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

THUS SPOKE THE HOLY MOTHER

One must practise spiritual disciplines such as worship and so forth. As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it, as one gets the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, in the same way one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God. But you can realize Him right now, if you become desireless.

Why can't one meditate if one has a pure mind? Why should he not be able to see God? When a pure soul performs Japa, he feels as if the holy Name bubbles up spontaneously from within himself. He does not make an effort to repeat the Name. One should practise Japa and meditation at regular times, giving up idleness.

Whenever the mind goes after anything other than God, consider that as transient and surrender the mind at the sacred feet of the Lord.

Everything will happen in time. For how many cycles did the Munis and Rishis of old practise austerities to realize God but did not succeed, and do you believe you

will attain to Him in a flash? If not in this life, you will attain to Him in the next. If not in the next, it will be after that. Is it so easy to realize God?

Don't puzzle the mind with too many inquiries. One finds it difficult to put one single thing into practice, but dares invite distraction by filling the mind with too many things.

Even the injunctions of Destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hand what she has written about such a person. What does one become by realizing God? Does he get two horns? No. What happens is he develops discrimination between the real and the unreal, gets spiritual consciousness, and goes beyond life and death.

Everybody says regretfully, "There is so much misery in the world. We have prayed so much to God, but still there is no end of misery". But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion. Is it not so?

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL HOLY MOTHER—THE IDEAL OF MODERN WOMANHOOD, is an attempt to interpret the life of Holy Mother Saradamani Devi as the Ideal of woman seeking total liberation today.

UNTO SARADAMANI DEVI is an inspired poem on Holy Mother Sarada Devi by Smt. Hari P. Vaswani of Pune.

RENUNCIATION IN VEDANTA is an illuminating article on the subject by Dr. Leta Jane Lewis of California, U.S.A.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHY, by Dr. Nirod Baran Chakraborty, Head of the Dept of Philosophy, Presidency College, Calcutta, is a paper which the author read at a seminar

organised on the occasion of the 125th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda in Calcutta.

HOLY MOTHER ON GRACE AND SELF-EFFORT is a thoughtful article on the message of the Holy Mother Saradamani Devi. It is contributed by Dr. M. Shivaramakrishna, Professor, Dept. of English, Osmania University.

THE HOLY MOTHER'S COTTAGE AND THE OLD MATH AT BELUR is by Swami Amareshananda of Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

CHRIST-CHILD is a small poem by Bodhisattwa.

OH! HOW WE STUMBLE AGAIN AND AGAIN by Shri N. Gopinath of Bangalore, is a short sketch of a moment of spiritual insight.

HOLY MOTHER—THE IDEAL OF MODERN WOMANHOOD

(EDITORIAL)

The personality of Holy Mother Sarada Devi is a wonder of this age. History books of India mention Shri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda, but they are virtually silent about this quiet woman at whose feet the world-mover Vivekananda used to quietly kneel and whose decision and guidance he would accept without a murmur. Holy Mother Sarada Devi was the wife of Shri Ramakrishna who considered her as the power, the *Shakti*, behind his own life of epoch-making dimension. Today seventy years after her passing away, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, the village girl of Bengal, who had education neither in a university nor even in a school, is being literally worshipped as the Divine Mother, by men and women of highest education, culture, and

social eminence. Upto 1940s the Vedanta preachers of the Ramakrishna Order dared not to keep the photo of Holy Mother in the Shrine of Western Vedanta Centres.¹ Today her life has come out in different languages. In the West many worship her photo on the same altar with Mother Mary. Today after 2,500 years of Mahavira and Buddha, inspired by Sarada Devi's life, Indian and Western women of education and culture, despite the strong currents of permissive societies and women's liberation movement, are venturing to achieve spiritual fulfilment in personal life, and bring

1. *Shatarupe Sarada* (Bengali). Ed. Swami Lokeshwarananda, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta-29, 1985, p. 501.

the same in the lives of other women misguided, exploited, and cloistered in various parts of the world. To millions, she is today a living Mother Power, a power which answers prayers and offers guidance from darkness to light.

What is the secret of the increasing appeal of this simple village woman, who had long ago crossed the boundaries of limited womanhood, and emerged as Mother-guide, Mother-teacher, and Mother-power embodying unprecedented purity, knowledge and love to all irrespective of caste, creed, or nation? Why is this quiet woman who never preached, or sermonised but lived under veil, is called Holy Mother? Why do many people even worship her today as the latest human incarnation of the Mother of Universe?

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Indians believe that with each incarnation like Rama and Krishna comes a woman as the embodiment His epoch-making power. She is *Shakti*, the source of all strength and inspiration behind the phenomenal play of the incarnation game. There was Sita for Rama and Radha for Krishna. Holy Mother Sarada Devi was at once Shri Ramakrishna's wife and his greatest disciple. Although married to Shri Ramakrishna at the age of five, as a young wife she lived and even slept with her husband in the same room with the immaculate purity of a child when Shri Ramakrishna would remain in deep God-consciousness for hours at a stretch, and Sarada Devi would keep vigil, night after night, watching with reverence the godly husband with the inviolate celibacy of their life never broken. Finally he worshipped the young wife Sarada Devi as a living symbol of Divine Mother, and prostrated himself before her, uttering prescribed salutation of Hindu scriptures and thus concluded the historic sadhana of his life.

Never in history such unprecedented purity and respect of husband to wife was seen. Shri Rama banished Sita to satisfy the suspicion of his subjects, Christ did not marry. Ramakrishna with his divine reverence and systematic practical training brought out of his married wife, a simple village girl of Bengal, a living image of Divine Mother for teaching the Gospel of motherhood to the world in this age.

From that time onward Ramakrishna's respect for her was unstinted. Once when she purchased a basketful of vegetables for feeding the devotees, Ramakrishna mildly objected to this little extravagance of hers, Sarada Devi went away, crying quietly. Shri Ramakrishna could not bear to see her crying. "Go, one of you", he at once said to his disciples, "and bring her back. My very devotion to God will take wings, if I see her weep!"²

And yet there was not in her the least feeling of attachment or assertion regarding the Master. It was all devotion, and life-long faithfulness to his words. Nivedita wrote, "So dear she was to him. Yet one of her most striking traits is the absolute detachment with which she speaks of the husband she worships. She stands like a rock, through cloud and shine, as those about her tell, for the fulfilment of every word of his. But 'Guru Deb!' 'Divine Master', is the name she calls him by, and not one word of her uttering ever conveys the slightest trace of self-assertion with regard to him. One who did not know who she was, would never suspect, from speech of hers, that her right was stronger, or her place closer, than that of any other of those about her. It would seem as if the wife had been long ago forgotten save for her faithfulness, in the disciple."³

2. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Sister Nivedita Girls' School, Calcutta-3) Vol. I, p. 104-105.

3. *Ibid.*

In total self-effacement she said to a devotee, "Who am I, my daughter. The Master is all. All of you pray so that no ego enters into me."⁴ In Ramakrishna she saw and worshipped the fullest manifestation of the incarnation power of Rama and Krishna. Her life was a constant worship of and living in the God who was her husband and Guru. Sometimes she had vision of her Master Shri Ramakrishna everywhere, even in an ant.⁵

About herself, on rare occasions, she would admit that she is 'Maya', the "Creative Shakti" of Shiva.⁶ Shri Ramakrishna himself spoke the same thing about her, "She is my Shakti". Again he said, "She is Sarada, she is Sarasvati, the goddess of learning. She has come to give knowledge."⁷ Yet her whole life was lost in him. "She used to look at the Master as Mother," said a disciple.⁸ She was totally identified with Shri Ramakrishna, and said, "Know me and the Master as One. Offer prayers to me, and meditate on the divine form whose vision I give unto you."⁹ To a devotee who wanted to know about her status regarding Shri Ramakrishna, she said, "The Master is God himself. And I? What else can I be? I am also Divine Mother Herself."¹⁰ She again said, "The Master had the feeling of Motherhood in every being of this world. To manifest that motherhood he has left me this time."¹¹

The Master said that Holy Mother would have to take more responsibility as spiritual guide than himself. When she refused to

accept such a responsibility and submitted, "I am a woman, what can I do?," Ramakrishna answered, "Never say so. You have to do a lot."¹²

Shri Ramakrishna did not allow her to be an ordinary mother but made her a mother of children all over the globe. Everyone who came to her became her own child, and a willing acceptance of the children's sufferings was her joy. To them she used to say, "No, my child, we have come for that only: If we do not accept their sin and tribulations, if we do not digest them, who else will do?"¹³

Devotees and disciples would be irresistibly drawn to her as their own Mother. When one of them wondered at her all-loving heart, she said, "I am the real Mother, nor the wife of the Master, nor an adopted mother, nor a mother merely for word's sake, but real mother herself."¹⁴

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The disciples of Shri Ramakrishna had a reverential awe and trust in her person. "Higher flights of spirituality which were uncommon even in the yogis were only 'natural' to her", said Swami Turiyananda, a born-ascetic. Another disciple, Swami Premananda, spoke of her as "Infinite patience, infinite compassion, infinite capacity to digest others' sins, and above all, absolute freedom from the least touch of pride." To them she was the embodiment of the fullness of motherhood, fullness of womanhood. That is why, Swami Abhedananda, Holy Mother's disciple, refused to print the old age photo of Mother. He liked the painting of Mother by Frank Dorak in which she is effulgent and young with all the power of the universe. "Because of Mother's grace, the monks of the Order

4. *Shri Shri Mayer Katha* (Bengali), Udbodhan, Calcutta-3, Vol. II, p. 116.

5. *Shatarupe Sarada*, p. 625.

6. *Shri Shri Mayer Katha* (II), p. 125.

7. *Shri Ma Sarada Devi*: Swami Gambhirananda, Udbodhan, Calcutta-3, p. 127.

8. *Shatarupe Sarada*, p. 85.

9. *Shri Shri Mayer Katha* (Vol. I), 12th Edition, p. 38.

10. *Shri Ma Sarada Devi*, p. 470.

11. *Shri Shri Mayer Katha*, (Vol. II), p. 251.

12. *Shri Ma Sarada Devi*, p. 133.

13. *Shri Shri Mayer Katha* (II), p. 337.

14. *Shri Ma Sarada Devi*, p. 236.

could become successful in the worship of woman as Shakti", said another disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vijnanananda.¹⁵ Swami Shivananda believed that She was Sati, the consort of Shiva, reborn for this age. When Holy Mother's body was cremated at Belur Math, he saw that the place was charged with the divinity of all the pilgrimages of Divine Mother. He also believed that Holy Mother was the ideal for womankind of this age, and that with her power women would excel even Gargis and Maitreyis and would prove their worth in all spheres of life, science, education, society, even in politics. Today that belief has become literally true.

* * * *

To Vivekananda Holy Mother was the embodiment of Great Mother-power who had come in this age to rejuvenate true womanhood all over the globe. He was afraid to write about Holy Mother. He considered her goddess Durga in human form. Like Shri Ramakrishna, Swamiji, too, saw in her the Incarnation of Sarasvati. That is why, he used to purify himself before approaching the Mother, and go into ecstasy while speaking of or praising Holy Mother. In his lecture on *My Life and Mission*, in the West, Vivekananda spoke about her, "Who would sympathise with me? None—except one....She was a woman. She was poorer than we were. Never mind! We plunged into the breach!"¹⁶ Vivekananda believed that his own Western conquest and the establishment of the Ramakrishna Order were possible only due to her blessings. When the land for Belur Math was first purchased, he took Holy Mother to the Math land, offered her new clothes, and said, "Ma, the load on my head is gone after bringing

you today to your own land." When the *Ramakrishna Punthi* by Akshoy Kr. Sen, a disciple of Ramakrishna, was published, Vivekananda found it defective since the invocation to Divine Mother was not there. In the second edition the defect was amended at Swamiji's advice.

To him in all matters the decision of Holy Mother was final. When he wanted to make animal sacrifice in the Math, Mother objected. That was enough. Vivekananda soon realised that all worship in the Math should be consecrated not in the name of all-re-nouncing monks, but in the name of Holy Mother. That is still the tradition.¹⁷

Holy Mother, on the other hand, was conscious that Vivekananda was the instrument of Shri Ramakrishna for the propagation of his epoch-making ideas. After Vivekananda sailed to the West, She had a vision at Nilambar Babu's garden house in which she saw that Shri Ramakrishna went down and melted into the Ganga. Vivekananda followed him and by sprinkling the holy water of Ramakrishna-Ganga to the afflicted people, he was bringing new life to them.

MOTHERHOOD: THE IDEAL FOR WOMEN

Swami Vivekananda once said, "We have seen in Shri Ramakrishna how he had this idea of divine motherhood in every woman, of whatever caste she might be, or whatever might be her worth. It is because I have seen this that I ask you all so earnestly to do likewise and open girls' schools in every village and try to uplift them. If the women are raised, then their children will by their noble actions glorify the name of the country—then will culture, knowledge, power, and devotion awaken in the land."¹⁸ Vivekananda believed that it is through the

15. *Shatarupe Sarada*, Pp. 88 to 106.

16. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, Pp. 81-82.

17. *Shatarupe Sarada*, p. 376.

18. *Complete Works of Sw. Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 220.

power and glory of Holy Mother's life that divine motherhood in all women will be raised in this age. That is what he said to his brother-disciples. When the first girls' school was afterwards started under the guidance of Nivedita, he brought Holy Mother to bless the ceremony of inauguration. Nivedita believed that this inaugural blessing was 'a grand omen' for the "educated Hindu womanhood of the future."¹⁹

To a disciple Vivekananda said, "If a man can be a knower of Brahman, why cannot a woman attain to the same knowledge? Therefore I was saying that if even one amongst the women became a knower of Brahman, then by the radiance of her personality thousands of women would be inspired and awakened to truth, and great well-being of the country and society would ensue."²⁰ That is why he wanted to start a women's Math for the higher spiritual manifestation of women. And this he wanted to build centring round the personality of Holy Mother who had already built up a community of women saints round her under her guidance. To one of them, Gauri-ma, she said, "Your life will be required to serve the living goddesses."²¹ To another woman attendant Sarala Devi, Mother said that she would have to do her work, after she left the world. After Mother's death to the same woman aspirant, Swami Saradananda told, "You have served the body of Holy Mother. Now try to realise her Real Nature." She struggled and eventually emerged a saint to be the first abbess of the first women's Math in order to fulfil Swamiji's dream, and Holy Mother's wish.

