in a letter from America to his brother-disciples of the Math, of which two stanzas are given below:

"We shall chew up the stars, and uproot the three worlds by force.
Do you not know us? We are the servants of Sri Ramakrishna!"

Even the impossible is made possible by such tremendous self-confidence and devotion to the Guru. Because Swamiji had these, he conquered the world. Jesus had also said: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." After the various spiritual experiences and visions of God which our Great Master Sri Ramakrishna had, he said to the Mother, for verification: "Mother, if all these divine experiences of mine be true, this large boulder here will jump up thrice." This happened, we are told, as soon as he said it. Are these things mere empty words?

REVIEWS & NOTICES

THE HUMAN SOUL, by Madhavan Nair ; 1990. Copies can be procured from the Travancore Law House, Kochi, Kerala 682-011. 148 pages ; Rs. 30/-.

An enquiry into the nature of the human soul presented itself as a problem of great importance to the scholars and savants of India mainly because it was crucial to the religious beliefs and practices of the people. The book under review is an attempt to unravel the mystery of the soul. The author has put down in a single volume the insightful thoughts scattered through the Upanishads, Brahmasutras, Bhagavad Gita, Bible, Quran, Theravada Buddhist principles, and also the works of modern researches undertaken by Dr. Ian Stevenson and R. Raymond Moody on the nature and destiny of human soul.

The book is divided into three chapters, the first chapter being devoted to the delineation of the nature of the soul by quoting extensively from the authoritative texts on the subject. The second chapter, which is entitled "Bondage to Karma" makes an elaborate study of the various forms of Karma in relation to the soul's destiny. The last chapter explains the relation of the soul to God, as conceived by the great theologians. The author also takes up a large spectrum of concepts related directly and indirectly to the central theme of his work.

The attempt of the author is undoubtedly praiseworthy in view of the fact that he tries to present a descriptive account of a very crucial and significant problem of Indian philosophy and religion. But the reviewer feels that the worth of the book could have been greater if the author had adopted an analytical and critical approach to the central theme, ignoring the many tangential questions. That would have helped him present an integrated, clear and cohesive idea of the soul according to the Indian seers. Because of its lack of cohesiveness, the work has turned into a medley of certain concepts and thoughts, and as a result the central theme

recedes into the background. Nevertheless, the book is neatly printed, though some typographical errors have crept in. It will be useful to those who are inquisitive about the Indian conception of soul.

Ranjit Kumar Acharjee
Tripura

A COMPREHENSIVE BIOGRAPHY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA—PARTS I & II, By Sailendranath Dhar (Second Edition, January 1990). Published by Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, 3, Singarachari Street, Madras. 1492 pages ; Rs. 350.

Swami Vivekananda was one of those puissant souls who descended on the terrestrial region to redeem mankind of its ills and evils, and to lead it on to the path of dharma. His message of strength, self-confidence and non-attachment is meant for one and all, and has inspired people of virtually all religious denominations.

Starting with *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, a number of standard biographies of Swamiji have been published in English, Bengali, and other Indian languages. But the present work stands in a class of its own because of its comprehensive nature and critical approach, and because of the historical insights which it provides, as for example, in matters of chronological succession of some events concerning the life of Swamiji.

It is difficult, nay impossible, to fully comprehend the life of a Mahayogi like Swami Vivekananda, who did not merely live at the surface level. Professor Dhar observes that even though the historian does not regard suprasensual and supraphysical happenings as the operative forces in history, yet he often gets flabbergasted while interpreting such events as "the shower of rain before Waterloo", or the astounding success of Swamiji at the Chicago parliament, when only a day before he was humiliated in the City streets because of his soiled clothes and doubtful credentials.

