



Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 86

DECEMBER 1981

No. 12

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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

'Truth is one : sages call It by various names'

अहं रुद्राय धनुरा तनोमि
ब्रह्मद्विषे शरवे हंतवा उ ।
अहं जनाय समदं कृणो-
म्यहं द्यावापृथिवी आ विवेश ॥

1. I bend the bow for Rudra¹ to kill the destructive (*Śaru*) enemies of Brahma². For the sake of My devotees I fight against their enemies. I pervade heaven and earth.
Rg-Veda 10.125.6

अहं सुवे पितरमस्य मूर्धन्
मम योनिरप्स्वतः समुद्रे ।
ततो वि तिष्ठे भुवनानु विश्वो
तामूं द्यां वर्ष्मणोप स्पृशामि ॥

2. I have given birth to the father-like sky³ placed above this world. My source (*yonih*) is in the ocean, within the waters.⁴ From there I pervade all beings and touch the heaven with My body.
Rg-Veda 10.125.7

अहमेव वात इव प्र वाम्या-
रभमाणा भुवनानि विश्वा ।
परो दिवा पर एना पृथिव्यै-
तावती महिना सं बभूव ॥

3. Like the wind that blows I set in motion all the worlds (by My sweet will). (I am) beyond the sky and beyond the earth, and I have become all this in My splendour.⁵
Rg-Veda 10.125.8

* Given here are the concluding verses of *Devī Sūktam* in which the Divine Mother Herself speaks of Her own real nature.

1. Śāyana believes the reference here is to an ancient mythological anecdote. The Asuras once got three cities of gold, silver and iron built by the celestial mason Mayah in the sky, the air and the earth respectively. At the request of the Devas, Śiva destroyed all the three cities. (Cf. *Kumārasambhavam* 7.48).

2. Brahma here may mean God, the Vedas or the holy man.

3. The Vedic sages looked upon the sky as father and the earth as mother. Śāyana reads here a reference to the *Taittiriya-Upaniṣadic* passage 'From that Atman was produced *ākāśa*' (2.1.1.).

4. According to Śāyana by ocean is meant the Paramātman here, which is the ultimate cause of the whole universe. He interprets *ap* as 'that which pervades', i.e. the mind; so 'within the waters' means the witness within all thoughts.

5. The *Devī-Māhātmya* (*Caṇḍī*) says that the Divine Mother dwells in all beings as *sakti* and other qualities.

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

This month's EDITORIAL discusses two types of harmony: a lower one attained through social adjustment, and a higher one attained through meditation.

In HOLINESS WITHOUT A SHADOW Swami Ananyananda, President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, and editor of this journal, shows that the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was the embodiment of all the great virtues cherished by Hindu women through the ages.

WHAT IS ADVAITA by Dr. A. Ramamurty is a brilliant attempt to elucidate some of the key concepts of Advaita especially the

two-fold denial of duality at the objective and subjective levels. The author is Reader in the Department of philosophy, Viswa-Bharati University, Santiniketan, and the article was originally presented as a paper at a seminar organized by the Andhra University, Waltair.

THE STORY OF JESUS' BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD is the reprint of an article which first appeared in the December 1918 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Its author Swami Atulananda was a Dutch born American Swami of the Ramakrishna Order widely respected for his saintliness and spiritual attainments.

MEDITATION AND HARMONY

(EDITORIAL)

The natural harmony

In a remarkably felicitous passage the Upaniṣad speaks of the natural harmony which pervades the whole universe: 'The earth remains as if meditating, the sky remains as if meditating, water remains as if meditating, mountains remain as if meditating ...'¹ Here meditation means tranquility, tranquility means equilibrium, and equilibrium comes from harmony.

There is a natural harmony in the universe. Every object has its own place in nature. Every subatomic particle is related to other particles in a definite way. The German philosopher Ernst Mach believed

that gravitation is a property which matter derives by virtue of its relation with the rest of the matter in the universe. Einstein's theory of relativity is based on the symmetry properties of space-time. Indeed, what the scientists are trying to discover and express through theories and laws is nothing but the natural and intrinsic harmony of the universe. Again, it is the same overall harmony of existence that finds expression in social institutions like family, society and nation and in art forms like music, painting and dance.

There is of course, perpetual change everywhere, even in the heart of the atom. The whole universe is in a state of flux. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who first introduced this doctrine into Western thought put it, 'No man ever steps into the same river twice'. However, there is a universal pattern behind all these movements. There is a cosmic rhythm running through the whole universe. The Vedic sages called it *ṛtam*, the ancient Chinese sage Lao Tzu

1. ध्यायतीव पृथिवी ध्यायतीवान्तरिक्षं

ध्यायतीव द्यौर्ध्यायन्तीवापो ध्यायन्तीव

पर्वता . . . ।

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 7.6.1.

called it the Tao, the Greek philosophers called it the Logos or universal reason. The sun and stars, wind and waves, plants and animals, houses and machines, good and evil and sorrow, birth and growth and decay and death—all these are parts of the cosmic rhythm pulsating through the universe. To live in tune with this rhythm, to live in Tao, is the natural state. It is a state of peace. Conflicts and other troubles arise when, owing to ignorance and egoism, man forgets his original state and cuts himself off from the main rhythm of life. Meditation is a return to the universal rhythm. In meditation man recovers the natural harmony of his being.

Development of meditation

One of the great cosmological discoveries made in ancient India was that all changes take place in cycles. Not only does the individual pass through the cycle of birth and death but the whole universe passes through cycles of evolution and involution. It is as if the whole universe were a giant wheel moving around a divine centre impelled by the inexhaustible powers of the Divine. Says the Upaniṣad, 'All that is in this world is the glory of the luminous Lord who keeps revolving this wheel of Brahman, *brahma cakra*'.²

It was the understanding of this universal principle that gave rise to the concept of *yajña*, sacrifice, in the Vedic period. Life is a continuous exchange between the individual and the cosmos at different levels. Everything that is taken from the universe for individual use is the effect of a cause and must be returned to the cause. This act of refunding an object to its

source is what is called sacrifice. Thus the whole life is a series of continual sacrifices. The Vedic sages performed *yajña* as a symbolic enactment of the cosmic sacrifice. It was meant to remind the people that the law of life is the law of sacrifice. It is only through sacrifice that man can attain harmony with life, and not through enjoyment, accumulation, aggrandizement. The more we give up and the simpler our life becomes, the closer we move towards universal harmony.

It was only as an accessory to the sacrificial act and as a means of gearing it to the ultimate goal that *upāsanā* or meditation first appeared in the Vedic age. Gradually, as ritualistic *yajña* gave way to the principle of renunciation, meditation developed into an independent discipline. But the original idea of attaining harmony was never lost sight of. The goal of *upāsanā* has always been the union of the individual soul with the cosmic soul. Similarly, the concept of sacrifice was never wholly separated from meditation. *Upāsanā* without renunciation and without the concept of unity has no meaning in the Vedantic context. The isolationist view of meditation (which regards the goal as the separation and isolation of the individual Self) taught in Patanjali's yoga never got full acceptance in Hinduism except as an accessory discipline. No doubt *upāsanā* too entails a certain degree of seclusion and withdrawal from social life for short periods during its early stages. But its goal is to seek harmony with universal life at a higher level of consciousness, and to return to society if possible with the deified vision.

Harmony and awareness

There is natural harmony in the world, but how many people are aware of it? It is one thing to lead a quiet life without quarrelling with others, but it is another to be fully conscious of the rhythms of life.

2. देवस्यैष महिमा तु लोके येनेदं भ्राम्यते

ब्रह्मचक्रम् ।

Svetāsvatara-Upaniṣad, 6.1.

The tree is in harmony with the forest, the fish is in harmony with the water, the stone is in harmony with the rock. But it is all unconscious harmony. We too seldom notice the harmony of life of which we are a part. On the contrary, we more often see only discord and conflict everywhere.

There are two main reasons for this. One is the restlessness of our minds caused by desires and emotions. In order to see harmony outside we must have harmony within us. It is only when the mind is calm and peaceful can it feel the rhythms of universal life.

The second obstacle is our habit of conceptualization. We are always busy recognizing, classifying, categorizing everything we see and hear. Whenever we see an object we immediately connect it to some past experience. When we are not thinking of the past we may be planning for the future. We do not want to have experience as it is but must clothe it with our ideas and conceptions. When everything around us is known, familiar, commonplace, stale, and when our minds are cluttered up with hundreds of pieces of information, life loses its freshness, novelty, challenge.

But in some rare moments we spontaneously wake up to reality. When we visit a new place, perhaps a solitary hill or a lonely forest, our minds may stop conceptualizing for a short period, and then we suddenly become aware of the silent flow of the river of life. Our minds become intensely alert, we get fixed to the present moment and encounter reality afresh. Many children and adolescents get this spontaneous experience frequently, but lose it as they grow up. However, some highly sensitive grown up people, especially poets and artists, get this experience once in a while. Wordsworth's little poem 'Daffodils' is a record of one such experience. Usually this experience or mood does not last long, and the person finds himself drowned in

the din and bustle of the workaday world once again.

Can these moments of deep awareness and harmony be consciously cultivated? Yes, it can be done through meditation, though unfortunately this point is not often stressed while teaching techniques of meditation to beginners. Through the practice of meditation the mind can be trained in spontaneity and harmony. In fact this forms the core of Zen training. Zen does not divide reality into the transcendental and the empirical. It believes that the highest Truth can be realized even in ordinary life. The purpose of Zen training is to cultivate meditative awareness and openness to reality at all times in all walks of life. The Japanese have made Zen a part of their culture and through the tea ceremony, rock garden, ikebana and other customs keep the harmony of nature a living experience in everyday life.

In India too during the Vedic period meditation was regarded as an inseparable part of normal life. One has only to go through the Upanishads to understand how close the Vedic man was to nature and how open he was to its harmony and rhythm. The sun, the moon, fire, waters and the earth figure prominently in Upanishadic meditations known as *vidyās*. And everywhere in the Upanishads one comes across the statement that the reality within is the same reality without. This closeness to nature and integral view of life was to a great extent lost in the later centuries when the unreality of the world was over-emphasized and meditation got divorced from normal life.

It should however be understood that the purpose of meditation is not to create a poetic mood or float us on a dreamy existence. The harmony of life that poets and dreamy people experience now and then is fleeting and superficial. There is a tendency in modern times to reduce meditation and Zen to this kind of euphoria.

The very nature of ordinary mind (*manas*) is analytic; it constantly moves between the two poles of affirmation and negation, 'yes' and 'no', right and wrong, good and evil. It is the *buddhi*, the intuitive faculty existing at a deeper level behind the ordinary mind, that gives unity to all experience. But it remains dormant or closed in most people and, as long as it remains so, the unity of life that some of them experience once in a while will also remain vague and momentary.

What meditation aims at is a transformation of consciousness which alone can make the experience of unity permanent. This is the result of an inner growth. The lotus begins as a small knob at the bottom of a pond, grows slowly upward and finally emerges out of the surface of the muddy pool. Only then will it open at the touch of the golden rays of the sun. If the bud is prematurely pulled out, it will not open to the sun. In the same way, the *buddhi* must gradually grow and emerge fully above the surface of the ordinary mind. Only then can it open to the all-pervading divine light. This is what is meant by transformation of consciousness. It begins with purification of the mind, prayer and worship and culminates in meditation.

Meditation should be looked upon as a process of inner growth. It is a mistake to regard it as an unnatural, artificial, tedious discipline. No doubt, meditation is a difficult lesson to learn, but it is not something imposed upon us from outside. It is the unfolding of the higher consciousness already lying dormant in us. What makes meditation difficult is the presence of obstacles in the form of desires—gross and subtle—and the constant tendency of the mind to conceptualize. Once these are overcome and once the *buddhi* emerges to the surface, meditation becomes a spontaneous experience of the unity and harmony of life and existence.

Harmony and bondage

No man is an island. Every individual is surrounded by widening circles of larger life. First of all comes the family. Wider than this is the social circle which includes one's neighbourhood, place of work, school, etc. Wider still is the circle consisting of one's caste, religious sect, political party or other cultural groups. Next comes the country to which one belongs. Right from childhood everyone finds himself caught in a web of relationships, and one of the problems of life is to live in harmony with different types of people at different levels. With the exception of the perfect idiot, there is hardly a person who has not felt the conflicts of adjustment with his milieu. In fact more than half the energies of the average person is spent in making perpetual adjustments with the society.

Here a question arises. We see so many people leading an apparently well-adjusted, happy life without the help of meditation. Some of them even seem to thrive in conflicts and quarrels which they themselves create. On the other hand, many sincere spiritual aspirants who try to practise meditation find it difficult to adjust themselves well to their social environment. What part, then, does meditation play in bringing harmony into one's life? Has meditation any creative role to play in social integration? This takes us to two types of harmony in life, the lower and the higher. The first one is harmony in bondage while the second one is harmony in true freedom.

The lower type of harmony can be attained in two ways. One is by surrendering oneself to the collective. This is usually done by repressing one's ego and by conforming one's behaviour to the group pattern. In effect this simply means following the leader. The majority of the apparently well-adjusted individuals we come across in social circles belong to this category. A highly enlarged version of this is the nation-wide harmony attempted

in totalitarian countries through massive collectivization and indoctrination.

This kind of harmony is usually attained at a high price. Dominated by fear instinct and herd instinct, this harmony is actually an intensification of human bondage. Creative people are seldom found among those who blindly follow the herd. For all their seemingly well-adjusted life, these people have neither solved their inner problems nor attained security and fulfilment. They constantly need the company of people, crime fiction, cinema, radio and other means of diversion to prevent themselves from going the way of neurotic people whom they ridicule. Evidently, these people can have no use for meditation.

There is a second way of attaining lower harmony—through stoic forbearance. There are people who have acquired a wonderful degree of equanimity and poise through self-discipline, austerity and sheer courage. Their adjustment to community life comes not from surrender to the collective but from self-sacrifice. They do not depend on diversions to kill time but boldly face monotony by engaging themselves in routine chores and drudgery, alone and unaided. They belong to all walks of life and include housewives, poor servants, soldiers, social workers and all those who have forged a noble character on the anvil of self-denial. They are the heroes of society. From the days of Socrates Western society has idealized this kind of heroism.

Nevertheless, stoicism alone cannot bring fulfilment, and has now become an outmoded concept in affluent societies. Though harmony with life attained through forbearance and self-denial is a noble thing, it cannot in itself provide a lasting solution to the problems of life. It may at best serve as a foundation to a higher life.