Vivekananda foresaw the spiritual foundation on which this women's Math would be established. He said, "Spirituality, sacrifice,

and self-control will be the motto of the pupils of this Math, and service or Seva-dharma the vow of their life. In view of such ideal lives, who will not respect and have faith in them? If the life of the women of this country be moulded in such fashion, then only will there be the reappearance of such ideal characters as Sita, Savitri and Gargi."²²

About the women's education in general Vivekananda once said to Nivedita, "We must turn out the greatest intellects in India!" At the same time he wanted that education to be constituted "of depth and severity."²³

For him even marriage was an austerity to be observed unto death for the creation of a perfect society. The Roman Catholics and the Hindus, had held marriage sacred and inviolate. That is why, said Vivekananda, these two religions have produced great chaste men and women of immense power. To the Arab, marriage is a contract, or a forceful possession, to be dissolved at will. That is why, the ideal of the virgin, or the Brahmacharin, was not developed there.²⁴ The worship of Motherhood is the "guiding" and "the restraining force of the whole Indian character."²⁵

In Indian society motherhood in women is respected even in married life. The *Mahabharata* (chap 86 shloka 48) says, "The husband is reborn as son through the womb of the wife. The wife is, therefore, called jaya, because she gives janma (birth) to children by becoming mother."

*Jayam patih sampravishya yad asyam
jayate punah
Jayaya iti jayatwam yah tasyam
jayate tatah.*

19. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. I, p. 112.

20. *Complete Works of Sw. Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 219.

21. *Shatarupe Sarada*, p. 272.

22. *Complete Works of Sw. Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 218.

23. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. I, Pp. 212-213.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Vivekananda spoke of this ideal of motherhood respected in India, to the Western women,

"To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules."²⁶ To Nivedita he said, "Against marriage, in order to rise beyond marriage, I have nothing to say". "The perfect marriage was," said Nivedita, "to his thinking, of the type that he had seen in his Master, in his brother Yogananda, and in his disciple Swarupananda." In the life of Shri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, marriage transcended all human bondage, and culminated in divine companionship for the sake of the highest spiritual living. By his life Shri Ramakrishna proved what he once said to Holy Mother, "To me, you, my own mother, and the Divine Mother Kali, are one and the same."²⁷

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The Vedic culture glorified women in all spheres of life. In the Vedic period no sacrifice could be done by the husband without the participation of his wife. There were lady-Rishis in Rigvedic times, who composed verses, performed sacrifices, offered hymns to the Gods, and won honourable place in society. Vak, the daughter of sage Ambhrina, was the first woman through whom *Devi-sukta*, the voice of Divine Mother, was heard in human words. Princess Ghosha was a celebrated Rishi; so were Lopamudra, Mamata, Apala, Surya, Indrani, Shachi, Sarparajni and Visvavara. The woman-seer Visvavara, not only composed verses in praise of Agni or Fire, but

even performed the function of a ritvik or priest at a sacrifice.²⁸

In the post-vedic period, under the pressure of priestcraft, women became gradually relegated to the background. She was denied the power to read the Vedas, the Gita, or recite the Gayatri and even Om! In a Smriti called *Dharma Sindhu*, occurs a discriminatory verse which asks the women not to worship Shalagrama and Shivalinga. In another Smriti *Nirnaya-Sindhu*, (Chapter-4), it is written that women can worship from a distance without touching the Shalagrama and Shivalinga.²⁹ After the advent of Shri Ramakrishna these traditions are exploded.

Some among the Islamic community believe that women have no soul. In some semitic societies, she is a food for man's enjoyment. St. Paul said that man was not created for women, but women were created for men. The Digambara Jainas believe that women can never have the highest spiritual enlightenment. Ordination of women priest is not favoured in Christianity. But new thoughts are arising today. In the April 1976 meeting of Vatican on the subject of the ordinability of women, the seventeen Commission members had voted 17 to 0 that the New Testament does not settle in a clear way and once for all whether women can be ordained priests. The commission also voted 12-5 that Christ's plan would not be transgressed by permitting the ordination of women. In his book *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, Roger Garyson says of the ordination of women nun-priests

28. Abinash Ch. Das; *Rig Vedic Culture*, U. N. Dhar and Co., Calcutta, Pp. 248-249.

29. Swami Ranganathananda: *Private Collection*,

(i) *Stri-shudrava sparsha-sahitam shalagrama chatringita banalimgani na archayet.*

(ii) *Shudra va, anupanito va, sadhava, vidhava, angana va, durat eva, asparshan, pujam prakryat, Shiva Krishnayoh (Shivalinga Shalagrama).*

26. *Complete Works of Sw. Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 57.

27. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. I, p. 221.

that "it was a sacramental ordination," and that it was "an institution peacefully accepted by a large part of Christianity for several centuries."³⁰

Votaries of women's liberation claim that Christ's first unequivocal revelation in St. John's Gospel (4:26) on his Messiahship was given to a woman, "I who speak to you am He." In the classical Christology, women are baptized "in Christ" and "represent" the "image" of Christ in whom there is "neither male nor female". (Galatians 3:28)³¹ "And I, if I be lifted up shall draw all men unto me", Jesus said. When the psycho-physical force is raised up to higher levels of consciousness by a man or woman, society is bound to kneel at the feet of his or her. Dr. Lucanas, the royal physician of the Roman Empire which crucified Jesus, suddenly met Mother Mary after the death of Jesus. He knelt at her feet and eventually became transfigured into St. Luke, one of the apostles who never met Christ.

A votary of women's liberation wrote on the subordination of women in the Church, "God is tragically dependent upon theology, for theology images God to the world. Bad theology, therefore, bears the mark of sacrilege. Tying ordination to masculinity is bad theology....Its name is injustice. Its name is sacrilege".³²

Many feminists today are getting more conscious of the need of spiritual development in women's lives for the success of women's liberation movement. One of them recently wrote, "If women need liberation, so do men. If women need to be in touch with the lives of their ancestors, so do men. If women need to affirm themselves through experiencing their lives as liturgy, as wor-

ship, so do men....Liberation theology has sought to interconnect spirituality and social transformation". The New Feminism, wrote the same author, "may bring a more authentic balance of action and spiritual nurture to liberation practice".³³ Women, even when married, can develop their spiritual life. Teilhard Chardin, the celebrated scientist of 20th century, held that "chastity, like everything else, is evolving, and that the relation of man to woman will transcend the purposes of procreation to rest on a spiritually meaningful plane."³⁴

* * * *

Holy Mother's life teaches how to transcend the pains of a helpless womanhood by the attainment of spiritual conquest of the ordinary self, which made her a dynamo of power, knowledge and love for all. It is her spiritual greatness that compelled social, and religious stalwarts to kneel at her feet.

To those women who feel that economic prosperity alone would bring self-sufficiency, Mother's life showed that to seek for any help from other at the cost of womanhood and self-respect, is a kind of begging. Ramakrishna foresaw the dark days of dire poverty that Holy Mother would have to pass after his demise. And he told her, "Never stretch your hand to anyone for help....You will stay at Kamarpukur, plant vegetable leaves in the pond; eat only boiled rice and leafy vegetables, and chant the name of the Lord". Holy Mother practised that to the letter even when she did not have a little salt to mix with her poorest diet.³⁵

Slowly the disciples of Ramakrishna came to know of her lonely life of unbearable poverty. Help came. But she never accepted beyond the bare necessities. Total dependence and surrender to God per-

30. *Cross Currents, (A Quarterly Review to explore the implications, of Christianity for our times)*; New York, U.S.A. (1984, p. 145-146).

31. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

33. *Ibid.*, 1988, p. 2 and 15.

34. Teilhard De Chardin, by Beatrice Bruteau in *Cosmos*, Australia, May, 1981, p. 12.

35. *Shri Ma Sarada Devi*, p. 163.

meated her "stateliness of womanhood" through and through. It fulfilled her, and elevated her from the human to the divine. Austere in habits, she never used shoe or umbrella, never used extra clothes. She used to stitch old clothes torn in places, and wear them. Divine fulfilment in the midst of a calm, silent, and austere life—that was Holy Mother. When Vivekananda reminded Indian women that their ideal were all-sacrificing Sita and Savitri, he had Holy Mother before his vision. In her life Uma's austerities for Shiva, Sita's faithfulness to Rama, knowledge of Vedic women seer Vak, and above all, a spirit of Mother's compassion for all, irrespective of caste and religion, got a historic manifestation.

Inordinate greed for social honour drives women to goad their husbands to earn more and their children to fare better even beyond their limits, when a mother turns more into a 'seeker' than a 'giver'. The long life of Holy Mother is a saga of unstinted giving to her children, giving of knowledge, of love, of purity, of divinity, of guidance, of infinite blessings, and of taking on her own shoulder the pains and sufferings of these children everywhere.

Many women, despite education and wealth, suffer from peacelessness. But no socio-economic or political freedom can remove it. Only a life of spiritual elevation can. Mother lived this very life. When some women devotees complained of peacelessness and unrest, Mother used to answer that even a little spiritual practice would remove such peacelessness, and bring harmony and bliss in life.

Although she lived in a strictly purdah style of life in the midst of the most orthodox Hindu women for whom in those days the touch of white-skinned western women was a sacrilege, Holy Mother was the first to accept the Western disciples of Swamiji, Josephine McLeod, Mrs. Ole Bull and Sister Nivedita with the words "My daughters."

She even allowed Nivedita to rest in her room. Holy Mother's broad acceptance and welcome extended to the three Western women was, to Nivedita's vision, an instance of deep forethought and kindness with which she was constantly working to make a place for others, foreigners, in Hindu society and make Hinduism broad like a Mother-Church of all religions.

In Holy Mother one finds the depth of Indian womanhood with the broadness and catholicity of Western women at its best. Born and brought up in strictly orthodox culture of a Bengal village without any knowledge of English or even school education, she at once caught the spirit of the Easter-day music when it was played before her. When the marriage ceremony conducted by the Church was enacted before her by Nivedita, she spontaneously appreciated the spirit of the 'Dharmi words' of the ceremony. "We have exalted motherhood, and you wifehood", Vivekananda said to a European, "and I think both might gain by some interchange". He knew that "oriental and occidental ideals needed to be refreshed by one another".³⁶

About the saints Nivedita wrote, "They use religion, as common men understand it. They love it. They speak its language. But when they suspect that truth leads outside and beyond, they never hesitate to defy it, to set it at nought. Truth is, after all, their religion, and they must need break smaller bounds. Did anyone ever hear of a great saint who did not transcend, some limitation or other?"³⁷ She had Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Holy Mother in her vision, especially Holy Mother who, despite her old orthodox life, silently broke asunder the petrified and irrational customs of Hindu

36. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. I, p. 223.

37. *Sister Nivedita's Lectures and Writings*, Sister Nivedita's Girls' School 1975, p. 136.

society by accepting foreigners not only to her room, but as part of her life. This was a step which Ramakrishna did not achieve to this degree, and Vivekananda had to struggle a lot in order to accomplish.

Although calm on the surface, Holy Mother could and did sometimes turn into a heroic woman. When two innocent women were paraded by British police, through a long distance to a police station, the entire Bengal rose to its feet. When the news reached Holy Mother, her face turned inflamed with anger and she inquired if there were no men to release those women by a few blows to the police. "If that is really the order of the East India Company, then its days are numbered," she said.³⁸ Her words turned prophetic.

To all, both Indians and foreigners, she was the Mother. Nivedita wrote, "They always call her 'Mother' and speak of her as 'The Holy Mother'—and she is literally their first thought in every emergency. There are always one or two in attendance on her, and whatever her wish is, it is their command. It is a wonderful relationship to watch."³⁹

During worship, Sarada Devi was the Mother and Ramakrishna was a baby to her. In those moments she looked like the "concentrated sweetness of the twilight". Nivedita who saw her during those moments wrote, 'I never saw a face so full of love'.⁴⁰

Of Holy Mother's home Nivedita wrote, "The Holy Mother is here now, always the same. When she is here, one has a home! ...There is such sweetness in that house! If one runs in on business before beginning the day's work, there is such a warmth of love and blessing and nothing—wanted-of-you! I cannot describe it!"⁴¹

One of her disciples wrote, "One could see Holy Mother in two moods. In one mood she was a common woman serving her children, and relatives in a hundred different ways. In the other she was in her transcendent mood far above the reach of ordinary beings. In that mood her heart would well up in prayers for her sons and daughters everywhere, and for all living beings."⁴² The old Muslim dacoit Amzad was as much her son as the enlightened and scholarly monk Saradananda. Like a true mother she would clean the left-overs and the leaf-plates of the dacoit, the saints and the so-called low castes. When one of the orthodox women staying with her objected against her, a Brahmin's daughter, cleaning the plates of Shudras, she only answered, "Who is Shudra, a low caste? Does a devotee of God belong to any particular caste?"⁴³ "If you want to find peace, do not look into other's faults. Look at your own fault—the world is your own, my daughter, none is alien to you."—this was her last message to a woman devotee.

When womanhood culminates in the motherhood of all, in the spirit of a Mother-saviour, woman becomes a place of rest and providence. Nivedita wrote of Holy Mother, "A yearning love that can never refuse us; a benediction that for ever abides with us; a presence from which we cannot go away; a heart in which we are always safe: sweetness unfathomed, bond unbreakable, ~~politeness~~ ^{politeness} without a shadow—all these indeed and more is motherhood".⁴⁴

On a rare occasion from Boston she remembered Mother and wrote the most charming lines ever written on Holy Mother.⁴⁵

38. *Shatarupe Sarada*, p. 468.

39. *Letters of Nivedita*, Edited by Sankari Prasad Basu, Firma K. L., Calcutta, 1984, p. 10.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 727.

41. *Ibid.*, letter No. 277, and 693.

42. *Shatarupe Sarada*, p. 575.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 477.

44. *Pravrajika Atmaprana, Sister Nivedita*, 1977 Sister Nivedita Girls' School p. 259.

