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

THUS SPEAK THE SAINTS

PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is of three kinds ; the moving pilgrimage, the mental pilgrimage, and the pilgrimage by going to a holy place.

The knower of Brahman, the man of Self-realisation is a moving pilgrimage. Such persons are absolutely pure and fulfil others' desires. Their words purify human beings stained with worldly desires. By serving such a person one gets rid of all sins and gets one's desires fulfilled.

The mental pilgrimage is the attainment of truthfulness, forgiveness, control of the senses, kindnesses to all, simplicity, giving help to others, control of the mind, contentment, continence, sweetness of speech, knowledge, patience, and spiritual austerities.

The pilgrimage to a place is like going to places like Ganga, Kurukshetra, Pushkar, Prayag, Naimisharanya, etc. (*Kashikhanda*)

Attainment of a pure mind is the real pilgrimage. One should make all necessary efforts to purify the mind, when one goes to a pilgrimage. (*Brahmapurana*).

To perform, following the guru's instruction, such pious acts as worship, pilgrimage, and service to living beings is called Karma Yoga.

The Bhakta takes shelter under *vidyamaya*. He seeks holy company, goes to a pilgrimage, and practises discrimination, devotion, and renunciation.

Pilgrimage becomes futile if it does not enable you to attain love of God.... What is the use of making pilgrimages if you can attain love of God remaining where you are ?

(*The Gospel Of Shri Ramakrishna*: Pp. 700, 578, 696, 469)

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INDIA—THE LAND OF DEVOTION

(EDITORIAL)

On the austere Himalayan height of fourteen thousand feet, every year thousands of pilgrims bound for Amarnath walk up the long path of some twenty miles. On one side of these narrow paths hangs huge mass of boulders on loose hill tops, and on the other side lies a steep chasm of several thousand feet. The least slip of a step means sure death. Some of them die too each year. Yet the same flow of pilgrims continues year after year. Men and women, old and young, young mothers with new babies, old women with a tattered stick, some on horse back, but most of them on foot, take this death-defying journey braving rain, winds, snow-fall, and temperature running below the freezing point. They go for a rebirth after the darshana of Shiva in His own sombre, and sublime region where there is no life. This is the Himalayan height where the world is not, and God is real. Millenniums ago, in such a Himalayan path, the heroes of Mahabharata had one day walked up in their last journey to God, after all the victories of life. To the Indians, the Himalayas is indeed the abode of Gods. It is known as *Devatatma* or "Enshrouded with

the soul of divinity", which has eternally lured Indians to come in search of God. This is India—the land of devotion.

A woman devotee of the West came to pay a third visit to India a few years ago. Someone asked her, "Why do you come to visit India again and again?" She answered, "In the West, we have religious atmosphere inside our retreats, but in India one can feel the spirit of religion and God even in the streets." Several years ago a German Engineer who came to visit India, was brought to see a well-known steel project of India. "But I did not come to India to see these projects. We have got too many of them in our country. What I want to see are the holy places where people worship God," said the Engineer. He was taken thereafter to some time-honoured pilgrimages of India. He felt fulfilled.

Indian pilgrimages are wonders of man's devotion to God. It is a sight to see how thousands of devotees stand for several hours in the line just to be present for a precious thirty seconds before the image of Lord Venkateshwara at Tirupati. Day and

night this hunger for a direct feeling of the presence of God continues in the pilgrimages of India. The twelve Jyotirlinga Shiva temples situated in different corners of India, draw millions of Indians throughout the year. The fifty-one pilgrimages of Mother or Shakti worship scattered all over the country, where, according to mythology, the different parts of the body of Sati, the wife of Shiva, are believed to have fallen, have turned into equally powerful pilgrimages. There thousands throng everyday. Varanasi, the holiest city of India, is having at least a thousand temples where ceaseless worship is going on for centuries. Kanchipuram, the Varanasi of the South, stands imperiously with its three magnificent temples of Shiva, Vishnu, and mother Kamakshi. From North to South, from East to West, hundreds of pilgrimages with thousands of temples create a gigantic spiritual vibration that has turned the geographical boundary of India into a spiritual entity. Hundreds of South-Indian temples with their huge sky-touching Gopurams studded with life-size figures of gods and goddesses of Hindu mythologies, are wonders to even the most casual visitors. There is an age-old saying—*Bhakti Dravida Deshe*—Bhakti is to be found in Southern India. The huge temple complexes of Madura-Minakshi, Rameshwaram-Shiva, Srirangam-Vishnu, Tirupati-Balaji and some others stand like forts of divinity. Each covers vast areas in which virtually a whole township is based on temple rituals which have been going on for the last thousand years. In these temples the Hindus, rich and poor, high and low, of all castes and faiths, have come and poured their wealth before the living deities. The vast treasures of the Somnath temple had attracted sixteen muslim invasions. Each time the temple was razed to the ground and left desolate.

The temple proper, especially in South India, is built on an anthropomorphic con-

cept. *Chandogya Upanishad* describes man as the "City of Brahman". Each temple has represented this "City" in the body of man. The *Garbha-Griha* (sanctum sanctorum) represents the *Self* within. The music hall or *Natamandapam* represents the heart of the devotee where prayers are born. The *Balipitha* corresponds to that portion of the body where animal propensities manifest most, and this has to be sacrificed at the *Balipitha*. The *Dhwajastambha*, or the towering pillar represents man's conquest of the *Self* over the non-self.

Round the temple proper but inside the temple compound, exist different huge buildings meant for administration, study, accommodation of priests, and huge cooking-range for preparing sacramental foods. Few such magnificent temple complex stands in the north like the colossal temple of Jagannath at Puri, the Lingaraj temple of Bhuvaneswar, or Srirangam temple in Vrindavan. Thousands of priests survive on the elaborate rituals and other functionings of the temple of Jagannath and other temples surrounding it. Despite the modernisation of life, more people attend today the celebrated Car-Festival of Puri or the Dewali festival in Southern temples.

Christian Churches like St. Thomas at Madras, or St. Xaviers at Goa are founded on the martyrdom or death of saints. Muslim piety in India was primarily centred round two factors; glory of women and sanctity of the saint's graveyard. In many villages of India, the *dargah* or graveyards of muslim saints are places of prayer. The Taj Mahal is the great Mughal's immortalisation of love for a great woman. With the Hindus, man's existence is dependent, included and fulfilled in the towering presence of the Almighty, and hence the historic temples of India—the greatest monuments of a God-centered civilisation.

Centering round the temples are held occasional huge religious festivals which

turn into a pilgrimage in themselves. Grandest of all the periodical pilgrimages are the Kumbha Melas which are held at four places in India, Haridwar in the Himalayan foothills, Prayag at Allahabad, Nasik in Maharashtra, and Ujjain on the banks of Shipra. During Kumbha Mela these areas turn, in fact, into a city of tents, and moving monasteries where thousands of Sadhus congregate, discuss, dispute, and reaffirm the greatest goal and purpose of human life—God realisation. Millions, both lay people and monks, take the holy dip in Ganga or other rivers, at the specified and auspicious hours. The entire Mela City reverberates day and night with the readings of holy texts, prayers, devotional songs, and discourses. The austerities and heartfelt prayers of millions bring a transformation even in the minds of agnostics and non-believers. In one of the colleges at Tirupati, a student asked a Swami, “Why is it, Swamiji, that people claim to feel the palpable presence of God before the stone statue of Tirupati?” The Swami answered, “The intense heartrending prayers of thousands, even lakhs of devotees everyday for the last few hundred years have made the atmosphere of the small sanctum sanctorum and the image of Tirupati charged with faith, devotion, confidence, hope, love, adoration, holiness, self-surrender, and a sure feeling of God’s grace and help for human suffering. This is what fulfils, strengthens and elevates a devotee.” Even the Buddha who derided the Vedas could not resist the temptation of Varanasi, and started the wheel of his religion at Sarnath, only six miles away from the holy city. Alexander was deeply influenced by an Indian Yogi on the banks of Punjab rivers. Alexander returned from Punjab. Had he reached Varanasi or Vrindavan, probably history would have changed.

In the overwhelming psycho-kinetic vibrations of strong faith and devotion of

millions, God becomes real. Faith in the Supersensuous, Almighty Power, is ignited. ‘Faith is not belief, it is the grasp on the, ultimate, an illumination’, said Vivekananda¹. It is this faith and devotion which made the metal image of Rama swim and dance with Shri Ramakrishna. It is the same faith and devotion which made the baby Gopala alive, demanding, walking, and seeking affection from Gopala’s mother, a highly spiritual woman-devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. Tradition has it that when Tulasidas used to write the Ramayana, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita would be present before him. Krishna used to dance, according to tradition, when the born-blind poet Suradas used to sing. People believe that Andal, the immaculately pure girl devotee of Krishna who refused to get married to any human being, was absorbed in the image of her chosen deity in the temple. Even today the garland offered to her image is subsequently offered to Lord Himself. Devi Sahay, the well-known blind devotee of Shiva at Varanasi, composed on one stormy day in his life the unforgettable song, “O Shiva, carry my boat across the ocean of life.” Tradition has it that on that day all his sufferings ceased. His eye of Knowledge opened up. Others believe that on the same day he got back his physical vision in the holy city of Shiva.

Varanasi is the sanctum sanctorum of India. Every Hindu dreams of visiting this holy city at least once in lifetime. It is the oldest city of India, if not of the entire human civilisation. Even in the Ramayana (Kishkindhyakanda) and the Mahabharata, the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, and at least in seven Puranas, this city is glorified as the city of God. Some fifty major temples, and an equal number of sanctifying pilgrimages are situated in this city on the bank of

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition) Vol. 7, p. 60.

Ganga. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in 6th century A.D. mentioned this city with a hundred major temples and ten thousand priests. It was for a time also a seat of Buddhist spiritual culture. Spiritual vibrations are intense in this city. Hindus believe that to live and die in this city is to live and die in the presence of God. That is why all saints and sages right from the time of the Ramayana have come and made spiritual struggles in this God-centred city of India, where every lane near the Ganga has a temple of historic association.

If the pilgrimages have inspired devotion in the minds of common men, it is equally true that saints by their intense spiritual practices have turned ordinary places into living pilgrimages. The sadhana of Ramadasa is immortalised in Bhadrachalam in Andhra. Shankaracharya's sadhana has created four well-known maths in four corners of India. Shri Chaitanya by his sadhana rediscovered the ancient glory of Vrindavan after it was razed to ground by Mahmud of Gazhni. Shri Ramakrishna's unprecedented spiritual sadhana has turned the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, belonging to a so called low-caste woman, into an international pilgrimage today. Padma-purana, an old Indian scripture, says, "Wherever a person lives by controlling his senses and passions, that place itself becomes a pilgrimage like Kurukshetra, Prayag, or Puskar."

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But this devotion did not always make the Indian only otherworldly or mystic. Sometimes it has inspired great aesthetic creations. The marvellous sculptures of the temples of Bhuvaneshwar and Konarak in the North, and temples of Ellora, Belur, Hampi, or Halebid in the South, are inspired by religious fervour. Similar Buddhist art pieces of Ajanta, and Jain sculptures in Mount Abu are among the greatest monuments of Indian art. Even

Indian classical music and dance have at its back deep feelings of religious devotion. The Perini Shiva-tandava dance, and Kuchipudi dance inspire devotion. Many of the ragas (tunes) like Bhairava, Bhairavi, Kedara and others are dedicated to Shiva, Mother, Vishnu and other gods and goddesses.

The devotion of Tulasidas for Rama was the power behind the creation of his immortal epic poem *Ramacharitmanasa*. The simple hearted devotee of Guruvayurappan in Kerala was inspired to write the well-known *Narayaneeyam*, an easy abridgement of the *Bhagavatam* in popular and readable Sanskrit. The immortal songs of Purandaradasa, a wealthy money-lender, changed into a great devotee by a sudden theophany of God, are inspiring millions of Indians to devotion. Similar and perhaps still more appealing are the soul-stirring songs of Suradas, the born-blind devotee poet, of Kabir, Nanak, Tyagaraja, Tukaram and Narsing Mehta. The songs of Mirabai, the queen of Chitore, who stands as the most inspiring example of devotion, are the great assets of Indian culture and religion. These are the ideal devotees of India who, in the words of Vivekananda, are "Strong with the strength that comes from touching the feet of God."²

"The Bhakti of India is not like Western Bhakti," Vivekananda said, "the central idea of ours is that there is no thought of fear. It is always, love God. There is no worship through fears, but always through love, from beginning to end."³

The devotion of the Gopis for Krishna has been the ideal of highest devotion in India, where the devotee realises the words of Krishna in the Gita, "Give up every other tie for me." "It is the religion of India," said

2. Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 23.

3. Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 301.

Vivekananda.⁴ That is why the devotion of Indians is expressed not through martial war movements of Zihad or Crusades, but through complete devotion of the soul to God. It is not a devotion of a community or a group, although the devotees do sometimes live in groups for mutual spiritual help. It is the individual soul's spontaneous cry for reaching God—the abode of purity, perfection, and above all love. Temples of India resound not with weekly sermons or messages from religious prelates addressed to the flock but with prayer and worship of individuals, which go on day and night in thousand different ways.

The power and thought behind the universe is what is called God. Indians realised that whenever the finite mind has sought to grasp God, it has to take a name and a form. Its highest name is *OM*. But according to the variations in human nature, an individual seeks to adore God with a particular "name" and "form", and a 'thought' or an 'idea' behind. This name-form-idea of God is known as *Pratika*. That is why a devotee chooses his own *pratika*, his own dear name-form-thought of God, which is known as *Ishta*. The word *Ishta* is derived from the root '*Ish*', to desire or choose.⁵ Indians gave utmost liberty to each individual to choose and worship God in his or her own way, with the chosen Ideal suited to each. And thus was evolved the vast range of gods and goddesses in Hindu tradition, like Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, and hundreds of other names representing the one Eternal Godhead. To these forms they offer worship with various kinds of flowers, and incantations or mantras (sacred words) suited to each of these divine symbols. These worships in various forms are known as *archana*, *pooja*, *aradhana*, *namasamkirtana*, *parayana*, *bhajana*, *upasana*, and *prarthana*.