Harmony and freedom

The two types of harmony discussed above are more or less adjustments to one's

bondage—like a prisoner's trying to adjust himself to his life in the jail. Without freedom harmony has no meaning. Therefore the apparently well-adjusted individuals are in no way superior to those unfortunate individuals who find it difficult to accommodate themselves to the routine norms of a commercial society. Some of these individuals, if not all of them, may be seeking a higher form of harmony in life. Seeking needs freedom. It is this urge for higher freedom that usually manifests itself in many spiritual aspirants as a form of 'divine discontent' and inability to follow the herd. This normally occurs only as a temporary phase. For, through the grace of the Lord, these sincere aspirants soon learn to acquire inner freedom which will enable them to attain a higher harmony. Is not a harmony based on freedom, even though difficult to attain, better than a harmony based on bondage?

True freedom, as Plato says, 'is no matter of laws and constitutions; only he is free who realizes the divine order within himself, the true standard by which a man can steer and measure himself'.³ Freedom, according to Swami Vivekananda, is an existential urge and is inseparable from life. Says Swamiji, 'Freedom is the one goal of nature, sentient or insentient; consciously or unconsciously everything is struggling towards that goal. The freedom which the saint seeks is very different from that which the robber seeks; the freedom loved by the saint leads him to the enjoyment of infinite, unspeakable bliss, while that on which the robber has set his heart only forges other bonds for his soul'.⁴ It is the urge for higher freedom that manifests itself

3. Quoted by Edith Hamilton, 'Lessons of the Past' in *Adventures of the Mind* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1960), p. 76.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977), p. 109.

as spiritual struggles. To a beginner these struggles could be profoundly disturbing and could create problems of adjustment with other people. But as he progresses in spiritual life, he learns to contain these struggles within himself without allowing them to disturb normal social life.

A certain amount of adjustment is, of course, unavoidable in normal social life. It is not necessary to quarrel with others in order to lead a meditative life. It is certainly harmful to develop a self-centred, holier-than-thou attitude. Everyone should follow the simple rules of sane living. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to think that the goal of life is somehow to lead a well-adjusted, trouble-free life. According to Vedanta the goal of life is freedom—freedom from all bondage and sorrow.

Freedom is the basis of evolution. This is the central theme of Lecomte du Nouÿ's famous book *The Human Destiny*. According to him adaptation and evolution are two different processes. Adaptation is the tendency to find equilibrium with the environment while evolution is a teleological urge to undergo change and transformation. Animals which are perfectly adapted to their environments have no need to evolve and consequently lose their intrinsic urge to evolve. In other words, they are so bound by their adaptation that they lose their freedom to evolve. For instance, all the monkeys and apes did not evolve into man. Only a few among them did which sought new environments and faced new challenges. The rest, which were perfectly adapted to their life in the forest, are still there as monkeys and apes. Says du Nouÿ, 'The criterion of adaptation is usefulness.... The criterion of evolution is liberty ... (when the) equilibrium representing perfect adaptation has been attained, the animal naturally ceases to transform itself as long as the external conditions are not sufficiently modified to make a new adaptation necessary, as long as the equilibrium has not

been broken'.⁵

According to du Nouÿ, evolution of life is possible only in unstable biological systems. This is true of spiritual evolution too. The feeling of insecurity and instability that many people feel need not always be interpreted as a mental disease. It may be, on the contrary, a sign of the emergence of an inner freedom and the higher evolutionary urge. Many distinguished modern psychologists like Eric Fromm, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers have shown that conformity to social conventions is not a true criterion to judge the worth of an individual or even the state of his mental health. The well-adjusted person who is afraid of seeking a higher life for fear of losing his group's approval is in a way more sick than the neurotic individual.⁶ The Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing even goes to the extent of saying that schizophrenia is a kind of psychedelic experience much superior to normal experience!

Nothing is more harmful to spiritual progress than complacency. The soul which is petrified in social conformity loses the evolutionary élan. False security created by social adaptation robs the individual of the desire to seek a higher harmony. The need for higher spiritual life comes only to the individual who has realized the impermanence of all worldly relationships and enjoyments. Sorrow and suffering are sometimes necessary to jerk people out of their false security and vain dreams. The *Bhāgavata* narrates the story of Bali, a king of the Asuras, who once conquered all the three worlds. Lord Viṣṇu then incarnated Himself as Vāmana, the Dwarf, and not only got back all the three worlds

5. Le Comte du Nouy, *The Human Destiny* (New York: The New American Library, 1956), pp. 68-69.

6. Cf. Eric Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 80.,

but also made Bali His slave. When the god Brahmā interceded on behalf of the virtuous king, the Lord told him: 'O Brahmā, I take away the wealth of one whom I want to bless. Otherwise overcome by vanity he will insult me and the whole world'.⁷ God's grace often comes to us in the form of suffering in order to break our bonds.

Harmony and unity

We have seen that it is possible to attain a higher harmony which is based on freedom. Why is it, then, that all people do not strive for it? What makes people seek the false security of lower harmony and adjust themselves to their bondage? It is fear. As Eric Fromm has shown in his book *Fear of Freedom*, most people do not want to be free because they are afraid of freedom. Freedom entails responsibility, and the greatest responsibility is to face the unknown. A slave does not have to face the unknown, for everything is determined for him by his master. But the free individual has to face an unknown future. Spiritual freedom means cutting oneself away from all supports, all that binds the soul to the world. Spiritual freedom entails the responsibility of seeking God. And spiritual seeking means giving up the known and plunging into the unknown. God does not appear before the aspirant as soon as he sits for meditation. Until the aspirant succeeds in gaining a glimpse of divine Light, he has to sit alone in the interior darkness and silence facing the unknown—not for a few days only but sometimes for years. In order to attain higher harmony one must overcome this fear of the unknown.

What is the root cause of this inherent

fear, this existential dread? 'Fear comes only from duality' says the Upaniṣad.⁸ Duality is built into our world of experience, and we see everything separate and different from us. As long as a person sees only diversity he cannot eliminate fear from him whoever he may be. To pretend to be fearless when one has not removed the root cause of fear is nothing but self-delusion. One day Akshayakumar Sen, the author of the modern Bengali classic *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Punthi*, told Sri Sarada Devi that he had nothing to fear as she was there (to protect him). The Holy Mother at once corrected him, 'No, my son, don't say that. He who has fear gains victory'.⁹ Here the Mother is not only warning us against false fearlessness, but also hinting at the possibility of gaining true fearlessness.

What is the way to true fearlessness? If duality is the cause of fear, unity should lead to true fearlessness. How to experience unity? By realizing the Supreme Self, declare the Upaniṣads. This answer represents one of the great discoveries made in ancient India, namely, that the source of unity lies within, deep down in consciousness. All beings are united in the Supreme Self. Like the string on which the pearls in a necklace are strung, the cosmic Self runs through all creation. The basic rhythm of life, the natural harmony of the universe mentioned at the beginning of this article, is ultimately derived from the universal Self. All beings are only extensions of this Supreme Self and are projected and withdrawn into It 'just as a spider produces and withdraws its web'.¹⁰

8. द्वितीयाद्वै भयं भवति ।

Brhadāranyaka-Upaniṣad, 1.4.2.

9. *jar ache bhoy taroi hoy jay*, Cf. Br. Akshay Chaitanya, *Sri Sri Saradadevi* (Calcutta: Bhattacharya Sons, B.S. 1344), p. 256.

10. यथोर्जनाभिः सृजते गृह्णते च ।

Mundaka-Upaniṣad, 1.1.7.

7. ब्रह्मन् यमनुगृह्णामि तद्विशो विघ्नोम्यहम् ।

यन्मदः पुरुषः स्तब्धो लोकं मां चावमन्यते ॥

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, 8.22.24.

The realization of this fundamental unity will enable us to attain the highest and best form of harmony. It is not possible to attain real harmony at a lower level of consciousness where we see only the conflict of good and evil, of happiness and sorrow, of love and hate, of profit and loss, of birth and death and other polarities of life. As we have seen, the lower harmony is based on ignorance, bondage and fear. It necessitates endless adjustments and manipulations of people and objects all through our life, and therefore cannot bring us lasting peace. But the higher harmony derived from the realization of the unity of all beings in the Supreme Self gives us freedom and fearlessness. 'What delusion and what sorrow can there be for him who sees oneness and has realized all beings as his Self?' asks the Upaniṣad.¹¹

We should never forget the important point that the source of harmony lies not in the outside world but in the Ātman within us which is inseparable from the Supreme Self. It is not by fighting and quarrelling with others and by trying to

change the whole world that we can attain harmony and peace, but by transforming our consciousness, by discovering the centre of unity within us. The full realization of the Atman may take time and may involve intense struggles. But it is possible to gain some understanding of it through intense prayer, meditation, self-analysis and other disciplines. Once we are able to locate our true spiritual centre, we should try to organize our whole personality around it. We should make this centre the converging point for all our thoughts, emotions and energies. We should hold on to this centre not only at the time of meditation but always even when we are engaged in work. Then every activity becomes a form of meditation. The Buddhists speak of walking meditation, working meditation, singing meditation, etc. Constant practice of this kind of meditative awareness will integrate our personalities and will bring a certain degree of higher awareness, higher freedom and higher harmony into our lives.

The harmony thus attained may not be the highest type which is the result of full illumination. But it will enable us to lead an intensely spiritual life even in the midst of the duties of life unaffected by the negative influences of the environment.

¹¹. यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।
तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥

Iśa-Upaniṣad, 7.

HOLINESS WITHOUT A SHADOW

SWAMI ANANYANANDA

'Motherhood in its purest form is endowed with a yearning love that can never refuse us; a benediction that for ever abides in us; a presence from which we cannot go away; a heart in which we are always safe; sweetness unfathomed, bond unbreakable, *holiness without a shadow*'—in these words, Sister Nivedita pays her humble homage to the personality

of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna. We can discern all these virtues and graces mentioned by Sister Nivedita operating in full force and measure in the quiet and otherwise uneventful life and day-to-day activities of the Holy Mother. She was a mother to one and all, the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, the scholar

and the unlettered, the socially high-placed and the socially fallen; there was no exclusiveness in her. Her maternal arms held every one in her embrace, without any regard to caste, community, race, or sex. She was a mother *par excellence*.

The sweet fragrance of flowers floats with the wind, says a medieval mystic, but the soul-elevating fragrance that emanates from a saintly personality, the fragrance of purity, holiness, and spirituality, floats even against the wind! It is pervasive and persuasive in character. It affects and makes responsive even refractory and reprobate souls, those who have fallen in the estimation of society. The effect of such a divine influence is profound and far-reaching. It not merely brings about a transformation in the innate tendencies and propensities of the spiritually unregenerate souls, but gives a higher direction to their lives and activities, changing the very course of their lives, and lifts them up to a level of consciousness where they can live, move, and have their being in God. Sri Sarada Devi, by the purity of her life, her impeccable character of holiness and saintliness, proved to the world that she was such an extraordinary influence, in her own right. To the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, who looked upon her as the manifestation of the Divine Mother, she came to be known as the Holy Mother. She combined in herself divine traits and moral excellences to such a degree that she stands out as the crowning glory of the ideal of Indian womanhood.

To quote Sister Nivedita again :

'To me, it has always appeared that she (the Holy Mother) is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.... In her, one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain. And yet, to myself, the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are about as wonderful as her sainthood.'

As we study the life of Sri Sarada Devi, otherwise quite common and with nothing extraordinary about it, two facets of her personality shine forth most prominently. One of them portrays in bold relief the very picture of purity and holiness—*holiness without a shadow*—that she was; and the other reflects the motherly affection and concern that she ever bore towards all.

Our physical mother, the mother who bears us and brings us up, whose incomparable love and self-sacrifice qualify her to stand above all other human relationships even she, bestowing her greatest care and attention, can bring comfort and joy to us only on the physical plane. She seldom sheds light on our spiritual path. But if a great spiritual personality, like the Holy Mother, assumes this highest of all human relationships—the role of the mother—the relationship she establishes with all those who come to her seeking spiritual succour and solace becomes all the more deep and divine. Such a mother's concern is not merely confined to the physical well-being of her spiritual children, but extends to their deeper self, their inner spiritual growth. To them, she becomes a *jñānadāyinī*, bestower of spiritual knowledge, lifting the veil of ignorance from their earth-bound vision and saturating their souls with purity and holiness. She becomes *jagajjananī*, universal mother, incessantly working for, and concerned with, the good and welfare of the whole world. She becomes *bhavatārīṇī*, redeemer from worldly existence, lending a helping hand to all weary souls groping in spiritual darkness, kindling the lamp of the eternal Spirit in their hearts, bringing to them supreme peace and blessedness that pass all human understanding, and freeing them from this round of births and deaths.

To the Holy Mother came numberless men and women seeking her spiritual guidance and benedictions. Her motherly love

was as intensive as it was extensive. Those who came to her were men and women from every walk of life. Her maternal affection and concern did not know any bounds or barriers—bounds and barriers which separate man from man, and create segments among them, one exclusive of the other. Sri Sarada Devi transcended all such petty bounds and barriers, and even the prevailing social and ethical notions of the community of her time.

The performance of the *ṣodaśī-pūjā* by Sri Ramakrishna, when he actually worshipped his own wedded wife as the manifestation of the Divine Mother, installing her on the pedestal of the deity, is unparalleled and unprecedented in the annals of the lives of saints and sages, mystics and god-men, religious leaders and prophets. This act of his was the culmination and consummation of his spiritual *sādhana*s. Sri Ramakrishna was an immense store-house of spiritual power, which he had gathered as a result of his twelve long years of diverse spiritual practices. At the conclusion of the *ṣodaśī-pūjā*, he offered at the feet of the deity in front of him, his own wife, the fruits of his austerities, his rosary—a tangible symbol of this offering—himself, and everything that was his. The Holy Mother, on her part, accepted everything without any hesitation or protest, reflecting thereby her willing and spontaneous copartnership in Sri Ramakrishna's mission in life. This worship reveals to us an altogether new and significant dimension of her personality. The fact cannot be overlooked that the influx of spirituality that flowed from her God-intoxicated husband into herself was quietly accepted and assimilated, without any outward show, as the rivers flowing into the ocean do not disturb the latter in the least. The fact remains that a receptacle that takes in anything from outside itself is, and should be, bigger and greater, if not equal, both in content and

form, than the source from which it receives, to contain it. This worship was unique in its spiritual exaltation and in its emotional appeal. As the complement of a mighty spiritual force that was Sri Ramakrishna, who was, as it were, the epitome of the spiritual life of India for thousands of years, Sri Sarada Devi, too, realized, at that moment, and manifested her divine nature and stature to the fullest extent. He concluded the ritual by prostrating himself before her and uttering the prescribed salutation. It was his firm conviction that she was none other than the Divine Mother Herself in human form; and he behaved as such in his relationship towards her.