45. *Letters, Nivedita*, Letter No. 725.

"Surely you are the most wonderful thing of God—Shri Ramakrishna's own chalice of His love for the world—a token left with His children, in these lonely days, and we should be very still and quiet before you—except indeed for a little fun! Surely the 'Wonderful things of God's are all quiet—stealing unnoticed into our lives—the air and sunlight and the sweetness of gardens and of the Ganges, these are the silent things that are like you!'"

Nivedita's final vision of Holy Mother as the historic ideal of Indian womanhood is well-known.

"To me it has always appeared that she is Shri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her, one sees realised 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 almost as wonderful as her sainthood."⁴⁶ Nivedita herself emerged as the symbol of the new womanhood combining in her life, as a Western author saw it, 'intellectual robustness' and 'modern-outlook, of European women' with the 'nobility and sanctity of Indian woman',⁴⁷

* * * *

It was earlier than 1908 when Nivedita saw the 'beginning of the new' ideal of

womanhood in Holy Mother. Today after eighty years the scene is changed. In 1962 with the publication *Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan women's liberation movement triggered off. All over the world women revolted against the oppression and exploitations of a male-dominated society. Liberation was encouraged but a living ideal of perfect liberation was missing before women. In many cases the movement stood self-defeated. In 1982 when Betty Friedan wrote her second book *The Second Stage*, she brought the idea of going back to motherhood for all women for the success of the movement. It is at this stage that the life of Holy Mother Sarada Devi stands as the symbol of power and glory of true womanhood fulfilled in Divine motherhood. In her life, severest of self-control is combined with the sincerest sharing of other's sufferings; higher knowledge is happily combined with down-to-earth action as loving service to God; most practical knowledge is rooted in a clear futuristic vision for the good of all mankind; orthodoxy regarding purity and discipline is combined with the broad-mindedness of the most modern mind; compassion to all, especially the afflicted and the fallen, crosses the boundaries of country, caste, creed or religion; a perfect householder's life is combined with the intense renunciation and burning purity of a nun, and the true strength and glory of womanhood manifest through the all encompassing love of universal motherhood.

⁴⁶. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. I, p. 105.

⁴⁷. *Sister Nivedita*, p. 266.

UNTO SARADAMANI DEVI

HARI P. VASWANI

“O Daughter of the Morning Star!”
How may we our homage pay
To thee, peerless in purity?
Our hearts, alas, are full of stains
Of vices, that not only in this life,
But also in many a bygone birth
Have we fallen prey to.
With bowed heads we appeal to thee
Upon us to pour thy gaze of chastity
And cleanse the mirror of our souls,
And purify us through and through,
That we behold the reflection
Of the Sundaram, shining in splendour
and glory.

O Bride of the Great Master,
Ramakrishna, himself, a bride of the Spirit,
Thou didst emphasize this teaching
Of the Vedas and ancient Scriptures,
That the journey of the human soul
Comes to a close only when,
She makes the Eternal Companion
Her Celestial Groom and Spouse.
And so thou dost even now inspire
Human beings, to grow in the Spirit
Of holiness and humility, of longing
and chastity.

O Jewel in the Kingdom of the Spirit!
Thou dost the prodigal and the errant,
And those that wander in the night,
With thy light lead and guide aright.
And with the rich radiance of thy life

Thou dost help to attain the goal
Many a stumbling, struggling soul,
For thou dost wear the crown of compassion,
O thou whose heart is a home of deep
devotion!

O Mother of million hearts!
Thine arms of love thou wide dost spread
To embrace the sinner and outcast
The impoverished and oppressed, the lowly
and the lost.
Thy warm bosom doth offer refuge
To him who shelter seeks,
No matter to what country he belongs
No matter to what caste or creed.
With thy tender smile thou dost welcome
Each soul that to thee doth come
For upon thy love each one hath a claim
For art thou not the Mother Divine
Whose love no limits knows,
And crosses all boundaries?

O Goddess! Countless children in various
climes
Adore thee and thy blessings seek
And I, thy child, with folded hands
And a heart, reverent and lowly
Stand before thee and beseech thee
To bathe me in the love of the Beloved,
To fill me with strength to give up
The sordid pleasures of the flesh,
And to grant me the gift of yearning
With the Divine united to be.

RENUNCIATION IN VEDANTA

DR. LETA JANE LEWIS

For most of us, the word "renunciation" has a dismal, forbidding ring. It evokes visions of somber, black-clad puritans whose stern, joyless faces are wrinkled from guilt and self-condemnation. Renunciation seems virtually synonymous with self-torture advocated by cold kill-joys, who, never having had any fun in their own lives, want to spoil it for others. We insist that it is normal and natural to love ourselves, to want to be happy, and we quote psychologists who say that lack of self-love is pathological. Since this life's happiness is all that we know, we can't help suspecting that renunciation would constitute a suicidal leap into the void. We empathize with the rich young man who turned sadly away when Jesus told him to sell all that he had, and follow him. Like the rich young man, many of us almost twenty centuries later are not convinced that we would gain anything by renouncing. Of course, the suggestion might be made that renunciation now could facilitate our post-mortem entry into heaven. But would it be rational to forfeit this world's tangible happiness in exchange for bliss in a heaven no living person ever saw? And if such a heaven does exist, why should there be any conflict between getting the most out of this life and getting the most out of the next one also? We raise such objections, and, yet, there is something within us which keeps insisting that self-seeking is not good, that renunciation is better than pleasure and should be pursued.

Vedanta responds to such thoughts with a surprisingly positive conception of renunciation, according to which one's happiness is directly in proportion to one's ability to renounce the lesser good for the greater good. As paradoxical as it may seem, the great Vedantist, Swami Vivekananda, urges

us to "renounce and be happy."¹ Vedantists maintain that a happy, smiling face is the natural result of genuine renunciation and that a sad, gloomy face is a certain indication that one has not renounced properly.

This concept of joyful renunciation is supported by Vedanta's central metaphysical statement that man's real nature is divine, that the true Self, the Atman, is of the essence of Brahman, the divine ground of the universe, which is absolute joy. "From joy springs this universe, in joy dwells this universe, unto joy goes back this universe."² But we do not experience the blissful Self because of cravings and aversions which block our higher awareness. So in order to become conscious of the joy within, we must renounce our cravings and aversions as well as the limiting identification with the body, mind, and senses from which they arise. Thus, according to Vedanta, peace and happiness in the Self are our eternal birthright and renunciation is the only way to attain them.

Since the initial reaction to the prospect of such apparently drastic renunciation is fear and consternation, the sages are quick to assure us that we are not expected to renounce everything immediately, that renunciation almost always takes place gradually, step by step, with joy increasing at every step. They explain that the saint who has given up what the world values most doesn't feel that he has lost anything. Compared with the bliss he experiences, the

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1964, V, p. 137.

2. Quoted in Swami Prabhavananda, *Religion in Practice* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968) p. 80. See also *The Upanishads*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (New York: New American Library, 1975), p. 59.

gratifications which had once seemed so vital to his well-being have turned out to be fool's gold. The Buddha, for instance, could easily have returned to enjoy the wealth and power which he had inherited from his royal ancestors, but after he had attained the bliss and peace of nirvana, he was totally indifferent to such things. Tradition has it that, upon his return to the capital city as a beggar monk, the Buddha's wife sent their son to request his inheritance from his father. Instead of handing the keys of the kingdom over to the boy, the Buddha gave him the only thing of lasting value he had to offer, a symbol of renunciation in the form of a piece of the cloth from which monastic robes are made.

As a young man, the Buddha had left his father's kingdom, his beautiful wife, and his infant son in search of lasting security. He knew that his young wife would eventually grow old, losing her strength and beauty, and that everyone in his kingdom, even his dear little son, would some day fall prey to disease and death. So he stole away in the night to find a way to counteract time's destructive power.

The Buddha's disillusionment with the ever-changing world was motivated by selfless love, but other types of disillusionment can also inspire spiritual quests. For instance, a young man or woman living comfortably and as yet hardly aware of suffering and death may be dissatisfied with an essentially materialistic existence and intuitively long for something better. Goethe's Faust showed this kind of discontentment when he bargained as follows with the devil, who was offering him all possible enjoyment in order to take his soul: "If ever I shall say to the moment tarry, you are so beautiful, then you can put me in chains. Then I will gladly go to ruin."³

3. From the German:

Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen:

Being unable to satisfy Faust with any earthly pleasure, the devil was forced to let him go. Disillusionment with life as it is ordinarily experienced may also result from some type of personal frustration or grief. Death may take a man's dear wife just when he has finally begun to succeed in a long struggle against poverty. A mother may lose her beloved child after an agonizing illness. Or a well-intentioned person who has made an honest effort to live a good life may, nevertheless, feel pain when he thinks of his shortcomings.

When disillusionment is profound, it can inspire a yearning for something finer and more deeply satisfying. Such a sincere yearning inevitably opens a channel for glimpses of wisdom from the higher Self to penetrate the surface consciousness, and, as it does so, the conviction grows that the world's spiritual giants were right in proclaiming the divinity of man and the supreme value of renunciation.

The aspirant with such an incipient yearning has only a vague notion of spiritual goals and of the length of the path one must travel to reach them. He might wish to renounce everything at once, to cover the entire spiritual path with one mighty leap like the mythological monkey, Hanuman, who covered the distance from mainland India to Sri Lanka with one bound. Unfortunately, however, there are few spiritual Hanumans today. Unless the aspirant who makes such an all-out effort, has an extraordinary longing for Self-realisation, he will falter and fall. Then he will have to pick himself up and continue slowly, one step at a time, in spite of humiliation and disappointment. Entering

Verweile doch! du bist so schön!

Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,

Dann will ich gern zugrunde gehn!

John Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Georg Witkowski, Vol I (Leiden: Brill, 1936), p. 58.

upon the spiritual path is like approaching a great mountain from some remote point. In the distance, the mountain's peaks appear relatively small, close, and accessible. The pilgrim travelling toward them discovers only by degrees that they are farther away than he had thought. But as he moves closer, he is overwhelmed by a magnificence of which he had not dreamed. Although he then knows that the path will still be long and arduous, he feels such joy that the effort and delay seem unimportant.

The faith of the average beginner, for whom this world and the little limited self are the only known realities, is barely the size of the mustard seed about which Jesus spoke. Of course the mustard seed has tremendous potentialities, but it must bud and put forth branches and leaves bit by bit. The aspirant, too, must follow the natural law of slow growth. He must resist the temptation to give up spiritual practices altogether after a discouraging attempt to accomplish too much too soon. He must accept himself without self-condemnation, recognizing his faults and weaknesses and persistently doing his best to overcome them even though they don't disappear immediately. Swami Brahmananda was fond of comparing the aspirant struggling to overcome his evil tendencies, to a new-born calf. The little calf instinctively wants to get up and run, but it cannot control its wobbly legs. The spindly little legs spread out in all directions when it tries to stand on them. It wants so badly to stand and walk, however, that it continues to try in spite of its failures until, finally, when it is least expecting it, it stands firm and runs.⁴

The inevitable failures in spiritual life are acceptable as long as one continues to struggle without making excuses like "After all, people weren't intended to be perfect" or "I'll go to heaven anyway". Swami

Vivekananda expresses Vedanta's opinion of such rationalizing unequivocally:

The first ideal of this attempt to realise religion is that of renunciation. As far as we can, we must give up. Darkness and light, enjoyment of the world and enjoyment of God, will never go together. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Let people try it if they will, and I have seen millions in every country who have tried; but after all, it comes to nothing. If one word remains true in the saying, it is, give up everything for the sake of the Lord. This is a hard and long task, but you can begin it here and now. Bit by bit we must go towards it.⁵

Because they knew that magnificent spiritual goals could not be reached overnight, the forest sages of ancient India advised most people to go through four stages of life. First, when children were old enough to learn, they received spiritual and vocational instruction to prepare them for the future. Often the little boys and girls went to live in the homes of their gurus who taught them the disciplines which would eventually enable them to achieve love of God, renunciation, and Self-realization. After completing their education, the young adults chose between married and monastic life. A few did embrace monasticism, but the majority, then as now, decided to enter upon the second stage of life, that of the householder. The householder, always mindful of the ultimate goal, was to work diligently not only to clothe and feed his own family and provide for its future, but also to serve the community. He was to do his part toward caring for the poor, sick, and old, and toward building roads, digging wells, and other community projects. Although a considerable amount of self-sacrifice was involved in performing such

4. *Religion in Practice*, p. 240.

5. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1962, IV, p. 180.

duties, the householder was not expected to live a cold, austere life. Honest pride in his accomplishments and the satisfaction of being a respected citizen were the acceptable fruits of his conscientious hard work. The comforts of home, the love of wife and children, and, yes, sex⁶ were his rightful

6. Since the Vedantic attitude toward sex is easily subject to misinterpretation, some words of clarification are due. Swami Prabhavananda writes with deep concern:

The ideal of continence has been so misrepresented in this country that nearly everybody thinks of it as something negative, as a "don't". Don't be incontinent, the churches tell us; it is a sin. In this way, for the great majority of people, who instinctively hate "don'ts," the idea of continence has become unattractive, and associated with repression, gloom, and cowardice; while the idea of incontinence becomes more and more attractive, and is associated with freedom, fun, and courage. This terrible and destructive misunderstanding, if not corrected, will eventually poison the whole national life. Unless boys and girls can be taught the vital connection between continence and spiritual life, they will gradually waste their powers, they will lose the possibility of spiritual growth and with it much of their creativeness, and awareness.

Continence is *not* repression; it stores up energy and applies that energy to better uses. It is not an end in itself but an indispensable means of freeing the mind from distracting passions and keeping it in the consciousness of God. Sex energy controlled becomes spiritual energy. To one who is continent, spiritual growth comes quickly and easily. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Sermon on the Mount according to Vedanta* (New York: New American Library, 1963) p. 54-55.

Some people who have read (and misunderstood) Freud are apt to say sneeringly: "Religion is nothing but repressed sex." And this remark is supposed to shock us into giving up religion in disgust. But it would not have shocked Patanjali in the least, though he might have laughed at its stupidity. "Sex," he would have retorted, "is nothing but potential religion. Use the same energy for a higher purpose, and you will obtain enlightenment."

