



Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 94

MARCH 1989

No. 3

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

THUS SPEAKS SHRI RAMAKRISHNA

Incarnation of God as Saviour

The Avatara or Saviour is the messenger of God. He is like the viceroy of a mighty monarch. As when there is some disturbance in a far-off province the king sends his viceroy to quell it, so whenever there is prevalence of irreligion in any part of the world, God sends His Avatara for its destruction.

The Avatars are born with Divine powers and Divine qualities. They can go into and stay in any state of realisation from the highest to the lowest. In a king's palace a stranger can go only to the outer quarters, but the king's own child, the prince of the house, is free to go to every corner.

The Avatara is always one and the same. Plunging into the ocean of life, He rises up in one place and is known as Krishna ; diving again and rising elsewhere, He is known as Christ.

Think not that Rama and Sita, Krishna and Radha, were mere allegories and not historical personages ; or that the scriptures are true only in their inner or esoteric meaning. Nay, there must have been human beings of flesh and blood who personified

the ideals of Rama and Sita, and because they were also divinities, their lives can be interpreted both historically and allegorically.

When there is a flood—river, stream and land all alike present one watery surface. But the rain-water flows away through different channels. So when a Saviour becomes incarnate, all are saved through his grace. The perfected men who are called Siddhas only save themselves, by much pain and penance.

As a large and powerful steamer moves swiftly over the waters, towing rafts and barges in its wake ; so when a Saviour comes, he carries thousands easily across the ocean of Maya.

In the saints, God manifests Himself only in part, like honey in a flower. You suck the flower and get a little honey. In the Incarnation, it is all "honey"—all sweetness and all blessedness.

No one knows the immensity of the sacrifice which God makes when He incarnates Himself.

(Teachings of Shri Ramakrishna)

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is on SHRI RAMAKRISHNA WHO CREATES AND ELEVATES.

VIVEKANANDA AND CONTEMPORARY HUMANISM IN INDIA is by Swami Someshwarananda, Ramakrishna Math, Bombay.

FROM THE STEPS TO THE ROOF: RAMAKRISHNA'S MYSTICAL LADDER is a scholarly article on modern thinkers' views on Shri Ramakrishna's mystical visions. It is by Dr. M. Shivaramakrishna, Professor, Dept. of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTION BUILDING: A MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE by Dr. S. K. Chakraborty is the last part of his article.

INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND HARMONY is an article based on a talk given by K. Hussain, Principal, M.H. Saboo Siddik College of Engineering, Bombay, in the Symposium on Inter-religious Understanding organised at the Ramakrishna Math, Bombay in September, 1988.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE ONE-WORLD IDEA is by Dr. Nirod Baran Chakraborty, Professor and Head, Department of Philosophy, Presidency College, Calcutta.

SURENDRA NATH MITTRA, an impressive life-sketch of the householder devotee of Shri Ramakrishna, is by Swami Chetananda, of Vedanta Society, St. Louis, U.S.A.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA—THE SAVIOUR WHO CREATES AND ELEVATES

(EDITORIAL)

On a hot and dusty day after the sunset, Russian artist Nicholas De Roerich and his companions who were crossing the Mongolian desert, came for shelter under a huge Karagach tree. This was the only tree in the midst of the sea of sands, which was the sole refuge for all the animals, innocent or ferocious, in the whole region. They saw the footprints of both the wolf and local antelope. They heard the chirping of birds settling for the night on its branches. Thoughts of the Russian artist slowly shifted to another giant shelter where all humanity could find a place of peace and acceptance—Shri Ramakrishna. He wrote, "Thoughts turned to the radiant giant of India—Shri Ramakrishna. ... The present name has already changed into a great national, universal, concept." The giant elm tree and

Ramakrishna both had, Roerich thought, one thing in common—the great power of creative goodness. Roerich thinks that Ramakrishna is 'good', because he constantly created, and also elevated whatever he created. "Ramakrishna never belittled anyone," writes Roerich, "The good never destroys, it untiringly elevates and builds."¹

Ramakrishna called himself "the eternal child of the Divine Mother", the Almighty Mother who creates and destroys universes. Like the Mother, the son of Mother, too, destroyed what is non-self, nescience, and ignorance, and created what is divine and eternal, what is Light and Knowledge, blissful and beautiful. When in the Kali temple a leg of the image of Krishna got broken,

1. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1936, p. 122.

Ramakrishna refused to reject it as a mere stone. The living soul even in the non-living was clear in his vision. Ramakrishna recreated the broken one, and made it whole.

When the drunkard dramatist Girish came, Ramakrishna accepted him with all the love of father, mother, friend, and Guru. He himself went to the despised theatre of Girish which was supposed to be a place of impious and fallen actors, and saw their theatrical performance. When the actors were playing with all their emotion the role of Shri Chaitanya and his other associates, Ramakrishna felt he was seeing not the actors, but the real characters like Shri Chaitanya and others. He said, "I saw that the real characters and the actors are the one and the same." When Girish later on begged his permission to leave the theatre, Ramakrishna asked him to continue in the profession as a means of spreading holy ideas, Girish remained a dramatist-actor, but by the grace of Ramakrishna, emerged into a saintly man. "People will marvel at you," Ramakrishna told him. "The prophecy has been fulfilled in the true spirit," wrote later a disciple of Ramakrishna.² Today the actors of Bengal theatres consider Ramakrishna as their patron God who lent sacredness to their so-called secular and degraded profession.

When the shepherd boy of Bihar came to him for grace, Ramakrishna at once accepted him, and slowly transfigured him into a finished saint Adbhutananda whom Vivekananda called 'the miracle of Ramakrishna.' Rasik, the sweeper of the Kali Temple came to him for grace. Ramakrishna blessed him, and fulfilled his life.

Everywhere he saw the Divine Mother manifested through all beings. His soul established in the unity of all souls became

an ocean where the world's pain and unrest flowed in hundred different channels. His heart bled for men and women suffering both materially and spiritually. "There can be no religion for an empty stomach," he taught. At Deoghar in Bihar and Kalaighata in Bengal, he asked the rich steward Mathur to arrange food and clothing for the starving thousands.

For days, months, and years the God-intoxicated son of Mother Kali of Dakshin-eshwar, went to Calcutta steeped in the pride of western learning, and comforts of a materialistic life. He went not to temples or the congregations of holy men, but to seek out people groping in the darkness of ignorance and to lead them to God. It became his passion to lift men and women to heights of holiness, to save the lost sheep, and bring them back to the radiant world of divinity of which he was the master.

Like Christ and Buddha he became a Saviour of the fallen, the neglected, and the God-seekers of all caste, creed and religion. On 1st January, 1886, he revealed himself as an Incarnation-power, a Saviour who took up the sins and tribulations of whoever came to him, and brought great spiritual transformation in them by his divine touch. Vivekananda, the Pauline Apostle of Ramakrishna, later saw in his Master, "the Saviour of the masses, Saviour of women, Saviour of all, high and low."³ Saviours with pen like Rousseau or Marx brought intellectual ideas that rejected the old and held promise for the golden millennium which never came. Saviours with sword like Napoleon, Alexander or recent political heroes sought to create new order of society by destroying whatever did not fit in to their ideology. But their efforts dwindled to insignificance even before the end of a century. Saviours as son of God come not to destroy but to fulfil.

2. Swami Prabhananda, *First meetings with Shri Ramakrishna*, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1987, p. 333.

3. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama), 1987, p. 207.

The impact of Saviours as son of God like Christ and Buddha still goes on. "Salvation belongeth to the Son of Man," said St. Paul. Ramakrishna's power is today slowly encircling the entire human civilisation.

* * * *

Shankaracharya at the beginning of his commentary on the Gita says that Krishna preached the message of the Gita in order to establish and preserve the ideal of brahminhood.

In his unfinished work, *India's message to the World*, Vivekananda wrote down these points, "The great ideal of India—Brahminhood. Property-less, selfless, subject to no laws, no king except the moral." "The ideal man of our ancestors was the Brahmin", said Vivekananda to Indians.⁴ Every Indian feels glorified to trace back his ancestry to a Rishi or an ideal Brahmin. What is meant by ideal Brahmin? "Our ideal is the Brahmin of spiritual culture and renunciation... I mean the ideal Brahminness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of the Hindu race", says Vivekananda.⁵ This ideal he found fully manifested in his master's life.

Vivekananda saw Shri Ramakrishna as the Saviour, the ideal Man, the ideal Brahmin established in knowledge, renunciation, and Universal Love for all. That is why he reminded the Indians, "Our heroes must be spiritual. Such a hero has been given to us in the person of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If this nation wants to rise, ...it will have to rally enthusiastically round this name".⁶ To his Madras disciple, Vivekananda wrote, "India has suffered long, ... But the Lord is merciful. Once more He

has come to help His children, once more the opportunity is given to rise to fallen India. India can only rise sitting at the feet of Shri Ramakrishna".⁷ Yet Ramakrishna was no hero of action like Gandhi or Mao. He lived a quiet God-centred life. "He was contented simply to live that great life and to leave it to others to find the explanation," said Vivekananda.⁸

* * * *

The beloved child of the pious brahmin family finally set aside the age-old tradition. During the sacred thread ceremony he refused to take alms from any brahmin, even from his own mother. Long ago the child gave words of promise to the low-caste midwife Dhani Kamarni that during the sacred ceremony he would accept alms from her. This pious woman saw the birth of the blessed child, and loved him with all her heart. To the child Ramakrishna, Truth stood triumphant over tradition. Ramakrishna did not disrespect any tradition. He only expanded the horizon in which such traditions worked. 'The devotees of the Lord all belong to one caste', he used to say.

Shri Ramakrishna was the son of an outstandingly sincere and pious brahmin Kshudiram who one day lost everything because he refused to bear false witness. Villagers of Kamarpukur would not dare to take bath in the pond when Kshudiram used to come for his ablutions. He was the very symbol of devotion to his beloved God Raghuvira, to truth, to austerity, to simplicity and to those saintly qualities that are the hallmarks of an ideal brahmin. Ramakrishna himself was brought up and nurtured in the pure brahminical traditions of worship, devotion, singing the glories of the Lord, and an austere, simple, God-centred life. His elder brother Ramkumar took to the

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Volume), Vol. 3: 196

5. *Ibid.*, 3: 197.

6. *Ibid.*, 3: 315.

7. *Ibid.*, 6: 281.