Formal worship matures finally into ceaseless prayer of the soul for God, and this prayer is expressed through soul-stirring chantings, incantations and songs of devotees. In India there is an old saying—*Na vidya sangitat para*—there is no knowledge superior to music. "Any song...if one's soul is in that song, one attains salvation, one has nothing else to do. They say it leads to the goal as meditation," says Vivekananda.⁶ Tukaram of Maharashtra, Ramprasad and Kamalakanta of Bengal, Bhadrachalam Ramadasa and Tyagaraja of Andhra, Tulasidas, Mira, Suradas and Kabir of the North, have realised God through their immortal songs.

Ramana Maharshi, the great sage and Jnani, used to deeply enjoy devotional songs. When devotees would ask that he was only a Jnani, and not a bhakta or devotee, he would answer, "Bhakti is Jnanamata," which means "Devotion is the mother of knowledge." Ramakrishna used to say that Bhakti is like woman who can enter into inner apartments, while Jnana, like a male, is welcomed only upto the outer apartments. Even the knowledge of Shankara has culminated in his celebrated hymns addressed to Ganga, Narmada, Divine Mother, Shiva, and Govinda.

Indians think that human life has four goals or *Purushartha*; *dharma*: the need of a moral and ethical living according to the accepted laws of conduct; *artha*: earning of necessary wealth for living this ethical life; *kama*: legitimate enjoyments of life; *moksha*: liberation from the slavery and bondages of body and mind. In the Bhakti-tradition, attainment of Bhakti or pure love of God is considered to be the fifth goal or *Purushartha* of life. Shri Ramakrishna used to say—"Bhakti-i Sar"—Devotion of God is the essence of human life.

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4. Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 111.

5. Ibid., Vol. 4, pp. 50-51.

6. Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 74.

This all-pervading atmosphere of devotion has also deeply influenced the kings and warriors. King Ashoka's total devotion to the Buddhist faith has made him the greatest monarch of all times in history. As a young king Shivaji was so inspired by the saintly life of Samarth Ramadasa, a devotee of Shri Rama, that he even decided to leave his kingdom and go for the life of a recluse. His guru Ramadasa asked him not to leave the kingdom but serve the kingdom in the spirit of a humble servant of God for the protection of helpless subjects who were living in constant fear of attack and ruthless exploitation by foreign invaders.⁷ The devotion of Indian saints had influenced even the great mughul emperor Akbar. He created the new capital of Fatehpur Sikri not just as a political capital (Rajdhani), but also as a place for religious devotion (Yoga Dhani). Akbar met the holy saint Dadu in the desert areas outside this new capital. Dadu blessed the emperor in his attempt to make the new capital a place of spiritual pursuit.⁸ Today when the old capitals of the other emperors have turned into ruins or historic monuments, Fatehpur Sikri still reverberates with the devotion of pilgrims who come from far and near to pay their homage in the holy shrine of the saint Sheikh Selim Chisti who came at Akbar's request to the new capital, lived a great spiritual life, and died there. Akbar even made a pilgrimage to the holy shrine Vaishno Devi in Jammu.

The Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur was beheaded in the court of Aurangzeb. After he was killed, they found a note hanging from his severed neck, "Sir dia, Sar nehi dia" (I have given my head, but not the glory of

my religion.)⁹ Teg Bahadur's son Guru Govinda Singh brought a spirit of wonderful heroism based on deep spiritual devotion in his followers. The popular couplet of the Sikhs reads: "Sawa lakh par ek charau, jab Guru Govind nam sunao," meaning "When Guru Govind gives the Name; i.e. initiation, a single man becomes strong enough to triumph over a lakh and a quarter of his foes."¹⁰

Bankim Chandra's song '*Vande Mataram*' where the country emerged as the Divine Mother, has inspired the entire national struggle that brought independence from the British rule. In Maharashtra, the 'Ganesh Puja' was another source of patriotic struggle and sacrifice in pre-independence days.

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The holy rivers of India contributed immensely to this spirit of devotion. If the Himalayas has inspired knowledge, Ganga, Yamuna, Krishna or Narmada have emerged as Mothers of the people, purifying them of their past karma. As millions take bath in these rivers, especially in the Ganga even today, they chant "Ganga-Mayee ki Jay"—victory to Mother Ganga.

The Indian atmosphere of devotion is largely due to the long-standing influence of the two immortal epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and the various Puranas. These are the most popular mythologies which have translated the highest philosophical truths, through simple and sometimes tragic stories, for the common masses. These two epics have interpenetrated the Indian life, its society and culture, law and ethics, politics and administration, arts and music, folk-lore and ballads, and its classical

7. Shri Charu Chandra Dutta, *Ramadas O Shivaji* (Bengali), Calcutta University, 1941, p. 108.

8. Shri Kshitimohan Sen, *Dadu* (Bengali) Vishwabharati Granthalaya, Calcutta, 1st Edn. 1342 (Bengali), p. 71.

9. Shri Kartick Chandra Mitra, *Sikh Guru* (Bengali), Sulabh Granthamala Karyalaya, Calcutta 1329 (Bengali), p. 56.

10. *The Complete Works of Sw. Vivekananda*, Vol. 6, p. 514.

literature. Those characters like Rama, Sita, Arjuna, Krishna or Bhishma never belong to the past. Rama and Krishna are the most beloved personal gods of India. Sita and Savitri are Indian ideals of chastity. Sita is, according to Vivekananda, "Purity itself embodied—the most beautiful character that ever lived on earth."¹¹ The immortal characters like the faithful Lakshmana and Hanuman, the God-fearing feeble king Dhritarashtra, the majestic character of Bhishma, the philosopher King Yudhisthira, the fighter-devotee Arjuna, the stately queen Gandhari, and the loving mother Kunti will never die in Indian consciousness.

From Rameshwaram in the Southernmost-point to Kedar in the Northern Himalayas, from Manipur in the East to Prabhas in the West, the influence of these Epics and Puranas, can be seen and felt everywhere in India.

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Out of intense devotion God has been humanised in the lives of India's devotees. Mira used to adore Krishna as her master. Kamalakanta and Ramprasad sometimes worshipped Divine Mother as their baby daughter. In fact India has taught the world to love God as son, husband, friend, wife, Lord, and above all the most beloved in life. The *Agamani* songs of Bengal, which are addressed to Uma, the daughter of the Himalayas, are songs of parental affection for a daughter who has been married to an unworldly husband Shiva. Kamalakanta consoles the queen mother of the Himalayas, who is disconsolate to see her daughter Uma. Kamalakanta say, "O queen-mother, do not weep; be calm, who will be able to measure the real form of your Uma? Do not you know She is verily the Infinite Reality? Why are you thinking of her as limited human being, out of your motherly affection?"

¹¹. Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 119.

Just as the deity is humanised, similarly in many instances of the highest form of devotion human beings are deified. Sages and saints had the vision of God in human beings. Shri Ramakrishna saw and worshipped the Divine Mother in the being of his consort, Sarada Devi. Even today Indians worship virgin daughters as Divine Mother—through the ritual known as Kumari Puja. A Guru of Self-realisation is worshipped as God himself.

Nature in India is deified. The Himalayas is Shiva Himself. The Ocean is only a form of God. Villages, Cities, Hills, and the most beautiful spots of natural beauty are dedicated not to Kings or Queens but to God. Many Buddhist and Jain monasteries like those in Kanheri near Bombay or Udaygiri and Khandagiri near Bhuvaneshwar are carved out of beautiful mountains. The Hindu shrines of Kanyakumari, Rameshwaram, Jagannath, Somnath and Dwaraka are on the sea-shore, and temples of Kedar, Badari, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Tunganath or Joshj Math are on the most sublime and awe-inspiring Himalayan heights.

The beginning and the end of Indian life—Brahmacharya and Sannyasa—are dedicated to contemplation of God, leaving the middle half to spend the unspent desires in the path of dharma. Each action is deified. Ramprasad of Bengal sang, "When you lie down, you are only saluting Divine Mother, when you sleep you only meditate on Mother. When you eat, you are only offering oblation of food to Mother who is inside you." Each pilgrimage is a step forward towards total self-surrender to God.

This is the Eternal India which Vivekananda glorified in the West, "...that nation (India), among all the children of man, has believed, and believed intensely, that this life is not real. The real is God; and they must cling unto that God through thick and thin. In the midst of their degradations

religion came first. The Hindu man drinks religiously, walks religiously, marries religiously, robs religiously."¹²

This holy land is itself the Tirtha (Pilgrimage) whose every single dust seemed holy to Vivekananda after his triumphant return from the West. At Ramnad in his first

address on the Indian soil, Vivekananda said, "If there is any land on this earth that one may claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi*, to be the land to which every soul on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way godward must come to attain its last home, ... it is India." This is the Eternal India—the land of devotion to God.

^{12.} Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 74.

EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

Before embarking on a journey, the traveller collects various necessary articles from different rooms of his home, then packs them securely in his suitcase. Once he reaches his destination, he removes those articles and places them in different locations in his new abode. Thus, those objects which were scattered, were first collected and then again spread out. This is just a simple example of expansion and contraction.

When we close our fists, it is contraction. As they are opened to perform some action, our hands expand. Our everyday life is filled with similar examples of the two-fold process of expansion and contraction. If we are observant, we can see the process occurring on many levels: physical, chemical, biological, financial—and even intellectual, moral, and spiritual.

We wake up in the morning to an expanded world—the sky above, the meadows and hills, the trees and the chirping of birds. We become aware of the gradual noise of life with all its activities. The day ends and at night we go to sleep. In sleep, the experience of the manifold comes to a state of unity. With the advent of the day, we become again keenly aware of an expanded world, with all of our struggles before us.

We live in a world of endless multiplicity in both the waking and dream states. The converse of this occurs naturally in sleep. In sleep the external world of space and time and our mental world of thoughts and emotions disappear, though, to where we do not generally know, nor care to know. Then again, we wake up to expansion and the cycle continues: expansion and contraction. This is the plan of nature.

There is now a great deal of research investigating the nature of the universe, and we are witnessing wonderful discoveries. Science tells us that this universe slowly can be reduced to finer and finer elements, and this can ultimately be reduced to energy. The universe eventually becomes a tremendous ball of fire: this ball of fire bursts and then again, the universe issues forth. Thus, the cyclic process goes on. Although some scientific philosophers follow this train of thought, they nevertheless conceive of this process in a materialistic way. This expansion and contraction are facets of nature, mysterious though they be. There is no certainty of any conscious power guiding this phenomenon.

Yet, man cannot always live on the material plane because he is aware of his

own consciousness. Man himself is part of the show. When man thinks of himself, he realises that there are many things which he must face—and yet he does not understand why. In this life, he must endure sufferings and frustrations, and the end is in death. No one can escape this rotation. When we think of this, the questions arise: “What is the life?”, “For what purpose do I exist?”, “Why must I undergo all these troubles when the culmination of life is the disappearance of everything?”. When we sleep it is with the assurance that we will wake up again the next day. But when we think of death, we are terrified, because we think that from death there is no return. Then it is that we seriously begin to ask the question, “Why?” “Why?” “Why?”.

This is the beginning of the spiritual search. The search for meaning—not merely in the external world, but in our own life as well. The question of “Why” is not necessary in our practical everyday life, but this question is essential for our life as a whole. Man eventually comes to the point when the terrible shocks and contradictions of life lead him to ask deeper questions about life’s true meaning.

In ancient India, there were thinkers who asked those deeper questions, and they also found some answers. Those answers were recorded in the Vedas which contain the accumulated spiritual knowledge of the ancient rishis, or, seers of Truth. The culmination of the Vedas, or Vedanta, was expressed by the rishis in the Upanishads. Those rishis declared that there was a self-existent, timeless Spiritual Reality at the back of expansion and contraction. This Reality is the totality of everything: It is the totality of space, time, matter, life and mind.

Everything that we encounter is included in that Reality. The name given to that Reality by the ancient seers was “Brahman”,

which literally means, “the Greatest”. The Greatest includes everything. Everything is contained in Brahman: the material, the psychological, the moral and the spiritual.

All creation comes from that Ultimate Reality which is Brahman. As we read in the *Mundakopanishad*:

*Tadetaṁ satyam yatha sudiptaṁ pavakad
Visphulingaḥ sahasraśaḥ prabhavante
sarupāḥ
Tatha ‘kṣharad’ vividhaḥ soṁya bhavaḥ
Prajayante tatra chaivapiyanti.*

“As from a blazing fire thousands of sparks similar to it issue forth, so manifold beings are produced from the Imperishable, and they verily go back to It again.”¹

In Vedanta, the well-known proposition is: “the effect is not different from the cause.” Whatever emerges from any source shares the nature of that source. So with fire: everything that emerges from fire contains a bit of that fire. Brahman is Sat-Chit-Ananda, or Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. That which emerges from Brahman is also Sat-Chit-Ananda; so any segment of the created universe is in essence Brahman.

Akasha first emerges, which is akin to the modern concept of the space-time continuum. After *Akasha* appear the other four elements (bhutas) *Vayu*, *Agni*, *Ap* and *Prithivi* and their various permutations and combinations. In this way, the process of evolution begins and multiplicity arises. There is no end to the multiplicity. This is the Vedantic process of creation. Everything comes from Brahman and returns to Brahman: what we call death is returning to Brahman.

Another analogy can be given: A tree springs from a seed, and from this seed a

1. *Mundaka Upanishad* II. 1.

plant grows. By a gradual process, the plant develops into a tree; flowers, and then fruits come. With the passing of the seasons the fruits drop, the leaves fall, and the bare skeleton of the tree remains. But the cycle renews itself: from the seed the plant springs forth, then the tree, the flowers and the fruits. Again, the cycle begins anew.

What should be our response to this idea? We should remember that this process is a spiritual truth. Spiritual truths become our own by "Shraddha", that is, faith in the words of the scriptures, and by repeated listening and thinking upon them. When we develop this Shraddha, we realise that there is a God, a Conscious Reality. Expansion and contraction are continually in motion, and we are a part of the process. We realise that we are sparks of that mass of fire which is Brahman. We realise that we are a little bit of that Sat-Chit-Ananda and there are millions of other bits of Sat-Chit-Ananda. I am a bit Sat-Chit-Ananda, and so is the little bird. The river is another bit of Sat-Chit-Ananda, and so is the ocean. Whether great or small, everything appears, continues, and disappears in Sat-Chit-Ananda.