How to know God, the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), Pp. 165-66.

due, but moderation was strenuously enjoined. Ideally, husband and wife were to live as brother and sister after the birth of one or two children. The householder progressed in renunciation by adhering to the highest ethical standards of his society. His learning not to lie, cheat, and steal involved not only renunciation of these acts but also renunciation of the ambition, avarice, and pride which motivate them. Referring to more recent times, Swami Vivekananda speaks in the vein of the ancient forest sages:

Renounce the lower so that you can get the higher. What is the foundation of society? Morality, ethics, laws. Renounce. Renounce all temptation to take your neighbour's property, to put hands upon your neighbour, all the pleasure of tyrannising over the weak, all the pleasure of cheating others by telling lies. Is not morality the foundation of society?... Renounce! Renounce! Sacrifice! Give up! Not for zero. Not for nothing. But to get the higher.⁷

If he chose, the middle-aged householder could leave his responsibilities to his grown children and retire to a forest hermitage. There, in the third stages of life, he would engage in spiritual practice until, as an elderly man he was ready for the fourth stage of life, that of total renunciation. Then, if his health permitted, he could become a beggar monk carrying blessings to all as he wandered through the land. But not everyone found it necessary to leave home in order to renounce completely. Since renunciation is a state of mind independent of external circumstances, a number of ancient India's most holy sages were royal householders, that is, kings with heavy responsibilities. Although King Janaka was indifferent to the power and riches connected with his throne, he performed his royal duties conscientiously for the benefit of his subjects. At work he practised the presence of

7. Swami Vivekananda *Works*, IV, p. 242.

God, and in his free time he either meditated or sought the companionship of other sages.

Modern India, too, has had its householder sages whom the householder aspirant might do well to emulate. One of these, Nag Mahashay, was such a paragon of renunciation that Swami Vivekananda invited him to live at the monastery as an example for the monks. World-renowned Mahatma Gandhi was also a dedicated householder. During the Zulu rebellion in Africa he headed an ambulance corps composed entirely of East Indians. When the white doctors and nurses refused to tend the wounded Zulus, Gandhi and his compatriots carried them to a shelter and dressed their wounds, some of which had been neglected for so long that they gave off a bad odour. Because he found this selfless service very rewarding, Gandhi took a personal vow of renunciation so that he might dedicate himself completely to the downtrodden and underprivileged. He was an ugly little man by traditional Hollywood standards, but his face radiated the warmth, benediction, and joy of a loving renunciate.

As the ancient sages knew, absolute honesty with regard to one's motives is the sine qua non of spiritual life. If a beggar were to feel superior in renunciation to a rich householder like King Janaka with whom he would only too gladly change places, he would be deceiving himself. If a miserable young man, unhappy at work and generally unable to get along with people, were to enter a monastery under the pre-

tence of renouncing the world, he, too, would be deceiving himself, as would an angry coward who claimed to have turned the other cheek out of love.

Help does not fail the honest aspirant who has succeeded in facing himself and sincerely wants to overcome his baser tendencies. Of course the strength to renounce must ultimately come from within himself just as the strength to stand up and run came from within the little calf in the story. The calf's strength came from its own muscles, and the devotees strength comes from the Atman within. Nevertheless, inspiration from outside may increase the aspirant's spiritual resolve and bring out his inner strength. Often such inspiration comes from a spiritually advanced sage, whose presence the aspirant feels as a divine radiance entering his consciousness. In the sage he catches a glimpse of his own true Self, and, as this awareness intensifies, he grows to love and identify with the blissful consciousness which he has found both in the sage and in himself. Thus, he gradually experiences the unchanging, undying Atman, the knowledge of which takes away the fear and consternation which the very thought of renunciation arouses in almost everyone. Through personal experience he learns that genuine renunciation brings happiness only, and has nothing to do with stern, joyless faces wrinkled from guilt and self-condemnation. He discovers that, far from being a suicidal leap into the void, renunciation intensifies life and enhances the joy of living.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

DR. NIROD BARAN CHAKRABORTY

I am thankful to the authorities of Shri Ramakrishna Math and Shri Ramakrishna Mission for giving me an opportunity to speak on 'Swamiji's contribution to Indian philosophy' in this seminar which has been organised to celebrate the 125th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. The subject is vast and the time at my disposal is short. So I like to place my points almost in the form of aphorisms, very often, without sufficient explanation and elaboration.

1. At the outset I like to point out that the basic problems of philosophy have been the same in the East as in the West and the chief solutions have striking similarities, yet the methods of philosophical enquiry differ in certain respects and the aim of philosophical speculation appears to differ. So the problems of Indian philosophy are really the problems of philosophy as a whole and their Indian solutions concern all interested in philosophy. This is why Swamiji's contribution to Indian philosophy is really his contribution to world philosophy and this is a valued possession not only of Indians but of all human beings throughout the world. We should not forget that our Indian Swamiji really belonged to the universe and he was a man without frontiers.

2. In Indian tradition Lord Buddha is generally taken as anti-Vedic. Swami Vivekananda considers Lord Buddha as an advaitin, an interpreter of the ethical aspect of the Upanishads. To quote him: 'Advaita was never allowed to come to the people. At first some monks got hold of it, and took it to the forests and so it came to be called 'Forest Philosophy'. By the mercy of the Lord, the Buddha came and preached it to the masses, and the whole nation be-

came Buddhists.'¹ Swamiji added 'In the Upanishads the arguments are often very obscure, by Buddha the moral side of the philosophy was laid stress upon, and by Shankaracharya, the intellectual side.'²

In *Padmapurana* Shankaracharya has been described as a crypto-Buddhist. Dr. S. N. Dasgupta and Dr. Benimadhab Barua have supported this view. But strangely enough we find that Shankara himself has criticised all the Buddhistic schools of philosophy in his commentary on *Brahma Sutra* (2.2. 18-32) and he tried hard to save Hinduism from the flood of Buddhism.

Swamiji, however, observes: 'Buddha was a reformer of Hinduism'³. We have already stated that to Swamiji Lord Buddha was an advaitin and an interpreter of the ethical aspect of the Upanishads. We all know that Buddhism is taken as an ethical religion but nobody before Swamiji could understand that this ethics is essentially Upanishadic.

Swamiji not only accommodated Lord Buddha in Hinduism and Vedic Indian philosophy, but also in Advaita Vedanta to make it wider and acceptable not only to monks but also to the masses. He combined in Advaita Vedanta the Buddhistic heart with the intellectuality of Shankara in order to make it living, poetic and complete.

3. Swamiji used to say, 'Unity in variety is the plan of the universe'.⁴ In Indian philosophy and history this truth is exemplified. In Indian philosophy we speak of

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, p. 82.

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 139.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 82.

4. *Selections from Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama, 6th edn. p. 162).

harmony of the different systems of philosophy and in history we find synthesis of different cultures. We are here interested only in the harmony of the Indian systems of philosophy. Udayana in his *Atmatattva-Viveka* contends that different systems of Indian philosophy except Charvaka exhibit harmony in their differences as all of them aim at *Nihshreyasa* or *mukti*. These are all *Moksha shastras*. Swamiji definitely admitted this but he gave us a new point of view also. To quote him: 'We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes. We must learn that the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints and yet be the same thing.'⁵ We may take different photographs of the same sun from different places, the photographs will be different but these will represent the same sun.

Nyaya-Vaisheshika pluralism, Sankhya dualism and Vedantic monism are the different gradually progressive approaches for understanding Reality. Here we attempt at grasping Reality progressively from pluralism to monism through dualism. The point requires elaboration. Explanation aims at unification. Different systems of philosophy attempt at explaining life and the universe. Nyaya-Vaisheshika philosophers admit plurality of reals. Sankhya is for dualism of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. Advaita Vedanta explains everything in terms of a single principle. All these are different explanations. We proceed here from many explanatory principles to one through the two. Unification is complete when we reach the One and so the Advaita explanation is the best. But this does not mean that Nyaya-Vaisheshika pluralistic explanations or Sankhya dualistic explanations are wrong. This is a progress from many to one but these different stages of this onward journey are all true.

5. Ibid., p. 163.

Even in Vedanta, holds Vivekananda, there is a progress from dualism of Madhva to the Advaita of Shankara through the qualified Monism of Ramanuja. Dualism, Qualified Monism and Advaita are all true. We do not proceed from falsity to truth, Swamiji adds, but from lower truth to higher truth. Consequently pluralism, Dualism and Monism are not incompatible or contradictory, these are harmonious in being different stages of understanding Reality.⁶

4. In philosophy of Religion, Swamiji's application of this Indian concept of harmony is unique. He has introduced Comparative Religion as a new branch of Indian philosophy. Before him Ram Mohan Roy in his *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiduddin* made a comparative study of different religions. But Swamiji's approach is more philosophical being analytical and critical. In 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion'⁷ he makes out the point that in every great and recognised religion there are three parts. First, philosophy which presents the whole scope of that religion, setting forth its basic principles, the goal, and the means of reaching it. The second part is mythology, which is philosophy made concrete. It consists of legends relating to the lives of men or of supernatural beings and so forth. The third part is the ritual. This is still more concrete and is made up of forms and ceremonies, various physical attitudes, flowers and incense and many other things that appeal to the senses. Swamiji goes on to argue

6. 'With my little knowledge, I have come to the conclusion that...just as in the case of six Darshanas we find they are a gradual unfolding of the grand principles, whose music beginning far back in the soft low notes ends in the triumphant blast of the Advaita, so also in these three systems we find the gradual working up of the human mind towards higher ideals till everything is merged in that wonderful unity which is reached in the Advaita system. Therefore these are not contradictory.'—Ibid., p. 247

7. Ibid., p. 157 to 174.

that the harmony of different religions cannot be established on the basis of philosophy or mythology or ritual as these are incompatible as we find them in different religions. The harmony of religions is to be found in their common end which is realisation of God. Every sect, every soul, every nation, every religion consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward, towards God; every vision of truth that man has, is a vision of Him and of none else. Different persons of course may follow Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga or Jnana Yoga or Raja Yoga according to their taste and temperament. Here Swamiji has obviously been influenced by his Guru Shri Ramakrishna's realisation of *yata mat tata path* (as many faiths, so many ways).

5. Swamiji had his own interpretation of Indian history which gave rise to what is known as philosophy of history. He contributed to social and political philosophy also. His contribution to Aesthetics in general and musicology in particular should not be lost sight of. I only raise the points but cannot develop them now.

6. Swamiji's contribution to Vedantic thought deserves special attention.⁸

(a) Vedanta relies most on Sabdapramana or scriptural authority. '*Tarkapratishtanadapyanyathanumeyamiti chedevamapyavimokshaprasangah*' is a Brahma Sutra. Every sect of Vedanta has to annotate on it. Here it is clearly stated that *tarka* cannot give us finality, Veda is final, *tarka* which supports *shruti* can be accepted, but anti-Vedic *tarka* is useless. Swamiji observes that the Vedas reveal the truths of the spiritual realm as science gives us the scientific laws of the material world. Scientists discover scientific laws, the Rishis also are the discoverers of the truths of the spiritual

world. In this sense Veda is eternal and not man-made. Different acharyas have interpreted the Vedic texts differently and it is difficult to understand their implication for an ordinary man. Swamiji considered his Guru Shri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of the Vedas and the Upanishads. He was in favour of understanding the Vedic texts in the light of the preachings of Shri Ramakrishna who himself realised Truth and harmony of all texts.

(b) Swamiji separated the spiritual contents of Vedic revelation from the *Varnashrama* social system in which it was embedded according to the Vedic exponents of the past and presented them as the universal philosophy with a universal appeal. Thus Vedanta which was confined to the forest and cave came out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish and with the students that are studying.

(c) Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, as we have already said, are not mutually conflicting to Swamiji as was supposed to be in the past, but complementary to one another, one leading to the other with man's spiritual evolution.

(d) *Tattvamasi* (That thou art) is considered to be a mahavakya in all systems of Vedanta philosophy. But different acharyas have interpreted the text differently and the scholars are of opinion that different systems of Vedanta originate on the basis of these different interpretations.

Advaita Vedanta interprets the text as expressing essential identity between Jiva and Brahman. Dualistic Vedanta denies this identity and speaks of eternal distinction between Jiva and Brahman. Vishishtadvaita Vedanta admits identity between 'That' standing for God, the omniscient, omnipotent creator of the universe and 'thou' for God existing in the form of man,

8. Swami Tapasyananda: Swamiji's Contribution to Vedantic Thought, *Prabuddha Bharata*, January 1989.

the embodied soul (*achid-vishishta-jiva-sharirakam*). The identity asserted here is therefore between God with certain qualification and God with certain other qualification—an identity of the two differently qualified terms which are the same at bottom (*vishistayoraikyam*).

Swamiji accepted all these schools of Vedanta as valid, as different points of view according to the development of man's spiritual insight. He has not anywhere indulged in the logical discussion of *Tattvamasi* like the great acharyas of the past. In place of entering into linguistic analysis and logical quibbles, he interpreted this text to mean 'Each soul is potentially divine'. This potential divinity in man is to be actualised through sadhana.

(e) To Swamiji the goal of all human beings is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. He asks us to do this either by work, or worship or psychic control or philosophy—by one or more or all of these and to be free. This is for Swamiji the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are secondary details.

Three points are to be noted here. First a new definition of religion is advanced by Swamiji. Religion is manifestation of divinity already in man. This also implies that religion is realisation, being and becoming. Secondly, realisation is possible in various ways and all these are equally efficacious. Thirdly, synthesis of yogas—Jnana, Karma, Bhakti and Raja yoga is possible. Previously we heard of *jnanakarma samucchaya* or combination of knowledge and work. But Swamiji widened the scope of combination and synthesised all the yogas.

(f) Swamiji chalked out a new sadhana for the realisation of the divinity of man

which is service to man as service to God (*nara-narayana seva*). This is definitely rooted in the Upanishadic text *Tattvamasi*, but Swamiji understood the text in the light of the teachings of Shri Ramakrishna. Shri Ramakrishna was one day talking about the three main disciplines followed by the Vaishnavas, viz., kindness to creatures, love for the Lord's name and respect for the devotees of God. Shri Ramakrishna did not like the idea of kindness, as a finite man, according to him, cannot show kindness to another man. A man can only be served as God.