This unique event in her life made the Holy Mother not only a co-partner in the spiritual eminence and responsibility of Sri Ramakrishna, but also a dynamic instrument in the fulfilment of his mission. It was her living presence and inspiration that nurtured, during its infant stage, the great spiritual-cum-social reformation movement that bears the hallowed name of Sri Ramakrishna—the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. Even the direct disciples of the Master—themselves great centres of spiritual power and inspiration—looked up to her for guidance and encouragement in their several spheres of work, spiritual as well as philanthropic. Those who felt orphaned by the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna went to the Holy Mother for spiritual solace and consolation. She, too, felt that she had a responsibility towards their spiritual welfare. Thus the Holy Mother became, under the compulsion of circumstances ordained by a divine design, the centre and source of unbounded love and inspiration for all those who gathered round her.

With the gradual spread of the message of Sri Ramakrishna, devotees from far and near, Eastern and Western, began to flock round the Holy Mother to pay their

homage and to worship her, as well as to be initiated by her. Her compassionate countenance and graceful benedictions captivated their hearts. They all felt spiritually uplifted in her presence. They felt that they were in the presence of the Divine Mother Herself.

The life that the Holy Mother lived from day to day was so silent and unostentatious that its very ordinariness and uneventful character baffle us. To the surface vision, there was nothing conspicuous about her, but deep within her heart shone forth the effulgent light of divine consciousness. To Sri Ramakrishna, she was 'the representation of the Blissful Mother in human flesh'.

The high esteem in which some of the prominent disciples of the Master held the Holy Mother reveals to us glimpses of her divine personality. They looked upon her as the veritable manifestation of the Divine Mother. We shall refer to only three of them here.

1. Swami Vivekananda, the Master's foremost disciple, says :

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of the Mother's life. Without Shakti, there is no regeneration of 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.

Referring to the blessings of the Holy Mother he himself received on the eve of his departure to the West on his epoch-making mission to spread broadcast the spiritually elevating message of India in the light of the realizations of his Master, the Swami says :

Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are paramount to me. Before proceeding to America, I wrote to the Mother to bless me. Her blessings came ; and at one bound, I cleared the ocean.

2. The author of *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, Swami Saradananda, who

aptly bears the Mother's own name, who was the lifelong General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, and who was content to consider himself a mere 'door-keeper' at the Holy Mother's house in Calcutta, conversing with a devotee once remarked : 'I also implore and wait for her (the Holy Mother's) favour by whom you have been blessed. She can even at this moment seat you here in my place, if she so desires.' The Swami, while dedicating his masterly book in Bengali on Shakti-worship in India to the Holy Mother, writes :

By whose gracious look the author has been able to realize the revelation of Divine Motherhood in every female form—to her lotus feet, this work is dedicated in all humility and devotion.

3. Swami Premananda, who was well known for his unsurpassing love towards all, brings out this facet of the Holy Mother's personality very prominently. Says he :

'Who has understood the Holy Mother? . . . Do you not see how many are rushing to be blessed by her? We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison we could not ourselves take. . . . Even though in a human form, she is the veritable goddess who does *līlā* for the sake of humanity. . . . With what patience, endurance, and forgiveness does she live, doing all the duties of the mother of the house ! Such an ideal has not been manifested in the past. . . . You will realize her divine love and infinite largeness of heart. . . . Her infinite grace is on all. Getting even an atom of it, we shall become filled.'

If anyone seeks to be guided by mere objective and external standards of an eventful life of thought and action, then there is every likelihood of his missing the true perspective of the sublime life of the Holy Mother. True worth and real greatness are measured not in terms of the political upheavals or social changes that one can bring about, but in terms of one's inner spiritual potential which, by its impact, can awaken men and women to a sense of the deeper values of the spirit. That, indeed, is

the sign of true spiritual greatness. The Holy Mother, in this sense, was the very embodiment of divine qualities and spiritual potentialities.

The episode relating to the 'Dacoit Father' in her early life—as a young bride going to Dakshineswar to be by the side of her God-absorbed husband and to serve him, considering that to be her duty at that time—shows how, by her native and innocent behaviour, gentle words, and childlike trust, young Sarada brought about such a remarkable transformation in the evil intentions even of a highwayman, that he felt parental love and affection towards her. We have only to recall the incident to appreciate the gravity and the risk involved. When young Sarada found herself alone, face to face with the desperado shouting at night-fall, in a vast field far from human habitation, separated from her companions, she instantly mastered the situation and, in an endearing voice with perfect presence of mind and full of self-confidence and self-assurance, addressed him : 'Father, my companions have left me behind, and possibly I have lost the way. Will you kindly conduct me so that I may join them? Your son-in-law dwells in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, and I am bound for that place to meet him. If you escort me as far as that, he will gratefully entertain you.' As this conversation was still in progress, they were joined by the wife of the brigand, who was closely following him. Sarada was greatly relieved to find that the newcomer was a woman. Correctly guessing her to be his wife, Sarada took the strange woman by the hand and addressed her in an affectionate tone : 'Mother, I am your daughter Sarada. Cut off from party, all alone and benighted in this wilderness, I found myself in a terrible plight. Luckily, you and father turned up; else I do not know what I should have done for my safety.'

The 'brigand couple' stood there disarmed and transformed ! Young Sarada's winsome simplicity, endearing conduct, and unhesitating trust had touched their hearts. They comforted her and began to treat her as their own daughter ! They took her to their home, fed her, and looked after her comforts for the night during her stay with them. Next morning, they conducted her as far as the next halting place, where she was to join the rest of the party. What a miracle of spiritual transformation ! In later life, whenever this 'dacoit couple' visited Dakshineswar, even Sri Ramakrishna would behave towards them exactly like a son-in-law !

The love of the mother is all-encompassing and all-forgiving. It cannot display any segments of exclusiveness, preference, or hierarchy. A mother is mother to all her children. And the Holy Mother was 'Mother' to every man, woman, and child that came to her. The motherly affection in her was always uppermost. Her solicitude for all who sought refuge in her knew no bounds. Whoever came to her felt that there was one, dearer than their own kith and kin, to whom they could bare their hearts unhesitatingly, before whom they could unburden their minds and worries, and in whom they could confide their innermost secrets and thoughts. The Holy Mother, too, on her part, bestowed her love and grace on one and all, without any distinction of rank or race, caste or community, creed or sex. A few instances drawn from her life at random reveal in bold relief this aspect of the Holy Mother's maternal solicitude and concern towards those that came to her.

When the Holy Mother's house at Jayrambati was being built, a number of Muslims from a nearby village were engaged as labourers. Since these labourers had a bad record previously—socially speaking—there was some consternation among the inhabit-

ants of Jayrambati, when they saw those labourers at work in the Holy Mother's house. But she remained unperturbed. Not merely that. One day, when one of these Muslims brought some bananas to her and said, 'Mother, I have brought these for the Master. Would you accept them?' The Holy Mother readily accepted the offering very gladly. It goes without saying that she offered the bananas to the Master.

On another occasion, the Holy Mother took one of these Muslims—Amzad by name—into her house for a meal. When Amzad had finished his meal, the Mother tidied up the place herself. At this, Nalini Devi, her orthodox niece, loudly protested and cried out: 'O dear aunt, you lose your caste thereby!' But the Holy Mother cut her short, saying: 'Keep quiet. Even this Amzad is as truly my son as my Sharat (Swami Saradananda) himself is.'

Once the Holy Mother was requested not to allow a certain young disciple to come to her presence because of some misconduct on his part. But the mother in her would not listen to the request. She tenderly said: 'If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?'

When a certain woman who had not led a very chaste life went to the Holy Mother in a mood of sincere repentance and made an unreserved confession of her sins, the Mother embraced her with great warmth of feeling, uttering these words of assurance and consolation: 'Don't despair for whatever you have done. You will get over all your sinful tendencies.' The Holy Mother also gave her initiation and instructed her in spiritual practices.

After Swami Vivekananda's successful mission in the West, when Western women disciples of the Swami began to come to her, the Holy Mother accepted them all naturally and spontaneously as her own, saying: 'These people are also my children.' She

mixed with them freely and even ate and slept with them, looking upon them as members belonging to the spiritual family of Sri Ramakrishna.

When the Swadeshi Movement was in full swing in India, in the beginning of this century, a disciple of the Holy Mother had purchased only cloth of Indian make for the children of the Mother's brothers. The women of the family did not like the coarse cloth and suggested what they preferred. The disciple, out of patriotic feeling, excitedly told them: 'But what you want is all foreign cloth. How can I buy them?' The Holy Mother, who was present there, said with a smile: 'My child, they (the Western people) too are my children. I must accommodate everyone. Can I ever be exclusive? Buy the things they want.'

These are only a few among the numerous instances that we have garnered from the Mother's life. Today, they may not appear to be anything extraordinary, as social conditions have changed with more of communication and education among women. Considered against the then prevailing social conditions, norms, and restrictions, the way the Holy Mother conducted herself in the few instances cited above was revolutionary in character. It was the beginning, we are inclined to remark, of a new awakening among the women of India. Let us also add here that those episodes and events in the life of the Holy Mother were the tangible and significant pointers to the large-heartedness, liberal-mindedness, all-comprehensive vision, and, above all, the motherly love and affection she possessed for all. Maternal love and solicitude were the warp and the weft of her being.

Purity in thought, word, and deed is the foundation of spiritual life. The Holy Mother's life reveals to us that she was the very embodiment of purity. Referring to his own spiritual *sādhana*s and realizations,

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'The credit for this was no less due to her.' Her unsullied purity and saintly character were his shield and armour. She was too pure to drag her divinely inebriated husband to the ordinary life of worldliness. She told him, when the choice was given to her, that she had become his wife not to pull him down from his spiritual heights, but only to help him in the attainment of his life's ideals and aspirations—a *sahadharminī* in the truest sense of the term. If she had but desired to choose the worldly way of marital life, it was open to her. Sri Ramakrishna gave her the choice, but she was constituted differently.

The one golden thread that passes through the various beads of the Holy Mother's life, in all situations and circumstances, and which shines most brilliantly, is her perfect purity of character. Swami Abhedananda, in a Sanskrit hymn to the Holy Mother, portrays her to us as the very personification of purity (*pavitratā-svarūpiṇī*). We can catch a glimpse of the degree of excellence her spotless life had attained from her own words :

On moonlit nights, I would look at the moon and pray with folded hands: 'May my heart be as pure as the rays of the yonder moon!' or, 'O Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind'.

Speaking of the immaculate character of the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna himself has declared :

Had she not been so pure, who knows whether I might not have lost my self-control from her inducements? After my marriage, I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, remove even the least taint of carnality from the mind of my wife'. When I lived with her, I understood that the Divine Mother had really granted my prayer.

That the Holy Mother was made of the purest stuff can be discerned from her spirited reply to Sri Ramakrishna. One day,

when the Master put her a straight question, 'Do you want to drag me down to Maya?' Pat came the reply, 'Why should I do that? I have come only to help you in the path of spiritual life'—a reply from a worthy wife to a saintly husband! She had already come to realize the part she had to play in the drama of Sri Ramakrishna's life on earth. She had come to be united with him not for leading a worldly life, but for becoming a real helpmate and life-partner of her God-intoxicated husband. What she cherished most was to live with him, to look after him, to serve him, and to mould her own life after the pattern of the Master's. The Holy Mother's was an impeccable character, like the fragrance of the fresh flower at dawn, untouched and unsmelt by man.

It is needless for us to add here that the Holy Mother comes in the long line of the great women of India, who have shed lustre on Indian womanhood and illumined the pages of her history by their saintly life, pure character, great learning, and heroic deeds. Their number is legion. One has only to turn to the pages of history in order to get acquainted with them and to learn of their extraordinary life of thought and action, sacrifice and service, literary contributions and valorous actions, contemplation and meditation.

To our contemporary India, the Holy Mother's life represents certain unique features of Indian Womanhood, something easily the highest and best in that ideal, being as it was one of artless simplicity, piety, purity, and self-sacrifice. She had accumulated such virtues and graces in a natural way, without much effort, as to make her self-effacement complete. She was shy by nature and never sought the limelight. She quietly lived her life, away from the din and bustle of the world, whether it was in her native villages of Jayrambati or Kamarpu-kur, or in the metropolis of Calcutta.

Always, she lived, moved, and had her being in God.

From her own words, 'Sri Ramakrishna left me behind to manifest the motherhood of God to the world', though it could be said that the spirit of motherhood was most dominant in the life of the Holy Mother, she stands out as having been at once a perfect wife, a perfect nun, and a perfect spiritual guide, discharging her several duties and functions in an accomplished manner and proving equal to the task of each role that she was called upon to assume.

The counterpart of a great spiritual teacher like Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi had to shoulder the responsibility of guiding many a spiritually weary soul. When the Master shuffled off his mortal coil, the mantle of spiritual leadership of a world-wide movement descended on her. She rose to the occasion and accepted that role in all humility in the name of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna had prepared her for that task, and she took to it quite naturally. And her spiritual ministration continued for more than three decades. Hundreds of devoted aspirants were blessed by her; and they slaked their spiritual thirst at the feet of the Holy Mother.

Her spiritual talks and conversations have been recorded by some of her disciples, both monastic and lay, men and women. These conversations, couched in a language of rural simplicity, are fully imbued with spiritual fervour, as they directly spring from a heart that is overflowing with divine wisdom issuing from personal knowledge and realization. Sri Ramakrishna had said of her :

'She is Sarada, Sarasvati. She has come to impart knowledge. . . . She is the communicator of knowledge; she is full of the rarest wisdom.'

While concluding this brief study of the Holy Mother, let us recall those profoundly significant and divinely inspired words which, though addressed to a particular individual, can be regarded as her last message to this distracted and bewildered humanity :

'If you want peace, my child, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own.'

What an invaluable message to our present-day world, cut up into sections and segments on grounds of race and religion, caste and colour, the backward and the advanced, the haves and the have-nots, etc. ! If only the wayward man learned to leave his wicked ways and listen to this sage advice of the Holy Mother, what a happy world he could create for himself and for his fellow-beings ! Will he learn to do it ? Then great will be the gain. If he does not heed it, great will be the loss.

This monograph on Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, was begun with a humble tribute paid to her by Sister Nivedita, who considered herself a 'foolish child' before the spiritual greatness and personality of the Holy Mother. The caption of this study is borrowed from that tribute—'Holiness Without a Shadow'. We shall conclude this essay by quoting from a letter from Sister Nivedita to the Holy Mother :

'Surely, you are the most wonderful thing of God, Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of his love for the world, a token left with his children. . . . Surely, the wonderful things of God are all quiet, stealing unnoticed into our hearts; the air and the sunlight and the sweetness of gardens and of the Ganges—these are the silent things that are like you.'