8. *Ibid.*, 8: 261.

brahminic traditions of teaching Sanskrit and scriptures. But When Ramakrishna was asked to take up the priest's job, he refused to accept the money-making life of a priest. With Rani Rasmani's importunate request when Ramakrishna finally accepted the work of Kali worship, he went without accepting a single penny. Ramakrishna went not as a priest, but a seeker to discover the Truth of God in that Kali Image. Nevertheless the brahminical orthodoxy lingered. Ramakrishna would not take food from the temple, as it belonged to a low-caste woman. Finally when the 'Great Illumination' came, the last bondages of tradition were cut asunder. It was like the 'autumnal storm'—*Ashwiner Jhar*—as he used to say, which drove away the last bit of petrified orthodoxy and pride of caste-superiority in the tempestuous tide of an universal love for God everywhere. His sacred thread fell off. He ate with the Muslim. He cleaned the privy of Pariah at night, stealthily, in order to free himself from the least pride of brahminhood. In all men and women, even the fallen ones, he saw the Divine Mother, and received them with the deepest respect. Ramakrishna became established in the ideal of a true brahmin, a knower of Brahman whose only passion thenceforward was to elevate to a divine life everyone, irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

* * * *

The Mahabharata declares the utmost superiority of Brahmin-life. Shanti Parva (74/29) declares him as the foremost of all. Anushasana Parva (35/1) and Shanti Parva (261/11) clearly state that a Brahmin from his very birth, occupies an honoured place. Again, in (131/49) of the same Parva, we are told that the source of *Dvijatva* is neither birth nor sacraments nor learning; conduct alone produces it. The same idea is found elsewhere too; for example, Anushasana Parva (131/48) states that even a Shudra,

who performs his normal duties well, is to be regarded as a *Dvija*, or Brahmin.

Anushasana Parva (135/10) provides that a Brahmin, who takes to the work of a Shudra after giving up his own duties, is relegated to the position of a Shudra; he should never be fed on ceremonial occasions. Again, even a Shudra, a member of the lowest caste, by conscientiously doing his duties, could deserve the honour of a member of a regenerate class.

This life of a Brahmin is for dharma; his dharma is not for pleasure, his days and nights should be spent in the pursuit of *punya* or holy acts. Shanti Parva, (237/23).

According to Shanti Parva (37/39) a Brahmin loses his Brahminhood when he lives working as a priest in general and as a *ritvik* in particular, as minister, ambassador, management of finance, messenger, a priest living on subsistence on the offerings made to an idol (*devaloka*), one earning livelihood by astrology or working as a moneymaking priest conducting the religious ceremonies for all classes of people (*gramyayapaka*).⁹

* * * *

In Madras, Vivekananda thundered the new gospel of Vedanta, the divinity of all souls and gave the clarion call to the neglected and exploited masses to awake, arise and ascend up to the great ideal of India—Brahminhood which is everyone's birthright. He said,

"In the Satya Yuga there was only one caste, and that was the Brahmin. ...We read in the Mahabharata that the whole world was in the beginning peopled with Brahmins, and that as they began to degenerate, they became divided into different castes, and that when the cycle turns round, they will all go back to that Brahminical origin. This cycle is turning round now, and I draw your attention to this fact. Therefore, our

9. Quoted from Dr. S. C. Banerji, *Indian Society in the Mahabharata*, Bharata Manisha, Varanasi, 1976, p. 235-238.

solution of the caste question is not degrading those who are already high up, is not running amuck through food and drink, is not jumping out of our own limits in order to have more enjoyment, but it comes by every one of us, fulfilling the dictates of our Vedantic religion, by our attaining spirituality, and by our becoming the ideal Brahmin. There is a law laid on each one of you in this land by your ancestors, whether you are Aryans or non-Aryans, Rishis, or Brahmins, or the very lowest outcasts. The command is the same to you all, that you must make progress without stopping, and that from the highest man to the lowest Pariah, everyone in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahmin."¹⁰

Seeing the prevalent condition of the so-called brahmins in India, Vivekananda realised the utter falsehood of the concept of Brahminhood by descent. He clearly saw that "various races have claimed and acquired the right (to Brahminhood) in the past as well as in the present." With a profound sense of humour he wrote about this vaunting of non-brahmins, "No claim is made by the doer of great deeds, only by lazy wrothless fools."¹¹ Caste distinction was the root of all social misery. To his brother-disciple Ramakrishnananda he wrote in 1885, "In the Buddha incarnation the Lord says that the root of the Adhibhautika misery, or misery arising out from other terrestrial beings, is the formation of class (*Jati*), in other words every form of class-distinction, whether based on birth, or acquirements, or wealth is at the bottom of the misery." Seeing the degeneration of India's ideal Brahminhood into terrible priestly exploitations over the credulent and ignorant masses, he wrote to the Maharaja of Khetri, "Priestcraft is the bane of India. Can man degrade his brother and himself escape degradation?"¹² He himself experienced the "spiritual tyranny of the priesthood and the ever increasing chain of ceremonials

which they were forging to bind down people with."¹³ In the Cranganore temple of Divine Mother, he was not allowed to enter as he was not a born-Brahmin. The Dakshin-eshwar Kali Temple authorities backed by Calcutta Brahmin group, barred his entry to the temple after his return from the West, where he had gone to restore the glory of Hinduism. The ideal of true Brahminhood was virtually lost. He wrote, "...the Puranas said there will be only non-Brahmins in the Kali Yuga, and that is true, becoming true every day." But the few great souls that he had met from all classes of Indians, during his wandering life gave him a confidence, and he wrote, "Yet a few Brahmins remain, and in India alone."¹⁴

It is his master's life which revealed to him the true meaning of Brahminhood, and the import of the scriptures. To brother disciple Shivananda he wrote in 1894, "without studying Ramakrishna Paramahansa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedantas, of the Bhagavata, and the other Puranas. ... He lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India." To Ramakrishnananda he wrote in 1895, "It was no new truth that Ramakrishna Paramahansa came to preach, though his advent brought the old truths to light." In the same year he wrote to Brahmananda, "What I mean by mentioning all this is that there were many good things in the ancient times, but there were bad things too. The good things are to be retained, but the India that is to be, the future India, must be much greater than ancient India. From the day Shri Ramakrishna was born dates the growth of modern India and of the Golden Age." To his brother-disciples at the Alambazar Math, he again wrote on 27.4.1896,

10. *Complete Works*; p. 3: 197-198.

11. *Ibid.*, 4: 309-311.

12. *Ibid.*, 4: 327.

13. *Ibid.*, 4: 328.

14. *Ibid.*, 4: 309-311.

"From the very date that he was born, has sprung the Satya Yuga (Golden Age). Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone down to the Chandala will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, Brahmins and Chandalas—he lived to root out all. And he was the harbinger of peace—the separation between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past. The fight about distinction that there was, belonged to another era. In this Satya Yuga the tidal wave of Shri Ramakrishna's love has unified all."¹⁵

Trudging through the length and breadth of the subcontinent, Vivekananda saw that Brahmins, by and large, had degenerated into moneymaking priests. Instead of scattering the highest ideas of religion and culture to the common masses, they were mercilessly exploiting the labour and lives of the masses for their own advantages. The Brahminic exploitation in Kerala horrified him. He saw in Kerala a "lunatic asylum". To Pundit Shankarlal of Khetri he wrote on 20.9.1892, "In Travancore the most priest-ridden country in India—when every bit of land is owned by Brahmins, and females (of the lower castes), even of royal family, hold it as high honour to live as the wives of Brahmins." Two years later from the West, he wrote (3.3.1894) to his Madras disciple Kidi, "What business had the priest to interfere (to the misery of millions of human beings) in every social matter?" To the Maharaja of Mysore he wrote (23.6.1894), "Priest-power and foreign conquest have trodden them down for centuries, and at last the poor of India have forgotten that they are human beings."

But behind the power of the priests he also saw the declining power of the Brahmin communities, and the historic signs of the rise of labourers, of masses who were seeking to break their century-long sleep.

15. *Letters of Sw. Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama), 1981, p. 207.

To his disciples at Belur Math he spoke in prophetic words,

"So long the Brahmins have monopolized religion; but since they cannot hold their ground against the strong tide of time, go and take steps so that one and all in the land may get that religion. Impress upon their minds that they have the same right to religion as the Brahmins. Initiate all, even down to the Chandalas (people of the lowest castes), in these fiery Mantras."¹⁶

"The British Rule" and the "Mohammedan Rule" India, in Vivekananda's vision, came as a great blessing for the destruction of exclusive privilege. He declared, "The duty of Advaita is to destroy all privilege....The days of exclusive privileges and exclusive claims are gone, gone for ever from the soil of India."¹⁷

Like a prophet Vivekananda offered the new Smriti for the modern age. He defined the role of spiritual aristocracy, and said that the accumulated culture of ages of which the Brahmin has been the trustee, must now be given to the people. It was because he did not give it to the people that Mohammedan invasion was possible. "It was because he did not open this treasury to the people from the beginning, that for a thousand years we have been trodden under the heels of everyone who chose to come to India," he said.¹⁸ He reminded the Indians,

"It is the duty of the Brahmin, therefore, to work for the salvation of the rest of mankind in India. If he does that, and so long as he does that, he is a Brahmin, but he is no Brahmin when he goes about making money."¹⁹

In India Vivekananda dreamt of a "new form of society" inspired by the message of Ramakrishna where the masses will attain

16. *Complete Works*; 5: 381.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 3: 294.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 3: 298.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 3: 297.

Brahminhood by developing economically, educationally, socially, and also religiously. To his Indian followers he gave the categorical imperative, "Keep the motto before you—elevation of the masses without injuring their religion." The spreading of the religious truths—*Dharmadana*—was the most important gift which must be accompanied along with other two gifts, the gift of food (*Annadana*) and the gift of knowledge (*Vidyadana*). In the West he was thinking "to create a new order of humanity", where a large number of individuals will combine efficient social action with deep awareness of the divinity within. Marie Louise Burke thinks "this was the very heart of the Mission for which he had come."²⁰

With his own experience Vivekananda found that most of the prevalent social customs of India were based upon *Smritis*, which define laws suited for a particular age. None of these customs was based on *Shrutis*, or eternal truths²¹ enshrined in the Upanishads.