Although many heard this, only Swami Vivekananda (then Narendranath) grasped the underlying idea and in later life he gave it a practical shape and propagated the idea as practical Vedanta.

If God can be worshipped in images made of clay or metal, He can be worshipped in human form also. This is a new gospel propagated by Swami Vivekananda. One who serves men as God removes human sufferings and hence does good to the society and in doing so he becomes free. This sadhana of *Naranarayana seva* is different from the ordinary humanitarian service which is generally inspired by mercy and compassion. In such a case a dualism between *sevyā* and *sevaka* or the served and the server, is unavoidable. Moreover, those who serve in this way place themselves on a higher footing as they give and the others receive. But in Swamiji's concept of *Naranarayana seva* there is identity between *sevyā* and *sevaka* as both of them are potentially divine. When one man serves another, really he serves himself. Because essentially and ultimately all are one.

Naranarayana seva is not even ordinary karma yoga. In Karma yoga there is dualism between *karmi* (the doer) and *karma* (the deed). But here in *Naranarayana seva* Nara, Narayana and seva are all spiritualised

and being spiritual they represent essential divinity. Here God worships God, as according to the Shastras, we are to worship Shiva ourselves.

Naranarayana seva is a new spiritual discipline which synthesizes jnana, yoga, bhakti and karma. In this sadhana man has to conceive of God through jnana yoga as one's own self, meditate on God as the self within, to be attached to him through bhakti yoga with whole hearted devotion, and through karma yoga serve Him with disinterested, desireless actions.

This Naranarayana seva takes the whole man—his hand, heart and head and so it becomes a worship of the whole being.

Moreover this Naranarayana doctrine assigns to man the highest honour, as man himself is God here. Human dignity lies in his divinity.

(g) Swamiji has added a new dimension to traditional Advaita. He has shown that Advaita as a rationalistic religion is harmonious with modern science and acceptable to a critical modern man.

(h) In Vedantic literature the word 'maya' is a tricky one. Different philosophers interpret it in different ways. Swamiji traces the different stages of the development of this concept in his lecture on 'Maya and Illusion' delivered in London. I cannot enter into the details. In conclusion Swamiji says—'The Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts—what we are and what we see around us.'⁹

The fact of the world is that it is ruled by space, time and causality and consequently 'it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence'. The non-permanent

character of the world is expressed when it is called maya. That the world is impermanent is a fact. Nobody can deny it. The impermanent world is riddled with contradictions. Swamiji says: 'The very basis of our being is contradiction, everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction, wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow and everyone who smiles will have to weep and vice versa.'

Thus Swamiji brings out the import of the concept 'Maya', removes the so called mystery about it and makes it acceptable to all reasonable persons.

(i) Swamiji accepted the traditional idea of Mukti as liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. But he freed the conception from a touch of escapism that surrounded it by redefining it as the manifestation of divinity already in man. Thus perfection or fulfilment as opposed to escape from an unpleasant situation became the ideal for spiritual aspirants.

(j) Swamiji defines theism as belief in one's own self and atheism as disbelief in oneself. This is a new interpretation hitherto unknown in the world of philosophy.

(k) Swamiji had a novel interpretation of *Pravritti* and *Nivritti*. *Pravritti* literally means 'moving toward' and *Nivritti* 'moving away from'. He interpreted the first as 'moving towards ego-centredness' and the second as 'moving away from ego-centredness', whereas the old acharyas interpreted them as 'moving into involvement in work' and 'moving away from involvement in work'. So for the old acharyas the pursuit of Moksha meant cessation of all work, whereas for Swamiji it meant freedom from selfishness. Work, to Swamiji, is not antagonistic to spiritual sadhana; work is worship.

9. *Selections from Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama, 6th edn. p. 103).

HOLY MOTHER ON GRACE AND SELF-EFFORT

DR. M. SHIVARAMAKRISHNA

I

Stressing the significance of mind and its purity in inner transformation, the Holy Mother declared unequivocally:

Everything depends on one's mind. Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. It is said, 'The aspirant may have received the grace of the Guru, the Lord and the Vaishnava; but he comes to grief without the grace of "one"'. That 'one' is the mind. The mind of the aspirant should be gracious to him.¹

The luminous clarity of this observation is matched by its immediacy and directness. This is an existential truth with pragmatism as its core value. The recurrence of 'mind' and its primacy are here kept in tension with but are never allowed to be superseded by 'grace'. If 'grace' comes unsought, the effectiveness of even this unsought blessing is *not* automatically operative. The mind must mediate and this mediation is bound up with its transformation. Not mind as such—the mind with which we are all familiar—but mind emptied of addictions is the instrument.

II

The affirmation of the primacy of the pure mind, if surprising, is also satisfying. The effective surprise is that it comes from one who, like the Master, can make the cumulative force of the triad—the Guru, the Lord and the Devotee—instantly effective by her own infinite 'grace'. The satisfying dimension is that the option is not now on some gracious 'Being' out there. It

1. *Teachings of Shri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*, (Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1985), p. 28; Hereafter referred to as *Teachings*.

is one's own mind which is the imperative precondition for actualizing the potential perfection. Therefore, it is not a gracious god that holds the key; the clue lies in one's own 'strategies' for the mutation of the mind.

If the consort of an 'Avatara'—comparably supreme in inherent spirituality—emphasizes the primacy of the mind, the reason is, presumably to rid aspirants of possible fantasies in this regard. For, the 'Avatara' can confer instant liberation; and yet here is no promise that she will intercede on our behalf with the Lord and allow the divine bliss to flow through without let or hindrance. On the contrary, there is an almost ruthless rejection of the fond fantasies inhering in popular, facile ideas of "grace" (specially fatal in the path of devotion which both the Holy Mother and the Master declared as eminently appropriate for our age). The assertive note evident in the words "everything depends on...", "nothing can be achieved without purity of mind" is hardly exhortation to surrender—for receiving the spontaneous 'grace' of the Lord.

III

The Mother and the Master certainly talk about grace. In fact, the Mother many times asks devotees to surrender to the Master. But surrender itself is the end-product of a pure mind; at least a mind freed from the peculiar fantasy which results from self-reliance: a sense of complacency that *everything* is possible on one's own initiative. This, in effect, is the paradox: one must be active and self-reliant; yet these alone do not guarantee success, unless, through the transformation of the mind we realize that this very activity and self-reliance are expressions of the will of God.

As the Mother put it elsewhere, in a statement startling in its candid admission, "Everything no doubt happens by God's will, yet man must work because God expresses this will through man's action."²

What the Holy Mother meant by purity of the mind is obvious from this: she meant realization of the total identification between man's action and God's will. A pure mind is pure to the extent it reflects God's will—which is to say, psychologically, the movement away from the contents of consciousness to the 'still point' which witnesses these contents. If, theologically, God is creator of both good and evil—then the consciousness which reflects this principle should itself be marked by an identical 'passionlessness'. If this passionlessness is not pure there, then we have the familiar phenomenon described by the Buddhists: we have "discerning" without "calming":

When he has only discerning without calming, the yogin's mind strays in sensory domains, just as a fire lamp placed in the wind is not steady. So the light of knowledge is not very bright, for which reason he must take recourse to both....By the power of calming, like a fire lamp placed where there is no wind, the mind is not shifted by the winds of discursive thought. By means of discerning, one eliminates the whole net of evil views and is not disturbed by others....By the power of calming, it becomes immobile; by means of discerning it becomes like a mountain."³

'Calming the mind' is, in this analysis an indivisible coordinate of 'discerning the real'. For both these the Mother offers profoundly pragmatic tools. If the mind (without entanglements) is the fire lamp—in

itself neutral—then whether it is calm or agitated depends on the winds. The Mother's image for the disrupting winds is the moon. To a disciple who complained about "the weakness of the mind," her answer is as clear as it is crucial: "...this is the law of nature. Have you not noticed the full moon and the new moon? Likewise the mind is sometimes dominated by good, and sometimes by bad tendencies."⁴ If these extremes are natural, then there is no point in worrying and wasting time/energy over it. The need is to develop neither active nor passive responses but to be aware of what the Japanese call Hara: "the imperturbability of the centre of gravity in the true centre" which reflects "the sustaining, ordering and healing strength rooted in the fundamental unity of life."⁵

IV

This true centre is usually lost because of three preponderant mental tendencies: restlessness, lethargy and attachment (or lack of dispassion).

Restlessness is a peculiar phenomenon which needs careful understanding. It could be prompted, paradoxically, by the ego, by entertaining fantasies regarding an uninterrupted continuum of positive, noble thoughts in long drawn-out bouts of intense meditation—even in the initial stages of inner quest. When this doesn't happen and we repeatedly come up against the hard facts that, as the aspirants repeatedly represented to the Mother, "the mind craves for enjoyments," "we do not succeed however we may try to remove evil thoughts," "insignificant desires crop up in our mind," "the mind is fickle and unsteady,"⁶ we are filled

2. *Teachings*, p. 59.

3. Alex Wayman, (Tr.), *Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978; Indian rpt. of the original published by Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 89.

4. *Teachings*, p. 30.

5. Karlfried Graf Durkheim, *Hara: The Vital Centre of Man*, (London, Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 31 and p. 71.

6. *Teachings*, Pp. 30-31.

with restlessness. Ironically, the restlessness we ought to feel for perfecting the technique of the practice of the presence of God, we feel towards the mind itself. This feeling is based on ignorance of the nature of the mind.

This ignorance is something peculiar, for it can be removed not by introducing something from outside, but only by activating something inherent to, the mind. The phenomenon is identified by the classic text, *Yoga Vasishtha*, in a beautiful verse: "...ignorance expands by means of ignorance, and yields greater ignorance; when it seeks wisdom, it feeds on wisdom and grows into wisdom in the end."⁷

The kind of ignorance that yields greater ignorance thrives on lethargy, the second impediment identified by the Mother. One aspect of it is easy to identify: indolence to stick to a regular routine. Sporadic, intermittent efforts are efforts alone, sterile and stillborn. The lukewarm nature of the mind in putting forth vigorous efforts consistently with a coherent rhythm is specially marked in the area of inner life. The Mother herself declares both of the theory and practical implications of it in her own life:

The mind naturally tends towards evil deeds. It is lethargic in doing good works. Formerly I used to get up at 3 a.m. and sit up for meditation. One day I felt disinclined to do so on account of physical indisposition. That one day's irregularity resulted in the upsetting of my routine for a number of days. That is why I say that perseverance and tenacity are necessary for success in all good work.⁸

Two things are very important here: first, they are spoken by a person for whom

the meditative way is the natural way; indeed, the meditative awareness of Ultimate Reality as an uninterrupted continuum is the very breath of her being; second, there was no disruption in the practice of meditation; there was only a tentative delay in adherence to the routine. Even then the Mother warns us against the tendency to slide in our efforts. Perseverance and tenacity are essential, therefore, not only in introducing a consistent rhythm in our efforts but also acquiring for that rhythm a steady focussing.

Focussing leads to one basic issue: dispassion through *vichara*.

V

Vichara is bound up with recognition of one important truth. If this is not yet a truth in the sense of self-evident perception, it should be regarded at least as a provisional, *a priori* truth. In Zen terminology this is expressed in the paradox that *perfection is present but asleep* in the centre of our consciousness. This is manifest occasionally in moments of absorption. These are epiphanies of actualized self-awareness specially evident in experience of aesthetic phenomena: the sound of music, the linguistic lilt and resonance in poetry bringing us intimations of a holistic consciousness. But these moments get smothered, are stifled, by irruptions of our so-called waking state buffeted by the duality of attractions and repulsions.

Vichara is therefore the intellectual perception of the paradox which is startlingly simple: we are *asleep* to the purity/perfection within our consciousness but *awake* to the illusion that there is nothing wrong with us. This paradox, as reflected in Zen thought, is brought out by Hubert Benoit vividly:

...everything appears to be wrong in me because the fundamental ideal that every-

7. *The Concise Yoga Vasishtha*, Swami Venkatesananda (tr.), (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 265.

8. *Teachings*, Pp. 29-30.

thing is perfectly, eternally and totally positive, is asleep in the centre of my being, because it is not awakened, living and active therein. There at last we touch upon the first painful phenomenon, that from which all the rest of our painful phenomena derive.⁹

Pinpointing the crucial significance of this phenomenon and the need to come to terms with it, Benoit continues:

The sleep of our faith in the Perfect Reality that is One (outside which nothing 'is') is the primary phenomenon from which the whole of the entangled chain descends; it is the causal phenomenon; and no therapy of illusory human suffering can be effective if it be applied anywhere but there.¹⁰

If this is kept in view, "vichara" is *not* analysis or cerebral logistics. It is, essentially, as the *Yoga Vasishtha* puts it, "directly looking into oneself", the effective operation of "the eye" of "unblinking focussing" which "does not lose its sight even in the midst of all activities."

Then the question is: how is it that this focussing is not continuous? What is it that makes us almost constantly lose sight of the fact of the Perfection, the Self? The reason, as the Mother identifies it, is lack of necessary dispassion. Not that we totally

lack it. We all have sporadic moments of intense dispassion—stung into being by frustrations, expectations gone awry. Conversely if expectations find fulfilment, dispassion disappears—relegated to the hinterland of apparent unconcern. This kind of dispassion contingent on expectation/frustration syndrome is the identifying mark, for both the Mother and the Master, of worldly people:

The Master used to say that the worldly person is like a spring mattress—sit on it and it goes down, but the moment you get up, it springs back at once. The regard and devotion for God of these worldly men is just like a drop of water on a hot plate—it evaporates in no time.¹¹

Obviously, even the grace of the Lord is ineffective in such a context and therefore we come back to the crucial precondition for any kind of inner awareness: the neutralising of desire. As the Mother puts it with her characteristic directness:

Everything is due to desire. What bondage is there for a man who has no desire? You see, I live with all these things, but I do not feel any attachment, not in the least.¹²

In short, living with all and yet perfecting the art of not feeling any attachment—is the Mother's technique—one among many she has suggested—for timeless realization.