Scientists have conducted elaborate research on the vast reaches of space. Whatever research they do is welcome, because as the Vedic sages have declared: "Whatever we discover is within God. God surrounds everything. Nothing can escape His reality. All that exists, exists in Brahman. Everything that happens does so in Brahman".

We play our part in this world, but if we can remember that everything happens in Brahman, then we slowly begin to develop an inner calmness, and a balance between our body-mind complex and the outside world. This balance comes from within the depths of our own being, from Brahman within our own self. Though Brahman projects this vast universe like sparks from a

fire, He remains unaffected; He is the Spectator of the show. He enjoys the play of the cosmic process of appearance, sustenance and disappearance. All changes happen in Him, but He does not change.

From the Upanishads we learn that God who projects this play cannot be an irresponsible actor. He wants us to discover the secret of the game. This play, which Vedanta calls "maya" binds us, but by taking refuge in God and seeking His help, we can escape maya. Then like the Creator, we too shall be eternally quiet. We shall attain the perfection and freedom which are in God.

Man is a combination of his body, his *prana* or life-force, his mind, his understanding and his ego. But all these elements of our personality are centered in the God that is within us—our soul, the flame, the Divine. Upon this soul, layer upon layer of coverings have been added—these coverings have deluded us. We must therefore pray to God, "Let us be able to solve this mystery. Let us be able to see your Face, even while living in this body."²

When we are able to do this with sincerity, our life becomes a life in God. Nothing disappears; our duties remain, and our external life appears the same. But, everything has changed colour. Our life has become God-centered. Even when sufferings come, we are able to bear them patiently. We understand that this life is a play, and a play has no laws of causation. When a child plays, he plays according to his own will. We cannot rationalise the play. The child says, "I want to beat something. I want to go here and jump and play." God is also a child, and a child that cannot be bound. He will not obey any rules. We, as devotees of God, should remember this. In this way, when we suffer we will not complain. "Why did this happen to me? Why to me

2. *Svetashvatara Upanishad* IV. 10.17.

and not to my neighbour?" We shall realise that these are foolish questions, because such questions cannot be asked of God. God is God. If we realise and accept this, our hearts will become quiet. We will develop a different kind of mind: our minds will become surrendered to God.

Self-surrender gives tremendous peace and great joy. Jesus Christ taught us self-surrender. His central idea was, "Thy will be done." In human terms he experienced joy, but he experienced and endured also, great suffering. Many people praised him, adored him, and listened to him. But there were others who did not want to listen to him; they wanted to torment him. Eventually they killed him. But Christ remained calm: "Thy will be done. Not I, but Thou." This was Christ's principle, and to the devotee, this idea gives courage and strength.

The life of a devotee is, no doubt, a life in the world—a mixture of pain and suffering, smiles and tears. But in mature spiritual life these contradictions disappear. Living in this world, the devotee has found the thread of unity: he has found God. The devotee always remembers, "It is God's will." Moreover, if a person can genuinely surrender himself to God, God will see that His devotee does not unduly suffer. So says the Gita.³ We read in the Upanishads:

"Yo vai bhuma tatsukham nalpe sukhamasti bhumaiva sukham."

"That which is infinite, is happiness. There is no happiness in the finite. The infinite alone is happiness."⁴

Only in the Infinite is there joy. The little things of this world—the little sense enjoyments and possessions, the little honour and fame—all these are paltry compared to the

vast majesty of God. God is so vast that even to have a little of God is overwhelming.

The Upanishads declare that man's life becomes meaningful only when he understands the mystery of life. The mystery of life is simple: there is a God who is the Cause and the Ruler of everything. The Upanishads declare God to be *sarvajna sarvavit*—all knowing. God knows everything in detail and in totality.⁵ Nothing is beyond His knowledge. If a leaf falls, God knows that it is falling. Whatever wonder science may discover comes from God. Science cannot discover anything outside God, because God is in everything. If a great scientist discovers a law and wins the Nobel Prize, God smiles and thinks, "Well, it is my law! I knew it before you!"

Brahman is the Director of the three processes of expansion, sustentation and contraction. Yet, their existence is but momentary; the speed of the change is so tremendous that we cannot comprehend it. Atomic scientists are only now beginning to understand these subtle matters. Those atomic processes occur at such a rate of speed that the scale of time is beyond our comprehension. We cannot comprehend one billionth of a second: such a unit of time becomes a mere figure of mathematics. Our minds cannot conceive it. Nevertheless, just as these processes are scientifically true, equally true are the actions of God in the world's processes. To fully comprehend this, however, we must have faith in God.

Though God is vast and encompasses everything, though God is almighty and all-knowing, He is also kind, full of love, and very sweet. His kindness and compassion are scattered in all mothers of the world. Without the love of mothers, how could creation be sustained? For whom does the tree-mother draw the sap from the earth?

3. *Bhagavad Gita* 9.22.

4. *Chandogya Upanishad* II 22.1.

5. *Mundaka Upanishad* II 2.7

For her children—for the flowers and for the fruits. Maternal affection is manifest in all creation, and this love and compassion come from God.

A justice of the high court is a very powerful man, and everyone dreads his decrees. Those under his jurisdiction fear the judgement that he will impose. But, when that same justice returns home, he becomes a sweet husband and father. In the same manner, the same powerful and majestic God is—to a devotee of God—a sweet Father, a sweet Mother, a sweet Friend, Child or Lover.

The sages tell us that we can certainly establish a human relationship with God. In our worship, prayer, and contemplation, we need to remember and follow the examples and teachings of those holy people who have practised the love of God through human relations. These ideas and practices are known as Bhakti Yoga, or communion through devotion.

The sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of collecting the scattered mind and focussing it on our soul—the immortal part of our personality. This discipline is called *Raja Yoga*. The soul in Sanskrit is named *Atman* or *Purusha*. This yoga of concentration can lead a seeker to freedom from the bondage of nature (*Prakriti*).

The last method is *Jnana Yoga*: the path of *vichara* or reflective analysis. In *Raja Yoga*, or the method of concentration, the soul (*Purusha*) comprehends the immortal spiritual principle as different from the body, *prana* (the principle of vitality), and mind—but the soul's story is not complete. As a result of prolonged practice, the *Purusha* can attain freedom from *Prakriti*, or nature. But *Prakriti* as the ghost of multiplicity has not yet contracted to the ultimate unity; one soul is free, but millions of others continue to be in bondage. *Jnana Yoga* completes this task of bringing

all expansion into the total unity of knowledge.

The method of *Jnana Yoga* is a process both of negation and affirmation. Initially, the aspirant negates those things outside of himself, and this includes his body, mind, ego, and the external world. The inquirer has undertaken the inward journey, for just as there can be an outward journey in space, so there also can be an inward journey into inner space. The spiritual aspirant's determination is to stand on his own Self, and to find out who he really is. While there are different methods on the path of analysis, the object is the same: to eliminate all the distractions which obscure our ability to see the Self within, and to go back further and further from the layers of distinction, until finally, the distinction between the object of contemplation and the one who contemplates is lost. We need not be afraid to undertake this inquiry because, as the great teachers and scriptures have declared, the inward journey reveals to us our real nature. We are only discovering our true identity *Viveka*, or discrimination between the unreal and the real, and *Vairagya*, or dispassion, are the primary qualities necessary in the practice of *Jnana Yoga*.

The true Self of man is the Self of everything. The true Self of man is the Self of me, and the Self of you. It is the Self of the sky and of the mountains. Everything that we see and experience has a core, and that core is this Spiritual Reality. At the stage of worship and prayer this Reality was an external God, but as the inquirer deepens in his spiritual life, he finds that the Reality has become himself. He finds that the *Atman*, the Supreme Spirit in man, is infinite, and has no limitations. Nothing can bind him: neither space, nor time, nor any of the laws of nature. He finds that his real nature is the same as the highest truth of God.

There are verses in the Upanishads which

affirm the identity of God's ultimate nature and the true nature of man. God, in his ultimate nature, is said to be "nirguna"—without attributes. When we speak in terms of nirguna, we cannot say that He is God, He is Creator. The majesty of Brahman is so great that words cannot describe Him, and the mind cannot conceive of Him. The Atman, the Self within man, is identical with That.

When Self-Knowledge dawns upon us, the same truths which the Upanishads declared about Brahman, apply to the Self. We see further that the language in the Upanishads also changes to reflect this: *Atmaivedam sarvam*—"Atman, the true Self of man, is all this."⁶ This Atman is timeless; it is the source of all joy. Our real perfection will come when we attain that Self-Knowledge.

Another great truth we read in the *Isha Upanishad*:

*"Yastu sarvani bhutanyatmanyevanupashyati
Sarvabuteshu chatmanam tato na vijugupsate."*

"He who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings, hates none."⁷

When one realises the Self, he sees the Self in everything. He finds himself in the sky, in the ocean, and in millions of other human beings. He also finds that all of this universe is in him, in the inner core of his personality. The core of the personality of man is not bound: it is ever free. These truths which are described in the Upanishads are for us to realise. If we are serious and

if we follow the procedures set down for us by the sages, then we shall be able to find this perfection for ourselves. Then we will see that the multiplicity of the universe is an expansion of our own Self. Then, we shall exclaim, "It is I who have become everything! It is I who have expanded, and it is I who can bring the expansion into contraction, and it is I who am beyond both expansion and contraction." Expansion comes from our own Self, and contraction goes into the Self. When one understands this, he forgets the two words "expansion" and "contraction". He becomes speechless.

Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "A man cannot describe in words what he feels in samadhi. Coming down, he can give just a hint about it. I come down a hundred cubits, as it were, when I say 'Om' after samadhi." The terms "expansion" and "contraction" are good and useful analogies on the relative plane of existence. But in the spiritual world, this is a matter of experience and not merely an idea.

This may appear to be a very distant ideal, but we should nevertheless hear about it and think about it seriously. This is not an experience that we shall attain today or tomorrow. It is important, however, that we think about it and remember it; because, that in itself will remove many of our superstitions, attachments and prejudices.

When in the course of time we have understood and experienced the meaning of expansion and contraction, we shall not speak of creation, preservation or dissolution. We shall find ourselves as Brahman at all stages forever and forever and be quiet.

6. *Chandogya Upanishad* VII. 25.2.

7. *Ishopanishad*, 6.

THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA IN THE MAHABHARATA

SWAMI MRIDANANDA

Though it is true that the origin of the Aryan Culture, which had made India venerable before the nations of the world, is the Vedas and the Upanishads, it is equally well-known that it was the sages like Valmiki and Vedavyasa who supplied the fertile manure and pure water for the growth of the mighty spiritual tree of our noble heritage. Among the great sage-poets of old, Vedavyasa certainly ranks the highest and the foremost position. Though the great sage had contributed many Puranas and legendary poetic works and also interpretations of Vedanta, the epic poem Mahabharata is undoubtedly the noblest of all his grand creative works. This great epic has influenced from time immemorial the thought-wave, culture and life-perspective of the Indian people, moulding their lives into a great, singular and symmetrical pattern of piety and religious fervour. Words cannot describe the soul-stirring and perennial influence left by the illustrative stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana on the illiterate masses of India.

The main reason for this great, deep, and abiding impression and impact of the Mahabharata on the minds and hearts of the Indian people is the realistic life-like portraits depicted in the stories of Bharata inseparably connected with the true life of mankind. When the Vedas became the monopoly of a privileged class, Vedavyasa wrote the Mahabharata for the propagation of Aryan culture among the common folk of India. Thus, the Mahabharata acquired the name and glory of being the "Fifth Veda" in course of time. The gallery of portraits of variegated characters presented by Vyasa in this great epic poem of more than one lakh stanzas, evokes our stupendous admiration and wondering gaze at the spontaneity and variety, as broad as the panorama of

life passing before us. The story of the Mahabharata (that of Pandavas and Kauravas and their enmity leading to the war at Kurukshetra) is a very long, intriguing, complex, and eventful one. Besides the main plot of the enmity between the Pandvas and Kauravas, there is beautifully woven into the main theme a garland of many legends and sub-plots and digressions which beautify the main story as gems and precious stones add glory and brightness to the diadem in a crown.

The gallery of portraits presented by Vyasa in the Mahabharata is a skilful delineation of life-like characters in all variety and fidelity to real life. Besides, Vyasa has successfully and effectively portrayed their quarrels, competitions, combats of ambition, alliances, and dispositions which appeal to our sense of reality and poignant feeling. Some of the characters in the Mahabharata keenly resemble the people we come across in our daily lives. So life-like and realistic are the characters in this great epic! For this very reason, the Mahabharata is definitely the noblest and most praiseworthy of all noble and inspiring works that have seen the light of the day so far in the world. Truly, this great epic poem is called the Mahabharata on account of its intrinsic merit, and the density and enormity of its size.

The purpose of Vyasa in composing this great epic poem was not merely to entertain the readers with an interesting and beautiful narrative. Vyasa aimed at leading humanity to a noble goal by presenting great ideas and ideals for its grasp and assimilation. With this end in view, Vyasa successfully lays bare the realities of life through the innumerable characters in his great work. "Rivalries and conflicts will lead man only

to ruin and disaster”—this great truth is exemplified by the poet in the depiction of incidents in the course of the main plot and sub-plots.

There are a few sceptical souls who pose the question: “What is the relevance of depicting the story of a family feud of more than 5000 years ago, in modern times?” The truth is: “Human nature remains the same in spite of the passage of centuries.” We see around us all the qualities, foibles and idiosyncrasies of the individuals and groups that were clearly and unmistakably presented through the characters of the great epic poem and the versatile genius of Vyasa. Even today, we see around us Duryodhanas, Karnas, Shakunis and blindly doting fathers like Dhritarashtra. Are the power-crazy war-mongers (who are ready to clasp hand with even devil for attaining their ambitions, and remorselessly indulging in all violence, gambling and open cheating throwing all principles to the wind) scarce today? How could we find a better and nobler book than the Mahabharata to guide us along the right path living as we are in the midst of such charlatans and cheats? No one can help wondering at the prophetic vision, wonderful gift of observation and the deep study of human nature exhibited by Vyasa in his great epic. We stand amazed at this great marvel of human genius.