WHAT IS ADVAITA

DR. A. RAMAMURTY

What is Advaita ? More than one answer is possible. Popularly it stands for a philosophical doctrine which when expressed succinctly comes to the statement: *brahma satyam jaganmithyā* (Brahman alone is real, the world is unreal). Historically it stands for a particular type of interpretation, one among many, of the Vedānta texts. Philosophically it may be explained as a type of Absolute Idealism comparable to the philosophical systems of Hegel and Bradley. All these explanations are in a sense valid and meaningful, but none of these individually indicates the true significance of the term 'Advaita'. For the Advaita as we find it expounded and developed in the works of classical Advaitic thinkers like Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara is all these and something more.

Advaita is a system of philosophical thought, logically well-knit, and at the same time something more than a philosophical system. As referring ultimately to an absolute experience described in the Vedānta texts, it is something positive and mystical. And in this respect it transcends all the categories of human understanding. Because of its nonempirical and sui generis character nothing can be said about it in empirically meaningful terms. And anything that is said about it cannot be literally true of it. As experience it does not share the characteristics of experience as it is ordinarily understood. It is radically and qualitatively distinct from empirical experience, and therefore all those categories that are valid and meaningful with regard to empirical experience cannot be applied to it. Of its possibility we are to depend primarily upon the authority of *Śruti*, and secondarily on spiritual tradition by which I mean the wisdom of those who have personally realized the Advaitic truth. How-

ever, an attempt is made towards the end of this paper to show how its possibility can be appreciated from the empirical standpoint. Beyond establishing such a possibility, we are helpless to know, independently of *Śruti*, anything about it positively.

Intellectually or rationally we can deal only with the logical side of Advaita, or Advaita as a philosophical position. As a philosophical concept, Advaita is by definition negative in significance. Logically it is not possible to define Advaita in positive terms ; for anything of which a positive definition is possible is not Advaita, as the reality so defined, however comprehensive it may seem to be, has to presuppose the basic duality or distinction of the subject and the object or the definer and the defined. Thus any positive definition is logically incompatible with the notion of Advaita. Therefore Advaita has traditionally been defined negatively as the cessation of all duality, or duality in all its modes, *sarva-dvaitopaśame advaitasiddhiḥ*. That is to say, philosophically Advaita means the denial or refutation of all philosophical positions as well as religious doctrines which involve duality in any form. This in a sense has also been the position of all the absolutist thinkers. It is not possible to assert meaningfully, and without self-contradiction, that the Absolute is known conceptually by a subject. The knowledge of the Absolute which we may claim to have is in reality nothing but self-knowledge on the part of the Absolute attained of course in and through an individual subject who is but a self-conscious manifestation of the Absolute. That is to say, the Absolute which attains, on the empirical level, self-awareness in and through man or rather human reason, its supreme self-manifestation, knows Itself simultaneously in and

through the self-unfoldment of self-conscious human reason. We cannot therefore maintain that we have knowledge of the Absolute as we can have knowledge of a particular object. This is because by definition the Absolute is all that is there, and any claim to its knowledge, other than the knowledge of itself by itself, presupposes a reality other than itself to which it can become an object of contemplation or knowledge.

Now there are many forms or modes of duality. All our experience and understanding are possible because of the basic duality of the subject and the object. Without this distinction no experience of any kind is possible. And to deny this basic distinction is to deny ultimately all the activities based on or involving it. Thus philosophical understanding, religious experience of all types and scientific knowledge presuppose or are based upon this basic distinction. We can therefore understand the Advaitic denial of duality on two different levels; either on the level of manifestation or activity, or at the source level, that is, the origin or basis of such manifestation or activity. Denial of duality at the level of manifestation means denial or refutation of all metaphysical positions that involve duality in any form, all types of religious experience involving the duality of the individual and the object of his worship and communion, and all cosmological explanations in which the world is looked upon as something distinct from oneself, as well as from its supposed ground or source of existence. The same in effect can also be accomplished by showing how the basic duality of the subject and the object, the ultimate ground of all duality, is untenable and an illusion. As no dualistic system of thought or experience is possible without the basic distinction of the subject and the object, when it is refuted all that is based on it stands refuted.

Denial of duality at the level of manifestation

We may now take for the purpose of our analysis and understanding the statement that the world is an illusion, or it has no objective existence, *sarvaprapañcopaśame advaitasiddhih*. If the world were real and objective it would go against the fundamental position of Advaita, namely, that the Reality is one without a second, and that It has no internal difference. To admit objective existence to the world amounts to the denial of Advaita in its classical sense, though some of the modern Advaitins do not find any contradiction between the objective existence of the world with all that it means, and the fundamental truth of Advaita. Our concern here is not to deal with them. Their positions are referred to, if at all, only to clarify and strengthen our position. Is it at all possible to deny meaningfully objective existence to the world? On the face of it, it looks meaningless to deny existence to a reality in which we live and participate, and of which we are part and parcel. As the centre of all that we know and do, it is presupposed at every moment of our lives. Its denial therefore goes against the demands of our common-sense. And also all the sources of valid knowledge seem to testify its objective existence. But, according to Advaita, in denying the world nothing that is objectively real is denied. It is an axiom with Advaita that what is there objectively cannot be wished or explained away; and what is not there objectively cannot be brought into existence by wishing or imagining it to be. Of course, an imaginary entity too has a type of existence, namely, imaginary or mental type of existence. In this sense anything that can be conceived of will have a sort of existence. But subjective or mental type of existence is no real existence. A subjective reality cannot only not exist by itself, but it cannot also be talked about

and communicated meaningfully, though it may have its own value and significance to the person concerned.

What is then meant by the world and how is it only an illusion? The term world, as we all use it, really stands for a notion or a concept, a view or a mental construction. The world as such is not an object of anybody's knowledge. It is not known the manner in which any particular object is known. Even the so-called objects, like tables, etc., are not objective if we are to go by the tests of pure objectivity. Everyone of us thinks and talks about the world. Even those people who have not known anything beyond the frontiers of their little villages, and are practically ignorant about the extent of the known geographical world also refer to the world when they judge it as this or that. While some people think it is good and beautiful, others consider it to be evil and wicked. While some of us regard it as the best place, there are people who consider it not so happy a place to live in. To them it is the source of suffering and bondage; and hence something to be freed from. Again we speak of a poet's world, or the world of a metaphysician, or the world of common sense. It is also true to say that the same person lives in different worlds according to his understanding of the world which goes on changing as he grows in understanding. One may even alternate one's view of the world according to the changing situations of one's life. One may live in a world of moral values, or in a world of religious sentiments, or in the so-called world of facts. Moreover, depending upon one's religious beliefs and philosophical outlook, one's estimate of the world also changes. Thus the Sanskrit words *jagat*, *prapañca*, *loka* and *viśva*, which stand for the world are not themselves free from expressing certain views. They do not express a reality which is completely objective. For example, the connotation of the word *jagat* is different from

that of *prapañca*. Historically also for a long time most of the mankind looked upon the world as a creation of God, and now most of us consider it to be a product of evolutionary process. Our understanding of the world normally involves all these factors, that is to say, when we talk about the world we mean by it all these things.

Then what is it that is referred to when we talk about the world? As the understanding of the world differs from person to person and from time to time depending upon one's attitude towards it, it may not be far from the truth to say that we live in different worlds, or the world is not the same for all of us. Can we then reasonably suppose that all those worlds which we speak about are objectively real? Is it possible for all of us to agree on what we mean by the world? What one means by the world is one's own view of a reality of which one shares a common awareness with others. Now we may suppose that every one of us is in fact aware of an objective reality known as the world, though in knowing it and talking about it, each one of us invariably interprets it, or attaches his own view of it to it. But on closer examination we find no such clearcut distinction in our understanding of the world between the subjective and the objective elements. These elements are so mixed up that one is not usually aware of the distinction between them. And if we accept the Kantian analysis of experience, it is not possible without an intimate interplay of both these factors. Even science to which the prerogative of knowing the world in its purest objectivity is assigned is not yet in a position to offer us a completely objective knowledge of the world. Moreover, as science is in a state of continuous progress, its various doctrines about the world also tend to be views in the long run. Consequently a categorical and final statement about the nature of the world cannot be expected from science. For the world as

such is no object. It is a notion. In all our understanding of the world there is a predominant element of mental construction, and therefore what one means by the world is mostly one's own peculiar understanding of it.

Another important fact, which goes in favour of our position is the difference in the life patterns or the ways of life adopted by people. Differences in the goals of life pursued, and the diversity of attitudes taken towards it by different people are directly related to the differences in their understanding of the world. Our understanding of the world has much to do with our understanding of ourselves, and vice versa. We can thus assert that the world we talk about and live in is nothing but a view, a mental construction, or an imaginary picture of what is there, and of whose real and objective nature we do not completely know. We have only different views of it like the Marxian, the Christian, the Hindu; or an idealist view of it or a common-sense of it. But a view is not objective knowledge. Even science gives us only a view of it—the scientific view. However, the scientific view is distinct from the rest in that it is dynamic and changing, while the rest are practically stable. In the light of the above discussion we can clearly see how objective is our understanding of the world. Historically also no particular view of the world has ever commanded complete universality.

All this does not mean however that the various views of the world are purely subjective or mental for men react or respond to a reality that is there, though differently. Now we cannot explain the differences in our understanding of the world as due to the world itself. We cannot say that it becomes different things to different people, and that too at the same time, as different views of the world can subsist simultaneously. What status can then be assigned to these views? How are we to judge their validity? We cannot leave the problem of

judging their validity to those who hold different views, for each one would claim his own view of the world to be objective. For instance, a Marxist or a Christian thinks his view of the world to be the real and objective picture of the world, though there is to be found nothing common to them except the fact that they are about the same reality. Nevertheless, we are to admit that the moment one is freed from a particular orientation or a way of looking at things, the view of the world born of it ceases to be objective, and also loses its meaningfulness. Then it is seen clearly as a view or a construction. That is how the various views of others appear to us. Now a view not only seems to be objective to the viewer, but also fascinates him existentially. Usually one gets existentially involved in a view of the world and fully participates in it. It determines one's way of life and confers meaning to it. It is the world in which one practically lives. In a way it is one's reality though from others' point of view it is just a construction. In this light we can understand and appreciate the Advaitic assertion that the world of duality is mental, *manodṛśyamidaṁ dvaitaṁ*. All duality, which includes the various views about the world, is a matter of active imagination or *kalpanā*. The various views about the world only indicate a persistent belief (*abhiniveśa*) on our part, but having no objective reality corresponding to them. We are so much attached to our views that we think them to be objective. It must have been a rude shock to common-sense to be told that the sun does not rise or set. Even now we think, talk and act in terms of the sun's motion even though we know that the sun's motion is an illusion. In a way the sun's motion conforms to our daily experience. Likewise our belief in the objective existence of the world is only a matter of belief, but a belief which has practical significance and works. The common-sense view of things is pragmatic.

Anything that works is true according to it. But the practical efficiency or existential satisfaction cannot be the criterion to judge the objective validity of a view. Thus according to Advaita, the status of the various views of the world or any one of them is *māyā*. *Māyā* is both real and unreal. It is neither purely subjective nor purely objective. It is both. Etymologically it means 'to measure'—measure mentally. The various views of the world are our measures of it, as each measure the world according to his own measure. Therefore, the different views of the world are practically and existentially real and meaningful, though objectively unreal. They are practically real as without them the pursuance of life will not be meaningful. A view of the world meets the practical demands of life and also the existential needs of man. It acts as a sort of support to life, either intellectual or moral. Nevertheless, when the reality is known in its complete objectivity, that is to say, reality as freed from all types of conditioning and interpretation (*adhyāsa*)—cultural, religious, moral and metaphysical—the various views of the world lose their validity or cease to be, and the reality is revealed as being the objective ground of all such views. The objective ground of all world views, as without a ground no view is possible, is one and the same reality, and that alone is really objective. As views not a single view conforms objectively to the nature of reality, though at the same time all the views are about it.

Now in the writings of Śaṅkara and of other Advaitic thinkers, we find positive exposition or views about the nature of the world, the nature of the self, etc. On the basis of such positive views is it not possible for us to say that Advaita too has its own way of understanding things positively, or it too is a positive system of metaphysics? We may thus be tempted to assert that Advaita does not mean simple

negation of all dualistic views, but a positive explanation of things. In the Upaniṣads also we come across several positive doctrines about the nature of the world and its origin. What should we say about such positive views and explanations, both ontological and cosmological? According to Advaita, we have to treat all such positive doctrines in so far as they are based on or suggest duality in any form as equally due to *māyā* or as *māyā*. They too are to be treated as mental constructions and are to be negated ultimately. The classical Advaitins have gone to the extent of extending their logic even to the Veda. It is said that the Veda becomes *aveda* the moment one transcends the realm of *māyā*; and that means all the views contained either in the vedantic texts or in the writings of Śaṅkara or of others are to be transcended ultimately in realizing Advaita directly and immediately. However, as long as one is intellectually and existentially dependent upon an idea or a system of philosophy and finds in such an idea or system life's meaning as well as its support, one has no reason to doubt its validity. As a matter of fact, one does not doubt its objective validity. Its validity is questioned, or its objectivity is doubted only when one is intellectually or existentially outside of it.

Now a problem arises. Each view is relative to the other; but what about a judgement in which all the views are treated as illusory and are negated? Obviously it is not possible to deny all the views from any particular point of view however comprehensive it may be. Denial of all views is possible only by standing outside of all the views. And that amounts to transcending the world. The status of the world or its objective validity cannot be judged by being within it. But to transcend the world, so as to be able to judge it, seems to be an impossibility. How can anyone stand outside of the world, as the term world has a very wide meaning, and all our thinking,

understanding and experience are possible only by being within it? Here we should note that according to Advaita, the illusory nature of the world is known only when Brahman is directly realized. That means the statement that the world is an illusion is a logical corollary of the statement that Brahman alone is real. In this sense, to transcend the world is to realize the illusory character of all the views about it, and to deny them all consequently. And as *māyā* is the single source responsible for the emergence and sustenance of all the views, to transcend them is to transcend the realm of *māyā*. Thus freedom from *māyā*, which subjectively is ignorance, is freedom from the world, which in reality means giving up of one's exclusive attachment or clinging to any one of the views about it.