9. Hubert Benoit, *The Supreme Doctrine*, (London: Inner Traditions International, 1985), p. 8.

10. Ibid.

11. *Teachings*, p. 20.

12. Ibid., p. 26.

OH ! HOW WE STUMBLE AGAIN AND AGAIN !

N. GOPINATH

The photo of the Master is placed in *Mandasana** over a table in the hall of my house. The photos of Holy Mother Shri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda adorn different positions of the hall. Each morning, after bath, incense sticks are burnt and wavered before photos and prostrations made. A friend of mine exclaimed, after glancing at *Mandasana*, "What ? You have placed Him (Shri Ramakrishna) in *Mandasana*! (meaning that the Master is revered to the status of God)".

On that day, a manual labourer (who earns living by removing tender coconut from tree, and visits me often) happened to enter the hall, stood before the photo of Holy Mother for some time and asked in all innocence: "Sir, is this your mother ?"

* A best-wood Mantapa in which idols of God are placed for worship.

"No," I replied, "she is the Divine Consort of Shri Ramakrishna (pointing him to the photo of the Master)".

There it did not end! Only after he left the place, I began to repent: Why I, who in the heart of heart feel myself to be a devotee of the trio Shri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, failed to admit Holy Mother as my mother ? Is she not Mother of all ? (at least of her devotees ?). Moreover, that simple man would certainly have believed if I had said 'yes'.

Of now, every morning before I prostrate Holy Mother I feel as if Mother is whispering smilingly: "Am I not your mother, child ?"

To which, I bend my head in shame and....
Oh! how we stumble again and again!

THE HOLY MOTHER'S COTTAGE AND THE OLD MATH AT BELUR

(NILAMBAR BABU'S GARDEN HOUSE)

SWAMI AMARESHANANDA

The Holy Mother is Shri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort and helpmate of Shri Ramakrishna. Before establishment of her permanent Calcutta Residence known as 'Mayer Bari', 'The Mother's House' or 'Udbodhan House' on account of the location of 'Udbodhan', the Bengali monthly of the Ramakrishna Order, devotees had arranged her stay in different places in and around Calcutta metropolis. Among those, the Garden House of Nilambar Babu at

Belur has acquired a unique position. The cottage in which the Holy Mother lived occasionally for varying periods, known as the 'Nilambar Babu's Bagan Bari' (the Garden House of Nilambar Babu) or 'Rajar Bagan' (the Garden of the King) is situated on the western bank of Ganga at Belur. Here the Mother lived a life of intense austerity, earnest prayers, long hours of japa with deep meditation. Here she finally had a thrilling and vivid vision which made her

conscious of her role in the mission of the Master. Apart from the Holy Mother, the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna, too, lived in this Garden House in 1898, an austere life, spending long hours in japa and meditation and holding discussions on religious topics, when the (Ramakrishna) Math (monastery) was shifted here from Alambazar. Shri Ramakrishna said, "Definitely know it that God is manifest in the place where many perform austerities, japa, dhyana, and offer earnest prayers with noble intention of having the vision of the Lord. Due to their devotion, divine thoughts get crystallised there as it were. Hence, it is quite natural that in such places the devotees easily become absorbed in the meditation on God and enjoy His vision."¹

In this Garden House the Holy Mother lived several times for varying periods, the longest one being six months. This Garden House was a typical 'Pleasure Resort' built and owned by Zamindars in the nineteenth century, many of whom had the title 'Raja' conferred on them by the British Rulers, like the titles 'Sir' or 'Lord'. Sometime common people themselves applied this epithet to some Zamindars. The owner of this Garden House was Shri Nilambar Mukherjee, Prime Minister of Kashmir, and was commonly known as Nilambar Babu's Garden House. The Garden House is situated on the Western Bank of Ganga on an extensive stretch of land (about five acres) and had well-laidout garden with shady flower and fruit-bearing trees, creepers with fragrant flowers, and various types of palms. There was a big pool behind the main building. Also there were several marble statues of Grecian models on high pedestals suitably displayed in the Garden.

Swami Vivekananda, during his visit to

Kashmir in 1897, had got acquainted with the Chief Justice of Kashmir, Shri Rishibar Mukherjee, brother of Nilambar Mukherjee, and in February 1898 he took this Garden House on rental for housing the Math temporarily before shifting to its permanent location i.e. the premises of the present Belur Math. The Mukherjee brothers had called on Swami Vivekananda, when the Math was here, on the 5th November, 1898. Since Nilambar Babu stayed in Kashmir, there was only a care-taker. The house had been available for rent for a long time and the Holy Mother had stayed in this cottage several times. After the passing away of Shri Ramakrishna on the 16th August, 1886, the disconsolate Holy Mother Shri Sarada Devi was taken by devotees to some holy places on a pilgrimage. She spent major part of this time at Vrindaban when "...the terrible physical separation was not easy to forget. At every turn, and with every thought the Mother was being reminded that the Master was not there just as he used to be. The devotees too, knew of this state of her mind. And they, therefore, planned to send her on a pilgrimage to places which had been sanctified by the Lord in His previous incarnations and on which He had impressed His indelible marks, so that by coming face to face with these indubitable signs of the Lord's undying presence she might forget the pangs of separation...."²

Accordingly, she started for Vrindaban via Vaidyanath, Banaras, Allahabad (Prayag) and Ayodhya, on the 30th August, 1886, accompanied by her women companions and Swamis Abhedananda, Adbhutananda and Yogananda. After spending a year in the holy places of North, ... 'brimming with the happiness born of visiting the most

1. *Bhakti Prasanga*, Swami Vedantananda, 3rd ed. p. 149, General Printers and Publishers (P) Ltd., 119 Lenin Sarani, Calcutta-13.

2. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1969) p. 139.

sacred places and the repeated visions of the Master, she returned to Calcutta. ...³ After a few days' stay, she went to Kamarpukur. Shri Ramakrishna advised her, 'You will stay at Kamarpukur, you will grow pot-herbs, eat your rice with greens, and call on Hari.'⁴ On a study of the Mother's life, we come to learn that commencing from her arrival at Kamarpukur in September, 1887, she lived there a life of privation and poverty till April, 1888, after which the devotees brought her to Calcutta in early May.

"In a few days the Garden House of Nilambar Babu on the Ganges at Belur was engaged by the devotees and Holy Mother went there with Yogin-ma, Golap-ma, and some monks as her companions and attendants. She stayed there for six months."⁵ Holy Mother lived on the first floor in the room situated on the extreme north, having wide windows opening to East, North and South, through which can be viewed the Cossipore Cremation Ground, where Shri Ramakrishna was cremated, the Dakshin-eshwar Kali Temple, and the Southern flow of Ganga, respectively. Her meditateness was so intense here that one day, her companions rising from their seats, found her in deep 'Samadhi' with her body stiff and motionless. After a long time, on hearing the chant of Master's name, she said, while descending to the normal plane to Yogin-ma, 'O Yogen, where are my hands, where are my feet?'⁶ Still it took quite a long time for her to regain normal consciousness. Staying here for six months, on the expiry of lease, the Mother went to Balaram Bose's house in November, 1888 and from there she set out on a pilgrimage to Puri.

The Mother came to this cottage for the second time to stay in the summer of 1893 with Swami Trigunatitananda among others

as her attendant. He was very mindful of the minutest details of her needs. He used to collect the 'shephalika' flowers by spreading a clean sheet under the tree during the night and the next early morning take out the collected clean flowers for the use of the Mother in her daily worship. One of the foremost events of this period was the performance of 'panchatapa' (Austerity of Five-fires) by the Mother. 'Panchatapa' is one of the types of severe penances undertaken in midsummer by sitting amidst four blazing fires in the four corners, with the scorching summer sun as the fifth, from sun-rise to sun-set all the while fixing the mind on divine thought for a resolved period. When a devotee asked the Mother regarding the need for austerity, the Mother replied, 'Penance is necessary, ...Even Parvati did it for (obtaining the hand of) Shiva. These are undertaken for the good of the people.'⁷ Holy Mother had been advised to undertake the 'Panchatapa' in different ways. Though the pilgrimage to holy places might have helped to recover from the pangs of separation, her detachment for life became so very strong that though she performed her duties mechanically, she kept on thinking that as the Master was no longer in flesh and blood her life was altogether meaningless. When she was in Varanasi, studying her mental condition, a Nepali Sannyasini (nun) who used to frequent her, had advised her to undertake the 'Panchatapa'. That directed the Mother's thought to a new channel.

In her ears were ringing the words of the Master, 'You must not die; you have to stay on.'⁸ When she was in that vacillating frame of mind at Kamarpukur, she had seen with open eyes a young girl moving about her with unkempt hair and wearing ochre cloth and a necklace of 'rudraksha' beads.

3, 4, 5, 6: Ibid., p. 146, 148, 164 and 165 respectively.

7, 8, 9, 10, 11: *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 173, 172, 173, 174 and 176 respectively.

In another vision, a Sannyasin (monk) suggested her to undertake the 'Panchatapa'. At first she ignored such visions; but the Sannyasin persisted in his advice till the desire became strong in her during her stay here. She did not know what it actually meant and hence consulted Yogin-ma, who encouraged her and said that she too would undertake it. Accordingly, arrangements had been made for both of them to undertake it by covering with earth the terrace of the one storeyed portion of their house, and over this at intervals of five cubits four big fires were set ablaze in a square with cow-dung cakes, and overhead was the fiery summer sun. The Mother used to bathe in the Ganga and then come to the fires. Seeing the Mother somewhat dismayed, Yogin-ma cheered her saying 'Get in Mother, why are you afraid?'⁹ So with a silent prayer to the Master she went and sat, remaining true to the Hindu tradition which calls upon every married woman to see divine in her husband's person, and Yogin-ma sat by her. Once she was there, it seemed as though the fire had lost its heat. Meditation and japa continued within the circle of fires, till the morning sun slowly reached the zenith, and then slowly sank below the western horizon. The Mother and Yogin-ma then came out and again bathed in Ganga, and after their evening prayer had their repast. This went on for seven days till the scorched skin of the body looked black and her original beautiful complexion was hidden once for all from the common gaze. The mental fire was then appeased a little, and the ochre-clothed girl departed from her vision for ever.

After the 'Panchatapa' she had a significant vision in this Garden House on a fullmoon night which convinced the need for her continuing in the body. "The bright moonbeams were dancing on the white ripples of the Ganga like molten silver. The Mother came out to the head of the steps

leading to the water to enjoy that beauty without any other thought in her mind. Suddenly Shri Ramakrishna emerged from behind and rushed down by her into the river, and his body of pure spirit got dissolved in the holy waters of the river, which has been washing away the sins of millions of people for ages. The sight made the Mother's hair stand on end. Dumbfounded, she kept her eyes fixed there, when all of a sudden, Swami Vivekananda burst upon the view from nowhere and shouting with elation, 'Glory unto Ramakrishna' went on sprinkling handfuls of that water over the millions of people standing around, who, before her very eyes, became freed from this world at the very touch of that water. The vision was so vivid and lifelike, that for days together she could not step into the Ganges for bathing for fear of touching the Master's divine body with her feet. This transcendent vision had another effect; it impressed on her mind indelibly and forever the true meaning of the new avatar's life; and from a consideration of its implication she came to believe that she had an important part to play in fulfilling his mission."¹⁰

Desire for doing good to others was innate in her from the very childhood. During her stay this time in this Garden House, her mood of helping others expressed itself in full measure through another touching incident. Shri Durga Charan Nag, commonly known as Nag Mahashay, the ideal householder devotee of Shri Ramakrishna, whom Shri Ramakrishna compared to King Janaka of epic age, believed the Holy Mother to be none other than the Mother of the Universe. It was 'Ekadashi', a day on which orthodox Hindus fast completely or take only light diet of roots, fruits, milk, etc., according to their convenience. When the Mother had sat for her scanty repast, the maid servant announced that Nag Mahashay was bowing down to her by striking his head very hard against the paved

floor in spite of earnest entreaties from Swami Yogananda. No sooner the Mother heard of Nag Mahashay, overriding the usual practice of men devotees not appearing before her directly, she asked Swami Yogananda through the maid servant to send Nag Mahashay upstairs. When Yogananda himself led Nag Mahashay to the Mother's presence, she noticed that his forehead was swollen, his eyes full of tears and his steps unsteady. It seemed as though he was not in the conscious world. The sight made her forget her natural shyness and taking hold of his hand she made him sit by her. He was crying 'Mother, Mother', yet he was so peaceful and unobtrusive. The Mother ate a little of the roots, fruits, etc. and put some of these into the mouth of Nag Mahashay. As he was completely indrawn, he could not eat, but went on repeating 'Mother, Mother, holding to her feet.' Patting him on his head and body, she uttered the name of the Master into his ears and then only he came round. Now, resuming her repast, she went on feeding her devout son, too, like a child. Afterwards when he was being led down, he kept on telling the Mother "Not I, Not I, but Thou, Thou". The Mother drawing the attention of others present there remarked, "look what a perfect wisdom!"¹¹ The Mother loved this son of her very deeply and had the confidence that he could do everything for her.

Henceforth the Mother's visit and stay at this Garden House is associated with the establishment of the permanent Math at Belur and its subsequent development. A plot of land at Belur village on the western bank of Ganga was purchased for the permanent location of the Math. There is a popular Bengali saying: 'Gangar Paschimakul Varanasi samatul'—Ganga's western bank is equivalent to Varanasi. From Alambazar the Math was temporarily shifted to Nilambar Babu's Garden House at

Belur on the 13th February, 1898, to facilitate supervising the construction work at the new site. During the location of the Math in this Garden House, it was a two-storeyed building having five rooms on the ground-floor and four on the first-floor and one big hall on each floor with a verandah both on the ground-floor and the first-floor. The chapel was located in the big central room on the first-floor and Swami Vivekananda stayed in the room towards the south on the same floor.