In Ramakrishna's life and teachings Vivekananda discovered 'the wonderful unconscious method²² for national regeneration in this age, the 'epochal new dispensation', and 'the reformed and remodelled manifestation of all the past great epoch-makers in religion.' The 'promoting of every sphere of spiritual culture in this great life', according to Vivekananda, "surpasses the manifestations of all past ages."²³ Shri Ramakrishna's life inspired him to declare the new *Smriti* for modern India which tells that everyone has got the power to rise to Brahminhood, and that everyone must be provided all opportunities to reach that highest ideal of Indian national life. With

a prophet's vision Vivekananda spoke of the way for lifting the masses up to the class of Brahmins, "We have to give them secular education. We have to follow the plan laid down by our ancestors, that is, to bring all the ideals slowly down to the masses, raise them slowly up, raise them to equality. Impart even secular knowledge through religion." Like a prophet Vivekananda declared,

"The Smritis must change with time. This is the admitted law....This is going to be in the future. If the manifestation of the power of one tribe utilising the labours of the rest produced wonderful results at least for a certain length of time, here is going to be the accumulation and the concentration of all the races that have been slowly and inevitably getting mixed up in blood and ideas, and in my mind's eye, I see the future giant slowly maturing. The future of India, the youngest and the most glorious of the nations of earth as well as the oldest."²⁴

* * * *

Prophets and saints in India have emerged from all the classes, and worked as Saviours of the masses. The Mahabharata respects the wisdom of a hunter-sage (Dharma-Vyadha). Saint Kabir was a weaver, Ruidas a cobbler, Sena a barber, Namadeva a carder of cotton, and Tukaram of Maharashtra a farmer. Dadu is supposed to be born in a muslim family, but preached the highest truths of religion in simple language. All of them had realised the Truth, rose to Brahminhood, and gave the highest Truth to the people in the language of the people. Even Ramanuja, a great spiritual leader like Shankaracharya, and Shri Chaitanya, an incarnation of Shri Krishna Himself, had come down as the saviour of the lower classes. Both had taught the highest truths in the language of the people. Yet their effort in the long run could not, by and large, raise the masses to Brahminhood.

²⁰. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, (Advaita Ashrama), Vol. 3, p. 4.

²¹. *Complete Works*; p. 4: 309-311.

²². *Ibid.*, p. 8: 267.

²³. *Complete Works*; p. 6: 185.

²⁴. *Ibid.*, p. 4: 309-311.

Vivekananda saw that the reason of this failure to level the masses up to Brahminhood, was that they did not preach in Sanskrit. In India Sanskrit and prestige go hand in hand. The Jains and the Buddhists taught in the language of the people. These preachings brought new religions, but the ideal of Brahminhood was gradually lost sight of. With his historic insight Vivekananda saw the cause of this failure, and said,

“Even the Buddha made one false step when he stopped the Sanskrit language from being studied by the masses. He wanted rapid and immediate results, and translated and preached in the language of the day, Pali.... That was grand; he spoke in the language of the people, and the people understood him.... But along with that, Sanskrit ought to have spread. Knowledge came, but the prestige was not there, culture was not there. It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge.... Therefore, the ideas must be taught in the language of the people; at the same time, Sanskrit education must go along with it, because the very sound of Sanskrit words gives a prestige and a power and a strength to the race.²⁵

In his Madras lecture on the *Future of India*, Vivekananda gave the call of cultural and educational renaissance among the masses, “The only safety, I tell you men who belong to the lower castes, the only way to raise your condition is to study Sanskrit. ... The only way to bring about the levelling of caste is to appropriate the culture, the education which is the strength of the higher caste.”²⁶ That is why Vivekananda had founded the mission in his master's name in order to bring an educational and cultural renaissance among the have-nots, which could raise the masses to Brahminhood. He wrote,

“Just as Sanskrit has been the linguistic solution, ... So the Brahminhood is the solution of the varying degrees of progress and

culture as well as that of all social and political problems.”²⁷

* * * *

In the Upanishadic period we have seen women standing independently as teachers of religion and spirituality. The Pauranic tradition of the Mahabharata respected women as symbols of prosperity and success, but it never thought that women could live independently. Shri Ramakrishna broke the Pauranic tradition and set a new trend for women's regeneration in this age. He was the first Incarnation of God who honoured the idea of women's living independent spiritual life. He was the first Godman to accept as Guru a woman ascetic.

When the young God-seeking girl Gauri came to see him, Ramakrishna at once saw in her a woman spiritual teacher of the future. One day symbolically he bent a branch of a flower tree and said, “Well Gauri, I am pouring water on the earth; you knead the clay”.... “What I mean is that the women of this country are in a sad plight. You must work for them.”²⁸ True to his words, Gaurima turned into a powerful spiritual teacher who did pioneering work for women's education and spiritual life in Bengal.

Benodini Dasi, a helpless poor girl, entered the Calcutta theatre at the age of twelve. Society admired her brilliant acting, but considered her fallen. One day when Benodini was acting in the role of Shri Chaitanya, Ramakrishna came to see the play *Chaitanya Lila*. Benodini bowed at his feet after the play was over. Ramakrishna blessed her. In a dancing posture Shri Ramakrishna said to her, ‘Hari Guru, Guru Hari’. Wrote Benodini, “He then purified my unholy

25. Ibid., p. 3: 290.

26. Ibid., p. 3: 290-291.

27. Ibid., p. 4: 311.

28. *First meetings with Shri Ramakrishna*, p. 261.

body by placing both his palms on my head. He blessed me saying, "May you be blessed with spiritual awakening!" Soon Benodini left the stage and started living a holy life of devotion. She got transfigured. Later, her guide, Girish wrote about her, "Suddenly I remember that the life of this girl bears the testimony of a great lesson. People often whisper that she was low, that she was to be hated, but the Saviour of the neglected ones does not hate them, but redeems them from sin and damnation. Benodini's life is a living illustration of this."²⁹

In the dark godless world of material enjoyments in Calcutta, the citadel of Western culture in those days, Ramakrishna, like a Saviour, brought the light of God, and showed people groping in darkness, the way to a divine life of fulfilment. "We are to be saved from sin by being saved from ignorance. Ignorance is the cause of which sin is the result," said Vivekananda.³⁰

Battered and broken by the treatment of a drunkard husband, the young mother Yogindra Mohini came out of the home literally floating on the mercy of God. She met Ramakrishna who blessed her and guided her in spiritual life. Soon she reached the highest spiritual experience of samadhi, and emerged as the woman saint 'Yoginma' whom even Vivekananda held in high esteem.

Before his death Ramakrishna gave the entire responsibility of looking after the devotees, the young disciples, and the emerging order of monks, on Shri Sarada Devi. She protested that it would not be possible for her, a woman. Ramakrishna assured that the mighty power (shakti) of Divine Mother already awakened in her, will work it out. Holy Mother Sarada Devi indeed fulfilled the great role. Nothing would be done either by Vivekananda or

any of Ramakrishna's disciples without her direct guidance or consent. Her power protected them all, and helped build up the mighty edifice of the Ramakrishna movement.

Vivekananda thought of Christ and Shankaracharya inferior to Buddha because they bowed down to the demands of their times and felt afraid to open the doors of spiritual liberation for women and the mothers. Buddha stood against his times. He heard the cry of the women and opened the avenue of the highest spiritual knowledge and purest life for them too. Ramakrishna's significant contribution is this liberation of women as spiritual beings, as Holy Mother, as powerful shapers of men and purity-givers to societies which are today haunted by materialistic values of wanton sense pleasures. For the first time in the history of humanity here was a God-man who had learnt the highest spiritual knowledge, sitting at the feet of a woman teacher. This is something which is unimaginable in the case of Buddha and Christ. Ramakrishna was permanently established in seeing the Divine Mother, the Mahashakti in all women. Even the fallen women of Calcutta would inspire him to see Mother in them. And finally he fell at the feet of his own young wife, Sarada Devi and worshipped her as the Divine Mother.

Vivekananda realised that through this act of Mother worship in woman Ramakrishna had raised the Mother-power, the Mahashakti, in this age. That is why he wanted first to build a Math for Holy Mother and the other women spiritual inheritors of Shri Ramakrishna in order to raise the condition of women both in India and the West.

To his Indian disciple Haripada Mitra, he wrote (28.12.1893) from the West, "Can you better the condition of your women? Then there will be hope for your well-being,

29. Ibid., p. 341-344.

30. *Complete Works*; p. 8: 181.

otherwise you will remain as backward as you are now." To his brother disciple Ramakrishnananda he wrote in 1895,

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.

Hence, in the Ramakrishna Incarnation, the acceptance of a woman as the Guru, hence His practising in the woman's garb and frame of mind, hence too His preaching the motherhood of women as representations of the Divine Mother.

He was the Saviour of women, Saviour of the masses, Saviour of all, high and low. And let Akshaya introduce his worship in every home—Brahmin or Chandala, man or woman—everyone has the right to worship Him. Whoever will worship Him only with devotion shall be blessed for ever."

An American scholar highlights this historic contribution of Shri Ramakrishna for modern times.

Shri Ramakrishna's attitude toward women, exemplified by his worshipful respect for his own wife, has significance today. This exalted place of womanhood as a reflection of Divine Motherhood can be viewed as one workable solution to the grave problems besetting contemporary cultures regarding the institutions of marriage and monasticism.... Woman's place in society would be ennobled, as her self-understanding and her appreciation by men would flow from the religious realization that the godhead contains both the divine masculine and the divine feminine.³¹

* * * *

Without any formal academic education, and with only the power of superhuman purity and concentration Shri Ramakrishna exhibited a depth of knowledge that awed the greatest of contemporary scholars and pundits. From his childhood he heard the recitation of Puranas and various scriptures, and he remembered them all. His guru Bhairavi Brahmani was an accomplished

Sanskrit scholar. He himself would go to debates on religious matters, and loved to hear and appreciate them. A born lover of knowledge, he would run and seek the pundits and scholars like Vidyasagar, Pundit Shashadhar, Padmalochan, the court-pundit of Burdwan, or Brahmo-scholars like Keshab, and Shivanath, and talk to them on the most abstruse philosophical problems.

Yet he spoke for the common people in simple rustic language with the rhythm of the basic simplicity and goodness of life. Like Buddha and Christ he spoke in parables which form the 'rich store-house of pious wisdom'. They were 'homely', 'picturesquely worded', and they always had a 'very real and touching spiritual beauty'. Unlike the philosophers he did not try to cater to the tastes of pundits but spoke of eternal verities in the language of the masses. To millions all over the world they are gospels—spellings of God.

* * * *

In the Mediterranean sea, on the ship Vivekananda was intently watching and praising all day long the service of the Turkish Muslim sailors. Nivedita, deeply struck by her master's glorification of these sailors, asked him if this respect for the common man's life was a gift from his master Shri Ramakrishna. At once Vivekananda admitted that "it was Shri Ramakrishna who had the habit of seeing people from their strongest point."³² Even in the rejected and the fallen ones Ramakrishna could find something great, a spark of the essential divinity within. "This time our Lord has been born in the thatched cottage of the poor," said Akhandananda, a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda inherited the passion for the poor and the rejected ones from his master.

31. Claude Allan Stark, *God of All*, Claude STARK Inc. Mass, U.S.A. 1974, p. 186.

32. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I saw Him*, 1972, p. 228-229.