We may here consider the position of the Mādhyamika philosophers whose approach also seems to be somewhat similar to that of Advaita. They treat all views simply as various logical possibilities, and therefore they think that they can refute each and every view by following the logic inherent within that view. Only the logic is to be developed rigorously to its logical end. But by the term *māyā* we do not mean that the various views of the world are simply logical possibilities, though some sort of logic is operative in the development of a view. Most of the views are based on some sort of experience or insight which may be either religious or empirical or even a mystical feeling. Therefore it is not possible to deny them simply by applying the principles of logic or dialectic rigorously. What is based on an experience cannot be judged solely in terms of reason. As the validity of logical truths is independent of experience, the validity of an experience cannot be decided upon by logic. An experience is valid *per se*, and it can be judged only in the light of another experience. According to Advaita, the Advaitic experience not only transcends all duality, but

in its wake the dualistic experience stands sublated. Yet it is the ground of all dualistic experience. Since we cannot think of the possibility of an experience higher than that of Advaita, it is accepted as the highest possible norm for judging the validity of all other experiences. Thus it is not simply the logic, as in the case of the Mādhyamika philosophers, that is sufficient to negate all views, but a higher experience which ultimately justifies our denial of all dualistic views.

Denial of duality at the source of experience

Let us now try to understand briefly the sense in which the source of all dualistic experience and understanding is itself an illusion. The source of all dualistic experience is the mind in its comprehensive sense, or the *Jīva* or the subject; and according to Advaita it has no independent or objective existence. It is the individualized expression of the Self which actively imagines various things about the reality and then identifies the reality—the ontological ground of all such imagination—with those things. In like manner, the self goes on constructing various views about itself and gets identified with them. Does it possess objective reality? Advaita takes the state of deep sleep or *samādhi* as the nearest possible analogy for understanding the true nature of the Self. We are to note in this connection that as there are several views about reality, there are diverse anthropological views also. Every thinker has developed his own view or philosophy of man. Now we can understand the presence of diverse views regarding the nature of Reality, for even the existence of it is a problem to us, and also it is not given to our direct observation as our own reality. But how to explain the diversity of views regarding man's own reality? According to Advaita, the sense of mystery dawns on

man while trying to know his own reality. He knows himself intimately and directly, and yet he feels a sense of mystery about himself. All the anthropological views thus refer to human reality, and yet they are not objectively true. The broad spectrum of views from the position of the Cārvākas to that of the Buddhists indicates the same. None of these views about man, as in the case of the views about the world, is either completely false and unobjective or completely true and objective. As views they are both. What is the mystery about man? What is the explanation for his lack of objective knowledge about himself, and consequent diversity of views regarding himself? One's illusory experience about oneself, according to Advaita, stems ultimately from the mind. It is the mind that is the source of all views. So long as the mind is active, the process of imagination and speculation because of which the multiplicity is created or projected and then experienced, takes place. The active sense of 'I' in man is generated only in relation to something other than himself of which he thinks he is the experiencer or the subject. And consequently in the absence of objects to be known or experienced the sense of 'I' is not felt, as happens in the states of deep sleep and samādhi. That means the existence of 'I' and the existence of objects are interdependent. Each depends for its existence on the other, as the one is not known to exist in the absence of the other. As thus the existence of the one is dependent upon the other, neither can claim independent and objective reality for itself. Neither can exist by itself. Now what exists in relation to the other ceases to be the moment the relation is dissolved. The real lack of objectivity, and the seeming possession of it at the same time, is what is meant by the illusoriness of a thing.

Here it may be pointed out that the mind or jīva has no capacity to create or imagine anything anew. It is not true to say that

man creates anew in dreams and in imagination, for the images, the basic constituents of dream experience and imagination, are formed out of one's objective experience. Only the way the images are related and arranged is something new. Even such relating may have its own laws which are mostly unconscious. That means even the dream experience and imagination are not purely subjective experiences. How can we therefore explain that all duality is an imaginary creation of mind, for mind can only imitate or represent? But we have to admit that the mind has the capacity to create forms. The forms are not there like Platonic Ideas which the mind can only copy. The mind freely creates afresh various forms, and names accompany those forms. The various cultural, social and aesthetic values and forms are the active creations of man. The world of forms and names is thus a creation of the human mind. They are one in substance, and are the tools by which māyā creates all this. They are Māyā itself. Accordingly we may say that duality exists only in name and form. Apart from the differences created by them the reality is one only without a second. But then how to account for the names and forms, as most of the forms we find in nature are not our creation?

Thus we come to the problem of explaining the presence of māyā or something other than Reality whatever may be its status and validity. It does not matter whether it is objective or subjective or both. As long as it is there it needs satisfactory explanation, for to admit its reality, whatever may be the mode of its existence, is to give up or compromise with the notion of Advaita. Historically various explanations have been suggested as to its status and validity, and almost all possible types of relation that can exist between itself and Brahman have been explored. To admit any type of relation ultimately between māyā and Brahman means to accept

duality. So in order to establish Advaita all relations are to be denied ultimately. The relation between *māyā* and Brahman therefore cannot be one of creation, or manifestation or evolution, as all these types of relations create logical problems of their own. How then to understand this problem?

The following may be a way out of this problem, and which can be both logically and experientially satisfactory, and does not at the same time violate the basic spirit of Advaita. As Brahman and Atman are convertible terms, man is the best possible model to understand the nature of reality as well as our present problem. Man as spirit or self-conscious being is essentially dynamic in the sense that we cannot think of the self without its capacity for self-expression. Like the sun and its light, the self and its expression are co-extensive, and necessarily go together. They are inseparable, as they are one and the same, only they are viewed and termed distinctly. They are not two ontologically, as one cannot be known to exist without the other. It is not possible to think of the self without its expression and vice versa. Therefore there is no problem of relating them. They are ontologically one and the same though the language creates a distinction which however is only apparent. The various expressions of the self in and through which it reveals itself are the self itself, as they cannot be without it. As these constitute the nature of the self the self cannot be without them. However, some may deny the existence of self as something more than its various expressions of which only we are aware of, while others may admit self only as an indeterminate substance and deny all expressions. The first position is not tenable as in that case we cannot explain how the various expressions are known, and are interrelated and integrated. And also as these various expressions are only intermittent but not co-extensive with the self, no single ex-

pression can be said to constitute the self. Each expression reveals and at the same time also points to self as something more than itself, and this would not be possible if expression is all. The other position is equally untenable as in that case the self can never be known either mystically or empirically. We cannot think of a self which is not self-conscious, that is, a self without its capacity to reveal itself. However, the need to relate the two arises because we in the first instance intellectually make a distinction between the self and its various expressions, as we talk of the sun and its light.

All this may be meaningful in the case of the self and its various expressions as both are spiritual in nature. But how to understand on this analogy the nature of Brahman and the world as being related as self and its expression? How to explain the presence of things which are apparently opposed in nature to spirit, that is the material aspect of nature? If Brahman is pure spirit and everything is its self-expression, how can anything other than spiritual come into existence? Here we touch the limits of our logical understanding. To have an understanding of this problem we are to rely on the *Śruti* and the mystical experience of Advaita according to which there is in reality nothing which is not Brahman. It only appears as something other than Itself in nature without itself being in any way causally responsible for the appearance. Now we can only hint at its possibility by referring to some of the findings of science. These can at least help us in appreciating the possibility of Advaita, though empirically it is unintelligible, and may even appear to be absurd. According to a scientific finding, matter and energy are convertible terms, as mass is frozen energy and energy is released mass. The one and the same reality thus appears differently as two distinct things depending upon the standpoint from which it is viewed. As

these viewpoints are possible simultaneously, we cannot think of reality becoming this and that at the same time. All this discussion may or may not be logically convincing, but it helps us to appreciate a problem which when earnestly pursued ends up in a deep sense of mystery. And unless the sense of mystery is felt directly, one cannot stop clinging to the various views about reality, and be satisfied with them.

Advaita as experience

Let me conclude this paper with a brief consideration of the positive or the mystical side of Advaita. By Advaitic experience we mean Self-realization; and Self-realization means an integral or complete knowledge of the Self. In It the subject and the object are identical. It is pure experience in which knowing and being are one. To have Advaitic experience is to transcend the limitations and distinctions of empirical experience.

Now there are two ways of knowing one's self. In one the self knows itself inferentially or indirectly as that which knows, thinks, feels, etc., and consequently it is known as the thinker, knower, etc. On this level one's knowledge of oneself is in and through one's awareness of one's various possibilities or self-expressions. An expression is a realized possibility. How are we to know that we are something more than those realized possibilities? As seen earlier, none of its expressions is co-extensive with the self. That is to say, we at times think, and at other times we feel and still at other times we do some other thing. Now if the self were to be identical only with these expressions, it should cease to be in the absence of any one of them. That is to say, if the self is identical with the thinker, it should cease to be when one does not think. But one may be feeling or doing some other thing when one is not thinking. That means the self cannot be identified exclusively with

any one of its expressions. As that which is common to all the expressions, the self is equally present in all and is simultaneously revealed in and through all its expressions. As consciousness it is the common ground of all that we know and experience. But ordinarily when we think of ourselves we are selective in our approach, and identify ourselves with some of our possibilities to the exclusion of others, and would like to be known as this or that. For reasons which may be cultural or moral or religious or philosophical, we fail to identify ourselves with all that we are, and instead identify ourselves with some of our possibilities. But as the self is equally present in all its expressions as their common ground, or as all are its expressions equally, to identify it exclusively with any one or more of its expressions is not to realize it fully or integrally. And as it is not possible for any one to realize all his possibilities at any given time of his existence, to realize one's self is to realize it as something more than its realized possibilities. Moreover, as that which is commonly revealed in and through all its expressions, the self transcends them all. To realize it as transcending all its possibilities is not to miss it in its realized possibilities. Thus to realize the self in its true nature means to realize it as something beyond all its expressions and possibilities and at the same time as being revealed equally in and through all its expressions and possibilities. Whereas to identify it with anyone of its realized possibilities, and to know it consequently as this or that, is to know it wrongly or incompletely, as the self cannot be reduced to anyone of its possibilities. And it is equally an error to select some of its possibilities to the exclusion of others as being true of itself. Thus exclusive identification of the self with one or some of its possibilities leads to bondage, whereas to realize it equally in and through all its expressions—actual

and possible—which at the same time means to see it as something more than any of its possibilities is to realize one's true status which is freedom.

Accordingly, Advaita means an integral or full knowledge or realization in which nothing is seen as something other than and distinct from the Self or Brahman, as in reality everything is Itself or an expression of itself.

'This (self) was indeed Brahman in the beginning. It knew only Itself as, "I am Brahman". Therefore It became all. And whoever among the gods knew It also became That; and the same with the sages and men.'¹

Commenting on this Śaṅkara says, 'Even before knowing Brahman, everybody, being Brahman, is really always identical with all, but ignorance superimposes on him the idea that he is not Brahman and not all.' Gaudapāda expresses the same idea in a different manner.

^{1.} ब्रह्म वा इदमग्र आसीत्, तदात्मानमेवावेत् ।
अहं ब्रह्मास्मीति । तस्मात्तत्सर्वमभवत्, तद्यो यो देवानां
प्रत्यबुध्यत स एव तदभवत्, तथर्षीणाम्, तथा
मनुष्याणाम् . . . ।

Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.10.

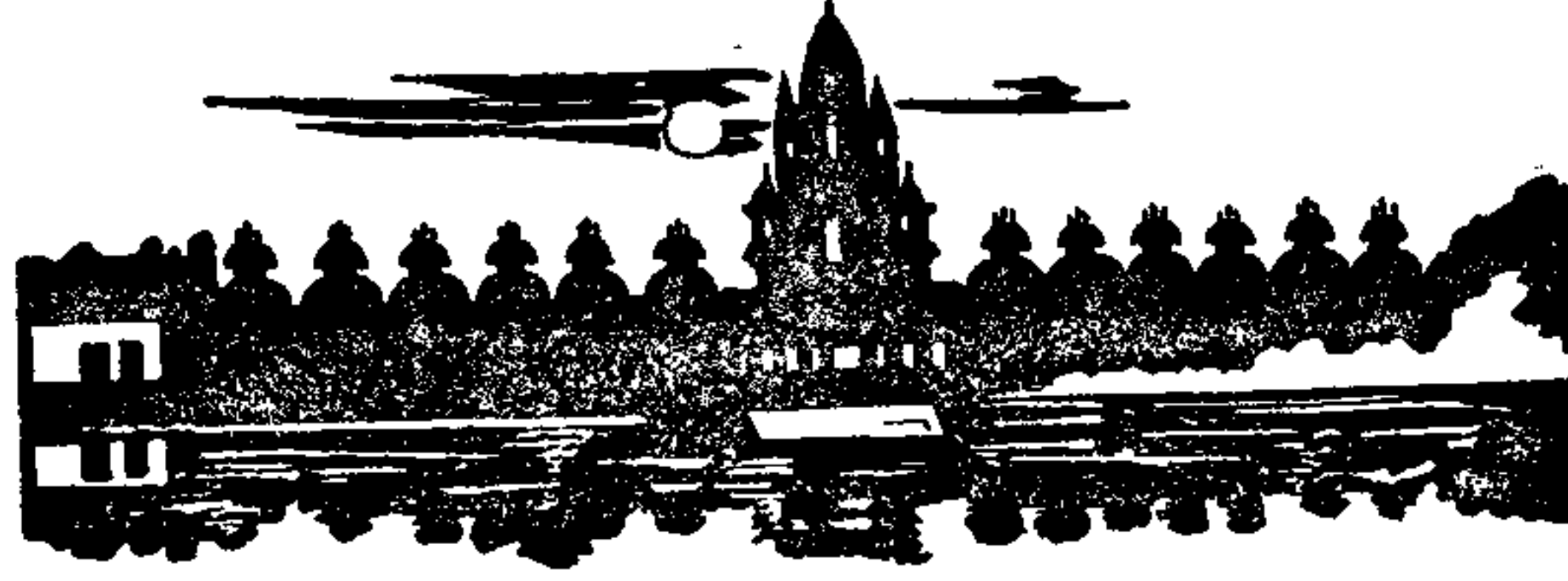
'Those who affirm (the existence of creation) attribute it to the mere will of God, while those who look upon time as real declare time to be the manifestor of all beings. Others think that the manifestation is for the purpose of enjoyment (of God), while still others attribute it to mere diversion (on the part of God). But it is the very nature of the effulgent being (Atman) (for) what other desire is possible for Him whose desire is always in the state of fulfilment?'²

In classical Hinduism also God is seen present equally in both *śivam* (good) and *ghoram* (dreadful), in the beautiful and the ugly, in life and death etc., and yet He is seen as transcending them all. This means that all philosophical and religious views in some way denote or point to Reality, but by themselves no single view is exclusively true of It. In other words, ignorance means the exclusive identification of Reality with any one of the views, and consequent attachment of oneself to that view. It is knowledge to see all views, both actual and possible, as various self-expressions of one Reality. And in realizing all as the Self's expression we do not have to face the various logical problems which we are to face otherwise when we try to conceive any sort of causal relationship between the One and the all.