Vedavyasa upholds *Satya* (Truth) and *Dharma* (Duty) in the Mahabharata—*Yato Dharmastato Jayah* (Victory is assured where *Dharma* is followed). This is reiterated in the course of the great narrative. We also see Vyasa making some of his characters the mouth-pieces of his noble counsel of *Dharma*. Ultimately, he laments thinking about the way of the erring and truant world.

*Urdhvabahurvirammyesha
na kashchit shrinoti me*

*Dharmadarthashcha kamashcha
sa Dharmah kim na sevyate.*

“I raise my hands and cry: Why don't you people rely on *Dharma* knowing fully well that you can get both *Artha* (wealth) and *Kama* (sense-satisfaction) from *Dharma* (observance of one's duty)?” But, no one heeds the cry, as a cry in wilderness.” Look how passionate is Vyasa's desire for the establishment of the path of *Dharma*. If we protect *Dharma*, *Dharma* will protect us too. If we cast away *Dharma* into the background, *Dharma* too will abandon us and the result will be our ruin.

*“Dharma eva hato hanti
dharmo rakshati rakshitah.”*

Vyasa tries again and again to convince us about the truth of these statements.

Man builds castles in the air ignoring and setting aside *Dharma*. But all of them tumble down, for “A house built on sand will not stand.” This is the essence of the Mahabharata. The final victory is of *Dharma*.

The story of the Mahabharata commences with that of Maharaja Shantanu, the father of Bhishma. He courts Satyawati, the daughter of a fisherman. The fisherman decides to make use of this golden opportunity for the furthering of his selfish interest in promoting the welfare of his daughter. He lays the condition that the throne of Shantanu must pass to the offspring of Satyawati, not to the king's rightful heir Bhishma. The clever and calculating fisherman extracts a solemn promise from Bhishma that he would not only give up his claim to the throne but also would never marry so as to ensure that never would the throne pass to hands other than the issue of his daughter Satyawati. But, what do we see in the end? All the castles built in the air by the fisherman tumble down. Both the sons of Satyawati, Chitrangada and

Vichitravirya, die without issues. For the continuation of the dynasty it is Vyasa, the son of Maharshi Parashara, who begets sons in Ambika and Ambalika, widows of the king. Thus the linear dynastic rule passed from the succeeding generation of Shantanu to that of Parashara. Moreover, the two sons, Dhritarashtra and Pandu born handicapped to Ambika and Ambalika could not rule long. It was during the period of the next generation that the great calamities took place. Satyawati, the daughter of the greedy and ambitious fisherman, had to stand witness to the mutually destructive Kurukshetra war in which all her fond desires were burnt to ashes. This is the ignominious end of desires nurtured by unrighteous means— "*Dharma eva hato hanti.*"

Bhishma is the steadfast follower of *Dharma* and rightful heir to the throne. Though he abdicated the throne in favour of Satyawati's offsprings, he is the solemn witness of the whole havoc and tragedy. He is approached by both the Pandavas and Kauravas for his blessings for victory in the war. After the reign of Yudhishtira, the Kuru race was continuing to exist through Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna, the son of Indra. So, the linear dynasty did not continue even through the generation of Parashara. This is the result of the fisherman's selfish ambition which was not based on *Dharma*. The fisherman prided in having achieved for the sake of his succeeding generations the abiding rule of the kingdom and rejoiced in his feat. But his daughter Satyawati and her generations got only disappointment, frustration, destruction of the race and dismal sorrow. Is not this an object lesson for the world? Men fret and fume to amass wealth and fortune for their offsprings. They often ignore the injunctions of *Dharma* and get hold of others' property by unholy means. They are the victims of lust and greed. They build castles in the air

regarding "The future security" of their offsprings and even the succeeding generations. But when his calculations misfire and his fond castles tumble down in wreck and ruin, he looks above with outstretched hands and cry in grief "O Lord, why this?" Then and then only man realises that there is a Higher Will and Destiny that overrules the will of man and that the whole universe obeys the law and dictates of that Providence and mighty Power. Vyasa teaches us the great and ennobling lesson that the best way of life is to surrender to that great Power and live according to the dictates of *Dharma* without *Kama* (lust) or *Lobha* (greed).

There is still a greater lesson that Vyasa teaches us through the epic, i.e. the futility of war. Nothing can be achieved through hatred or mutual animosity. Both the victor and the vanquished are immersed in grief by the cruel acts of Death, the mighty leveller. Peace, everlasting peace can be achieved only through love and goodwill. If only the Kauravas had a little more tolerance and goodwill, they could have averted the great war which sowed destruction all around. But they chose the wrong path of malice and illwill and belligerent animosity. The result was total destruction. Even Bhishma and Vidura, the grand apostles of true *Dharma*, were helpless before the onslaught of *Adharma* or evil. Would we not be able to lay the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous future for the world, realising the need for establishing *Dharma* firmly in society? Vyasa successfully draws a beautiful picture in the Mahabharata of the victors and victims grieving alike.

We never think about the reality of death around us, but keep alive the grand delusion that we are immortal and plan to live for ever. Vyasa says in the Mahabharata that this is the "Wonder of wonders." The reply given to Yaksha by Yudhishtira throws light on this mighty truth:

Ahanyahani bhutani gachanteeha

Yamalayam

Sheshah sthavaramicchanti kimashcharyamatahparam.

(Every hour people are going to the house of Death. Those alive still think they will never die. What greater wonder can there be!)

One will refrain from violence and injustice only if one is always conscious of the evanescent nature of life and the triumph of *Dharma*. Vyasa makes us realise that only "the actions of the just" will blossom and survive "the dust". Therefore, we have to accept the principle:

Grihita iva kesheshu mrityuna dharmamacharet (One should stick to *Dharma* with steadfastness as if Death has caught one in its grip).

Lord Krishna who is depicted in the Mahabharata as the great counsellor of peace, and the equally great champion of the counsel for action through the Gita, also has contemporaneous relevance. The world of today is not in need of the Krishna who stole butter, herded cattle and played the divine lilas with the gopis and gopas of Vrindaban. As Swami Vivekananda says that the world today is in need of the 'Partha-Sarathi' Krishna who advised Arjuna to overcome the weaknesses and act boldly in accordance with the principles based on *Dharma*. Lord Krishna appears in the Mahabharata as the representative of the great Lord who is the architect of the destiny of the universe. He serenely holds his smiling face even in the most critical situations. He is divinely detached, steadfast in mind and intellect and omniscient and seeing far into the future. He is unaffected by the events that take place. Even the death of Abhimanyu, His nephew, ruffles Him not. Vyasa's aim in describing the events of the war in the Mahabharata is a realistic portrayal of ups and downs in real

life. It is a day-to-day phenomenon that virtue meets with temporary failure and defeat, and vice with ephemeral success and prosperity. Though Krishna is the Almighty Avatar in whose hands the pivot of the story of Mahabharata turns, He allows the chain of events to take its natural course. But He makes it abundantly clear that the ultimate victory is for *Dharma*. Thus the Mahabharata is relevant and replete with ample counsel for sustenance of *Dharma* for the successful conduct of life for the average man of today in his struggle for existence.

How many counsels of *Dharma* are given by Vyasa through *Bhagavad Gita*, *Sanat-sujateeyam* and *Viduravakyam* etc., all in Mahabharata—which are applicable to all people at all times. It is beyond doubt that the Gita will survive as long as the world exists. *Bhagavad Gita* alone will suffice to make the Mahabharata universal and perennial.

Vyasa himself claims that the Mahabharata is a portrayal of the world we live in irrespective of the passage of time.

Yadihasti tadanyatra yunnehasti na tat kvachit. (You may see in other books what is in this book, but you won't see elsewhere what is not in this book). This is not an exaggeration. More than one thousand and eight hundred characters appear in the great, exhaustive, and extensive epic Mahabharata. The poet has been able to cover elaborately all the individual and social experiences of life in this great epic. Fondness for carnal enjoyment and the resultant frustrations and sufferings are vividly and realistically portrayed in the story of Yayati. Thoughtless, irresponsible love and the consequent frustration and grief are depicted in the stories of Amba and Devayani. When Ashwatthama who mercilessly killed Draupadi's children while asleep, was brought before her, Draupadi, who was till then burning with revenge, is transformed into a fountain of mercy and motherly concern

because of her concept of *Dharma*. It is doubtful whether we will come across in the world literature such brilliant apostles of *Dharma* as Bhishma and Vidura who stood steadfastly for justice and virtue. In spite of the long procession of grief-causing events in her life, Kunti is not at all attached to worldly enjoyments even after her children became rulers. When she left for the forest along with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, she gave the following advice to Yudhishthira who followed her for a short distance, which is worth noting:

Nivartasva kurushreshtha

Bhimasenadibhih saha

Dharme te dheeyatam buddhih

manaste mahadastu cha.

"You go back along with your brothers like Bhima and others. Let your mind and intellect remain established in *Dharma* always. Let your mind expand." What a great and noble counsel! How big a mother's heart!

While Vyasa emphasizes the necessity of doing actions based on *Dharma*, he also points out the need to discard actions based on *Adharma* at appropriate places.

Dhritarashtra who colluded with Duryodhana in his Adharmic actions due to blind love for his son, tells Sanjaya that men who protect *Dharma* are bestowed with peace of mind here and hereafter, and not men of Adharmic action.

Even Duryodhana is conscious of the superiority of *Dharma*. He says:

*"Janami dharmam na cha me pravrittih
Janamyadharmam na cha me nivrittih"*.

"I am conscious of *Dharma* but I am unable to abide by it. I know *Adharma* (evil) but my nature leads me to it."

Selfishness is the root of all evil. Only the observance of *Dharma* will lead to good both in this world and hereafter. *Dharma* consists in the effacement of self and striving for the happiness of others. True observance of *Dharma* is tantamount to worship of God. All actions dedicated to *Dharma* are offerings to God. This is what is meant by Swami Vivekananda when he says that all actions which turn our heart towards God are *Dharma*. The aim of life is the attainment of God. This is the message of the Mahabharata: *Yato Dharmastato jayah* (Where there is *Dharma*, there is victory).

The great epic poem by Vyasa is for all time and for all clime. It has been a perennial source of inspiration for humanity through the ages. Many works in many languages are inspired by this epic. Reading of this great epic will serve to make us enthusiastic and interested in a pious life, and face it boldly and steadily with the deepest faith in *Dharma*. The relevance of the Mahabharata will never fade at any time.

VIVEKANANDA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN KERALA

SHANKARI PRASAD BASU

(Continued from the previous issue)

Now about the role of Kumaran Asan. Daniel Thomas summarised Asan's contributions to S.N.D.P. thus: "Kumaran Asan was the Secretary of the Yogam for about 12 years (16 years?). During this time the Guru's advice and guidance stood him in good stead as he pursued the aims of the Yogam.... Within these 12 years people

recognised the need of the Yogam. Kumaran Asan got the full support and co-operation of the majority of the Eazhava community. In the history of the S.N.D.P., these 12 years were years of progress both for the Yogam as well as for the community. There were 6 Malayalam newspapers; *Sujanandini*, *Kerala Kaumudi*, *Desabhimani*, *Gaja Kesari*, *Mithabadi*, *Sahodaran*, to serve as the organs of the Yogam and to speak for the downtrodden masses."

G. Kumara Pillai stated in the booklet *Kumaran Asan*, to which we have referred earlier, that Asan, before returning to his native place in 1900, studied Sanskrit in Bangalore and Madras, and then for two years at Calcutta Sanskrit College. "(These) five years... were of greatest significance to the development of Asan's personality. These were years of strenuous study of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit literature. It was at this time that he was introduced to English language and literature....The wider horizons in the big cities must have extended his personality, and in particular, the two years he spent in the heart of nascent Bengal have enriched his inner life in an indefinable way."

As we have seen, India was full of Vivekananda in the aforesaid five years. The return of Vivekananda to India from his glorious achievements in the West, his lecture tours from Kanyakumari to Punjab and Himalayas, founding of the Ramakrishna Mission and putting the 'Practical Vedanta' in action by his followers through the unique service activities in famines, floods, sometimes even braving deaths ('die-game' in Vivekananda's words) while nursing plague and cleaning the infected slums of Northern Calcutta, caught the imagination of the moribund nation.

Did Kumaran Asan meet Swamiji when he was in Calcutta in 1898-1899? We do not know. But it can be safely assumed

that he heard from Dr. Palpu and others about their personal talks with Swamiji and impressions thereof. Asan, who himself belonged to depressed classes, might have known about the orthodox attacks and persecutions on Vivekananda for his progressive acts and ideas. Deeply attracted by Buddha and his teachings, Asan could have seen similarities of those in the life and teachings of Vivekananda. We can say with some certainty that except that of his Guru, Swamiji's influence on him was the greatest.

Earlier we have said, Asan held a very important place in Malayalam literature. The poet started his career following neo-classical trends then prevalent in Malayalam literary arena. But subsequently he came to be the pioneer of romantic movement with the publication of his first book *Veena Poo* (Withered Flower). "The whole philosophy of his life has been condensed in this small book consisting of 41 slokas. It is a symbolic representation of the momentary glory of human life."¹ Gradually he became more socially conscious, made use of his poetry to expose social evils and oppressions, called for protest against them, and opened his anguished heart in sympathy and love for the degraded humanity. *Chintabistaya Sita* (1919) released his pangs for the suffering souls. Like Rabindra Nath Tagore he selected themes of his poetry from Buddhist legends, such as *Chandala Bhikshuki* (1923) (the subject being passionate love of a chandala woman for Ananda, a disciple of Buddha, and sublimation of the same through Buddha's grace.)

As regards social response in Asan's poetry, *Duravastha* (state of misery and wretchedness) published in 1923, was the most remarkable. Only in this poetical work Asan adopted contemporary incident as subject matter. Here we find his open

1. B. K. Nair, *Mahakavi Kumaran Asan* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 8 April, 1973.

challenge against untouchability. It stands as a literary landmark of progressive ideas in Malayalam literature, "My words may be rough," Asan said, "and not very pleasant for many but what I am at is something great and that of universal importance."