Of the many events of this period, a few notable ones are enumerated. The first one being the celebration of the Birthday (Tithi Puja) of Shri Ramakrishna which fell on the 22nd February, 1898, just nine days after shifting from Alambazar. As the authorities of Dakshineswar Kali Temple were not permitting Swamiji to enter their premises on account of some hostile forces, Swami Vivekananda decided to celebrate the Birthday of the Master in the Garden House itself. Swamiji had instructed his disciple Sharat Chandra Chakravarty to bring a good number of sacred threads as he wanted to invest the devotees with the sacred thread on this auspicious occasion irrespective of caste (only Brahmins were traditionally entitled to wear them) and communicated to the disciple special 'Gayatri mantra' for imparting to those who were not Brahmins. His idea was, by degrees, to lift all people of the land to the position of Brahmins. Accordingly, about 40-50 devotees (Bhaktas), after having a dip in the Ganga and going through proper expiatory rites, received the 'Gayatri mantra' and were invested with the holy threads. 'When receiving them Swamiji's face beamed with delight.'¹²

Two more events in succession within a gap of four days took place. The first one was on the 25th March, 1898. Swamiji

12. *Talks with Swami Vivekananda*, p. 94.

taught simple Shiva worship to Miss Margaret E. Nobel and after going through the rites of 'Brahmacharya' (vow of celibacy) she received the name 'Nivedita' from him and henceforth she became Sister Nivedita. As Swamiji had taught her Shiva worship, she used to address him as 'Shiva Guru'. The second one was on the 29th March. In the very early hours of the morning by offering 'Viraja' oblations in the sacrificial fire, Ajoyhari Banerji and Surendra Nath Bose were conferred 'Sannyasa' (the fourth stage of life according to Hindu Religion) by Swami Vivekananda. They were given names Swarupananda and Sureshwarananda respectively. Both of them were his initiated disciples and endeared themselves to him by their untiring work in the literary field and relief operations respectively.

The actual construction work of the Math at the new site began in April of the same year. During this time, one day the Holy Mother was brought in a boat to the monastery at the Garden House. Swami Yogananda, Brahmachari Krishnalal and Golap-ma accompanied her. When the boat touched the landing steps a conch was blown in order to announce the auspicious event. On her alighting the monks washed the Mother's feet with utmost reverence and led her to the verandah of the shrine. After a while, with simple worship and food offering she put the Master to rest. She also rested for some time after food. At about four in the afternoon when she was planning to return to Calcutta, Brahmachari Krishnalal carried the earnest request of Swami Brahmananda, 'May the Mother condescend to tread the new land of the Math before she departs.'¹³ Accordingly, the Mother proceeded by the boat to the new site and on her arrival Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, and Miss MacLeod, who were

then staying in a house close by there (Sonar Mali Bagan—later 'Leggett House') came out to greet the Mother and show her round. After she had seen all, she said with joy, 'At long last the boys have a place to lay their heads in—the Master has cast his benign look (on them) after such a long time.'¹⁴

We may recall here the Mother's feelings and her earnest prayer to the Master when she was on a visit to Bodh Gaya in 1890. The affluence of the monastery there (at Bodh Gaya) on the one hand, and on the other, the absence of any permanent residence, paucity of food and raiment, and the hard physical labour for running the monastery at Baranagore on the part of her world-renouncing sons, moved her very much. She said subsequently, 'Ah! for this, how I shed tears and prayed to the Master! And only then through his grace has come into existence today the Math.'¹⁵ In a reminiscent mood she said one day, 'Ah! how well I was at Belur (Garden House)! What a peaceful place it is! Meditation came naturally. And that is why Naren (Vivekananda) wanted to have a piece of land there!'¹⁶

Swamiji liked this Garden House, and said, "See how the Ganges runs close by and what a nice building! This is the ideal kind of place for a Math."¹⁷ Then came the autumnal worship of Kali, which fell on the 12th November 1898. The monks at the monastery had made preparations for the worship, and the Mother had been requested to grace the occasion. In the morning, after alighting from the boat at the monastery in the Garden House, she proceeded on foot to the new site of Belur Math under construction and after cleaning a spot with her own hands, worshipped the picture of the Master which she worshipped daily. At

^{13, 14, 15, 16:} *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 181, 182, 332, 264.

^{17, 18:} *Talks with Swami Vivekananda*, p. 110, 101.

noon she returned to the monastery and partook of some prasād. In the afternoon, Sister Nivedita took her along with Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda and Saradananda to Bosepara Lane, where the Holy Mother formally opened Nivedita's Girls' School.

A memorable event after this was the Installation of Shri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math. On 9th December, 1898, Swami Vivekananda after making offering to the consecrated sandals ('Paduka') of Shri Ramakrishna in the morning in the worship room of the Garden House, took on his right shoulder the copper casket containing the ashes of Shri Ramakrishna's body and lead the procession to the new site amidst music of bells and conchs. On his way Swamiji said to his disciple: "Shri Ramakrishna said to me, 'wherever you will take me on your shoulders, there I will go and stay, be it under a tree or in a hut'. It is therefore I am myself carrying him on my shoulders to the new Math grounds. Know it for certain that Shri Ramakrishna will keep his seat fixed here, for the welfare of the many for a long time."¹⁸

The Math (monastery) was finally shifted to the new place on 2nd January, 1899.

Another incident though it took place at a later date i.e. in 1901, is for the sake of convenience, included here. For the last time the Holy Mother stayed in this Cottage for five days (18-22 October, 1901) when Swamiji celebrated the annual Durga Puja in the image at the Belur Math and prevailed upon the Holy Mother to be present during the puja days. Also this was the last Durga Puja in which Swamiji participated, as he left his mortal coil on July 4, 1902.

During the tenure of the Math in this Garden House, there used to be discussion on many topics of interest. In the course of conversation with brother monks and his disciples Swamiji gave hints about his reli-

gious temperament when he was a mere boy and studying in a grammar school. He described how occult powers and supernatural powers surfaced when he was in America; and gave an account of his experience 'I am He' at Baidyanath, although Shiva was sitting on his head since his visit to Amarnath cave; hearing of Divine Mother's voice at Kshir Bhavani Temple, and his worshipping the Goddess Kshir Bhavani for seven days with an offering of a maund of 'kshir' (condensed sweet milk) to the Devi there each day. During this time he composed in Sanskrit two hymns on Shri Ramakrishna—'*Achandalapratihatrayah*' and '*Om hrim ritam tvamachalo*'¹⁹ in November 1898. In this very Garden House, he revealed about his future plan of work and completed the compilation of Rules, which he had commenced when the Math was at Alambazar. It is now known as the "RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH, BELUR, FRAMED BY SWAMIJI in 1897-98" a manual of codes for moulding monastic life of members of the Ramakrishna Order and for administering the Organisation founded by him along with his brother-disciples. Also here, Swamiji pronounced his choicest blessings on his disciple Sharat Chandra Chakravarty—"I bless you, that from this day all your egoism of caste, colour, high birth, religious merit and demerit—all may vanish for ever!"²⁰ In other words he freed the disciple from the bonds of duality. Finally, Swami Vivekananda gave out here his Clarion Call—"ARISE, AWAKE, STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED".²¹

This Garden House has been acquired by the Ramakrishna Mission recently and is called the "Old Math" (Purano Math), the

^{19, 20, 21}: *Talks with Swami Vivekananda*, p. 124, 137 and 110 '*Uttishthata jagrata prapya varannibodhata*' *Katha Up.* 3/14.

term denoted by Swami Vivekananda. A Veda Vidyalaya which was the dream of Swamiji, is being established here for which efforts are afoot. We shall only quote the words of the biographer of 'Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi', which reveal the historic importance of this old Math, the Garden House of Nilambar Babu.

"Many a time she had come there and stayed at the Garden House of Nilambar Babu or at the rented house at Ghusuri,

and all those places were sanctified by meditation and japa, religious discussion and practices, spiritual experiences and visions."²² "The Holy Mother is still there and receiving adoration from her sons and daughters and attracting many others from countries all over the world and filling their hearts with bliss and plenitude."²³

²² and ²³: *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 264 and 520.

THE CHRIST-CHILD

BODHISATTWA

He came to me this morning,
The Child, all in the joy of the unborn soul.
Yesterday He rode through the desert with
dusty feet

Blossoming lilies in the stone.

Yesterday He came home in the sombre
citadel ;

He stood in the darkness and there was light,
He stood among the dead and there was life,
He spoke in the temple with the innocence
of God

Thundering the priests with fire and flame.

He came this morning with tired feet
Asking me to carry Him on my back.
A strange stir startled my veins,
And I stood up to lift the little flower.

"Where shall you go ?", I asked.
He pointed to the mount of skulls
Where stood in burning white an alabaster
—a cross.

"How can I take you there ?"
Tears of Love gathered in those eyes,
And ageless passion cried in pain
Through the silent eyes of the immaculate
face.

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA : A GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL LIFE CHALLENGE AND INSPIRATION FOR SERIOUS SEEKERS

(A REVIEW ARTICLE)

(A GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL LIFE: SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA by Swami Chetanananda, Vedanta Society, St. Louis, U.S.A., 1989),

The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, as part of its Golden Jubilee celebration, has recently published a work of indispensable value to students of Hindu spirituality. Previously available in its entirety only in Bengali, *Dharma-prasange Swami Brahmananda* ("The Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda"), has now been carefully translated into English by Swami Chetanananda, Head of the St. Louis Vedanta Centre. Titled *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*, the book includes a short introduction outlining the life and contributions of the great first President of the Ramakrishna Order. Since it is a complete translation of the original, it contains materials not included in Swami Prabhavananda's *The Eternal Companion*, an earlier work on the life and teachings of Brahmananda. An appendix to the translation contains a valuable article by Swami Brahmananda on "The Guru". Throughout, the translator provides a lucid English rendering without sacrificing a sense of intimate contact with the speaker.

This later feature is important, for the original offers neither decorous prose nor formal discourse. Rather, it contains records, written and preserved by his disciples, of intimate conversations between the Swami and his disciples, both monastic and lay. As Chetanananda remarks, the words come "straight from the heart" (5). Happily, the translation preserves this tone of profound sincerity.

Brahmananda (1863-1922) was Shri Ramakrishna's "beloved disciple." He had met Ramakrishna as a teenager, when he spent two years living in the holy company of the Master, utterly forgetful of his family life. Ramakrishna, during this period, imparted spiritual disciplines to him and carefully supervised his practice. This laid the foundations of a profoundly developed mystical consciousness. Swami Vivekananda once commented, "In spirituality, Brahmananda has even surpassed me" (5).

A Guide to Spiritual Life reveals the mind of this spiritual giant, with Vivekananda the most highly revered of Ramakrishna's direct disciples.

It, therefore, represents a testament of more than ordinary significance. Bearing witness to a powerful ethos of world-renunciation, it contains a wealth of spiritual advice for followers of the Vedantic path.

Reading *A Guide to Spiritual Life*, we become privileged listeners to Swami Brahmananda's conversations as he undertakes the spiritual formation of the disciples. Gaining access to his holy company within the walls of the monastery, we attend and take in. Gradually we pick up an idea here, an attitude there. Soon we can see, if not the heart, at least the basic outlines of the spiritual life that he envisions for his followers.

Its dynamic centre is an intense, even passionate dedication to the goal of God-realization. This aim is so precious that it should totally consume true seekers. Combined with passion for the goal is an urgent rejection of all that would delay its actualization. Those who are serious must unhesitatingly and unremittingly dissociate themselves from all possible obstacles. We hear Brahmananda, again and again, encouraging his disciples to disengage their minds from mundane goals and free themselves from their seductive influence.

The teacher urges his disciples to see the limited nature of their life-energy. They must consciously choose to devote it to attaining what is of the highest priority. They must realize that to know the One Infinite, and thereby attain utter freedom, is a goal worth the total focus—and temporary narrowness—it demands.

The mind, Brahmananda explains, is a delicate instrument, having vast potential, but susceptible to dis-orientation and infatuation. It must therefore be constantly watched to prevent even the least influx of any undesirable influence (135). Seekers, clearly understanding this danger, must approach involvement in society with caution. They should regard conventional society's pleasures and rewards with mistrust, even disdain. A wary attitude toward such attractions serves as an antidote to the pull they invariably exert. Says the Master:

When you have gotten a glimpse of the light, do not look again at the alluring, enjoyable things of the world. If you do so, you will be drowned. The influence of enjoyment is so powerful that if it once leaves an impression on your mind, it can drag you down to a lower and still lower plane before you know it.

Only such vigilance, combined with the grace of God, will enable devotees to follow the path of purity and escape "from the trap of maya" (108).

A preceptor is perceptive enough to see into the disciple's innermost heart and knowledgeable enough to prescribe a path of practice that precisely suits his or her state of development (169). Indeed, the spiritual life of the disciple becomes serious only upon meeting the guru and receiving initiation. Brahmananda reveals that the initiatory process, from the teacher's point of view, requires "much work" (50). With the mantra during initiation, the preceptor imparts spiritual power sufficient to enable the disciple to follow the path and overcome obstacles. Indeed the power may be enough to "transform the latter's whole life" (174).

Second in importance to the guru is the practice of meditation. Brahmananda's conversations contain a good deal of instruction for the practice of meditation, especially valuable as it comes from so authoritative a source. The talks touch upon many important technical details, but the most emphatic message is the importance of regularity: "Practise meditation four times a day—in the early morning, after bathing, in the evening, and at midnight....Even if the mind refuses to dwell on God, you must keep up the practice" (81).

In the beginning, Brahmananda says, meditation is like "warfare with the mind." Overdone, it can cause strain (46). More common a problem is the aridity that might tempt one to abandon or reduce practice. Brahmananda notes that this is usual in the beginning and advises persistence and patience. Careful regulation of diet often

improves the quality of meditation (46-47). But perhaps most important is simple awareness and quiet acceptance that progress takes time: "It is not a matter for impatience. Practise your spiritual disciplines sincerely for two or three years; then you will get bliss" (51). Making such patience easier, Brahmananda promises that no effort goes to waste: "Work must have its effect. If you repeat the Lord's name either wholeheartedly or halfheartedly, it must produce results" (46).

Detachment from the world, attachment to the guru, regular and patient practice of meditation: these, it becomes apparent, form the basis of Vedantic spirituality as Brahmananda sees it. Though the teaching may, as the translator, points out, differ in detail or emphasis from person to person—especially depending on whether the student is a monastic or householder—the profound Vedantic message remains the same.