^{2.} *Māndukya Kārikā 1.8-9.*

HOLY MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY

The birthday of the Holy Mother. Sri Sarada Devi falls on Thursday, 17 December 1981.



STORY OF JESUS' BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD*

GURUDASA

(*Swami Atulananda*)

When I visited the holy city of Benares for the first time, I met, just before entering the city, a Hindu family. A young mother was riding a donkey and close to her breast she held a tiny baby. And alongside the happy mother walked an elderly man, staff in hand. And, oh, the happy expression on the man's face!

It was a typical Eastern picture. The little family had gone to worship God in Benares. Perhaps it was in obedience to a vow, that the happy couple had undertaken the long pilgrimage, to lay at the feet of Viśvanāth, the Lord of the Universe, their humble offering in token of their gratitude for the birth of a son.

And to my mind came the story of the holy family, Joseph and Mary, how they had journeyed to Bethlehem and how Mary gave birth to the divine child Jesus in surroundings so similar to those which the young mother must have met at Benares. For the Dharmasalas or resthouses in India are identical in appearance and accommodation with the Khans or caravansaries in Syrian villages. The Khan is a low structure, built of rough stones, a single story high. The floor, sometimes paved, sometimes of mud, is raised a foot or so above the ground. There are a series of small rooms under one roof with no front wall to

them. There is no furniture. The traveller brings his blanket and sits on it crosslegged and lies down on it at night. He must cook his own food and draw his own water. Often these places are overcrowded with travellers and one may be thankful if he secures space enough to stretch himself during the night.

In Palestine it not infrequently happens that back of the Khan, but opening unto it, is a room where the animals are housed. Such seems to have been the case in the little town of Bethlehem. In such a stable, among the hay and straw spread for the animals, Jesus' parents weary with their day's journey, passed the night, for when they came to Bethlehem—whither the law had called them to register their names—"there was no room for them in the inn." In these humble surroundings the baby Jesus was born.

Now it happened that not far from Bethlehem, which is surrounded by fields, "there were shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night, when, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord came upon them and the glory

* Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, December, 1918.

of the Lord shone round about them." And to their happy ears were uttered the good tidings of great joy, that unto them was born that day in the city of David, a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men and good will."

The shepherds, recovered from their first surprise said: "Come, let us go unto Bethlehem and see the thing which has come to pass, which the Lord made known to us."

They went up the terraced hill over the moonlit path, until they reached the summit on which the little town of Bethlehem is built. And there they found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in the manger.

What they saw was a peasant of Galilee, already beyond the prime of life and a young mother with an infant child, whom, since there was none to help her, her own hands had wrapped in swaddling clothes. That is all that the gospel tells us. But who shall say what glories might not have been witnessed by the eye of faith of the simple shepherds? For an ancient narrator tells us that at the awful moment of the nativity, the pole of heaven stood motionless. And the birds were still and the faces of all creatures were looking up. And elsewhere we are told that the childbirth was painless, that the ox and the ass kneeled down to worship Christ in the manger, that immediately after his birth, Jesus told his mother that he was the son of God and that the radiation of light from the manger-cradle illumined the place till the bystanders were forced to shade their eyes from the heavenly splendour.

Were the narrators of these wonder-events perhaps acquainted with the birth-stories of other Sons of God? Certain it is that there is a great similarity between

all these stories. Of Lord Krishna it is written that he was born in a prison, under danger of being killed by the tyrant king Kamsa. And we are told that immediately after Sri Krishna was born the whole place was illumined by a celestial light which emanated from the body of the new-born Saviour. Then angels appeared in the cell singing praises of Krishna and his holy mother and the angels bowed down at his feet and called him God and worshipped him with flowers, while celestial music filled the air. And the seven gates of the prison opened mysteriously and the father escaped with the child.

And of the nativity of Buddha we read how the tree bent down to make a bower about Queen Maya and the earth put forth a thousand sudden flowers to spread a couch, while ready for the bath, the rock hard by gave out a limpid stream of crystal flow. And how among the strangers came a grey-haired saint. Asita, one whose ears long closed to earthly things caught heavenly sounds and heard the Devas singing songs at Buddha's birth. And after touching eight times the dust, he spoke: O Babe! I worship thee! Thou art He! Thou art the Buddha and thou wilt preach the law and save all flesh who learn the law.

And so it is said of the great prophet Zoroaster that angels came to worship and that his birth was heralded by a star and other signs and omens.

How long the Virgin mother Mary and her holy child Jesus, stayed in the Khan, we cannot tell. But probably it was not long, as the early removal of the mother and the child to some more appropriate resting place, is quite likely. However we are told that on the fortieth day after the nativity the mother presented herself with her Babe for their purification in the Temple of Jerusalem.

It was on this occasion that the infant Jesus was recognized as the Saviour of

mankind by a just and devout Israelite endowed with the gift of prophecy. And it was revealed to this holy man that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah. And the Spirit led him into the Temple and when he saw the babe Jesus, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen the Saviour." And blessing the parents he departed from the Temple. In the Arabic gospel it is said that Simeon recognized Jesus because he saw him shining like a pillar of light in his mother's arms.

Now it happened, when Jesus was born at Bethlehem, that there came wise men from the East. Who they were we do not know. There is nothing but a mass of confused tradition to throw any light on their rank, their country, or their names. Whether they were Arabian kings or Oriental scholars or astrologers, we know not. But St. Matthew tells us that the motive of their journey was to discover the Saviour whose birth had been indicated by a strange star. They first went to Jerusalem expecting to find the child there. And it came to pass that Herod the cruel tyrant-king heard of their arrival. He learned that they had come to worship a child which was to become king of the Jews, for so Jesus was called by the prophets. But this was meant in a spiritual sense and not in a worldly sense as was then generally believed. And Herod, a mere usurper of the throne, became frightened at the news. He summoned to his palace the leading priests of the Jews to enquire of them where this future king was to be born. He received the reply that Bethlehem was the town mentioned by the ancient prophets. Then Herod at once decided to kill the child if it could be found. But he concealed his evil intention and sent the wise men to

Bethlehem, bidding them to let him know as soon as they had found the child. For—so the crafty king told them—he wanted to come and offer his homage to the child.

And so the wise men departed. "And lo, the star which they saw in the East, went before them, till it came and stood over the place where Jesus was." And they rejoiced finding the child and they fell down worshipping him. And they opened their treasures and presented unto him gifts worthy of a king.

When they had offered their gifts, the wise men would naturally have returned to Herod to bring him the good news. But they were warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, so they returned to their own land by another way.

We may well suppose that the wise men had told the parents of Jesus about their dream. And when they departed—so it is written—behold the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying: Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt and be thou there until I bring thee word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

Egypt was the natural place of refuge, for there they were beyond the reach of Herod's jurisdiction. And so the holy family fled by night from Bethlehem to Egypt and later returned to their native home of Nazareth when Joseph had again been assured by a dream that it would be safe to go back.

Legends tell us how on the way back to Nazareth the lions and leopards came to the child but left it unharmed. And roses blossomed wherever his little footsteps trod, the palm-trees at his bidding bent down to give their dates, and robbers, overawed by the majesty of the child, fled away. The Bible neither tells us where the holy family abode in Egypt, nor how long their exile continued. But legend again tells us that

they remained in Egypt two years and that they lived a few miles northeast of Cairo, where a fountain was long shown of which the boy Jesus had made the water fresh and an old sycamore tree under which they had rested.

The flight into Egypt led to a very memorable event. Seeing that the wise men had not returned to him, Herod became furious. He had now no means of identifying the royal infant. But he knew that Jesus whom he regarded as his future rival, was yet an infant at the breast. And as Eastern mothers usually suckle their children for two years, he issued the fell mandate to slay all the children of Bethlehem and its neighbourhood from two years old and under.

Nazareth lies on the slopes of steep and lofty hills. And its houses built of limestone, bowered in vines, palms and olive trees make a bright picture, to which the richness of the surrounding country adds its charm. And in this lovely country Jesus spent nearly thirty years of his mortal life. About his manner of life during these thirty years the gospels are silent. They only tell us that "Jesus grew up in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man."

Jesus was one of a large family of boys and girls whose parents belonged to the working-class, the father being a carpenter. Quiet and simple and humble was the outward life of the family. The children of Nazareth are dressed in many-coloured garments. And those who have watched their noisy and merry games and heard their ringing laughter as they play beside the fountain, may perhaps form some conception of how Jesus looked and played when he too was a child.

Mary, like others of her rank, would spin and cook food and in the evening visit the fountain with her pitcher carried on her head. Jesus would play and learn and help his parents in their daily tasks and visit the

synagogue on the Sabbath day. And perhaps he would often hide himself in some secluded spot and fold his little hands and pray to God.

Joseph instructed the boy in the law and beyond this and learning to read and write, the book knowledge of Jesus did not go.

Now it was the custom of the parents of the Lord to visit Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And now Jesus being twelve years of age they took the boy with them. It was perhaps the first break in the still secluded life, his first glimpse into the great outer world.

Nazareth lies from Jerusalem at a distance of about eighty miles. The number who flocked to the Passover might be counted by tens of thousands. They were far more than the city could accommodate. And the vast number of pilgrims would rear for themselves little booths of mat and wicker-work, which provided them with a sufficient shelter for all their wants. The feast lasted for a week—a week of great happiness and strong religious emotions. And after the feast, the vast caravan would clear away their temporary dwelling places and start on their homeward journey.

The road was enlivened by song and music and the pilgrims would pause to refresh themselves with dates and melons and water from springs and running streams. The veiled women and the stately old men were generally mounted, while the young people with long sticks in their hands led along by a string their beasts of burden. The boys and children would walk and play by the side of their parents, and sometimes, when tired, get a lift on horse or mule. Among such a sea of human beings how easy would it be to lose one young boy!

Jesus, probably absorbed in the rush of new and elevating emotions, had lost his parents and "he tarried behind in Jerusalem." A day elapsed before the

parents discovered their loss. They probably thought that the boy was with some other group of friends or relatives. But when evening came and the caravan halted for the night's rest, they learned the bitter fact that Jesus was missing from the band of returning pilgrims. So the next day in alarm and anxiety they retraced their steps to Jerusalem.

Neither on that day nor during the night, nor throughout a considerable part of the third day, did they discover him, till at last they found Jesus in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. He was there, an eager-hearted and gifted boy, whose enthusiasm kindled their admiration. They were all charmed with the pure and noble-hearted boy.

Here then, seated at the feet of the teachers, Joseph and Mary found their divine son. They were awe-struck to find him, calm and happy, in so august a gathering. But Mary ventures to address him in the language of tender reproach: "My child, why dost thou treat us thus? See, thy father and I were seeking thee with aching hearts." And then follows his innocent and simple answer: "Why is it that ye were seeking me? Did ye not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

These are the first recorded words of Jesus.

The temple was visited several times every day during the feast and it seems rather strange that Joseph did not go there first when searching for his pious son. And Jesus' answer is not so unnatural from such a spiritual boy. Still, we read: "And they understood not the saying which he spoke unto them."

However that may be, Jesus followed his parents to Nazareth and "was subject unto

them. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man."

These few closing words comprise all that we are told about Jesus from his twelfth year till he had long entered upon manhood. Here thus ends the story of Jesus' childhood.

The boy Jesus must have had his little troubles, his little fights and quarrels perhaps, as every boy has, brought up in a large family. His abundant vitality must have led him into little mischievous acts perhaps, for holy children are often naughty children. But these little outbursts of childish energy did not make Jesus any the less dear to the heart of his mother and friends, nor of the devotees.

Of Sri Krishna we are told that in his childhood he played many naughty pranks. But the devotees love the child even in his naughtiness. So a Hindu saint tells us how the little Gopal, as Sri Krishna was called, once went into the dairy to eat the fresh butter. He is discovered and the dairy woman says: "Who are you, child?" "Well, lady do not you know me? I am Gopal." "But what are you doing in my dairy, you naughty child?" "Oh, I thought it was my home, lady." "But why do I find your hand in the buttercup?" "Oh, lady, do not be offended. I am searching for a missing calf." And the poet sings: "Oh, may that naughty boy who so readily answered the shepherd's wife, enter into our hearts!"

And then the boy comes home one day and he cries: "Oh, mother, please give me the cup." "What for, my child?" "To drink milk, mother." "But, my boy, there is no milk now, wait till evening, when the cows come home." "When will that be, mother?" "When the darkness sets in, my darling." Then Gopal closes his eyes and says: "Mother, now it is dark, please give me the milk." And the devotee sings: "Oh, may the beautiful form of that sweet and clever boy, the lovely shepherd boy

who dwells in the heart of saints in meditation, the charming Gopal who played with the shepherded-lasses, fulfil our desires! Oh sweet child, grant me your sight, show me your lovely face." And many a Hindu saint in deep meditation has had a vision of the lovely child Gopal. And we have heard of Roman Catholic saints who have been blessed with a vision of the holy child Jesus.

"In whatever form the devotee longs to see Me," says Sri Krishna, "in that very

form I appear before him." Blessed are such visions, blessed is the devout heart that enters into such close communion with God. Blessed be the child Jesus, blessed be the Lord in whatever form He reveals Himself to His children.

We bow down before all great Incarnations. And we pray with the divine boy Prahlad: "Oh, Lord, the intense love that man has for worldly objects, may we have that same love for Thee and Thee alone; and that only for Thine own sake!"

RAMANUJA AND YOGA

(A Review Article)

[RAMANUJA ON THE YOGA. BY ROBERT C. LESTER. Published by the Adyar Library and Research Centre, Adyar, Madras 600 020, 1976, pp. 181. Rs. 18/-.]

Dr. Lester, Professor and Chairman of Religious Studies, University of Colorado, has specialized himself for about two decades in writing on Ramanuja, not as a philosophical exponent but as one who records intricate historical investigations in a language all his own and brings forward conclusions of a controversial character. The present monograph brings out the best in this direction. Its title *Rāmānuja on the Yoga* makes us ponder over what this 'Yoga' is. His conclusion is that Rāmānuja's adaptation of Patañjali's yoga is no good. For Patanjali Yoga is a pursuit of the spiritual culmination named *samādhi*, while for Rāmānuja, we are told, it is a subjective intensification of meditation. This is the central thesis of the main bulk of the book. The second appendix repeats verbatim, what he has already written in several papers and monographs. It seeks to establish that Rāmānuja did not advocate *prapatti* (total self-surrender) as a direct means to redemption, and that the

short composition *Saraṇāgati-gadya*, which tradition takes as a genuine work of Ramanuja and in which the pathway of *prapatti* is glorified as such a means, is not an authentic work of Ramanuja. These propositions demand close examination.