Vivekananda's disciples saw their master, "always rising to new heights of defence for the undefended, of chivalry for the weak." In Kashmir he was full of praise when an old Muslim lady pulled herself up with all dignity and said that by the grace of Allah she was a Muslim. In London he became deeply respectful to an erstwhile Bank Manager who was then working as a coachman in order to maintain his family. He was indeed 'a practical Vedantist with profound faith in himself,' said Vivekananda.³³

All this Vivekananda learnt from his master. He said,

"We have seen how Shri Ramakrishna would encourage even those whom we considered as worthless, and change the very course of their lives thereby! His very method of teaching was a unique phenomenon. He never destroyed a single man's special inclinations. He gave words of hope and encouragement even to the most degraded of persons and lifted them up."

Today humanism allows even the richest revolutionary to call himself a proletariat. Scientific humanism allows its adherents to create and experiment with nuclear bombs and bring multidimensional distortions in human life. Science with its 'reductionist arrogance', as Theodore Roszak calls it, has reduced man to experimental rats in laboratories. Humanism has resulted in, as Kenneth Walker said, the creation of that 'damp unenthusiastic creature' known as humanist. It is time for us to turn to Ramakrishna's humanism or the 'Ramakrishnite Vedantism' as Rolland calls it. Here we find the respect and the joy to see the existence of the same divine in all, even in the non-conformists, in non-believers, agnostics, the fallen and the neglected ones

* * * *

In the introduction to his commentary on the Gita, Acharya Shankara wrote that

³³. M. L. Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, (Advaita Ashrama), Vol. 3, p. 205.

Krishna taught the Vedic Religion to Arjuna, although he was overpowered by grief and delusion, "with the idea that the dharma would surely propagate if it is accepted and put into practice by people who are endowed with an abundance of good qualities." Arjuna, the *Savyasachi*, the all-rounder hero, was dearest to Krishna. "Among the Pandavas I am Dhananjaya", said Krishna. Ramakrishna had chosen the 'thousand petalled lotus' Narendra, the perfect combination of the highest dynamism of the West with the deepest spiritual profundity of the East, of Buddha's heart and Shankara's brain, as the carrier of his message and saving power. To his brother disciples Vivekananda wrote (1894), from the West, "I am the instrument, and He is the operator. Through this instrument He is rousing the religious instincts in thousands of hearts in this far-off country."

Vivekananda's Ramakrishna stands, above the horizon of any race or nation, like a colossal epoch-maker who came to rejuvenate the neglected masses all over the globe. In his Master's name he founded the Ramakrishna Mission "whose lot was cast for all time with the cause of woman and the people."³⁴

In 1894 from the West he exhorted his brother disciples to realise the Saviour-dimension of their Master, "It won't do merely to call Shri Ramakrishna an Incarnation, you must manifest power...He alone is a child of Shri Ramakrishna who is moved to pity for all creatures, and exerts himself for them even at the risk of incurring personal damnation, 'ITARE KRIPANA'—others are vulgar people."

"A huge spiritual tidal wave is coming—he who is low shall become noble, and he who is ignorant shall become the teacher of great scholars through His Grace."

To Dewan Haridas Beharidas Desai he repeated the same idea in 1894.

³⁴. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I saw Him* 1972, p. 280.

"So the old Hinduism can only be reformed through Hinduism, and not through the new-fangled reform movements. At the same time the reformers must be able to unite in themselves the culture of both the East and the West. Now do you think that you have already seen the nucleus of such a great movement, that you have heard the low rumblings of the coming tidal wave? That centre, that god-man to lead was born in India. He was the great Ramakrishna Paramahansa and round him this band is slowly gathering. They will do the work."

In 1897 the tidal wave was harnessed as the Ramakrishna Mission. In 1898 when he was preparing to establish the spiritual foundation of this Mission in the form of the Ramakrishna Math, his disciple Nivedita asked him if such missionary action would take away India's 'deep inner life ... her one great treasure.' At once flashed before Vivekananda's vision the complimentary existence of the dynamic and the spiritual aspects in his Master's life. He answered,

"Ramakrishna Paramahansa was alive to the depths of being, yet on the outer plane who was more active? This is the secret. Let your life be as deep as the ocean, but let it also be as wide as the sky."

"The history of the past has gone to develop the inner life of India and activity (i.e. the outer life) of the West. Hitherto these have been divergent. The time has now come for them to unite."³⁵

This was the ideal behind the establishment of the Ramakrishna Math. Vivekananda said,

"Such Maths we must establish all over the world. Some countries stand in need of spirituality only, whereas others are in need of a new worldly amenities. We must lead nations and individuals to the realm of spirituality through paths suited to them by fulfilling the respective wants that such nations and individuals may be most suffering from....The first and foremost necessity in India, is the propagation of education and religious ideas among the lower classes."

³⁵. *Complete Works*; p. 5: 227.

Vivekananda wanted the Math to develop into "a finished university, where the culture of philosophy and religion must proceed along with a fully equipped Technical Institute." He cautioned that the Math must not lapse into a mere *Babajider Thakurbadi* or a chapel where superficial ceremonies take the place of the spirit of the thing. "Such a chapel," said he, "may prove beneficial to a few or satisfy the passing curiosity of a handful but this Math will prove of inestimable value to the whole world."³⁶

Vivekananda did not destroy any of the old rituals like puja or Homa. Yet certainly he brought the new rituals of service to God in the ignorant, the diseased, and the exploited masses. "No, my watchword is construction. Out of the existing rituals, new ones will have to be evolved. There is infinite power of development in everything; that is my belief," he said.³⁷

* * * *

Nearly fifty years ago, a youth from an orthodox Brahmin family was going to enter monastic life in the Ramakrishna Math at Belur. Despite all persuasions when his relations failed to dissuade him from leaving the worldly life, they finally raised what they considered a crucial problem for an orthodox monk. "How can you eat at that Math," they argued, "where the non-brahmins, even Shudras eat in the same line with the Brahmins? Is it religion?" But it is this 'new religion' with its 'new God' Ramakrishna that attracted the young man, and is attracting hundreds like him even today.

Marxists sought to bring a classless society by forced economic equality which never came, and by deliberate destruction of higher

³⁶. Presidential Address of Srimat Swami Shivananda, at Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention, 1926, Belur Math, p. 7.

³⁷. *Complete Works*; p. 5: 217.

art, culture and religion, which even after being destroyed, are fast returning to socialist societies which are now experiencing an increasing hunger of the spirit. In Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition a classless society, the raising of the masses to brahminhood, has been accomplished, but not by a simple process of destruction. The entire movement is virtually a reconstruction of the highest intellectual, cultural and religious culture of the nation, in the new line shown by Shri Ramakrishna. In this order of Ramakrishna, caste-less society is created through the attainment of purity and spiritual progress, where Ramakrishna's life and message stand as the saving grace to all, an epoch-making power to lift the lowest to the highest peaks of knowledge and culture. 'The thought of reality of the surrounding world, is a substantial part of Ramakrishna's

message,' wrote recently the Russian Academician R.B. Rybakov.³⁸

Eminent Historian Arnold J. Toynbee wrote,

"In the history books written after fifty years or hundred years from now, I do not think Ramakrishna's name will be missing...I am particularly thinking of the community development work. This is helping the peasants in the hundreds of thousands of Indian villages to realise that they can do something by their own efforts, to make their life better. Making them better means making them better materially as a means to making them better spiritually and this brings us back to religion and to Shri Ramakrishna."³⁹

38. *Swami Vivekananda studies in Soviet Union*, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, p. 368.

39. *Vedanta and the West*, No: 141, Vedanta Society of Southern California, U.S.A. p. 10.

VIVEKANANDA AND CONTEMPORARY HUMANISM IN INDIA

SWAMI SOMESWARANANDA

India is a unique country in the sense that She has almost all the distinct characteristics of the modern world. The clashes between tradition and modernity, capitalism and socialism, hardcore nationalist and liberal internationalist which are common global trends today, are found in India. Though Indians stick to religion, they have opted for secularism. They are trying to blend democracy with socialism. While most of the Asian-African and Latin-American countries, after gaining freedom from imperialist clutches, have failed to highlight the democratic spirit, India is still the largest democracy in the world. While most of the countries, including the super-powers, went for either capitalistic or socialistic economic measures, India chose mixed economy, a trend which even USSR and USA are slowly

accepting along with many other developing countries now-a-days.

India is passing through a traditional phase where old values are losing ground while new values have not yet taken definite shape. This new trend is the harbinger of a change which shows that the people are trying to think independently. This happened in Europe during the Renaissance period, and in USSR and China in this century. The same is taking place in other developing countries too. The ominous aspects of this phase is that under these circumstances, conflict becomes intense, and regionalism and fundamentalism raise their ugly heads. The Indian experiment should be watched with special interest because She is trying to solve these problems through democratic means.

A new philosophy is the need of the hour: the philosophy of humanism. A question is often asked, "How to apply secularism in a multi-religious country?" Many including the communists say that religion should be divorced from politics. In the process we face two main problems. First, the need of a common civil code. Can we adopt a common code for all the people? How far is it possible in democracy, specially in India? Second, if any religion tramples the right of equality among man and woman, should the State keep mum?

From this maze we shall try to discover a way out in the light of Swami Vivekananda.

Humanism: religious and secular

The concept of humanism can be divided in two main groups—religious and secular. Religious humanism worked for the amelioration of the common people. The Buddhist monks, Christian missionaries and other religious men and women in various countries not only educated the common masses but also inspired them to build up a new social order. And so did secular leaders like Rousseau, Voltaire and Marx. Apparently these two views differ because they look at the world from different standpoints. Their philosophies are different. Religious humanism is chiefly God-oriented. (The Buddhist case is different, we agree. What we mean here is that most of the religions are God-centred). The basic principle of religious humanism is that, all the people are created by God or are children of God. Therefore, they are brothers. As we all are brothers, God is our father. We must be guided by His injunctions which are written in the scriptures.

On the other hand, secular humanism stresses free thinking. According to the secular humanists, we should frame only those laws which will help people in the practical or even political sense. We all

have to live in this world and so we should not come into conflicts, but try to find some common codes applicable to all.

Now, both these concepts have helped humanity as we have noted earlier. At the same time both secularism and religious sentiments gave rise to fanaticism and fundamentalism. How to solve this problem?

Vivekananda and synthesis:

Russia had Stalin, Kampuchea Pol. Pot. So we can not say that atheists are always better than theocratic rulers. Some middle-east countries have today highly fundamentalist leaders. As both the sides have produced equally good and bad men, we have to go deep. The question remains: How to retain good sides of both? How can we synthesise these two for a better India?