Swami Siddhinathananda sent me a summary of the book through Swami Maitrananda. Swami Sevananda writing on this book, opined, "Asan's *Duravastha*, *Chandala Bhikshuki* and *Vasavadatta* are filled with the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda.... The very ideas expressed by Swamiji about caste, education, 'root and branch reform' etc., in his Madras lectures, are all there in toto with the same tones and tempo in many places."

The theme of *Duravastha* was based on Mopla revolt in Kerala. Moplas were converted Mahomedans, "notorious for their cruelty." The theme of the poem is love and subsequent marriage of a Namboodiri girl with a Pulaya youth. This "is too distasteful for readers even today," wrote Swami Siddhinathananda in 1973, judging from prevalent social attitudes.

The poem began with this narration: In the province abundant in nature's gifts, with blossoming plants, trees, forests and flowing rivulets, where the cruel Mahomedans let flow the hot blood of the Hindus, in that province of Eranad, in the fortress of self-created memories and traditions and pomp, where as if the time has entrenched itself in that fortress, there reigned the great Namboodiris of Kerala.

On the other side of the picture was the pariahs, those "bipeds, with whom if compared, four-legged animals will get angry. They have nothing of their own. Enough it would be if they possess a loin cloth or a torn towel to cover-up their modesty." This and a handful of rice were all they could get in exchange of their life-long servitude for the upper classes.

When Savitri, the rich and noble daughter of Namboodiri Brahmin family approached the noble hearted pariah youth Chattan for marrying him, Chattan naturally felt embarrassed and could not give immediate consent. At this point the poet burst forth with words of inspiration and a glorious vision of the future. "Why should you, Chattan, you worshipper of truth, brood over dead images of stone? Here is an image of consciousness,... a perfect image, waiting for you to accept your devoted worship. There should not be any hesitation on your part.... You are now in possession of the light which has come of its own accord.... Go quick, and worship this emblem of the universal Lord in human form."

The poet then sounded a warning to the orthodox Vaidikas: "In the interest of our Motherland, in the interest of our religion, and in your own interest, do away with the evil social laws and practices, take away everything you weave, the threads are rotten and worm-eaten. They no more are strong to keep society and nation together. If you do not care, then these very laws and practices of yours will remove you. Can't you hear the warning echo in the whole atmosphere of Kerala?" Finally the poet said, "If you do not hear the warning, if you do not see the signs of time, then I am sorry, indeed, sorry for you." Swami Siddhinathananda wrote, "Asan visualised a collaboration between the old orthodoxy divested of its non-essential parts and fortified with the essential which is universal, and the down-trodden masses. The initiative must come from the orthodoxy, in a spirit not of patronage but of service, recognising the dignity of labour."

We can add more. Following Vivekananda, Asan stood against conversion. At the same time he judged the problem from historical standpoint. That was also in the line of Vivekananda. Here it should be

mentioned that the S.N.D.P. movement fought tooth and nail against untouchability and social obscurantism. Yet at the same time it fought actively against conversion.

The major portion of *Duravastha*, specially its social contents, was practically a poetic presentation of some of Vivekananda's ideas contained in his Madras lectures and also in his letters. We shall present some extracts from those to reinforce our contention. Vivekananda said in his *Reply to Manmadura Address*.

We, as Vedantists, know for certain that there is no power in the universe to injure us unless we first injure ourselves. One-fifth of the population of India have become Mohammedans. Just as before that, going further back, two-thirds of the population in ancient times had become Buddhists.... Christians are already more than a million. Whose fault is it? One of our historians says in ever-memorable language: Why should these poor wretches starve and die of thirst when the perennial fountain of life is flowing by? The question is: What did we do for these people who forsook their own religion? Why should they have become Mohammedans?... Let us blame none, let us blame our own Karma.

In another of his Madras lectures, *The Work Before Us*, Swamiji said,

What can you expect of a race which for hundreds of years has been busy in discussing such momentous problems as whether we should drink a glass of water with the right hand or the left? What more degradation can there be than that the greatest minds of a country have been discussing about the kitchen for several hundreds of years, discussing whether I may touch you or you touch me, and what is the penance for this touching! The themes of the Vedanta... were half-lost, buried in the forests, preserved by a few Sannyasins, while the rest of the nation discussed the momentous questions of touching each other, and dress and food. The Mohammedan conquest gave us many good things, no doubt....

In his Madras lecture on *The Future of India*, Vivekananda said,

Was there ever a sillier thing before in the world than what I saw in Malabar country? The poor Pariah is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high-caste man, but if he changes his name to a hodge-podge English name, it is all right; or to a Mohammedan name, it is all right. What inference would you draw except that these Malabaris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums, and that they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better? Shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed.

We need not draw further upon Vivekananda in which he emphasised on the great potentialities inherent in the so-called low-caste people. About Asan's persuasion to the Pulaya youth Chattan to worship the living image of Savitri instead of a clay image, we can quote a portion from one of Swamiji's poems written on 9 July, 1897:

He who is in you and outside you,
Who works through all hands,
Who walks on all feet,
Whose body are all ye,
Him worship, and break all other idols!

.....
Ye fools! who neglect the living God,
And His infinite reflections with which the
world is full.

.....
Him worship, the only visible!
Break all other idols!

Not only on burning social issues but also on deeper philosophical problems of existence, Vivekananda's influence can be traced in Asan's writings. During the period when Asan was the secretary of the S.N.D.P., he tried his best to popularise Swamiji's thoughts through his writings. The mouth-piece of the organisation, *Vivekodayam*, which he himself edited, was perhaps named after Vivekananda. Swami Maitrananda who studied Asan closely, thinks so. This journal regularly published translations from Swamiji's writings in Malayalam. Asan translated among others, Swamiji's poem *To a Friend* (the original in Bengali:

Sakhar Prati). This remarkable poem depicts on the one hand how a man who, with all his heart, loves his fellow beings, suffers most at their hands, being confronted with their selfishness and cunning, yet the hero plods on relentlessly in his cherished path to the goal of life which is love, the highest expression of Advaita in practical life. The poem contains in its original version some unforgettable utterances. In English translation they are (though no translation can express the inherent force of the original):

The nobler is your heart, know for certain,
The more must be your share of misery.
Thou large-hearted Lover unselfish, know,
There's no room in this sordid world for thee;
Let go your prayers, offerings, and strength,
For Love selfless is the only resource;
Lo, the insects teach, embracing flame!

And again,

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.

To Asan this was the highest humanism. His translation of the poem was first published in a journal *Rasika Ranjini*, and now included in Asan's Complete Works Vol. II.

Asan, though a Karmayogin, did not consider man only as a social being, but recognised at the same time a man's personal identity. Standing before the funeral pyre he could not but think of life's transitoriness and felt envious admiration for those who could control themselves in every trying situation, "His vision of life is essentially tragic," wrote G. Kumara Pillai, "Life is transient and darkened by man's cruelty to man. But life at its best is irradiated with love even under the shadow of sorrow and death. In fact, love is the primal force that animates the whole universe.... In the face of the imitative stuff of the neo-classical poets, he asserted the primacy of individual

imagination." This philosophy of life was certainly akin to Vivekananda's ideas expressed in his said poem, *To a Friend*.

Asan also translated Swamiji's Bengali poem, *Nachuk Tahate Shyama* ('And Let Shyama Dance There'), which was first published in *Vivekodayam* in 1904 in two issues and then incorporated in his Complete Works, Vol. II. The vision of the dark and terrible Kali, before whom man shivers with fear, lest his world of enjoyment falls shattered, and cries and prays like baby, drew only Vivekananda's pity. He sounded forth trumpet call to fight. All these influenced Asan to form his deeper philosophy of life.

Asan engaged himself in translating Swamiji's three yoga books—*Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*. From him we come to know that when he was finishing up his work with the first two books, learnt that another writer (his pseudonym being K.M.) had already translated them. He ceased publishing the first two but came out with his translation of the *Raja Yoga*. We could find references to these translations in some of Asan's collected works.

Shri Mular, a contemporary poet, requested Asan to translate Karma Yoga, with the intention of publishing them in the journal *Chandrika*. Asan answered him in a poem written on 1 October 1900, (in Swamiji's life time) where at the last stanza he referred to Karma Yoga: "Karma Yoga is a glorious outcome of the enchanting oratorical powers of the great Swami Vivekananda. I am going to translate that into Malayalam as desired by you and shall be sending to *Chandrika*." (Asan's Complete Works, Vol. II).

Before 1908, Asan completed his translation of *Raja Yoga*. This translation became popular and ran into several editions. In introductions to different editions, Asan supplied some facts related to them. He

wrote this in the introduction to the first edition:

While presenting this translation of the Raja Yoga in book form, something by way of introduction has to be said. The original of this invaluable book was written in English by the great Swami Vivekananda. The first part constitutes of eight lectures delivered by Swamiji in 1893 in different parts of America during his travels after the famous Parliament of Religions. The latter part is a word-for-word translation of the Yoga Sutras of the great seer Patanjali and a superb free commentary thereof by Swamiji. Like the first part, the present translator intends to publish (in future) the latter part also in *Vivekodayam*. Among the works of Swamiji, the Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga are famous. Of these the Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga have already been translated into Malayalam and largely known. In reply to a letter seeking permission from the Ramakrishna Mission to translate Raja Yoga in Malayalam, Brahmarshi Ramakrishnananda Swami wrote, Our President (Swami Brahmananda) is glad to hear that 'a very competent man has been good enough to translate the most difficult book of Swami Vivekananda into Malayalam'.

Though the translator cannot admit of his being competent, he believes that the readers will agree with Swami Ramakrishnanandaji when he says that amongst the books of Swami Vivekananda Raja Yoga is the tersest. "It is now eight years since the Mahasamadhi of Swami Vivekananda. He was born, rather incarnated, in the year 1863 and left this world in 1902. (Here follows a short biographical sketch of Swamiji comprising 7-8 pages)." After that Asan continues, "This book Raja Yoga is divided into eight chapters. All that Swamiji had to say on Yoga has been compressed here in a telling lucid style, unparalleled and inimitable for its flourish of eloquence and power of expression."

This introduction was written in February-March 1910. In September-October 1914, Asan published the second edition of the book. From its introduction we learn that Asan kept his promise of translating and

publishing serially the second portion of Swamiji's *Raja Yoga* in *Vivekodayam*. That was incorporated in the present second edition of his works. While translating the second part, Asan at times drifted from Swamiji. "The entire second part (Asan wrote) contains the translations of the main sutras of Patanjali and free commentary of Swamiji thereon. While translating into English the main Sutras, Swamiji exercised certain liberties wherever relevant. That was quite right on the part of Swamiji in view of his realisations and thorough knowledge of the subject matter. Moreover, he translated for the Westerners." Asan stated that as his re-translation was for the Indian readers he tried to follow Patanjali more closely.

At the beginning of this translation, Asan presented fourteen Sanskrit shlokas, written on 24 October 1908. They include eulogies of Patanjali Yoga Sutra, of Swami Vivekananda and lastly of his own master Narayana Guru. At the end of the third stanza, Asan said that in course of time decadence crept into the study and practice of Raja Yoga. Vivekananda by his spiritual power and genius re-established the glory of this great Yoga. Verses 4 to 7 were written directly on Vivekananda. I shall close this article by quoting free translations of those 4 shlokas:

"There arose one, in the land of Bengal, endowed with unparalleled intellect and glory, who was foremost amongst the inner circle of the great lord of seers and venerable Shri Ramakrishna.

"The world at large was amazed by his oratorical powers, who for the resuscitation of Religion, not only crossed the boundless ocean, considering that as the hoof of a cow, but also crossed the Saraswata Ocean (i.e., Ocean of Knowledge).

"Though he attained to the Supreme State beyond the powers of Prakriti, he showed himself as one endowed with the fragrance of manifold virtues. His name bore deep meaning, which has been glorified in the world, beginning with the

word *Vivek* (power of discrimination) and ended with *Ananda* (Bliss).

"Such was one about whose eminence has been spoken of above, who in his command over language and knowledge of Yoga, stood in comparison with the great sage and seer Patanjali—who rendered in extraordinary and most beautiful English the Yoga Sutras with commentaries."²

2. I express here my gratitude to Shri R. Prabhakaran, son of Kumaran Asan, whom we met on 24.10.1971, at his residence in the suburbs

of Trivandrum City. Swami Maitrananda took us there. Mr. Prabhakaran showed us some old bound volumes of *Vivekodayam* in which Asan's translations from Vivekananda were published serially. He also presented us with a copy of *Raja Yoga* translated by Asan. The book is still in circulation though other editions are available. Mr. Prabhakaran sought information from us whether Asan, when in Calcutta, met Swamiji. He enquired also about Asan's Sanskrit teacher Kamakhya Nath Tarkavagish. Unfortunately, we could not gather any information about these issues.

INDIAN AGRICULTURE: PERFORMANCE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

C. H. HANUMANTHA RAO

It has been persistently claimed in the recent period that we have not only achieved self-sufficiency in foodgrains in the country but also achieved relative stability in output and acquired the necessary resilience to withstand droughts. But last year's drought and the performance of agriculture cast serious doubts on the assumptions underlying our agricultural strategy. There are indications that droughts have become increasingly severe over a period of time. The failure of monsoons now causes a greater decline in output than a similar failure used to do 20 to 30 years ago. This is being misconstrued by some as a change in the rainfall pattern itself on account of deforestation and ecological or environmental degradation. However, if we look at the rainfall pattern over the last 100 years in India, it does not show any downward or upward trend, although it does depict year-to-year fluctuations. The incidence of below normal rainfall was as frequent in the past when forest cover was good, as in the recent period. Similarly, the frequency of above-normal rainfall years does not seem to have declined in the recent decades when there

has been a denudation of forests. For instance, within less than a decade, despite widespread deforestation, we have experienced two exceptionally good monsoons, that is, in 1983-84 and in 1988.

However, there is no doubt that ecological degradation has made the impact of droughts more severe. This is not so much on account of change in rainfall pattern as due to insufficient retention of soil-moisture and the consequent lowering of underground water level leading to scarcity of drinking water, fodder and fuel-wood. These scarcities have increased the burdens for the rural poor, particularly for women and children.