1

It is wrong to maintain that Patañjali is the discoverer of the way of Yoga as the method of spiritual emancipation. Yoga is much spoken of in pre-Patañjali literature and goes well with Nyāya and all the schools of Vedānta and also the non-Vedic traditions of Jainism and Buddhism. Patañjali only systematized the eight limbs of Yoga in an analytical manner and harnessed it unnecessarily to the cosmology and psychology of Sāṃkhya. It is possible to refute this theoretical adjunct and place Yoga in much sounder philosophical frameworks. The theistic Purāṇas and Āgamas abound in discussions on Yoga.

Ramanuja does not conform to Patañjali's Yoga and that does not constitute a deficiency in his system. It is more likely that he liberated it from its disabling Patañjalian associations. There is a radical contrast between Patañjali's conception of Yoga and that of Ramanuja. Dr. Lester has hardly discerned it. For Patañjali the core of the technique of Yoga is a progressive attenuation of cognitive consciousness, which is considered the source of human bondage, and when this negative process reaches its culmination and thought perishes, the self shines in the splendour of its purity. This is a reductionist theory of Yoga. For Rāmānuja on the other hand, cognitive consciousness is not a lapse or degradation. Only its limitation is the cause of bondage. Yoga is for the progressive expansion of that consciousness so that it may rise to the apprehension of God. This is an expansionist conception of Yoga. It is for this reason that for Patañjali, any object may be chosen for meditation, but for Rāmānuja only Brahman in all its glory is the right object for devout meditation.

Yoga, for Ramanuja, has two levels. At the lower level Yoga leads to the inward perception of one's own essential self. This goal is named *ātmāvalokana*. At the higher meditative level Yoga becomes Bhakti-yoga, which is the road to the summit of spiritual attainment, namely, the realization of Brahman, the Supreme Divine Reality. The lower level leads up to the emergence of Bhakti. This position is plain enough.

But the point repeatedly insisted upon by Dr. Lester is that, for Ramanuja, Yoga is a purely subjective process. It is a subjective process in its instrumental phase no doubt, but when the process reaches its proper consummation there is an objective revelation illumining and emancipating the subject. The earlier Yoga leads to self-perception by the self and does not get exhausted in subjectivity. The higher Yoga

of Bhakti is crowned with the vision of God. Bhakti as a means is subjective, but when the means matures into fulfilment, there is the supreme ecstasy of the immediate experience of God. This experience belongs to the realm of *phala*, fruition, and not to that of *sādhana* or planned endeavour. Ramanuja in all his major writings points to the self-transcendence of subjective Bhakti into objective Revelation. It is made clear in his interpretation of the *Gītā* (9.2, 10.11 and 12.8). It is the grand conclusion of the last words of *Vedārtha Samgraha*, which, according to him, sums up the entire wisdom of the Upaniṣads. In his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras*, we have it in his interpretation of the important sūtra *Api samradhane pratyakṣānumānābhyām* (3.2.23). Thus in both the levels of Yoga subjective meditation in its heights ascends to objectivity. Dr. Lester's stricture on Ramanuja's view of yoga that it is merely subjective is a cardinal error.

2

The second thesis of Dr. Lester is that Ramanuja does not raise *prapatti* to the status of a self-sufficient and direct means to *mokṣa*, liberation. This view stands in contradiction to the *Śaraṇāgati Gadya* and our author undertakes the labour of arguing that that brief devotional composition is not a genuine work of the Ācārya. Fortunately he avoids the circular reasoning of dismissing it on the ground of its adoption of *prapatti* in the form under consideration and of taking that doctrine away from Ramanuja's teachings on the ground that the *Gadya* is spuriously ascribed to him. He is at pains to establish the spuriousness of the ascription on the basis of certain doctrines and expressions in the *Gadya* that do not occur in the other works of Ramanuja. It is a curious procedure to deny to a great author the privilege of variations in

style in his different works and that of developing his thoughts through the series of his works. The identity cannot be rightly questioned, even if there is discrepancy among the works, much less can it be when there is only an advancement and elaboration of implications in subsequent works.

That apart, to flout the well-built tradition of taking the *Gadya* as the work of Ramanuja, requires very solid grounds. Three of the greatest commentators in the tradition, Sudarśana Sūri, Peria Āccān Pillai and Vedānta Deśika have offered explanatory commentaries on the *Gadya* and take it as the climax of his personal devotion. They refer to earlier commentaries. Vedānta Deśika alludes to Viṣṇu Citta and Peria Āccān Pillai records how Embār, a direct disciple of Ramanuja, obtained illuminating clarifications on the work from his preceptor himself. That Dr. Lester should ignore the entire tradition is the sheer bravado of an adventurous Indologist, and for him to seek support for his thesis from Tamil commentaries on Nammālvar's *Tiruvai-moli* makes it a joke.

Let us go over briefly the learned author's grounds for rejecting on internal evidence the authenticity of the *Gadya*. It gives a status to Śrī, as she is approached devoutly to make the *prapatti* to Nārāyaṇa sound and acceptable. Ramanuja in his other works, *Śrī Bhāṣya*, *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, *Vedārtha-Saṁgraha* and *Vedānta Dīpa* offers his reverence to Śrī. There is nothing novel regarding this in the *Gadya* where she is worshipped for making the *prapatti* good enough for the great purpose. He is only continuing the spirit of *Stotra-ratna* of the great Yāmunācārya himself.

Again, the *Gadya* uses the formula of *parā-bhakti*, *parā-jñāna* and *paramā bhakti* not found in other works. This formula condenses what is extensively found in the other works, a fact which has been estab-

lished by Prof. M. R. Sampatkumaran, who has carefully and fully examined Dr. Lester's thesis. *Parā-Bhakti* is devotion at its height prior to true vision, *parā-jñāna* is the true vision or direct experience of the Supreme Spirit and *paramā-bhakti* is the heightened and deepened love of God that issues from that experience. This progress from intense love to mystic communion and the subsequent elevation and perfection of love is an obvious and natural gradation. Why this formula, which appears in a scattered form in the *Gītā-bhāṣya* of Rāmānuja but is condensed into a definitive shape in the *Gadya*, should count as falsifying its ascription to Ramanuja by the tradition is strange and incomprehensible. The Ācārya in the climax of his prayer puts himself in all the required brevity and clarity.

That *mokṣa* is taken as *kainkarya* in the *Gadya* is a further point of novelty noticed by Dr. Lester. *Kainkarya* means *sevā* or will to serve. It is explicitly laid down in the *Gītā-Bhāṣya* and *Vedārtha-Saṁgraha* and is only repeated here. Nothing new is brought in by the term. That the other instances of *sevā* refer to the stage of *sādhana* and not to that of *mokṣa* as in the *Gadya* is no cogent argument. For *mokṣa* according to Ramanuja is an amplification and perfection of the experiential heights reached in *sādhana*, and the nature of the Jīva as *Seṣa* necessitates this conception of *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* is *anubhava*, *prīti* and *kainkarya*. The full range of the conception of *mokṣa* is presented in the *Gadya*.

The last and perhaps the least implausible ground adduced by Dr. Lester is that the *Gadya* takes *prapatti* as an independent and self-sufficient *sādhana*, in its interpretation of the final teaching of the *Gītā* (18.66), while according to the commentary on the *Gītā*, *prapatti* is subsidiary to *bhakti*. The *Gītā-Bhāṣya* explains the concerned verse in two alternative ways and in the *Gadya* a third mode of understanding it is offered.

This last meaning is no stultification of the other meanings but an addition of a new and more fundamental understanding. *Prapatti* can be not only an *anga* (part) but also an *angi* (main body) in *sāadhanā*. This striking advance is due to a heightened attitude to Bhakti itself. If Bhakti is just a *sāadhanā*, then *prapatti* is a *sāadhanā* to that *sāadhanā*. If Bhakti is elevated to the status of a *phala* (result) itself, an integral part of the ultimate end, there is a corresponding rise in the status of *prapatti*. It ceases to be the means of the means but becomes the means to the end itself. There is nothing in the *Gītā-Bhāṣya* to rule out this elevation of the role of *prapatti* as an implication of raising the status of Bhakti itself.

The generalised and broadened import of

that verse is well brought out by Vedanta Desika's judgment on the issue.

*Suduṣkareṇa suchedyo, ena ena iṣṭa hetunā
Sa sa tasyāhameveti caramaṣloka-saṅ-
grahaḥ*¹

With this rejection of the conjecture that Ramanuja did not author *Śaraṇāgati-gadya*, that he did advocate *prapatti* as a principal and direct means to *mokṣa* stands with unimpaired validity.

Dr. Lester has to be thanked for his thoughtprovoking labours on Ramanuja.

PROF. S. S. RAGHAVACHAR
Professor of Philosophy (Rtd.)
University of Mysore

1. *Tatparya-dipika* on Ramanuja's *Gita-Bhāṣya* (18.66).

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

CHAKRA : THE SYMBOL OF DHARMA :
BY PROFESSOR B. R. SHARMA. Published by the Indian Institute of World Culture, 6 North Public Square Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560 004. 1980. Pp. 31. Price not mentioned.

This is a talk given by the author at the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, on the Founder's Day (August 19, 1979). Professor Sharma has drawn heavily on the Vedas, Upaniṣads, *Mahābhārata* and Buddhist scripture to develop his contention that *cakra* (the wheel) is a symbol of Dharma in Brahmanical culture. Surprisingly, he speaks of the Tāntric *cakra* in a disparaging way. The Tāntrik *cakra* of Samaya-cāra is meant for spiritual uplift and spiritual development.

Professor Sharma traces the significance of *cakra* from the Vedic times. It is a complex cosmic symbol. In Vedic literature it stands for *kāla*, the sun, the supreme cosmic order, mystic

power, *samsāra* and so on. In the post-Vedic period it came to symbolize *samsāra* and also Brahman. In Buddhist texts there are four kinds of wheels and these are well explained by Professor Sharma. The concept of Avatāra links *cakra* with Dharma. The author points out that the *cakra* is an expression or symbol of eternity: 'It is an expression of continuity and incessant progress, and above all, in Buddhism in particular, it is a divine symbol of Eternal Doctrine' which leads to insight and supreme wisdom. This pamphlet has valuable footnotes.

The Ashoka Cakra has become a part of modern India's national emblem. All those who are interested in knowing more about the 'wheel' will find this small book a useful publication.

DR. P. S. SASTRI, M.A., PH.D.
Professor of English (Rtd.)
Nagpur University

NEWS AND REPORTS

THE GENERAL REPORT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

(FROM APRIL 1979 TO MARCH 1980)

[We are presenting here a brief summary of the latest report of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, which will give our readers some information about the activities of these twin organizations. The report was issued by the General Secretary in June 1981 from the Headquarters at Belur Math, Dist. Howrah, West Bengal 711 202, India.—Ed.]

Though Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, with their respective branches, are distinct legal entities, they are closely related, inasmuch as the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math; the administrative work of the Mission is mostly in the hands of the monks of Ramakrishna Math; and both have their Headquarters at Belur Math. The Math organization is constituted under a Trust with well-defined rules of procedure. The Mission is a registered society. Though both the organizations take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the former lays emphasis on religion and preaching, while the latter is wedded mainly to welfare service of various kinds. This distinction should be borne in mind, though 'Ramakrishna Mission' is loosely associated by people with Math activities also. It is necessary, moreover, to point out that the appropriation of the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda by any institution does not necessarily imply that it is affiliated either to Ramakrishna Math or to Ramakrishna Mission.

The Math and the Mission own separate funds and keep separate accounts of them. Though both the Math and the Mission receive grants from the Central and State Governments and public bodies for their social welfare activities, the other activities of the Math are financed from offerings, publications, etc., and the Mission is supported by fees from students, public donations, etc. Both the Math and the Mission funds are annually audited by qualified auditors.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

In spite of some obstacles, hindrances, and intimidations faced by the organization, the following notable developments took place during the year under report :—

New Nurses' Quarters at Vrindaban, Monastic Quarters and New Prayer Hall at Alang, a Museum Building at Purulia, and New Dining Hall at Silchar were inaugurated. A Centre of medical work, with the name 'Ramakrishna Mission Hospital', at New Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, was started. Foundation was laid for extension block of the Hospital at Kankhal,

In the other wing of the Organization, the Ramakrishna Math, the following developments took place :—

A new Temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Rajkot was dedicated. A new Guest House at Kamar-pukur was opened. Renovated "Old House" of the Holy Mother at Jayrambati was inaugurated. A new Shrine and Auditorium at Vivekananda Monastery and Retreat in Ganges Township, Michigan, under the Chicago Centre in U.S.A. and newly-built first floor of Charitable Dispensary of Dinajpur, in Bangladesh, were declared open.

CENTRES

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur, there were in March, 1980, 118 branch centres in all, of which 54 were Mission centres, 21 combined Math and Mission centres, and 43 Math centres. These were regionally distributed as follows : two Mission centres, five combined Math and Mission centres and three Math centres in Bangladesh; one Mission centre each in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius and France; one Math centre each in Switzerland, England and Argentina; 12 Math centres in the United States of America, and the remaining 47 Mission centres, 16 combined Math and Mission centres and 25 Math centres (88 in all) in India. The Indian centres were distributed as follows : 28 in West Bengal, 11 in Uttar Pradesh, 12 in Tamil Nadu, seven in Bihar, five in Kerala, four in Karnataka, three each in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, two each in Maharashtra and Meghalaya, and one each in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh. Moreover, attached to the branch centres there were over twenty sub-centres where monastic workers resided more or less permanently.

TYPES OF WORK

Medical Service. : The Math and the Mission institutions under this head served the public in general, irrespective of creed, colour or nationality. Prominent, of these are the indoor hospitals in Calcutta, Kankhal, Lucknow, New Itanagar, Ranchi, Trivandrum, Varanasi and Vrindaban,

In 1979-80 there were altogether 13 Indoor Hospitals with 1,666 beds which accommodated 46,704 patients and 78 Outdoor Dispensaries which treated 45,49,220 cases including the old ones. Besides, some centres had provision for emergency or observation indoor wards attached to their dispensaries. The Veterinary section of the Shyamala Tal Sevashrama treated 220 cases. The Sanatorium at Ranchi and the Clinic at New Delhi treated T.B. cases alone, while large sections of Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, and the hospital at Trivandrum were devoted to maternity and child-welfare work. At Trivandrum there was also a department of Psychiatry. Research on different branches of Medical Science as also Post Graduate training in degree and diploma courses were conducted at Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta.