In *A Guide to Spiritual Life*, we gain privileged access to an eminent master teaching his disciples, largely in a monastic setting. While a good portion of the teaching thus speaks to monks, there is much of universal value that will benefit any serious student of Hindu or Vedantic spirituality.

It is rare that English readers have such an opportunity to gain insight into the mind of one of India's great spiritual leaders. Brahmananda's is not a personal vision only, but one that profoundly shapes the outlook of modern India and the various spiritual movements that have brought Indian spirituality to the West. It is important, therefore, that documents such as this be available in English. In a world that has had its share of false and commercialized religious teachers, it is heartening to see Vedantic spirituality presented with such purity and authenticity.

While the reader might hope for an index in future editions, the book does contain a table of contents with subject headings for reference. A useful glossary is also provided. The layout and production are excellent.

NEWS AND REPORTS

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA MISSION VIDYALAYA COIMBATORE

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON THE RELEVANCE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S MESSAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

Shri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, organised A National Seminar to discuss the National Educational Policy of 1986 with special reference to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. It was inaugurated by Hon'ble Minister Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao on 2.9. 1988 at Shri Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (Deemed University), Coimbatore. The proceedings of the next two days were held in the Shri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya. Among the participants were Shri C. Subramaniam, Ex-Education Minister, Government of India, Shri J. Veeraraghavan, Secretary, Ministry of Human Resources Development, Shri Kishorilal Dhandhanian, General Secretary, Aurobindo Society, Dr. Jalaluddin, Joint Director, National Council of Educational Research and Training, Vice Chancellors Dr. V. C. Kulandaishwamy, Dr. K. M. Marimuthu and Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas, Dr. M. Aran, Member, University Grants Commission.

Swami Tanmayananda, Secretary, Shri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, welcomed the gathering at the inaugural session. In this session Shri T. S. Avinashilingam, Founder-Director, Shri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, said,

"We want to have an education revolution. The education revolution in the minds of men—so that India will live. We should think about our people, and work hard. Therefore we are conducting this seminar today about the relevance of the educational

ideals of Swami Vivekananda to the new educational policy".

In the Inaugural Address Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao said,

"This subject of Swami Vivekananda and New Education Policy was chosen long ago. I wanted to come because I know that the new education policy had a very substantial inspiration from Swami Vivekananda's teachings. We did not acknowledge it, but I don't mind acknowledging it now. Why do you need a New Education Policy? That was the first question which I had to answer. I had to ask myself, I had to ask of the educationists who were good enough to assist me and work along with me on thrashing out the new policy. And that is where this slogan of "Man-making education", as Swami Vivekananda says, gave us the glimmer of hope. We were just looking for something, something to guide us, something to be the basis of the new policy. These two words—man-making education—inspired us to think of something new".

Last year or the year before last, our Consul General in San Francisco sent a frantic telegram to me—because I had been with him earlier and so he took the liberty of sending it directly to me. He said, "Most of your boys, hundreds of them from the IIT's in India are sloping around here. Can't you take care of them? What is happening there? This is very embarrassing to me as the representative of the Government of India".

...Do you want a deculturised younger generation in this country, people without any rules? People who do not know what their society stood for? Is this the kind of new generation that we want? And if the answer is 'no', the only way is to go back to Swami Vivekananda. Though there are many other great men and saints, the per-

son who appealed to the modern mind, and also inspired the modern mind in Indian renaissance, is Swami Vivekananda.

I am very happy to inaugurate the seminar. And I hope that this will be the precursor to many such studies, many such seminars, many such symposia, and many such brain storming activity based on the New Education Policy."

In the paper on Swami Vivekananda and the National Education Policy, Shri T. S. Avinashilingam said,

"It has been recognised all over the world that the teacher is the kingpin of any educational system. When I was in the USA under the leadership exchange programme, U.S. experts pointed out that in the Indian system of education there is no teacher accountability. The American system, they said, is based on accountability. The teacher must prove his worth for his continuance in his job and for professional promotion. The evaluation is done at four levels—Self evaluation, Student evaluation, evaluation by the Chair person or Dean and peer evaluation.

Swami Vivekananda dreamt of building an education system which will produce strong, patriotic men and women who will build a great nation and a great country. It is this dream of Swami Vivekananda that the New Education Policy of the Government of India seeks to achieve. In furtherance of that great objective, the Seminar proposes to concentrate on some of the salient aspects under the following heads namely, programme for inculcation of Ethical, Social and Moral Values, Devising measures for stepping up the process of National Integration, orienting Teacher Education to meet the needs of the New Education Policy".

In his paper Shri C. Subramaniam said,

"According to Swamiji, the plan and purpose of education is to evolve out of indi-

viduals, a personality that is perfect from all points of view....

.... Unless teachers are dedicated and committed to give the children a value-based education as conceived by Swamiji, we cannot expect children to develop this social attitude.

.... But without people who devote their knowledge and their heart to our children, without teachers with a capital "T", all that may remain only formal and costly innovations not embodied in real deeds. ..."

In his paper Swami Tanmayananda said,

"Time has come for the student power in village and towns and big cities to launch a nation wide programme to rebuild the nation on the lines laid down by Swami Vivekananda. In every village and town and in cities there shall be a student wing of human development activity centre. Boys inspired by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda should form as small groups and start their work of service to poor and downtrodden brethren... In every school and college there should be study circles in the name of Swami Vivekananda".

In her paper on Fostering National integration through the education system, Dr. (Mrs.) Rajammal P. Devadas said,

"There are ways of invoking the divine power within each one of us. We become what we think. Pupils must be constantly exposed to the world's greatest scriptures such as: The Upanishads, Gita, Holy Bible and Koran. One or two periods in the week may be allotted for this purpose....

In Shri Ramakrishna's word, 'The companionship of the holy and wise is one of the main elements of spiritual progress. Opportunities should be provided for the pupils as well as staff to meet and talk with great men in the spiritual field'".

Dr. A. K. Jalaluddin said,

"There was no social action emanating from Vedanta, leading the society or the

nation, in its direction. It is only in the renaissance period Swami Vivekananda and Shri Ramakrishna Deva appeared on the scene along with the other social reformers. Education became one of the areas of their common concern. ... And now in that way when we talk of Swamiji and Vedanta, a true believer of Vedanta must be a practitioner of Vedanta. And how to practise Vedanta? We have to put before ourselves an ideal human being like Swamiji who is always in search of perfection and tries to remove the evils from the society. ...

We are trying to create basis for seeing the universal in the specific, general in the specific, God in the individual. That holistic kind of development is what we learn from Swamiji and Vedanta".

In his paper on Concept of Accountability in education and its implementation, Dr. K. Kulandaivel, Registrar, Institute of Home Science, Coimbatore, said,

"As far as possible a teacher should not have to teach or lecture more than three hours per day.

Senior teachers should have 14 hours of research work per week, 5 or 6 hours of reading and study, 5 hours of extra curricular or administrative work, 8 hours of teaching and laboratory work including testing and 8 hours of preparation for teaching work.

UGC also insists that there should be a minimum of 180 working days per year excluding examination days and efforts must be made to increase it to 200 and more".

In his paper on Role of Educational Institutions in Eradication of Illiteracy and Education of the masses, Dr. M. Aram said,

"As we all know, Swami Vivekananda stressed the importance of the 'Education of the Masses'. Eradication of illiteracy is one of the important thrust areas of the New Education Policy (NEP)".

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

MEDITATION

The Self, however, is infinitely more than all of its manifestations. All is the Self or Brahman. The saint, the sinner, the lamb, the tiger, even the murderer, as far as they have any reality, can be nothing else, because there is nothing else.

Think constantly of your real nature. Get rid of superstition. Do not hypnotise yourself into a belief in your own inferiority. Day and night tell yourself what you really are, until you realise (actually realise) your oneness with God.

"Imagination is the door to inspiration and the basis of all thought." All prophets, poets, and discoverers have had great imaginative power.

Holy meditation helps to burn out all mental impurities. All who are not Yogis are slaves; bond after bond must be broken to make us free.

One in whom the whole animal sex-force has been transformed into Ojas is a god. He speaks with power, and his words regenerate the world.

The more powerful the imagination, the more quickly will the real result be attained and the Kundalini be awakened. Until it does, imagine it does: try to feel the currents and try to force them through the Sushumna.

Imagination properly employed is our greatest friend; it goes beyond reason and is the only light that takes us everywhere.

Inspiration is from within and we have to inspire ourselves by our own higher faculties.

When we are calm and breathing equally through both nostrils, we are in the right condition for quiet meditation. It is no use trying to concentrate at first. Control of thought will come of itself.

—(*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VIII, Pp. 12, 37, 38, 39, 46, 47, 49, 50).

It is through the power of meditation, all scientific facts are discovered today. They study

the subject and forget everything, their own identity and everything, and then the great fact comes like a flash. Some people think that is inspiration. There is no more inspiration than there is expiration; and never was anything got for nothing.

Meditation, you know, comes by a process of imagination.

The Same can be attained by meditating upon a great soul; or upon the harmony of life. These are called objective meditations. So you begin to meditate upon certain external things, objective things, either outside or inside. If you take a long

sentence, that is no meditation at all. That is simply trying to get the mind collected by repetition. Meditation means the mind is turned back upon itself. The mind stops all the (thought-waves) and the world stops. Your consciousness expands. Every time you meditate you will keep your growth. ... Work a little harder, more and more, and meditation comes. You do not feel the body or anything else. When you come out of it after the hour, you have had the most beautiful rest you ever had in your life. That is the only way you ever give rest to your system.

—(*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, Pp. 230, 234, 235).

PRABUDDHA BHARATA: 90 YEARS AGO

Arise! awake! and stop not till the goal is reached! Katha Upa. I. iii. 14

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VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY AT GREENACRE

THE Greenacre Conferences were started by Miss Farmer in 1894, the year after the Parliament of Religions was held at Chicago. Since the time of their inauguration, the liberalizing and unsectarian spiritual teachings of the Vedanta philosophy have taken a prominent part in shaping the ideals of the Greenacre movement. The teachers of this philosophy have come from India, and have represented it almost every year. These teachers are known as "Swamis," a word meaning spiritual teachers, or masters. Of these, the first was Swami Vivekananda, the Hindu Sannyasin, or monk, who represented the Hindu philosophy before the World's Fair Parliament of Religions. He was the first Hindu teacher who came to America and explained the lofty ideals of the Vedanta through his wonderful eloquence, oratorical powers, and magnetic personality.

In 1896, his successor, Swami Saradananda,

came to Greenacre and taught Vedanta for two successive seasons. By his charming manners and unselfish love for humanity he succeeded in making a deep impression, as to the practical results of Vedanta teachings, upon the minds of almost all who met him personally or heard his discourses under the "Swamis' Pine" in the woods.

In 1898, Swami Saradananda, was followed at Greenacre by the writer of the present article. During that season he gave one lecture on "Science and Religion," in the large tent before the general audience, and four lectures before the Monsalvat School of Comparative Religion, established and conducted at Greenacre by Dr. Lewis G. Janes. On account of the pressure of work at different cities this season, the present Swami could give only three lectures in the last week of August. The subjects were "Is Hinduism Pantheistic?" "Reincarnation," and "The Spiritual Influence of India in the West."

MAHASAMADHI OF SWAMI ABHAYANANDA

(*Bharat Maharaj*)

(1890-1989)

It is with profound sorrow we announce that Swami Abhayananda, widely and endearingly known as Bharat Maharaj, entered into Mahasamadhi at 00.07 hrs. on Friday, 18 November 1989, at our hospital, the Ramakrishna Mission Sevapratishthan. He was 100 years old.

The Swami, known in his pre-monastic life as Atul Chandra Guha, hailed from Majkhara, a village in the district of Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), and was born in the year 1890. While studying in the National H. E. School, Dhaka, he became associated with a patriotically inspired and politically active group of freedom-fighters known as 'Anushilan Samiti' of Dhaka under the leadership of a famous revolutionary Sri Pulin Chandra Das. Consequently he had to discontinue his further studies.

He once came to Calcutta to seek some guidance in political activity from Aurobindo Ghosh, and afterwards, as destiny would have it, went to Belur Math to stay for a few days. As it turned out, 'few days' stretched into few weeks under the loving persuasions of Swami Brahmananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the first President of the Ramakrishna Order. This was a divine intervention that brought Atul in contact with most of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Gradually he began to feel that political pursuits would not help him gain the spiritual fulfilment his heart was seeking. Subsequently he joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1909 at Belur Math. Soon his name was changed to Bharat. After some three years he had the good fortune of being initiated (in 1912) by Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother and he had his *sannyasa* in 1920 from Swami Brahmananda.

Bharat Maharaj, stayed and worked at the Belur Math for the greater part of his life. After spending about five years initially at the Belur Math, he was posted as 'Manager' of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. There he stayed for sixteen long years. He was elected as a Trustee of Mayavati Advaita Ashrama in 1923. He was called back to Belur Math in 1930 to shoulder greater responsibilities, first as the Joint Manager of the Math and later as the Manager from 1966. He was chosen as a member of the Working Committee at the Headquarters from 1936 to 1940 and again from 1944 to 1946. He was elected as a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1947.

Bharat Maharaj possessed a magnetic and deeply mystical personality, which has left a lasting and vivid impression in the minds and hearts of all who came in contact with him. He was the local guardian of Smt. Indira Gandhi, our former Prime Minister, during her stay at Shantiniketan. He lent her his moral support with fondness and fatherly concern till her last days. He used to identify himself with visiting individuals, families and groups from different part of India and abroad, irrespective of their creed, caste, language or religion. His pragmatic strong common-sense, his depth of love, concern and fellow-feeling, and his selfless yet personal interest and influence in helping or advising men and women of all walks of life with their own problems and predicaments had made Bharat Maharaj a house-hold word of unfailing comfort and solace to many.

For the last six months or so he was undergoing treatment for old age ailments. Despite best efforts the inevitable end came, but peacefully. He was conscious till the end.

In his passing away the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission has sustained an irreparable loss.

On behalf of all its readers, the PRABUDDHA BHARATA offers its respectful salutations to the sacred memory of the beloved Swami.