However, the aim of the author is neither to overemphasise the role of destiny in Swamiji's life, nor to apotheosise him, but to make an objective assessment of his career and work within the parametres of academic scholarship. He does not suppress or distort facts, nor feel shy of delineating such issues as to who sent Swamiji to America, or who suggested to him to assume the monastic name "Vivekananda". Was it Sri Ramakrishna, the Maharaja of Khetri or he himself? Why did he part company with Pramadas Mitra? What provoked him to blast the theosophists or the orthodox, both among Hindus and Christians? What made him cross the *Jambudvipa*, take un-Hindu food, or dine with *mlechhas*? One may well recall Swamiji's words with regard to the last query: 'Every Hindu that goes to travel in foreign parts does more benefit to his country than hundreds of those bundles of superstitions and selfishness whose one aim is to be the dog in the manger.' And again: "Is God a nervous fool like you that the flow of his mercy would be damned up by a piece of meat?"

The book is divided into two parts. The first provides a detailed and analytical account of Swamiji's early life. The course of his *wanderjahre* in the West has been discussed in detail. Part II takes over from the last phase of his first stay in the West and includes a candid appraisal of his work to rejuvenate India. Swamiji's second sojourn in the West, though of a short duration, was not uneventful. Dhar has taken great pains to describe how Swamiji strove hard to consolidate his mission in the West, despite failing health. The sapling of Vedanta which he planted with meticulous care, steadily grew under the stewardship of his worthy successors. Swamiji succeeded, not merely in dispelling the superiority of Christianity over other religions, but also in removing gross misconceptions about Hinduism which had prevailed in the West for so long. While in India, he vehemently spoke against the monstrous excesses practised in the name of religion, the stiff caste barriers and the redundant customs and beliefs.

At a time when the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's message is being increasingly

felt, the publication of Sailendranath Dhar's biography in this second revised and updated edition is welcome all the more. There is perhaps not a single aspect of the great monk's life which has been left uncovered. If a known fact or an event is not mentioned in the text, it occurs in footnotes, some of which appear like mini-articles. The bibliography is short but the Index is quite detailed. Thirteen well-carved maps and forty illustrations have added to the value of the book.

Dr. Satish K. Kapoor
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ON PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, AND OTHER REFLECTIVE INQUIRIES By Paul Vjecsner. Publisher: Penden, New York, N.Y.; 258 pages, Price not given.

One must look at the title of the book carefully. The purpose is not to prove the existence of God. Rather, it is about the possibility of such proof. The question is whether it is possible to prove, in an objective, scientific manner, the existence of God and other such subjects that are normally put aside as being metaphysical. As Vjecsner says, "...statements customarily referred to as metaphysical have been thought impossible to demonstrate as true... if not looked upon as meaningless." Hence, a major portion of the book is devoted to the methodology, the procedure of such proof being, of course, a practical demonstration of the method. The existence of God is also taken up in the form of a theorem, with logical steps following one another. While the book would thus be a treat to the intellectually oriented, it cannot attract the emotional temperaments. The importance of intellectual conviction in spiritual matters cannot be underplayed. Hence the unshakable logic of Vedanta. At the same time, it would hardly suffice to be logically convinced about the existence of God or any other metaphysical truth. For, God is not merely an idea. He is an experience. This book needs a companion volume on the wonder of love, to complement the mental proving of God's existence.

Within the scope of the book, however, the procedure is careful and well thought-out. The language used is simple. The author also analyses in detail a variety of related areas, commencing with the very manner of using language, to the nature of the self, mind and the process of logic. The book is well brought out with a simple, neat, attractive cover that is apt to its clear, logical contents. The only doubt is, do we need proof for the existence of God, who pulsates in all life? Yes, sometimes we need a mirror to find that the necklace we have lost rests around our neck itself!

Dr. Sarada
Bangalore

AVASTHATRAYA VIVEKA, by Shri Devarao Kulkarni. Published and edited by Manas Kumar Sanyal, 182 S. N. Roy Road, Calcutta 700-038; 1990. 111 pages plus viii; Rs. 12/-.

We all experience three states of Consciousness, viz. waking, dream and deep sleep, in our daily life, which in essence, is the gamut of human life. But very few people are inquisitive to know the truth behind these changing states of consciousness. In the *Vedānta*, as evolved in our scriptures, this inquiry into true knowledge has been one of the means to remove ignorance by discrimination.