Droughts obviously cause greater hardship in the dry regions when compared to the irrigated areas. The poor comprising small and marginal farmers and the landless labourers suffer the greatest because of their low staying power and also because the proportion of people below the poverty line is higher in the dry areas or where the percentage of area irrigated is low. In general, the landless labourers suffer the biggest decline in employment and income when

there is a decline in output on account of drought. This is because, as mentioned earlier, foodgrain output has become more sensitive to variations in rainfall. New technology such as high-yielding varieties and fertilizers, is critically dependent on soil-moisture so that a given short-fall in monsoon now causes a greater cut-back in output and employment than before. Besides, a good part of the minor irrigation, expanded recently, is itself sensitive to monsoons.

It has been estimated that, on an average, for a decline in agricultural output of 10 per cent, there would be a cut-back in employment of labour to the extent of 6 per cent. On this basis it has been estimated that the people below the poverty line in the country would have lost as many as 1400 million man-days of employment last year on account of drought. As against this, the employment generated in a normal year through the special employment programmes of the government amounts only about 500 million man-days.

I have quoted these figures in order to highlight the severity of the problem of poverty and destitution on account of instability in output and droughts. Clearly, a strategy that minimises the vulnerability of agricultural output to droughts should be preferred to a strategy which causes instability and hence necessitates employment generation on a massive scale through special programmes. In any case, these programmes have failed so far to generate productive and durable assets for creating employment on a sustained basis. It must be pointed out, however, that achievement of complete stability can never be a realistic or attainable goal for agriculture which is necessarily dependent on nature. We cannot, therefore, minimize the importance of drought relief programmes. Yet, there is considerable scope for reducing instability in output and such opportunities need to be fully explored.

But before we set out to explore these possibilities, we have to ask some basic questions about our agricultural performance and agricultural strategy. Is it true that we have achieved self-sufficiency in foodgrains if we take into account the nutritional requirements of the poor in the country? How have we been able to accumulate large stocks of foodgrains despite slow growth of agriculture and despite the persistence of widespread poverty?

'Self-sufficiency' in foodgrains is always defined in relative terms, that is, at the given level of demand arising from the given level of income distribution and purchasing power. According to the Seventh Five-Year Plan, about 40 per cent of the rural population or about 37 per cent of the overall population in the country is still below the poverty line, the calorie intake of such people being below the nutritional norm. If somehow the purchasing power of this population below the poverty line can be increased to enable them to buy additional quantities of foodgrains sufficient to meet the nutritional norm, then the existing level of foodgrains output would be grossly inadequate and we would no longer be self-sufficient in foodgrains.

Foodgrains output in the country has been growing at the rate of about 2.7 per cent per annum since the beginning of economic planning. If we allow for the population growth of around 2.2 per cent per annum, the improvement in per capita terms has been meagre, i.e., 0.5 per cent per annum. Although the rate of growth in foodgrain production in the pre-green revolution period, i.e., prior to mid 1960s, was not lower than in the post-green revolution period, it did not generate enough marketed surpluses of foodgrains in relation to the demand in the non-agricultural sector and we had to import large quantities of foodgrains such as during the drought of 1966-67. By contrast, during the severe drought

of 1979-80 we could meet the requirements from the internal stocks. By and large, we were in a position to meet the requirements from the internal stocks during the last year also, despite the severe drought.

Thus, whereas agricultural output and rural employment have become more vulnerable to droughts in the post-green revolution period, the urban population has become less vulnerable to shortfalls in foodgrains. This is explained by fast growth of marketed surpluses of foodgrains in the post-green revolution period. Also, the growth of surpluses has been on a more stable footing than the total output. It appears, therefore, that the shocks administered by weather-gods are being increasingly absorbed by the rural sector, particularly by the rural poor, while the urban sector is being insulated from such weather shocks.

How has this 'miracle' been achieved? This has generally been attributed to 'miracle seeds' of the green revolution. But, as we have seen, there was no acceleration in the growth of foodgrain output on account of green revolution. It is not so much the higher yield brought about by the 'miracle' seed but the changing production structure in agriculture that is responsible for the higher growth of surpluses despite a modest growth of overall output.

Our failure to enforce ceilings on landholdings effectively and the political clout that the large farmers enjoy in our rural society provided the necessary institutional base for the growth of surplus-producing or commercial sector in agriculture. Secondly, there has been a marked change in the pace as well as pattern of public investment in agriculture. Public investment in the expansion of agricultural infrastructure like irrigation, drainage, rural electrification, roads and credit and marketing institutions, expands the base of agriculture to the less developed regions, and small and medium

farmers thus enabling a large mass of peasantry to participate in the growth process. Insufficient attention to such long-term infrastructural investments and concentration on current inputs like fertilizers, and on mechanised equipment like tractors and harvest combines has encouraged the growth of commercial or surplus-producing sector in areas which are already adequately served by infrastructure.

These factors have led to a fast growth of foodgrains output in the developed regions and in the large farm sector in different parts of the country where the employment generation has been slow. Since the consumption of foodgrains is already at a high level in such sectors, a considerably larger proportion of increments in foodgrains output is being marketed through public channels. This strategy has thus helped to achieve 'self-sufficiency' in foodgrains and meet the requirements in urban areas even in severe drought years.

Thus while the existing strategy has enabled us to accumulate stocks of foodgrains sufficient to meet the internal demand without recourse to imports, this 'self-sufficiency' has been achieved at the cost of other equally important objectives of agricultural development, viz, imparting stability to output growth, eradication of rural poverty and reduction in regional disparities.

Narrow agricultural base has a built-in tendency to increase instability whereas the widening of the base for agricultural growth is likely to impart greater stability to the growth of output. Expansion of irrigation facilities, for example, results in a reduction in output fluctuations. Further, irrigation facilitates an increase in cropping intensity through multiple cropping which contributes not only to even out the output stream during any year but also to reduce annual fluctuations in output. This is because, output from *rabi* crop is less fluctuating

than the *kharif* output. This arises from the greater dependence of *kharif* output on weather. Therefore, irrigation and multiple cropping in so far as they result in the expansion of *rabi* cultivation lend stability to output growth.

In a large country like ours, agro-climatic conditions differ significantly between different regions. Regional diversification in output growth lends stability to overall output at the national level because of compensatory movements in output between different regions. Concentration of output growth in the limited pockets, therefore, has a built-in tendency to increase instability in output at the national level.

Small and marginal farmers are found to irrigate a larger proportion of their cultivated area than the large farms. On account of this, they are able to achieve higher cropping intensity through greater labour absorption. All these facts clearly suggest that public investment to provide infrastructure like irrigation, rural electrification and marketing and credit institutions to benefit wider areas including small and marginal farms will contribute to growth with equity and stability. The available evidence shows that such an expansion of infrastructure will also lead to greater efficiency in the use of inputs like fertilizers and labour.

There is thus no conflict between the objectives of growth, equity, stability and efficiency at the present stage of agricultural development in India. From the social point of view, the small and marginal farm sector or the peasant sector is superior to the commercial sector as it contributes to greater stability as well as efficiency in recourse-use, apart from generating greater employment and income for the rural poor.

Environmental degradation on account of deforestation has adversely affected agriculture by lowering productivity of land and by making yields more vulnerable or sensi-

tive to variations in rainfall. More directly, the degradation of village common lands or common property resources has affected the livelihood of the rural poor, who depend substantially on such resources for fuel-wood, fodder etc.

Population pressure is generally considered to be the main cause for ecological degradation. There is no doubt that population pressure is one of the factors behind extension of cultivation to marginal lands, encroachment on forest lands, overuse of common grazing lands etc. But it would be simplistic to attribute ecological degradation to population growth alone. It is not generally recognized that the demand for forest products from high income groups, from the rural and urban areas, has been a major cause for depletion of area under forests. There are clearly more fundamental processes at work induced by the pattern of development that accentuated the ecological problem.

The unequal distribution of land and insufficient absorption of labour in the process of agricultural growth have driven down the cost of labour and raised their demand for alternative sources of livelihood. This has rendered activities such as tree cutting and its transportation cheap for the contractors. The regions with the greatest ecological stress are generally those where labour-use per hectare in crop production has been minimal and the wage rates low. The private cost of felling of trees is therefore low in relation to private return, but the cost to the society and to future generations from degradation is high. The breakdown of the traditional management practices and the failure of new systems to fill in the vacuum have also contributed to the degradation of environment.

Government programmes such as farm forestry and social forestry have so far

resulted more in coping with commercial demand for wood than in providing livelihoods for the poor. It is not surprising that large farmers quickly took to farm forestry, because of higher profitability, lower labour cost and very little management problems relative to field crops. Besides, commercial forestry, undertaken whether by large farmers or industrial houses, cannot meet the requirements of eco-development for which considerations of location and the type of trees to be planted are extremely important. Therefore, programmes which are merely aimed at providing raw material for industries have a danger of bypassing the rural poor forcing them into further exploitation of whatever forest land that still remains. Programmes for ecological restoration, to be successful, have to be integrated with the programmes to generate employment and income for the rural poor through their willing participation. Indeed, the programmes for ecological regeneration offer a significant opportunity for augmenting the incomes of the rural poor, who have not been able to benefit much from land reforms or from the green revolution.

I would now summarize the above discussion on agricultural development strategy and policy as follows:

After the introduction of new technology, agricultural output has become more sensitive to rainfall variations, and droughts are becoming increasingly severe. Production instability and droughts bear harshly on the poor on account of sudden decline in farm employment and income and the scarcities of drinking water, fuel-wood and fodder. Agricultural instability and droughts

are not isolated events but arise from the particular strategy of agricultural development followed, especially in the post-green revolution period. In this period, institutional changes like land reforms and strengthening of the peasant sector received low priority. The expansion of infrastructure like irrigation in the less developed regions was inadequate; and there was much greater concentration on individual crop-oriented technologies taken in isolation than on the evolution of cropping systems to suit the varying agro-climatic conditions and resource-deficient sectors like the small farms.

On the other hand, there has been a concentration of inputs in the developed regions and large farms through heavy input subsidies. This strategy has led to the development of commercial agriculture in limited segments in the country generating marketed surpluses on a relatively stable footing sufficient to meet the urban demand while instability in agricultural output in the country as a whole increased causing hardships to the rural poor in the form of very low employment generation as well as sudden and sharp decline in employment on account of droughts.

Ecological degradation caused by commercial felling as well as by the pressures for subsistence from the poor has aggravated the plight of the rural poor. The solution lies in reversing the agricultural strategy by making it more broadbased through effective implementation of land reforms, infrastructural development in the less developed regions and technology and input policies to strengthen the peasant sector.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTION-BUILDING : A MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

DR. S.K. CHAKRABORTY

(Continued from the previous issue)

III. Vivekananda's Insights Into Institution-Building

We have from Romain Rolland the following assessment about the genesis of the Ramakrishna Order:¹⁶

'A real leader of men does not omit the smallest detail. Vivekananda knew that if he was to lead the peoples to the conquest of an ideal it was not enough to inflame their ardour; he had to enrol them in a *spiritual militia*. The chosen few must be presented to the people as types of the *new man*; for their very existence was the pledge of the Order that was to be', (emphasis ours).

We think that in that sizzling phrase *spiritual militia* (also later called apostolic militia¹⁷), Rolland once again captures for us the *sacro-secular* keynote on which this essay began. The ideological mainspring of the Ramakrishna Order is coiled up in this sacro-secular, spiritual militia.

The sacred or spiritual wing of this militia was really born during 1886-87 at the Cossipore Garden House where Shri Ramakrishna had spent the last few months of his mortal existence, under the ardent care of his young disciples and householder devotees. This came to be institutionalised later as the Ramakrishna Math. The secular or militia wing of the Order was called the Ramakrishna Mission (Association at inception), launched by Vivekananda on May 1,

1897.¹⁸ The innovative elements in this two-winged organisation structure were:

(a) The Mission's membership was thrown open to monks, lay public and householders, as well.

(b) The top management of the Math was to be called the Board of Trustees, whereas that of the Mission the Board of Governors.

(c) The members of the Trustee Board and the Governing body were to be identical (and still are).

(d) Many of the branch centres in India combine both the Math and Mission activities; Some are purely Math centres.

(e) Branch centres abroad exist as Math centres for spiritual activities only.

(f) Trustees/Governors are elected from amongst monk members by a voting system.

(h) Each centre is financially on its own—although it can borrow sums from the Headquarters under specific conditions.

(i) Each centre strictly follows the principle that sums of money belonging to one account or activity-head will never be used to meet deficits under other activity-heads.

Thus, on-going coordination and synthesis between the sacred and the secular, between *atma-moksha* and *jagat-hitam*, had been built into the organisation, on democratic principles, right at birth.

So far as the Ramakrishna Mission is concerned, its superordinate goals and guidelines are¹⁹:

(a) To strive for the temporal, mental and spiritual advancement of humanity.

(b) to pursue the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions.

16. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965), p. 116.

17. Ibid., p. 128.

18. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, p. 24.

19. Ibid., p. 95.

(c) to train men to be competent teachers of such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses.

(d) to provide and encourage arts and industries.

(e) to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas.

(f) to have no connection with politics.

It seems clear that, if one tries to subdue or eliminate the little self, as Vivekananda has been quoted earlier to have advised, then all work and duty automatically begins to be transformed into spiritual performance on the part of the doer. Thus, the Mission had ruled out the conventional assumption that secular duty and spiritual progress were mutual enemies. Although the setting for managers, administrators, business-men and others is qualitatively different, the lesson to ponder appears to be: *If the missionaries are expected to move from the spiritual to the secular, the managers are equally expected to move (psychologically) from the secular to the spiritual.* It is not a glib external shift of pastures, but a determined inner odyssey.