Swami Vivekananda, as a student of philosophy, studied Hegel who spoke about thesis, antithesis and synthesis. An idea comes first; then observing its loopholes another idea which is opposed to that is grown, and that is antithesis; lastly a synthesis is found out by blending the good sides of both. Besides, Swamiji had a guru like Shri Ramakrishna who synthesised various religious faiths.

Swamiji could realise, as an ardent student of history and from his practical experiences, the practicality of both religious and secular humanism. Both of these enriched human civilisation and both the views are essentially humane. In modern India both are exerting their influence in their own way. Religious fundamentalism is there, but at the same time we notice that religious people stand for peace and helping the poor and the oppressed, irrespective of their religious beliefs. Secular or atheist revolutionaries also fight for the common people. Many secular organisations championed the cause

of the liberation of the masses. Apparently they differ in their outlook, yet one feels one can initiate a dialogue between them.

Swamiji noticed the positive effect created by the Buddhist monks and French revolutionaries. As a follower of Shri Ramakrishna he could realise that truth can never be exclusive to a particular faith. This he clarifies in his lecture, 'Is Vedanta the future religion?' The significance of Shri Ramakrishna's saying *YATO MAT TATO PATH* (as many creeds, so many paths) is that no one can claim monopoly over Truth. Truth is being expressed in different forms through different peoples. Swamiji could realise the impact of this saying in the field of humanism. In India the old quarrel is going on between the religious and the atheistic groups. They should be made aware of the significance of Shri Ramakrishna's teaching. In democracy exchange of views is imperative. Democracy is needed in political as well as religious spheres. Without opposition even religious thought stagnates. In medieval India we find so many brilliant philosophies coming up only because of the debate between the Buddhist and the Vedic scholars. In Russia and China Marxism as a philosophy stagnated, while in the West European countries it flourished. We do not find a Gramsci, Althusser, Hobsbawm or a Poulantzas either in USSR or in China.

In Swamiji we find a down-to-earth approach because he could realise, by his direct contact with human suffering, the need of a multi-dimensional humanistic approach to solve our problems. As a humanist he could not ignore anything evolved or thought of by the mankind. He said that religion, science, and fine arts were expressions of the same Truth. It was a unique Vedantic interpretation in the sense that in science, arts, or religion men always tried to express their immense possibilities. Through these various means they were trying to transcend

their limitations of the senses—finite men trying to be infinite.

Difference between the two views:

We have earlier discussed that religious and secular humanism differ because of the difference in outlook. What are the main points of difference?

At the first place a secularist says that men and society are always changing. People's aspirations, norms of behaviour, relationships, views towards the world and himself—all are changing with the passage of time. Their field of observation is expanding always as there is constant growth in science, sociology, and the pattern of life. So we cannot stick to the norms evolved a thousand or two thousand years ago which are written in the old scriptures. New concepts are coming up. Values are changing. The problems we face today are quite different from those in the ancient days. We need new ideas, new values and rules to solve the problems of the modern world. On the contrary, religious people argue that if the rules and values are always in a flux, if everything is temporary, people will not be able to cope up with their changing forms. There will be ideological vacuum which will make men immoral and sick psychologically. Moreover, if we adopt different norms in different time-space, what will be the basis of our relationship?

The next point is that man is a social being, and so there must be some well-defined basis of human relationship. Religious people say that we all are children of God and our relationship is God-centred. But a secularist says that we all are social beings, and the society is the basis of our relationship. They want social aspirations and working norms, and not God, to be the basis of our relationship. Moreover, a secularist raises the objection that since there are different concepts of God in different

religions, there cannot be any unanimous view and similar practices among all the religions. Different religions prescribe different codes of conduct. So God or religion cannot be the basis of human relationship. To this argument a religious advocate says: society means state or nation or a group of people, and each of them has its own distinctive and different norms and concepts which are expressed in their national Constitutions. In USA the states have their own legal rules; but it does not create any problem. In India people speak different languages and have their own patterns of culture, yet it does not create any problem. Similarly, though religions differ in their views, there are some eternal values common to all religions on the basis of which problems can be solved.

These two chief arguments create a rift between the religions and the secular humanism. Swami Vivekananda was aware of these two ways of thinking, and he tried to find a solution. When he spoke about YUGA-DHARMA, it meant that the scriptural injunctions are of two classes. One class speaks of the eternal truths. The other prescribes the temporary sets of values applicable to a particular space-time. Shri Ramakrishna said that in the scriptures one finds both sugar and sand, but he should give up the sand and accept only the sugar. Though human nature has changed with the passage of time, yet there are some common abiding characteristics which are the common eternal truths of all religions.

Secondly, every religion has three parts, the philosophical, the mythological and the ritualistic. Swamiji described these aspects in details. The central teaching of a particular religion is narrated logically in its philosophical portion. For the common men these philosophical ideas are elucidated through simple stories, and this is the mythological part. We find great saints in every religion. Their religious practices

were adopted subsequently by a large segment of society, and this gave rise to the ritualistic aspect of that religion. So, in order to comprehend the central teaching of a particular religion, Swamiji said, one must separate the grain from the chaff. Moreover, he made a difference between spirituality and priestcraft. When a religion takes the organised form, churches, priests and scriptures ultimately become inevitable. If these allow freedom to the common people there is no problem. But when this freedom is denied, priestcraft prevails. Swamiji denounced priestcraft and highlighted spirituality i.e. the manifestation of one's innate divinity.

Let us come to the second argument. What should be the basis of human relationship. God or State? In fact, the problem is neither God nor State, it is ideology. Whether a State is theocratic like Pakistan or secular like the USSR, it is based upon some ideology i.e. State ideology. Problems arise when the rulers believe that their ideology is the best and the others are inferior. Then comes the need of suppression of others' opinions and expressions. We see that the same religion may not operate in the same way in all the countries. East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, is separated from Pakistan. There is enmity among the Arab States, though all of them are Muslim States. At the same time, there were clashes between Russia and China, Vietnam and Kampuchea, though these are all communist countries. According to Swami Vivekananda, people should be given freedom; laws are to be framed on some common values which are the fulcrum of human relationship, but the goal is freedom. He gave the motto: ATMTNOMOKSHARTHAM JAGADDHITAYA CHA (one should work) for one's own freedom and for the good of humanity.

The similarities:

Both religious and secular humanism

stress some common basic values. All the religions emphasise love, justice, honesty, truthfulness, sacrifice, brotherhood, etc. Scriptural injunctions and the constitution of a secular State are framed for the good of the people, and for this purpose they suggest these norms. Since both religious and secular humanism accept these common values, human relationships should be based on these. Religions should check up whether any particular scriptural injunction is in harmony with those values. Similarly, secular humanistic laws also should be judged from that angle. Equality of man and woman, justice and legitimate rights to each individual, should be accepted by religious and secular codes of life.

Is Religion necessary ?

One may ask, "If these common values are the criteria of humanism, why should one accept religion? Even an atheist can be moral!" Marxists say that man's consciousness is guided by the material condition. But the history of the USSR and China has proved otherwise. Social change does bring a perceptible change in the people's awareness, but that cannot eradicate the root problem. There are some basic evil propensities, viz. greed, jealousy, power-hunger, etc. which cannot be checked by mere material advancement of the society. Progress of civilisation also cannot surmount these burning issues. The rate of divorce in the USSR is the same as that of USA. Hungarians are the highest on the list in committing suicide. Permissiveness and infidelity have gripped both capitalist and Marxist countries. Alienation and psychic problems have become acute in both.

There must be some practical methods by which man can try to overcome these basic evil propensities. Only preaching morality will not help. The hurdle lies elsewhere.

They know what is right, what is just and noble, yet they are impelled by some unruly impulses and urges within, which force them to go in the wrong direction. How is one to tackle these? Here religion can play a great role. Spiritual practices are needed to solve this problem.

One needs concentration of mind in every vocation and action in life whether one is a student or a player or an officer. So one should practise this from the formative years. General ethics prescribe basic human values, viz. love, justice, etc., but it does not show how to cultivate these. Here, religious practices can bring light and solace to a great extent.

Religion in modern age:

Swamiji wrote in a letter, "Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries." He wanted to herald a change in religious approach. He tried to make religion more rational and to have a down-to-earth, practical approach. The essence of religion is eternal, but its application has to be changed in the modern world, in the context of changed circumstances. Freedom of thought, pluralism of views, and individual creativity must be accepted and respected by the religious leaders and the common people alike.

Swamiji said that freedom is the essential condition of growth. To make growth all-round one has to grow physically, mentally, as well as spiritually. Can one grow mentally or intellectually without free thinking? So all the religious communities should allow the people the right of free thinking. There is nothing wrong if anyone questions religious injunctions. Secondly, as this is the age of democracy it is useless to impose dictatorship in religious sphere.

According to Shri Ramakrishna, none can monopolise truth. Only a bigot claims

that his religion is the only true religion. He is, in fact, blocking the spirit of free enquiry. His views are narrow. In the name of religion he encourages slave's mentality. Let everyone have freedom, the right to move in his own way provided that does not injure others freedom. Pluralism in religion is a healthy sign. It ensures democracy in religious sphere. Thirdly, creative spirit must be encouraged in religion. Though all the great prophets, viz. Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, and Shankara were nonconformists (in the sense that they questioned religious views and practices of their time), it is surprising that most of the people are just asked or even forced to conform to some or other religious approach. Religion must be dynamic, it must be creative. Thus freedom of thought, pluralism, and creativity should be accepted by religious communities. When Shri Ramakrishna said YATO MAT TATO PATH, he actually highlighted these criteria.

If a religious community fails to accept these three, it gives rise to fundamentalism and create communal tension. It puts its followers in chains and thus becomes anti-religious in practice. It becomes a 'lifeless mockery'. Fundamentalists in religions sneer at secular humanism. Instead, a dialogue must be initiated between them and the leaders of secular humanism.

Meeting points:

How can they meet? Following the ideas of Swamiji we can draw some conclusions about the meeting ground. First, according to Vedanta man is all-powerful. The Upanishadic precepts like *AHAM BRAH-MASMI*, *TATTVAM ASI*—emphasise that man has infinite possibilities. Scope should be given to him to develop these possibilities. A secular and rational humanist can easily accept this Vedantic view. What is the central teaching of history? It is people

who make and remake history. What is the central teaching of science? Man, though a small creature apparently, can win over the external nature. Thus the central teachings of history and science are just an echo of the Vedantic truth: man is the creator of his destiny. Now the question is, 'How can other religions, too, accept this view?' Well, according to most of them man is the creation of God. If so, God's creation must be perfect because He, the most perfect one, cannot create anything imperfect. The imperfection that we see in human beings is therefore only apparent, and man is essentially perfect.