Shri Devarao Kulkarni has taken great pains presenting the subject, and explores the illusory appearances of subject-object consciousness from the standpoint of the

Superconscious state called the state of *Turiya*. Brahman, the unchanging Reality, appears in subject-object form in the waking and dream states, with the identification of ego in the *Jiva*. This identification of ego is the ignorance which covers the true nature of the *Jiva*, which appears real in the dream state and becomes unreal in the waking state becomes unreal in the Super-conscious state, or *Turiya*. The book under review awakens this enquiry in the reader's mind.

The author has classified the methods of examination of the three lower states of consciousness from different standpoints and explains the true, effulgent, pure, *Turiya* (transcendental) nature of the *Jiva*. He quotes the original Sanskrit passages from the *Māṇḍukya Kārikā* commentary by Sri Satchidanandendra Saraswati Swamiji, and the *Upaniṣad* and *Brahmasūtra* commentaries by Sri Sankaracharya.

There are four chapters discussing the four aspects of the waking state, the four aspects of dream and deep sleep states, and the nature of *Turiya*, which is a very important theme in this book. The treatment is scholarly, but the get-up and printing are not up to the expectation. For such an important subject the quality in these respects could have been improved. However, the book presents an arresting subject and is a welcome addition to the Vedanta literature.

Swami Brahmasthananda
Ramakrishna Math
Hyderabad

There is another class of Jivas who lead a life of subjection like bondslaves, generation after generation. Their condition becomes so natural to them that they are afraid even to hear the name of freedom. They think: "We are all right as we are. If we have to enter upon the road to freedom which is unknown and uncertain, renouncing all that we have, we would rather forgo freedom!" If the worm which lives in filth is placed on a heap of flowers, it dies panting for breath. These are the bound-Jivas. They remain eternally bound to the worldly life.

FOR SEEKERS OF SPIRITUALITY

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A MUMUKSHU

According to Vasishtha, the *mumukshu*, the aspirant for emancipation, is one who has become aware of his bondage and so longs to become free. He is one who has thought about the world of objects and events and who has thought about himself. He wants to know the purpose and meaning of life. A person whose thoughts are devoted to these problems will find that normal life and normal activities do not give him any satisfaction. This was the condition of Rama.

Rama asserts that whatever is pleasant gives rise to pain after some time. He reports that people engage themselves in various activities in the way in which children engage themselves in play. He also realises that man's desires are fickle like a monkey which jumps from one tree to another. Rama requests Vasishtha to tell him whether there is any state of existence that is stable and free from suffering. He also asks the crucial question whether happiness can be sought by engaging oneself in various activities or by abandoning them all.

According to Vasishtha there are two basic propositions, namely, that the chief aim of an individual is to seek happiness and that this aim cannot be fulfilled by the pursuit of sense pleasures or by seeking the gratification of egoistic needs for status, power, etc. It must be recognized that both these propositions are based on the experience of every human being.

Vasishtha declares that the desire for worldly objects destroys wisdom and upsets the balance of mind. Desire makes one a victim to infatuation (*moha*). Infatuation makes him lose discrimination (*viveka*).

Why does a man become a victim to his desires and infatuations ?

According to Vasishtha this is due to ignorance about the nature of things and about the nature of the self.

Therefore the remedy for suffering is the removal of ignorance and attainment of Jñāna, wisdom. Sorrows do not affect a man of wisdom, a man who knows what ought to be known and who develops the right attitude towards things and the self.

Vasishtha also declares unequivocally that penances, offerings, pilgrimage to sacred places, etc., do not help to overcome ignorance and to attain wisdom.

Consciousness of suffering, the awareness that the pursuit of sense-pleasures and ego-desires constitute, however, only the pre-conditions. This awareness by itself does not lead automatically to wisdom.

What is necessary is the cultivation of four qualities, namely, *sama*, tranquility of mind, *santoṣa*, contentment, *sādhū sānga*, the company of the wise and above all, *vichara*, the spirit of inquiry, rational investigation.

Further, all these four qualities can be cultivated only by personal effort and constant practice.

Problems of life are there. We must neither succumb to them nor try to avoid them. We must face them, analyse them, understand them, we must develop a constructive attitude towards them by cultivating contentment towards what we have and what we obtain on the one hand and tranquility of mind on the other.

From *The Quintessence of Yogavasistha*