Besides the Master's ignition of the initial spark of 'service of God in man' within Vivekananda's soul, there are a few more allied factors which seem to have prompted him further for founding the Ramakrishna Mission in the style that it emerged. Thus we learn that while in America, he had told a lady that he had met the greatest temptation of his life in America! The lady was stunned and asked: 'Who is she, Swami?' The Swami had a hearty laugh and replied: 'Ah! dear, it is not a lady. It is organisation.'²⁰ This instinctive recognition by him of the need for organisation for serving the people of India has been interpreted at a deeper level by Nivedita. According to her, this meant that the traditional love in monks

for the remote and highest spiritual ideals had to be transmuted into an abiding and self-less enthusiasm to work collectively with discipline, for the city and the state. The highest and most distinterested characters could do this best.²¹

Coming to economic and industrial organisations, while literature is today beginning to talk of ideas like 'organisational culture', 'superordinate goals', 'spiritual values'²², the foundation of *disinterestedness* (i.e., selflessness) beneath all this is hardly recognised. If at all it is mentioned by a few, most people reject it outright as negative, unmotivating. Clearly, the immense strength-giving and purifying properties of disinterested work are not understood by us. Not only this; so narrow seems to have become the notion of self-interest in present-day Indian organisations, that discipline in the work-place has become the worst victim. And yet Vivekananda, the great institution-builder that he was, had once gladly confessed that the greatest achievement of the English was 'that they had known how to combine obedience with self-respect.'²³ Management thinkers and writers in India should do well to assimilate the meaning of this practical wisdom.

A unique element was introduced to protect the institutions of the Ramakrishna Order from sundering apart in the times ahead: the Order was to represent for centuries to come the 'physical body of Ramakrishna'.²⁴ Thus, a form, a structure was invested with pulsating life, unflagging inspiration and exalted emotion. Each

21. The Master as I saw him., p. 52.

22. Pascale, RT, and Athos, AG; The Art of Japanese Management, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1982), p. 51-56, 81.

23. The Master as I saw him, p. 53.

24. The Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel, p. 283, and Rules of the Shri Ramakrishna Math (in Bengali)-Part. II, items 3, 10, 12, and 13.

20. Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama,) p. 144.

member who joined (and joins) the Order was (is) indoctrinated in the spirit that all work that might come his way has to be treated as Ramakrishna's work. Anyone doing work with egoistic motives, or causing harm to the Order's reputation would be committing sacrilege towards the Master himself. Today Vivekananda and the Holy Mother have been added to this process of mental bonding amongst the members of the Order. Obviously, the leaders, the founders have to demonstrate very high degrees of selflessness and purity to become, in course of time, the psychological rallying points for succeeding generations of members. Like the Mount Kailasha of the Himalayas they must become and remain unpolluted summits. Can and should modern secular organisations, aspiring to be institutions, utilize this convergent concept as the basis for their culture-building strategies? Or, do they assume that merely the mundane aims can act as enduring materials for healthy culture formation?

Yet another pillar of the Ramakrishna Order, grounded and enshrined in its constitution and rules prepared by Vivekananda was (and is): 'keep politics at arms length'. In his assessment each country could achieve true excellence only along the distinctive grain of its own ethos. Lasting greatness and strength could not be achieved by a vain attempt to erase this grain. For India this grain was identified by him to be the constant aim of spiritualising our entire existence, and not politics or social conflict.²⁵ So the RKMM had to (and does) work exclusively at this base level. No contamination from other lines of pursuit, even though legitimate in themselves, would be (or are) permitted. Rolland had opined that this cautiousness of Vivekananda was wiser than Gandhi's attempt to blend religion and

politics.²⁶ This fundamental insight into institution-building has proved its beneficence beyond doubt for the RKMM has succeeded in maintaining and enhancing its credibility with all segments of society and all brands of government during the past decades. It is easy to see that this achievement has sprung from the superordinate goal for the RKMM as visualised by the loving heart of Vivekananda.²⁷

'I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing for certain that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep without caring what will be next'.

One of the fundamental aspects of institution-building is to invest it with a distinctive character of its own. This subtle character almost oozes out, as it were, through the pores and tissues of the institutional body. Very recently a few writings on organisational culture formation in the West are recognising the importance of rituals, symbols, collective rites, corporate folklore and the like to hold the psyche of a large number of persons, beyond a critical size, at a unified, synchronous wavelength. It is the combination of these carefully chosen elements which, over a period of sustained indoctrination and practice, gets into a distinctive institutional character—'the way things are done here'. All petty and mundane irritations—an everpresent scourge in all organisations tend to get dissolved in the medium of such a carefully nursed culture. Rationality and intellect alone are unable to act as the anodyne. Here are, therefore, certain examples of how Vivekananda had foreseen this strategic management variable almost a century ago, and built them into the lifestyle of the Ramakrishna Order—both in its internal and external aspects.²⁸

26. Ibid., p. 114-115.

27. Ibid., p. 134.

28. Rules of the Sri Ramakrishna Math (in Bengali)—last section, items 22, 21, 20, 10-19.

25. The Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel, p. 168.

(1) Whenever any activity is to be done collectively by all the members of a centre it has to be preceded by the gong of a bell.

(2) None can spend a night at the Math without permission from its Abbot.

(3) Visitors will be entertained in the guest parlour only.

(4) All inmates have to wake up early, clean their own clothes and their surroundings.

(5) All should perform some physical exercise.

(6) The Abbot should ensure that the inmates perform spiritual practices in the early hours of the morning.

(7) As far as practicable all should take their meals at one time and place.

(8) Afternoon will be used for small group, individual and full assembly readings and discussions.

(9) After sunset again individual spiritual practices will have to be performed.

(10) All work and communication will be done quietly and peacefully.

(11) Members going out for work to places away from the particular centre have to send every week a detailed letter about their activities to the Abbot. The latter has to maintain custody and copies of such letters.

Besides, during our own visits to many centres of the RKMM all over India, we have observed a few additional features which are now typical of this institution:

(1) Every morning, before sunrise, in all centres where a marble image of Shri Ramakrishna exists, a brief and quiet *mangalarati* is performed. Householder guests staying at the centre can also bathe in the serene beauty of this ritual.

(2) Before commencing lunch and dinner a *sloka* from the *Gita* is recited collectively (basically informing the whole process with a revival of the awareness of *Brahman*). In many centres, after finishing these meals, the glory of the Trinity of the Order—Shri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda—is also uttered in chorus.

(3) Wherever a marble image of Shri Ramakrishna has been installed, the entire 24-hour routine of the centre revolves around Him as if He were physically living there.

(4) Whenever any member of the centre goes out for work, he visits the *sanctum sanctorum*

and begs Shri Ramakrishna's permission and blessings. And on his return he again goes there and offers his work at His feet. If the Abbot leaves the centre for some days, all the other members collect by his side at the moment of departure and recite the glory of the Trinity of the Order.

(5) The evening vesper service in all centres has a set of three prayers sung in chorus by devotees—lay and otherwise. Of these, two had been composed by Vivekananda himself—and both on Shri Ramakrishna without naming him.

(6) The symbol or monogram of the Order was yet another creative contribution of Vivekananda's ideas to institution building. The symbol represents man's efforts, through the four Yogas, to cross the ocean of life into Eternal Bliss.

(7) Seniority is always respected. Thus, even the Abbot or the head of a centre, before leaving the place for some days on official duty or otherwise, touches the feet of all senior monks present for their blessings.

(8) All key decision-making in each centre is mostly centralised in the Abbot e.g., whether a lay devotee can stay as a guest for a few days. Even if this means delay in many instances, yet this seems to be more than compensated by better coordination, consistency and integrity of decision-making.

(9) Except on Sundays, every evening after dinner a reading-cum-discussion session is held. Usually a young brahmachari reads a few pages from a biography of one great spiritual personality or the other. All are welcome. Informal discussions also take place.

Enough has been cited above to show that those management writers or practitioners who are sceptical about the 'prescriptive' nature of such rules and rituals, are probably unable to think hard in practical terms. No evidence probably exists anywhere in the world to prove that enduring institutions have ever been built and sustained without resolute devotion to one set of 'prescriptions' or the other. They should take the institution-building process of Vivekananda seriously without, of course, indulging in imitation.

Like all really great leaders of men Vivekananda was most spontaneous. A

pure transparent mind, combined with burning love for all (*samadarshitva*), was the bedrock of his leadership role. In contrast, many modern ideas on techniques and skills of leadership, or on technologies for team-building appear as pretty superficial. With selfishness being completely burnt out of existence in his mind, he could transmit the conviction into his brother monks and other members of the Order that, during the initial years, the democratic principles of decision-making had to be held in abeyance. Such principles could be followed later when, with better spread of education people would be more capable of abandoning *self-interest* and *personal prejudices* for public good. Until such time the organisation had to be run by a 'dictator' whose authority must be obeyed.²⁹ Yet he himself donned no official post in the newly-formed Ramakrishna Mission. He had even handed over all his savings in America to a brother-monk, and later begged a few coins from the latter for a trip to Calcutta!

The great irony of modern India, however seems to be that, the more educated we are becoming, the greater is our penchant for rights and claims, for selfish aims and ambitions growing. The organised sector of India is an epitome of rights without duty-orientation. And yet, opinion-building elites espouse more of participation, democracy etc. This is a severe dilemma for India. It is rooted in the fact that most leaders in Indian organisations tend to be morally and ethically quite vulnerable themselves. Hence they can scarcely muster the courage of a Vivekananda to say that democratic principles should be kept frozen for sometime. And with their own credentials suspect, their followers and subordinates also function in a moral vacuum.

For, nothing is a stronger proof of such vacuum than the clamour for rights only, at the cost of duties. Duty-orientation in organisations alone can sustain a moral culture. And then only can organisations become institutions. True, all leaders cannot become Vivekananda. But that does not undermine the relevance of his model—ever reminding them of the gap they have to bridge. Otherwise, gimmick-oriented, technique-inspired complacency may continue to masquerade as professionalism.

Effacement of the lower self or the 'unripe ego' was another major characteristic of his leadership style. Thus, although his Master had uttered all kinds of picturesque superlatives about Vivekananda,³⁰ yet on one occasion he was almost on the verge of washing the feet of a distinguished Buddhist missionary who had come to visit the Belur Math.³¹ Latu Maharaj or Swami Adbhutananda was one of Vivekananda's *gurubhais*. In later life he had recounted two incidents which had occurred at Belur Math when the latter had begun to implement, by and by, the details of daily procedures to regulate the Math life. Vivekananda had just introduced the rule of ringing daily a morning bell to wake up the inmates for commencing meditation etc. Latu Maharaj was unwilling to fall in line. So the next morning he was about to pack off to Calcutta. Vivekananda asked him the reason for his quitting and was told bluntly that his meditational ability was not cut out to respond to a made-to-order, gong-of-the-bell stimulus; so he would like to be on his own. Vivekananda understood, and relaxed the rule for him.

(To be continued)

29. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography* (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1987), p. 241.

30. Swami Nikhilananda, (Trns.); *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna* (Madras, Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), p. 793-794.

31. Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1974), p. 547.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND WAR-TORN WORLD

NINA STARK

(Continued from the previous issue)

Even a little knowledge of fairly recent history would explain this fear. 20 million Russians were killed in World War II, or 12% of the population; 1 million out of 3 million population of Stalingrad were killed in the 900 day siege of that city alone. 500,000 were buried in a common mass grave. The figures are so staggering that we tend to blunt ourselves to their significance, just as we do with those of the Holocaust or with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The German attack on Russia, their "Drang nach Osten", almost succeeded in rolling through to Moscow. Only a heroic defense and the sacrifice of millions of lives saved their "Mother Russia" from defeat.

Vivekananda pointed out once that "in all matters the two extremes look alike. The extreme negative and the extreme positive look similar. When the vibrations of light are too low we do not see them, nor do we see them when they are too intense." We may think that the U.S. and Russia are poles apart in every way, but in the matter of enmity, or preparation for war, or faith in the market economy, they are alike. Both countries share the assumption that more production is equated with the highest good. Both countries are supporting, with clandestine actions or with force, countries within their respective "spheres of influence." Both are arming beyond the capability of solving social problems or meeting human needs. Like Joe's lamb, the goals and ideals of both countries have been thrown out to more easily preserve a bristling confrontation.

Reflecting on the U.S. military position that a limited war is possible and that we could triumph with it, reminded us that

Georgi Malenkov, when he was prime minister of Russia, had said that the use of the latest weapons would probably mean the destruction of Russia as well as the West, even civilisation itself. Later, after his resignation, he was severely criticised by *Pravda* for an ideological stand that was untenable—that the truth was only the West would be destroyed, the Soviet Union would survive. Thermo-nuclear technology has made Siamese twins out of the two nations; they are locked together. In each country the war mentality is a psychosis, an "addiction". In this type of mental illness it is difficult to break down barriers and act on facts rather than fears.

Only a ground swell of public opinion will make disarmament possible; governments cannot make peace. War is now the "Health" of the state because of the huge commitment to the military and industrial complex. Princeton Institute scholar, David Mitrany, has said that peace cannot be secured in the world by using the institutions that divide it. President Eisenhower said before his death, that if people want peace, some day the government will have to get out of the way and let them have it. "Some day", he said, "the demand for disarmament by hundreds of millions will, I hope, become so universal and so insistent that no man, can withstand it." Thoreau wrote *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* in 1849 and said: "I heartily accept the motto, 'That government is best which governs the least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe—'That government is best which governs not at all'; and when men are prepared for

it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government at best is but an expedient." Of course, this ideal presupposes a moral and ethical populace imbued with concern for all.

An exasperated friend recently told us, after listening to U.S. threats to the Russians and the need for more missiles: "For the love of God, why don't we try *liking* the Russians for a change? If we are all going down in a nuclear holocaust, why not try putting our arms around each other. *We might even get to like it!*" We might even come to the awareness that the long-term interests of America are identical with those of Russia, and that existence is co-existence—or no-existence.

The late S. Radhakrishnan, Oxford professor, Ambassador, and late president of India, said at McGill University: "We are living in the dawn of a new era of universal humanity....Peace is not the mere absence of war; it is the development of a strong fellow feeling, an honest appreciation of other people's ideas and values...we need, not merely a closer contact between East and West but a closer union, a meeting of minds and union of hearts." William James, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, wrote: "What we now need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war: something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does, and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved to be incompatible."