Second, human development was possible only because men raised many fundamental questions and tried to solve them. A humanist shows respect to this human endeavour. Respect for mankind and a spirit of questioning—these two are to be accepted. One should be aware of human contributions through the ages. If he does not accept these multidimensional expressions of the human spirit, he will become dogmatic. On the contrary, one should be aware of diverse expressions of human aspirations. Human dignity and freedom must be accepted. That is why Vivekananda said that if one is not allowed to grow to a lion, one will become a fox.

Third, man has two aspects—individual and social. He is basically a social being and so he must help the society. At the same he should be allowed individual freedom. Swamiji expressed this idea to Sister Nivedita. He said that in the West people are socially individualistic, but they are spiritually communistic. They have to follow the dictates of the church or the community. Vivekananda said that in the East men are free to develop spiritually. They are spiritually individualists. But in social life they are chained by rigid social laws and customs; they are socially communists. Vivekananda wanted an ideal society where

spiritual individualism of the East is combined with the social individualism of the West.

Fourth, human development should include all the three planes—physical, mental, and spiritual. Food, clothing, shelter and other basic needs are to be fulfilled. Education and culture help him to grow mentally. Spiritual practices are needed to make him rise above inner tensions, fears, temptations and failures.

Fifth, people should be made aware of the fact that reward and punishment cannot be the motive of work. The aim is creative development. They should be good people not because of the fear of police. Goodness must be spontaneous and effective. One should do things not because of reward or to avoid punishment, but because right, unselfish, altruistic, and moral actions lead to more of strength, joy, success and manifestation of one's innate possibilities. Swamiji's Karma Yoga explains this.

Some Basic problems:

Modern constitutions highlight fundamental rights while the scriptures speak about the fundamental duties of the people. Too much stress on the fundamental rights has given rise to new problems. The office-goers or workers do not work properly and every now and then go for strikes, and neglect their duties. It has taken epidemic proportions in the third world countries. On the contrary, the shudras in India and women in some fundamentalist countries were too busy with their duties and did not care for their rights, and so they were oppressed. A synthesis of fundamental rights and duties should be there if we want to build up a just society. Individually one has some rights, but socially one has some duties also. There must be a balance between right and duty. Inequality in this regard is sure to create tension and enmity.

Generation gap has become widespread now. The parents impose their ideas on their children, and the children rebel. Tradition has some positive points. Long-standing human experience does help. At the same time one should note that the sphere of knowledge is widening, and so one should accommodate new values. Traditional values and modernity must be blended. Both parents and children should accept others viewpoints and try to understand each other, and thus find a way out. Decision should not be forced but must be reached through mutual discussion. The parents must be aware of the social reality and new values. Children should try to understand the spirit of traditional values.

In the modern age the problem of alienation has become acute. Feeling of loneliness has spread like wild fire. Human relationship is at stake. Infidelity gains upper hand. Why is it so? Man tried to be individual, to live as he liked. But he forgot the fact that he was basically a social being. There must be some common norms of mutual relationship which should not be overlooked. Individual freedom should not ignore human relationship.

Indian culture:

The most important feature of Indian culture is the synthesis of different ideas. In ancient India the Aryans and the non-Aryans accepted each others views, and thus accommodated diverse ideas. After the Buddhist movement, there was a synthesis of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophies. When the Muslims came, Nanak-Kabir-Dadu-Chaitanya along with the Sufi Muslim saints worked again for this kind of synthesis. During the British period, the then great leaders like Raja Rammohan, Vidyasagar, and others tried for the same, in order to absorb the good qualities of the West retaining the Indian heritage.

In Vivekananda, this synthesis reached the best elements of the East. In him culmination. In his message science shook hands with philosophy. Religion was wedded to reason, and became a science of religion. In him the infinite spiritual possibilities of man combined with infinite humility, service, and sacrifice. In him the best elements of the West combined with

the best elements of the East. In him Advaitic mysticism was combined with down-to-earth action of practical Vedanta. Bhakti was combined with Jnana. The sacred was accepted along with secular, both serving to manifest the essential divinity of human life.

FROM THE STEPS TO THE ROOF : RAMAKRISHNA'S MYSTICAL LADDER

PROFESSOR M. SHIVARAMAKRISHNA

I

Explaining the nature and purpose of a Divine Incarnation, Ramakrishna used to say:

In order to bring people spiritual knowledge, an Incarnation of God lives in the world in the company of devotees cherishing an attitude of love for God. It is like going up and coming down the stairs after having once reached the roof. In order to reach the roof other people should follow the path of devotion, as long as they have not attained knowledge and become free of desire. The roof can be reached only when all Desires are done away with....¹

Identifying the steps and the roof as one in their essence he said:

You want to climb to the roof; then you must eliminate and leave behind all the steps one by one. The steps are by no means the roof. But after reaching the roof—you find that the steps are made of the same materials—brick, lime and brickdust—as the roof.²

In another analogy Ramakrishna compares the implications of the advent of an

Incarnation to a building with several storeys:

There is a vast difference between the jiva and Ishvara. Through worship and austerity, a jiva can at the most attain samadhi; but he cannot come down from that state. On the other hand an Incarnation of God can come down from samadhi. A jiva is like an officer of the king; he can go as far as the outer court of the seven-storey palace. But the king's son has access to all the seven floors; he can also go outside.³

Ramakrishna, like mystics in all traditions, uses the familiar, almost archetypal, image of the ladder with implicit ideas of steps and roof and ascent and descent. But *his* mystical ladder is unique in several ways. This is reflected both in his exposition, as in the above passages, and its counterpart, demonstration, as in his extraordinary life. This article is a contemplation of these implications.

II

The use of the analogue of the ladder as emblematic of the individual's ascent to the Divine is pervasive in recorded mystical literature. The inward odyssey has, almost

1. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Nikhilananda, tr., (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981), p. 272.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 767.

invariably, been explicated in terms of the ladder or scale. It sought to identify the different stages of the Way. As Edith B. Schnapper has put it:

The 'ladder of the god' has been set up wherever man has aspired to reach out beyond the plane of material existence and it has become the 'scale of perfection', as Walter Hilton has called it, or the 'ladder of divine descent' as a Christian mystic of the Orthodox tradition has named it who, himself was known as St. John Climacus, St. John of the Ladder.⁴

Several motifs surface from this symbol of the ladder. If the roof is reached, it means there is precedent awareness of *all* the intervening steps in those who have reached the roof. Moreover, by reaching the roof, the person concerned has also avoided the risk of getting stuck on any one of the steps, thereby wrongly identifying *a single step with the roof, a part for the whole*. But, then, each step can, in itself, be a definitive stop for some; for other—a few—it can function as a tentative point of rest and recuperation of further energy to go forward. In effect, each single step is comparable, in modern idiom, to a system, in the sense, "a group of related elements [religious in this case] organized" for the individual for a definite "purpose".⁵ Finally, the mystic who has reached the roof is different from the One who can constantly move, ascend and descend at will. This movement involving the threshold of relative consciousness is evidently to illumine those who got stuck with the *possibility* of moving forward or at least make them *aware* that there *are* other steps. In the words of Ms. Schnapper:

A scale or ladder is composed of steps or rungs and so is the Way for it is said to consist of certain stations or degrees which are interconnected, yet individually distinct and different from each other. They represent rallying points in which the previous phase finds its consummation but where, at the same time, lies imbedded the seed for further growth. Thus each step stands for a new level of development and a new Departure; one conditioning and, in a transmuted form, being contained in the other.⁶

If we decode the symbolic implications of this in terms of the basic consciousness underlying the mystical state, we can arrive at interesting "modes" through which the consciousness functions or "manifests" itself. The One who reached the roof and is able to move effortlessly on all the rungs is an Incarnation. In terms of consciousness his is an uninterrupted continuum in which each step or each level of consciousness usually identified with traditional forms has its place but not an exclusive one. In effect, the implicit "distinctions" either between form or the formless, the traditional or the 'modern' become "illusory". (It is also an implicit assumption in Hinduism that the Incarnation, who is eternally perfect and effortlessly moves on all the rungs, climbs the different steps *emblematically*.) Therefore, the different steps represent so many pathways or levels of consciousness. While valid individually, they manifest themselves still within the limits of "formal practices and religious perspectives" implicit in all the sacred traditions. Though ascending a single step itself is arduous, the ascent should be free from any sense of hardening or freezing. This results unmistakably in insulating the relevant path from recognizing that the Ultimate Consciousness transcends, though it subsumes, the parts or the paths. The Incarnation, in effect, experiences "all forms as one continuum of Consciousness".⁷

4. Edith B. Schnapper, *The Inward Odyssey* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965), p. 19.

5. Alan Bullock and Oliver Stallybrass, *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p. 621.

6. Schnapper *Op. Cit.*,

7. Alan Bullock and Oliver Stallybrass, *Op. Cit.*, p. 652.

In these terms, Ramakrishna affirmed the validity of the different rungs on the ladder, while he invariably sought to release the followers from the formal limitations of their individual rungs/paths. By his inclusive holistic experience, he gave his devotees freedom from their spiritual monochrome: what *is* for them *the* roof is, in fact, from the point of the roof only, *a* step. That a step can be limited while self-sufficient in itself at the same time—that a particular path is autonomous yet limited—is a paradox no *sadhaka*, however mature spiritually, can resolve. It is, obviously, the Incarnation who can resolve the paradox and release the implicit consciousness subject to name and form into a continuum bereft of all these formal and linguistic limitations.

III

Ramakrishna's significance, in these terms, consists in helping seekers transcend the implicit risk of getting stuck on one of the steps through an awareness of not only other levels but of mystical consciousness itself as, in its very nature, a continuum. In this sense Ramakrishna reflects, in the mystical domain, several parallel trends basic to the modern temper embodied, among other things, in the principle of indeterminacy ("it is impossible to measure the position and momentum of a particle simultaneously *with more than strictly limited precision*") the idea of *holism* ("wholes, or some wholes are more than the sums of their parts in the sense that the *wholes* in question have *characteristics that cannot be explained in terms of the properties and relations to one another of their constituents*."⁸) and synergy ("the additional benefit accruing to a number of systems should they coalesce to form a larger system."⁹)

Even a cursory glance at the idiom—"simultaneously", "more than strictly limited precision", "additional benefit", "coalesce", "wholes", "systems"—shows how Ramakrishna's experience validates what intellectuals in several, ostensibly secular, disciplines are formulating today. But there is a distinct uniqueness in Ramakrishna: he knew the risk of any system "turning out to be negative, because the totality is ill-conceived or ineffectively organized",¹⁰ or is not *confined* to secular systems alone. It is much more—and fatally?—pervasive in religion also.