Educational Work: The twin organizations ran, during the period, five Degree Colleges of general education at Madras, Rahara (24-Parganas), Coimbatore, Belur (Howrah), and Narendrapur (24-Parganas) with 3,940 students on their rolls. The last two were wholly residential, and the colleges at Madras and Coimbatore had attached hostels for residing students. In addition, there were three B.Ed. Colleges at Belur, Coimbatore and Mysore with 339 students, one Basic Training School at Coimbatore with 17 students, one Post-graduate Basic Training College at Rahara with 101 students, four Junior Basic Training Institutes at Rahara, Sarisha and Sargachhi with 297 students, a College for Physical Education, an Institute of Commerce and a School of Agriculture with 105, 12 and 103 students respectively at Coimbatore, four Polytechnics at Belur, Belgharia, Madras and Coimbatore with 1,607 students, 10 Junior Technical and Industrial Schools with 936 boys, 11 Vocational Training Centres with 656 students, 93 students Homes or Hostels, including some orphanages with 10,272 boys and 1,071 girls, 42 Higher Secondary, Secondary and High Schools with 21,599 boys and 10,149 girls, 28 Senior Basic and M.E. Schools with 4,058 boys and 4,028 girls, 46 Junior Basic, U.P., and Elementary Schools with 6,741 boys and 3,381 girls, and 357 L.P. and other grades of Schools with 12,719 boys and 3,635 girls. Besides conducting an Institute of Medical Sciences with 24 students, the Seva Pratishthan of Calcutta, and also the Math Hospital at Trivandrum trained nurses and midwives, the total number of trainees being 312. The Institute of Culture in Calcutta conducted a School of Languages for teaching different Indian and foreign languages with 1,746 students. The Ashrama at Narendrapur conducted a Blind Boys'

Academy, an Institute of Commerce and a Village-Level Workers' Training Centre with 141, 81 and 1,116 students respectively. The centre at Ranchi (Morabadi) ran a training centre in farming (Divyayan) with 282 students. The centre at Rahara conducted a Rural Librarianship Training Centre (residential) with 30 students. Thus there were altogether 69,493 boys and 21,074 girls in all the educational institutions run by the Math and the Mission in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Fiji and Mauritius.

Recreational Activities: Some of the Math and the Mission centres have been providing scope for recreational, cultural and spiritual activities for youngsters at stated periods outside their school hours. The *Vivekananda Balaka Sangha* of the Bangalore Ashrama has a fine building of its own. At the Mysore Ashrama also a number of boys take advantage of the various kinds of facilities provided for them, and the youth section of the *Janashiksha Mandir*, Belur, is engaged in similar activities.

Work for Women: The organization has ever been conscious of its duties to the women of India. Typical of the work done for them are the Maternity Sections of the Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta and the Hospital at Trivandrum; the Domiciliary and Maternity Clinics at Jalpaiguri and Khetri; the women's sections of the Hospitals at Varanasi and Vrindaban; the attached Invalid Women's Home at Varanasi; the Sarada Vidyalaya at Madras; the Girls' High Schools at Jamshedpur; the Sarada Mandir at Sarisha and the two Training Schools for nurses in Trivandrum and Calcutta. Moreover, there are separate arrangements for women in other hospitals, dispensaries and schools; and some institutions are conducted only for them. The Madras Math also conducts a High School and a Primary School for girls.

Rural Uplift and Work among the Labouring and Backward Classes: The twin organizations have all along tried their best to serve the unfortunate countrymen who have fallen back culturally or otherwise. These services are done in three ways: (a) By bringing them from rural areas to our Urban Centres; (b) By sending our dedicated workers in rural areas; (c) Through Centres located in rural areas. In addition to the more prominent village Ashramas like those at Cherrapunji, Sarisha, Ramharipur, Manasadwip, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Chandipur, Sargachhi, Along, Narottam Nagar, New Itanagar, Coimbatore, Kalady, Trichur and Nattarampalli, a number of rural sub-centres—both permanent and

semi-permanent—are run under the branch centres at Belur, Rahara, Sarisha, Tiruvalla, Kankurgachhi (Calcutta), Malda, Ranchi, Narendrapur and Cherrapunji. Of these, special mention may be made of the numerous village sub-centres started for educating the hill tribes in Meghalaya and a farming centre at Ranchi, specially meant for Adivasis and Scheduled Castes. Welfare work of various kinds was done among the Nagas, Kukis and Mizos, etc. by the Silchar Ashrama. Our educational, medical, and cultural activities in Arunachal Pradesh are also proving very useful and popular. During the year, the organizations ran in the rural and backward areas 19 Secondary or High Schools, 51 Senior Basic, Junior Basic, M.E. and U.P. Schools, 53 Primary Schools, 75 night Schools for adults, 11 Vocational Training Centres, a Rural Librarianship Training Centre, a Village Level Workers' Training Centre, 2 Schools of Agriculture, and an Institute for training village youths in farming—with a total of 23,449 students. The organizations also conducted 37 Outdoor Dispensaries treating 5,49,339 patients and 9 Mobile Dispensaries serving 2,54,760 patients, besides running 55 Milk-distribution centres and a number of libraries with three mobile units all located in the rural and backward areas. In addition to such varied activities, preaching and educative tours, screening movie-films and slides, and such other efforts were also undertaken frequently. For the poor and labouring classes in the rural and industrial areas, the organisations conducted several night schools, community centres, etc.

Pallimangal (Integrated Rural Development Programme) :

(1) The Math and Mission Headquarters took up Integrated Rural Development programme under the name of 'Pallimangal' in Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, and Bali-Dewanganj area. Twenty boys from the local villages were given orientation training at the Janasiksha Mandir at Belur for 2½ months. A short course training was also given in fishery, poultry, dairy, village extension programme, etc. The trained cadre is engaged in fishery development, agriculture, land reclamation, mass education and other services in these areas. Before long cottage industry development works will be undertaken. Villagers are slowly taking to the 'self-reliance' programmes of Pallimangal. Successful groundnut cultivation on sand beds has engendered self-confidence in the minds of the farmers whose arable lands were destroyed by sand deposits left by the 1978 floods. Pallimangal aims at generating its own wealth

based on renewable resources for its function. Rs. 7,274.38 have been spent till the end of the year under review. The total budget for Kamarpukur, Jayrambati, and Bali-Dewanganj Pallimangal Project, covering 15 villages, is Rupees Fifty lakhs over three years ending December 1982. Pallimangal has been accorded full exemption of Income Tax under Section 35 CCA.

(2) With a view to providing economic independence for the rehabilitated cyclone victims of Divi Seema, in Andhra Pradesh, the Mission received and spent Rs. 1,40,000/- for conducting modern fishery, scientific agriculture, cattle breeding and cottage industries, and for training 62 local unemployed youths for these projects, all of which were carried out through the kind agency and co-operation of a registered society named 'Gramashri' interested in Integrated Rural Development work. Gramashri now produces its own resources out of which it maintains these activities, with the assistance and participation of local people.

Mass Contact : From the foregoing account it will be evident that the organization's activities are not confined or concentrated in urban areas alone; they are spread over other fields as well. The message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is steadily spreading in all parts of India, which is evident from the participation of innumerable people during the annual celebrations. The Ashramas and temples also draw thousands of people throughout the year. Over and above these, there are a number of medical institutions where lakhs of people get free medicines and thousands are treated in the indoor departments. In the educational institutions also a considerable number of poor students get free education, board, or lodging. The organization is also running a good number of free libraries in the rural areas. The publication centres sometimes sell booklets at nominal price to suit the pocket of the masses.

Spiritual and Cultural Work : Both the Math and the Mission centres laid emphasis on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideals of India, and through various types of activity tried to give a practical shape to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna that all religions are true. The centres established real points of contact among people of different faiths through public celebrations, meetings, classes, publications, etc. More than 115 Libraries containing vast number of books and journals were conducted by them. Attached to the libraries Reading Rooms were maintained in many places. One Sanskrit

Chatushpathi too was run. At least ten centres published books on religious subjects and 12 journals in different languages. Special mention should be made of the Institute of Culture, Calcutta, which has published *The Cultural Heritage of India* (5 Volumes so far) and which has been trying to bring together eminent men and women of India and other lands in cultural fellowship. The Math centres at Mayavati, Baghbazar (Calcutta), Madras, Nagpur, Mysore, Rajkot, Trichur and Bhubaneswar, in particular, have to their credit a considerable number of useful publications. Some of our foreign centres too are publishing valuable books. It may not be out of place to tell here of the continuous preaching of Vedanta through classes and lectures for quite a few years now, being carried on by Swami Nihareyananda in Africa, (Zimbabwe—Rhodesia) with Salisbury (35, Rhodes Avenue) as his centre.

Relief and Rehabilitation Works : As usual the Mission undertook relief and rehabilitation work either directly through the Headquarters or in conjunction with some branch centres. Some works were also conducted by the branch centres themselves.

The following relief works were conducted in India :

A. Flood Relief was conducted by the Headquarters in collaboration with the Branch Centres at: Bankura, Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, 24-Parganas, Murshidabad, and Midnapore in West Bengal, and at Kutch and Morvi in Gujarat by Rajkot Math Centre.

B. Cyclone Relief : at Nellore and Prakasham in Andhra Pradesh, through Madras Centre, and at Renguya, Pathaghat and other places in Meghalaya, through Cherrapunji Centre.

C. Drought Relief : at Purulia and Ramharipur in West Bengal, through Purulia and Ramharipur Centres respectively, and at Ramgarh, Khetri and Singhana, through Khetri Centre.

D. Riot Relief : at Jamshedpur in Bihar, through Jamshedpur Centre.

E. Disturbances Relief : at Gauhati in Assam, through Gauhati Centre, and at Shillong in Meghalaya, through Shillong Centre.

F. Fire Relief : at Mugulla in Andhra Pradesh, through Rajahmundry Centre, and at Along in Arunachal Pradesh through Along Centre.

G. Medical Relief : at Sagar Mela in West Bengal through Seva Pratishthan, Sarisha and Manasadwip Centres.

H. Rehabilitation Work : (i) By the Headquarters : The construction of 320 houses, 2 Com-

munity-cum-Shelter houses and 2 Temples in Divi Seema of Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh was completed during the year under report. The whole project, after completion, consisting of 1004 pukka houses, 3 Community-cum-Shelter houses and 2 Temples, was handed over to the beneficiaries. (ii) 96 houses and one Community-cum-Shelter house at Bapatla in Andhra Pradesh were constructed by Hyderabad Math Centre and were handed over to the beneficiaries. (iii) In the district of Hooghly, West Bengal, the construction of 116 houses and a Community-cum-Shelter house in Abhayabari and Nischintaneer was completed and thereafter these were handed over to the beneficiaries; also the construction of 60 pukka houses in nearby Jagatpur was in progress. (iv) The construction of 111 houses in Vanalia and 78 houses in Morvi, out of the total project of 600 houses in Gujarat, was in progress.

I. Bangladesh Relief : The work of distribution of milk, clothings, food-stuff, medical assistance, etc. was continued through the Centres in Dacca, Narayanganj, Bagerhat and Dinajpur.

Annual Celebrations : Most of the Math and the Mission centres appropriately observe the days sanctified by the advent of great saints and prophets. The general features of the celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi (the Holy Mother) and Swami Vivekananda are : Special worship, *Homa* (making offerings in the sacred fire), chanting of scriptural texts, *Bhajan* and *Sankirtan* (often in chorus), distribution of *Prasad* (sacramental food) to the devotees, feeding of the poor in large numbers, and lectures by eminent speakers, including the Swamis of the Order. Thus the message of Sri Ramakrishna and his direct associates is steadily spreading, and many young and ardent souls are coming into closer touch with the ideals of the Math and the Mission. In co-operation with the local public, a few centres celebrate some of the more popular Hindu festivals, accounts for these being maintained separately.

Donations : It is hoped that the generous public all over India and abroad will continue to help the Math and Mission to respond to the cry of distress from whichever quarter it may come. All donations to the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission are exempt from Income-tax. Remittances may be addressed to : The General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math, P.O. Belur Math, Dist. Howrah, West Bengal 711 202, India; and cheques may be drawn in favour of either 'Ramakrishna Math' or 'Ramakrishna Mission', Belur.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Self-education for a Changing Society

In his famous book *Future Shock* Alvin Toffler quotes psychologist Herbert Gerjoux : 'The new education must teach the individual how to classify and reclassify information, how to evaluate its veracity, how to move from the concrete to the abstract and back, how to look at problems from a new direction—*how to teach himself*. Tomorrow's illiterate will not be the man who can't read ; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn'.

A tremendous explosion of knowledge is now taking place in all fields of human endeavour. In every department of life changes are taking place so rapidly that any one who fails to keep up with them will find himself anachronistic in the field of his work. This need can be fully met only through self-education. All those who want to make themselves relevant in society should learn to teach themselves constantly. Since the prosperity of a nation depends upon the level of excellence of its citizens, self-education should be regarded as a national duty. Every citizen has the responsibility of doing his work in the best way possible. This is called excellence. Since knowledge is an important factor in the creation of excellence, self-education must be looked upon as a means of gaining excellence.

Self-education has a second purpose: to build up a pure, strong, unselfish character. The education that young people receive in school and colleges being secular, almost wholly lacks the moral perspective and imperative. The present system of education which is examination oriented does not provide the time or means for learning the art of character building.

A third aspect of self-education is the preservation of the cultural continuity of the nation. What gives enduring identity to a nation is its cultural heritage, and without a strong collective awareness of it, national integration will remain a difficult problem. This does not, however, mean a chauvinistic glorification of the past. It is of course necessary to understand the culture of the past but it is equally necessary to contribute to it in the present and enrich it for the future. Says R. B. Perry in *Realms of Value* : 'Through education men acquire the civilization of the past and are enabled both to take part in the civilization of the present and make the civilization of the future. In short, the purpose of education is three-fold : inheritance, participation and contribution'.

Perhaps the most important function of self-education is the management of leisure. At least half the evils of society—night clubs, bars, dens of vice, etc.—are created by the people and for the people who do not know what to do with their leisure.

However, self-education should not be equated with reading books, especially cheap novels and crime fiction which only serve to dissipate mental powers. Self-education is a goal-oriented, creative process of inner growth which has to be learned. Schools are meant for teaching knowledge to children. But at least the colleges should be meant to teach students how to teach themselves. This is precisely what college education in India has failed to achieve.