In Madras, after his return to India, Vivekananda told his countrymen: "I cannot join any one of these condemning societies. Why condemn? There are evils in every society; everybody knows it....Everybody can show that evil is, but he is the friend of mankind who finds a way out of the difficulty." Since these words were uttered, it would seem that we are facing

appalling odds in a quest for peace. That is because not enough of mankind has begun at the source; within themselves. Only here will heroic action make any real difference, only here will our future be determined.

Some still small voices of American conscience can be heard above the noisy bustle of the crowd. Wes Jackson of the Land Institute in Kansas speaks of the injunction, "Love thy enemy" as no longer an option but a requirement. "We are required to love our enemies, not stockpile weapons against them or point missiles at them..." Then he moves on from truth to higher truth, from injunction to self-examination; "I confess that because I have not loved my enemies and all my countrymen and all my neighbours, I have increased the likelihood of a new eternal hell on earth due to nuclear weapons. I believe this deep in my heart now, for as a biologist, I do believe that everything is connected to everything else...."

Vivekananda would, of course, have us reach for the highest truth; that there is no such thing as "enemy". There will never be peace in the world as long as the word "enemy" is in existence. "No one is a stranger. The whole world is our own."

In our discussion of arms build-up, sanity, and the observations of some sane and caring Americans and others, we may have seemed to imply that if men and women would only try harder, become more active, gather in large masses to call for peace, there might be hope for peace. This is true to some extent, but this kind of action will only succeed if it is informed by men and women of deep self-control and awareness. An example of peacemakers without that awareness would be the French people in the radio studio who felt they were working for peace but were cold to us as members of, in their minds, the "warmonger" country. They may have thought they had found

the way to peace, but had forgotten that peace is the way.

That informed awareness is a recognition of the unity of all that exists which, in the words of Vivekananda, does not have "to be made, it already exists, and is here. We have only to recognise it, to understand it." At once the implication is clear; we must go within ourselves to find it before we can demand it of others or create it in society. We must find within the unity of all creation, "Knowing which everything else becomes known."

As a nation, America requires today the sowing of great thoughts in her own mind; she must reduce her involuntary meditation on Russia and practise voluntary meditation on her ideals. As individuals, we must turn from blaming others to a courageous look at our own dispositions. Thoreau wrote that "Man is the artificer of his own happiness. Let him beware of how he complains of the disposition of circumstances, for it is his own disposition he blames."

Practically speaking, how does one go within? The effort requires regular periods of withdrawal, of meditation, as already mentioned in *Raja Yoga*, so that in the conquering and control of the mind the real may be clearly seen. The mind is a mirror which is capable of clear reflection but it is dusty and fogged with selfish desires and with sense impulses. It is a struggle, as anyone who has tried to still the mind will tell you. Just as science is the struggle of man in the outer world, so spiritual practices are the struggle of man in the inner world. Conquering our restless mind, our passions, our prejudices is no joke—it is heroic work.

A brother disciple of Vivekananda, Ramakrishnananda, spoke of the outward pull of the senses, leading us away from ourselves as we really are: "The whole universe exists for man between the two ends of the

nerves,—this outer end on the surface of the skin, and the inner end in the spinal column. One part of the network leads me out through the channel of the eyes, another takes me out through the ears, another through the tongue, so this universe of forms and sounds, tastes and touch comes into existence. We have entangled ourselves and we seem to love to entangle ourselves. Such is the perversity of our nature. But only when we extricate ourselves from this labyrinth of nerves can we hope to be free."

Devamata writes that "many temples in India are built with the holy of holies within five enclosures to symbolize the sheaths of the human constitution and teach men that they must go deep within,—beyond body, senses, mind, intellect and ego—if they would reach the innermost sanctuary of soul-consciousness or God-union; the state Christ defines in the words, 'I and my Father are one.'" There is nothing mysterious about this search within. Vivekananda has shown the way as a scientific process. Everything can be explained rationally. Yoga practices are not mysterious, they are rational and clear. Ramakrishnananda said that "when a man is physically weak he takes to cunning. When he is spiritually weak he takes to mystery."

By finding ourselves as we really are, by experiencing that unity at the deepest level, we arrive at the basis of all ethics. Vedanta philosophers discovered this from time without beginning. All religions teach, "do not kill", "love thy neighbour", etc. but none have given the reason or answer to the question, "why not?" In a talk on "Vedanta as a Factor in Civilisation", Vivekananda said: "To this question there was no satisfactory or conclusive answer until it was evolved by the metaphysical speculations of the Hindus who could not rest satisfied with mere dogmas. So the Hindus say that this Atman is absolute and

all-pervading, therefore, infinite. There cannot be two infinities, for they would limit each other and become finite. Also each individual soul is part and parcel of the Universal Soul which is infinite. Therefore, in injuring his neighbour, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes."

A young man we knew, who was college age at the time of Viet Nam, declared himself a conscientious objector. A small N.H. draft board asked him for his religious affiliation. "I cannot claim any affiliation", he replied, "but I just feel, deep inside myself, that if I am forced to kill someone,

I will be killing myself." Another example of awareness of the unity of all life, this time sudden and final, we found in the corner of a field in France. By a low wall, there was a small stone marker roughly inscribed with a German name. It took some time to find out the story. During the German occupation of France, some citizens of the village were rounded up to be shot as reprisal for an act of sabotage. They were lined up against the wall and the order was given to fire. Suddenly, one young German soldier threw down his gun. "Ich kann nicht..." (I cannot), he said. On being told he would be shot if he did not obey orders, he just stood there weeping and repeating, "Ich kann nicht..."

SYNOPSIS OF GOVERNING BODY REPORT: 1987-88

The 79th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday the 25th December, 1988 at 3.30 PM. Swami Bhuteshananda, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission, was the chairman of the proceedings. A synopsis of the report of the Governing Body for 1987-88 placed before the members, is as follows:

This year signifies an important milestone in the Ramakrishna Movement. It marks the completion of 125 years of the advent of Swami Vivekananda. The celebrations to commemorate the occasion will be held throughout the year and will culminate in a four-day celebration at Belur Math in January 1989, coinciding with the next birthday (*tithi*) of Swami Vivekananda.

Amidst the important developments during the year, the commissioning of an ultra-sound scanner in the hospital at Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh), the starting of mobile medical services at Silchar and

the dedication of new temples at Chengalpattu, Guwahati and Rajahmundry, deserve special mention. Considerable progress was achieved in the massive tribal welfare project undertaken by our Raipur centre in the Abhujmarh area of Baster district. An outpatient dispensary, a mobile medical unit, a residential school, a rural development training institute, fair-price shop, etc are already functioning there.

Relief work: In the year under report the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission did extensive relief and rehabilitation work in several parts of the country, spending about Rs. 62.31 lacs. Also, relief articles worth Rs. 13.9 lacs received as gift were distributed amongst the afflicted people.

Medical service: The Mission did commendable medical work through its 8 hospitals, 58 dispensaries and 15 mobile units. Around 39 lac patients were treated and a

sum of nearly Rs. 4.72 crores was spent for this purpose.

The Ramakrishna Math served more than 7.63 lacs of people through its hospitals and dispensaries.

Educational work: The academic results of our educational institutions were excellent and our students obtained several positions of merit. The Mission conducted 1,341 educational institutions which had a students' strength of 1,28,750. A sum of about Rs. 16.35 crores was spent by the Mission on such work.

Rural and tribal welfare work: Both the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Math did considerable work in rural and tribal areas where a large number of our medical and educational institutions were located. The Mission incurred an

expenditure of approximately Rs. 92 lacs on rural and tribal welfare activities.

Foreign work: Our overseas centres were mainly engaged in spiritual ministration. A variety of educational, medical and cultural activities were also conducted on a modest scale.

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur, at the end of the year, the Mission and the Math had 76 and 73 branches respectively in India and in a few other countries.

It will not be out of place to mention here that right now the Mission is engaged in a massive relief and rehabilitation project in the Hingalganj and Gosaba areas of North 24-Parganas, in West Bengal, added to rehabilitation work in some parts of Bihar affected by earthquake.

(Swami Hiranmayananda)
General Secretary

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN ANCIENT HINDU SOCIETY by DR. RAMAYANTI DOONGAJI. Pub: Ajanta Publications, I.V.B. Jawaharnagar, Bungalow Road, Delhi 110 007. 1986 Pp XVI + 294 Price Rs. 275/-

The rule of law makes all the difference between a civilized and an uncivilized society. Society takes long to subserve the rule of law. The Hindu society had done it in the long course of her culture and civilization. The author here investigates the roots of the modern legal system in this society. Here is an excellent study of the law of crime and punishment in ancient vis-a-vis modern India. Author's professional acumen stood her in good stead in this probe.

This volume opens up with 'Origin and Development of crime in the ancient Dharmashastra'. Various definitions of crime given by eastern and western legal luminaries are considered and compared with definitions in Indian Penal Code and

Criminal Procedure Code. Concepts of sin, crime, punishment and *dharma* are explained in sufficient details.

The second chapter deals with classification of crime as then and now. Many of the offences which attract punishment now were not treated so in the good old days. Violation of stamp Duty Act or Copy Right Act are punishable only in modern times. It is interesting to note how offences pertaining to counterfeit coins, weights and measures, offences against public health, safety, convenience, decency and morals, defamation, marriages were dealt with. Investigation and court procedure are the subject matter of the third chapter. Methods of police investigation as told in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and in *Shukraniti* are described. The judicial hierarchy in ancient India is mentioned and procedures regarding issue of summons, custody of property pending disposal of the case and rules regarding adjournments have been described, various ordeals also are mentioned.

The philosophy of crime and punishment is the subject matter of the sixth chapter. According to the author, human weaknesses are the sources of crime. Social environment also is equally responsible for the growth of crime. The king or, in the modern parlance, the state was responsible for preponderance of offenders in a society. The king and the elites weave the moral fabric of the society. Retributive, deterrant and reformatory nature of punishment is described here. The last and the seventh chapter is the quintessence of this work. Here the author wants us to know as to how far ancient *Dharmashastra* would help to solve the present day problems. This chapter studies the problems before jurists and the state, as they are today. Ancient wisdom can very well help us in dealing with problems affecting human mind. The author has copiously quoted from

various *smritis* and other legal texts such as *Vyavahara Chintamani*, *Dandaviveka*, and *Arthashastra*. She has marshalled the facts immaculately and deserves much praise on that account.

The treatment of the subject is methodical and the investigation thorough. The present young generation studies law superficially and a majority of law students do not read anything beyond the made-easy series. But, for those who want to make law as their career, books of this type would help in gaining insight into the subject. This would equip them better for the legal profession. The paper and the printing of the book add weight to the prestigious Ajanta production.

Dr. Narendranath B. Patil
Retired Director of Languages,
Maharashtra, BOMBAY.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA: 90 YEARS AGO

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

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Union of the East and the West

Ever since the long-separated branches of the Aryan family came to know each other, ever since modern Europe, and modern India, came into contact, there has been growing a semi-conscious desire in both to know each other better—to blend, if possible, the one into the other, so that what were best in each might be brought together and fused so as to form a single organic whole—the highest physical activity growing unified with the highest spirituality.

But while the West sent its message of kinship through these adverse channels, the East never did so,—save on one memorable occasion. I allude to the occasion when a nameless Hindu monk went over to the Parliament of Religions, and addressed the vast concourse of men and women assembled there, as “Brothers” and “Sisters.” All those disadvantages under which the West works in the East, were happily absent in the case of the Eastern monk. The East delivered

its message in ideas “broad as the heavens above.” Since then a steady current has set to work with a view to bring the East and the West nearer.

As pioneers in the work, the Brotherhood, of which Swami Vivekananda is the head, should, in my opinion, undertake to start such an Ashrama, where Indian youths could be trained side by side, with the education of Western men and women in the higher studies of Vedantic philosophy and life. The experience and practical common sense which the Western men and women will bring with them, will be invaluable for forming the character, and for the proper training of the Indians for Western work.

Another important point, I should not like to leave unsaid, though it is too premature, is, that the Ashrama should be started somewhere in the Himalayas, even if it be only for the consideration of the health of the workers—the different branches in the plains doing duty as feeders of the Himalayan main centre, in this respect.



Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj

NEW PRESIDENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

It is with great pleasure we announce that Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj was elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Belur Math and the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission on 24 January 1989.

Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Math and the Mission since 1975, and succeeds Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, who entered *Mahāsamādhi* on 27 December 1988.

The Swami, known in his pre-monastic life as Sri Vijay Chandra Roy, hails from a village in the district of Bankura in West Bengal and was born in 1901. After graduating from the Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta, he joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1923 at the Belur Math. Though he had come to Belur Math earlier to join, he was not accepted because he was very young and had not completed his studies. During this time he used to spend his days in a Shiva temple at Baghbazar leading the austere life of a brahmacharin.

A disciple of Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj, he had his *Sannyāsa* from Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, the Second President of the Math and the Mission in 1928. Besides having the rare privilege of touching the lotus feet of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, he served Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj for a few years in Belur Math and came in contact with ten of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

The Swami made deep studies of the scriptures under Swami Shuddhanandaji Maharaj and Pandit Tarasar Bhattacharya at Belur Math and Pandit A.D.L. Srinivasacharlu at Mysore. He spent more than three years in tapasya at Uttarkashi (Himalayas), living on *bhiksha* (begging).

Besides building up and considerably consolidating the Shillong and Rajkot Centres as their head, he worked in various capacities at Dhaka, Mysore and Kankhal centres of the Order. As a result of his inspiration and guidance a centre in Japan was affiliated to the Order in recent years.

The Swami was appointed a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1965 and became one of the Assistant Secretaries in 1966. In 1975 he was appointed a Vice-President of the Organization and concurrently the Head of the Ramakrishna Yogodyan Math at Kankurgachi in Calcutta, a centre founded in 1883 by late Ramachandra Dutta, an eminent householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. During his tenure as the Vice-President he travelled widely in India and abroad, spreading the message of the Master.

The Swami is an erudite scholar in the scriptures and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. His conversations and classes are highly inspiring and enlightening. His class talks on Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) have been published in book form under the title Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Prasanga in five volumes. Other books to his credit are Mundakopanishad, Upanishad O Ajker Manush and Sharanagati.

We earnestly pray to the Lord for his long life and happy period of spiritual ministration and guidance to the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.