This seems to be the reason why he used to elicit *initially* the *personal* stance of the seeker *before* he affirmed the *general* truths of holistic consciousness. The dominant individual preference (the *Ishta*) is identified but gently, almost imperceptibly, the seeker is given insight into other rungs. *The Gospel*, for instance, in the very beginning, exposes M., its recorder, to this basic question. In their very first encounter Ramakrishna, almost deliberately, exposes M., to the paradox—the coexistence of different steps—by asking him an innocuous, apparently rhetorical question: "Do you believe in God with or without form?"¹¹

The question, almost predictably, puzzles M., for, trained in syllogistics, to affirm paradoxes—or juxtapose them nonchalantly—is to be guilty of irreconcilable, indefensible irrationality, of total naivete. As the words in the original Bengali suggest: this is, for M., "viruddha avastha" a position of (uncomfortable?) contraries. Naturally, he begins to wonder: "Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black?"¹² When he finally expresses his preference for God without form, "the Formless", rather

8. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 620.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *The Gospel*, p. 80.

12. *Ibid.*

than "a Being with Form", the Master's response further baffles him:

There is no harm in looking at Him from this or that point of view. Yes, yes to think of Him as the formless Being is quite right. But take care you do not run away with the idea that that view alone is true and all others false. Meditating upon Him as a Being 'with form' is equally right. But you must hold to your particular point of view until you realise—until you see God, when everything becomes clear.¹³

This affirmation of the truth of contraries comes to M., as radical and unique: "Never has he come across so strange a thing in all his books and to these his learning is confined."¹⁴

The implications of this affirmation of contraries by Ramakrishna are generally interpreted in terms of what is rather glibly called "religious pluralism". But a more significant inference would seem to be that Ramakrishna was emphasizing the truth as much of his famous experiential aphorism—"as many faiths, so many paths"—as the fallacy of attributing limited thresholds/patterns to a consciousness beyond all patterns and thresholds. The usual practice of confining what is basically an infinite awareness within the contours of one's 'Ishta' is valid but is valid as, for instance, any "pattern of thinking" is valid, in science, within a limited threshold.

Therefore, when Ramakrishna affirms contraries he seems to do as a mode to release the aspirant from getting stuck on one of the steps. As Lex Hixon has put it:

Ramakrishna has often remarked that the most serious distortion of spiritual life is the one-sidedness which makes us cling exclusively to a particular view-point. His guiding point was the continuum of Consciousness in which all forms or view points take shape and dissolve like bubbles in a stream. *Ramakrishna's was a comprehensive*

*way of devotion to the Divine Forms revealed in all sacred traditions. But his was simultaneously a way of wisdom that never perceived Divine Forms or Attributes as separate from their source in Ultimate Consciousness.*¹⁵

Ramakrishna's manifest divinity finds its significance, in these terms, in "releasing" seekers from their initially necessary and valid but eventually constricting commitment to formal and linguistic configurations. To use his extraordinarily suggestive image, the different configurations are comparable to several "salt dolls": they are instinct with form and name (*rupa* and *nama*) only so long as they do not touch the shoreless ocean of Ultimate Consciousness. The resulting negation of all forms is described by Ramakrishna as a positive affirmation of only the undifferentiated consciousness:

First of all reach the indivisible Satchidananda, and then *coming down*, look at the universe. You will then find that everything is its manifestation. It is God alone who has become everything. ...¹⁶

IV

Ramakrishna noticed the interesting fact that the fallacy of mistaking *one step for the roof*, or assuming that there is no roof apart from that which was visible from their own steps was evident even in those who ought to know: his gurus. Even as Ramakrishna "learnt" from his gurus the idiosyncracies of their respective paths, he seems to have realized the potential of these paths to get congealed into "monotone values" or monochrome perception. The uniqueness, therefore, of Ramakrishna lies, in this regard, in a dramatic reversal of the respective roles of the guru and the shishya—a reversal explicable in terms, again, of the rung/roof analogy.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Lex Hixon, "The Tantric Way of the Goddess Kali: Ramakrishna of Bengal," *Coming Home* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978), p. 43. *emphasis added*.

16. *The Gospel*, p. 395.

The implicit reversal is, in fact, the release which Ramakrishna effected in the "limited thresholds" of perception he found in his teachers. And the most significant of these was concerned, paradoxically, with that staunch, uncompromising exponent of "non-dualism": Totapuri. It is paradoxical because the Advaitic is the highest state reflecting an all-embracing continuum of Consciousness. This is, as it were, the roof in its entirety and Totapuri claimed the highest level of experiencing "the One without a second".

But, as things turned out, Totapuri's Advaita contained within itself several paradoxes which he was unaware of or probably bypassed as irrelevant. That mystical consciousness is a continuum in the infinitude of which both the form and the formless can function eluded him. Ramakrishna knew this and hinted at it in his own inimitably gentle, symbolic way. The incident is reported thus:

Observing (Totapuri's) regular habit of meditation Sri Ramakrishna one day said to him, "you have attained the highest knowledge. Why then are you so particular about meditation?" Pointing to his water-pot, Totapuri answered calmly, "See, how it glitters! Will it not lose its lustre if I do not rub it daily? Unless one brightens it daily with meditation, it becomes unclean."¹⁷

There is an implicit strangeness and irony in this conversation. The apparent strangeness is in the relative *positions* of the two speakers: technically Ramakrishna, as a disciple, ought by implication to learn and not question. Moreover, as a staunch Advaitin Totapuri should have had from *his* roof a total panoramic view of the entire spiritual landscape. Above all, Totapuri was still within conceptual relativism of clean and unclean. The related confusion is clarified by Ramakrishna's subsequent remarks:

The Master, while acknowledging the truth of the remark, said in turn, "But if it is made of gold? Then it won't require daily rubbing and scrubbing." "Yes, that is true," the teacher admitted with a smile.¹⁸

These remarks, as always in Ramakrishna, are deceptively simple. First, notice the caution and balance reflected in the way he *accepted the truth of the view advanced by Totapuri*. The same comprehensive view (reflected in conceding the viability of the single step) is seen, again, in the two contrasted levels of consciousness: the one is contingent on continuous effort for its retention (imaged in the brass pot requiring constant cleansing); it is sporadic, though by being sporadic, it is not inauthentic. The other is a continuum, an abiding awareness, the undifferentiated, holistic ground of all consciousness (imaged in the most enduring and lustrous of metals, gold). As Ramakrishna put it in another context, it is awareness that

God himself has become everything—the universe and its living beings. You will realize it when you have Perfect Knowledge. God Himself has become the twenty-four cosmic principles: the mind, intellect, body, and so forth: Is there anyone but Himself to whom He can show partiality?¹⁹

"Perfect Knowledge" is, obviously, a simultaneous awareness of the "steps" and "the roof" without exclusiveness of any kind.

V

Once exclusiveness is negated, further implications emerge. First, Ramakrishna's roof/steps image can be extended into a metaphor capable of absorbing the two poles of the grotesque and the sublime. In effect, the view from the roof is an all-embracing one encompassing *not only different paths but also the apparently contrary visions*

17. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971), p. 164.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *The Gospel*, p. 818.

impelled by desire at one end and smothered by fear at the other. The desire for order, harmony, may be pleasant but the same desire is often smothered by the shock of the undesirable and fear of the unpleasant and the disorderly. In other words, unable to reconcile our arbitrary categorisation of things, objects and experience into the pleasant and the not so pleasant, we may be victims of pathological dichotomizing. Expressed in terms of "steps", we can say that in our preference for "soft" steps (explicable in terms of the primal impulses crystallized by Ramakrishna in the memorable imagistic twins of the erotic and the economic, *kamini* and *kanchana*), we may ignore the presence of the steps glued to pain, suffering, misery and eventually the most terrifying of all: death.

The implicit ideas in this regard are very illuminatingly analysed by Joseph Campbell in the contrasted visions of the mythic character Actaeon and Ramakrishna. Elaborating his seminal concept of the hero with a thousand faces, Campbell notes that the apprehension of the totality of human experience, encompassing creativity and destruction is not possible without the religious vision which in essence is, as it were, the unified eye of Shiva seeing, as through a lens, at both.

In this sense, Actaeon, when he beheld Diana bathing naked was only filled with the vision of the unilateral eye ("the single step") and as such unable to comprehend the mystery of the multiple facets of the archetypal woman. For, as Campbell puts it, "by deficient eyes she is reduced to inferior states; by the evil eye of ignorance she is spellbound to banality and ugliness. But she is redeemed by the eyes of understanding".²⁰ It is, therefore, entirely logical

that Actaeon should be killed by his own "fell and cruel hounds". In terms of religious transfigurations, this is getting stuck on the step/image of 'woman as the Enchantress' but the seeker has to push forward so that he gets a view of other aspects. As Campbell puts it, "in numerous religious traditions," there is "a consciously controlled pedagogical utilization of this archetypal image for the purpose of the purging, balancing, and initiation of the mind into the nature of the visible world."²¹

Coming to Ramakrishna we find this acute insight into the nature of the visible world. But this insight is not available at the dualistic level, i.e., by those who regard the several steps (our basic perceptions of the world) as dichotomous. In effect, Ramakrishna's insight into the phenomenal world through the Divine Mother—the "Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, the harmonization of all the pairs of opposites, combining wonderfully the terror of absolute destruction with an impersonal yet motherly reassurance"²²—made him sustain in himself "the full revelation of the sublimity of this goddess." He knew, also, that very few people are fitted for this "full revelation" which one gets only when one arrives at the roof after traversing the intervening steps. "For lesser men," in other words, "she reduces her effulgence and permits herself to appear in forms concordant with their undeveloped powers."²³

All this leads to the culmination, the very apex of Ramakrishna's affirmative dynamism embodied in the command he had from the Mother: "Remain in Bhavamukha", the threshold of consciousness. Bhavamukha is roof/step unity, the experience of an all-embracing totality in terms of which Ramakrishna could plunge into the ecstasy of

20. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 116.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

23. *Ibid.*,

transcendental experience and yet retain the holographic paradigm for our struggle intense involvement with 'the mud and mire' to achieve a controlling principle for the of relative existence. He could delight in reconciliation of the *apparent* "panorama of both with their implicit anomalies and futility and anarchy". eventual resolutions. "Bhavamukha" is thus

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

DR. S.K. CHAKRABORTY

(Continued from the previous issue)

Some days later another *gurubhai*, Swami Premananda, (Baburam Maharaj) could not wake up to the gong of the bell. Vivekananda later told him that if the seniors, who had formulated these rules, themselves failed to observe them, how could the rest be expected to comply? Premananda quite readily agreed. In a few moments he also suggested that this rule should henceforth include a provision that those who might fail to wake up on time would have to undergo some punishment. Vivekananda listened to this ideal very calmly. And then suddenly tears began to roll down his eyes, and he spoke, in sobs: 'How could you ever imagine, Baburam, that I could punish you.' Soon Baburam too began to weep. Presently, Swami Brahmananda came in and was startled to see the two *gurubhais* weeping silently. Having heard them both, he then announced; 'The punishment for this infraction would henceforth be that the guilty would arrange for his food that day by *madhukari* (i.e., by begging not more than a handful of grains from each householder).' Listening to this Premananda was very happy, and gladly bore the punishment!³²

With respect to the taming and annihilation of the ego of his own *guru-ship*, we hear from Swami Shuddhananda—an initiated disciple of Vivekananda—the following:

'I want each one of my children to be hundred times greater than I could ever be. Everyone of you *must* be a giant—must, that is my word.'³³

Vivekananda frequently criticised the Westerners for their greed for money and wealth. He later felt deep remorse for such criticisms because his *guru* never had spoken one derogatory word about any culture or society. He admitted that he was not yet fit to speak about his guru. Swami Vimalananda—another disciple of Vivekananda who heard such confession from Vivekananda communicates his own impression:

"These words were really startling to us for more than one reason. Here was a man who was being idolised, nay actually worshiped by so many, and this man in their very presence confessing his inability to represent his guru! 'What an unpretentious man is before us' said we to ourselves."³⁴

Yet another crucial dimension of Viveka-

32. C. S. Chattopadhyay, *Shri Shri Latu Maharajer Smritikatha*, (Bengali), (Calcutta, Udbodhan, 1976), p. 280-281.

33. Swami Abjajananda, *Swamijir Padaprante* (Bengali), (Belur Math, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapeeth, 1972), p. 14.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 109-110.

nanda's role-modelling has deep significance for the Indian manager: his wonderful and authentic reconciliation between *jnana* and *karma*. By this achievement he, at one stroke, had demonstrated the relevance of the trans-empirical summit of Indian thought to the gruelling demands of the work-situation at the empirical level. Let us listen to Rolland's estimate of this singular synthesis:

'His whole edifice bears this double impress: the basement is a nursery of apostles of truth and social service who mix in the life of the people and the movement of the times. But the summit is the *Ara Maxima*, the lantern of the dome, the spire of the Cathedral, the Ashrama of all Ashramas, the Advaita built on the Himalayas, where the two hemispheres, the West and the East, meet at the confluence of all mankind in absolute Unity.'³⁵

And, at a less philosophical and imagery-laden level, the same author had commented thus somewhat earlier in his book:

'Sanskrit, Oriental and Western philosophy, manual work and meditation alike were taught there (the Math). He himself set the example. After his lessons on metaphysics he tilled the garden, dug a well, and kneaded bread. He was a living hymn of work.'³⁶

All this could be crystallised for the manager administrator into the following: to gain insight and true perspective into knotty management problems, systematic de-cerebration, *pratyahara* and mind-stilling are essential. Without going *inside* no *insight* is possible. Regular practice of such a process can slowly enhance one's capacity for deeper understanding from a higher level as it were. Armed with this ability one can tackle problems with greater confidence and positive value-orientation.

We learn another important lesson in leadership from the way Vivekananda per-

formed it. Management literature talks about 'formal' and 'informal' leaders, and also about the 'acceptance' theory of leadership. Almost immediately following the formal registration of the Ramakrishna Mission, he had resigned from its Presidentship. In fact, the first President of the Order is always understood to be Swami Brahmananda. Still, Marie Burke writes thus:

'Yet, *leadership* was implicit in Swami's very being. Whatever his legal position in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission was to be during the last year or so of his life, he *remained the leader*; it could not have been otherwise.'³⁷

This symbolic act of relinquishing the Presidentship is significant in the light of the current espousal by many management pundits that leaders need to be motivated through hopes for more power, name, fame etc. But if selfless service has to be the true basis of leadership values, then obviously something needs to be done to correct the preceding mercenary orientation in the world of management and government. The sooner contemporary leaders realise that loyalty and obedience have to be commanded on the basis of unimpeachable integrity, rather than demanded on the basis of crafty short-term bargains of convenience, the better for the future of the country. This is exactly why, despite his frequent fits of anger, and the impatient bulldozing of his ideas and plans, none of Vivekananda's *gurubhais* could ever dream of whittling down their love and support for him. His style seems to have been an epitome of *vajradapi kathorani*, *mriduni kusumadapi*—more tough than the thunderbolt, yet more delicate than a flower. In managerial parlance, 'entrepreneurs'—always have an element of the capricious, unpredictable, yet trail-blazing genius in them. They create.

35. The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel, op. cit., p. 314.

36. Ibid., p. 145.

37. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda: His Second Visit To The West*, (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1973), p. 734.

But 'managers' maintain and impart steadiness to what an 'entrepreneur' creates. The 'entrepreneurmanager' is a good model to interpret the relationship between Vivekananda and his *gurubhais*. Through purity and instinctive goodness, and not two-minute skills, alone constitute the well-spring of such a style. And since Vivekananda was indeed purity incarnate, a Swami aptly refers to the former's own vision of the basic purpose of the Ramakrishna Mission: to emerge as a gigantic '*purity-drilling machine*'.³⁸ Swami Satprakashananda too has pointed out to Vivekananda's repeated and unerring diagnosis that the basic deficiency of the world is not economic, cultural or political, but the goodness of man, and has rightly argued that:

'The efficient working of an organisation, vast or small, does not depend primarily on its constitutional laws and agreements but on the sincerity, the self-sacrifice, and the enthusiasm of its individual members.'³⁹

The Indian psyche responds instantly to leaders who are selfless—this is the lesson from Vivekananda, the institution-builder (also demonstrated later by Gandhiji).

V. Conclusion: Towards Classical Love and Discipline

In sum, the hood of the mythological snake-god Vasuki which appears to uphold the world of the Ramakrishna Mission is made up of *love-blended-with-discipline*. The early decades of the Buddhist monastic organisation were also informed with these very supreme ingredients. As for love, Swami Saradananda speaks thus about their days spent at Cossipore during the last phase of the Master's physical existence:

³⁸. Swami Jitatmananda, *Swami Vivekananda: Prophet and pathfinder* (Madras, Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 169.

³⁹. Swami Satprakashananda, *Swami Vivekananda's Contribution To The Present Age*, (St. Louis, The Vedanta Society, 1978), p. 16.

'The pure, selfless love of the Master on the one hand, and the wonderful spirit of friendship of Narendra (Vivekananda) and his noble company on the other, united together *to bind them in such a sweet and tender, yet hard and unbreakable bond...*' (emphasis ours).⁴⁰

Can members and leaders of commercial enterprises and bureaucracies replicate such a milieu? Obviously not. Yet, any manager must be capable of verifying that even a fraction of such love evinced by him in his work-situation can almost always win a highly positive response from others. But sincere and quiet determination and not loud, tactical show, is all that is required. Yet, this is so very scarce. At the same time, the very fact that an economic enterprise breathes the air of *kanchana* (money), necessitates (and not deny as commonly held) deliberate cultivation of the spiritual ideal of detached involvement as a deodorant.

And regarding discipline, Vivekananda had on one occasion told Nivedita that what had impressed him most about the English was their remarkable ability to reconcile self-respect with obedience (which is nothing but discipline). Once again, management literature and teaching miss out on this basic prerequisite for institution-building. Vivekananda had cried hoarse about the biggest malady of Indians—jealousy.⁴¹ And it is apparent from his writings that he had realised that excessive jealousy and poor discipline went together. Hence he was never tired of warning the members of the Ramakrishna Mission about this great evil. Once when Nivedita had imputed jealousy to his own character, he had thundered back:

⁴⁰. Swami Saradananda, *Shri Ramakrishna: The Great Master* (Trans. by Swami Jagadananda), (Madras, Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1984), Vol. II, p. 1018.

⁴¹. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Mayavati Memorial Edition), Vol. VI, p. 252, 256, 278, 286, 306, Vol. VIII, p. 298, 300.

'Your letter indicates that I am jealous of your new friends. You must know once for all I am born without jealousy, without avarice, without desire to rule—whatever other vices I am born with.'⁴²

Nowadays some reputed Indians (e.g., Mulk Raj Anand) use the columns of important national newspapers in English to exhort us to work towards and create 'new values' for a 'new' India. Heritage has no answers.⁴³ Unfortunately, they do not formulate clearly what these 'new values' ought to be. Nor do they seem to understand the essence of Indian heritage and so urge for 'new experiments' for creating 'new values'. But the real job is to carry new experiments—only to re-learn the old values and truths. The Ramakrishna Mission itself is a model experiment of this type. How correctly does A.N. Marlow, while writing on 'Vivekananda in Europe,' express the fundamental principle for institution, nay, nation-building in a vein contrary to that of Anand.

'...what mankind needs for its help and salvation is not novelty but truth.'⁴⁴

The Indian intelligentsia (in journalism and academia especially) seems to be mesmerised by the novelty-parading modern civilisation, and often it seems not to know the import of what it is writing or thinking on India's present predicaments. Thus,

42. Swami Vivekananda: *His Second Visit To The West*, op. cit., p. 713.

43. For example Anand, Mulk Raj. 'Inherit or Create?', *The Statesman*, (Calcutta, June 29, 1988).

44. A.N. Marlow, 'Vivekananda in Europe' in *Swami Vivekananda in East and West*, eds. Swami Ghananda and Geoffrey Parrinder (London, The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 1968), p. 109.

Anand, in the same piece mentioned above, argues for escaping the clutches of 'Karmic fatalism.' Yet, Arnold Toynbee, the great historian, interprets *karma* or actions as constituting an 'ethical banking-account' for man, *karma* as the determinant of ethical levels, and *karma* again—not scientific or technological progress—as the producer of happiness or misery.⁴⁵ All this deeper import of the *karma* theory eludes Anand. Basic truths are not at all easy to cultivate and sustain. Compassion, love, discipline, self-sacrifice etc., are deceptively simple truths. Yet they require a life-time of vigilant labour, *sadhana*, to live by in each generation.

None expects that economic enterprises or bureaucratic establishments should ever turn sacral in the full sense. Yet, if they have to work well for and by the Indians, the Ramakrishna Mission is an institutional model worthy of serious and urgent atten-

nantly belong to the sacral end of the spectrum. For, into this institution, its leader had breathed in a vitality unique in its wonderful and creative synthesis of the *believing* mind and the critical mind; the assimilating, trusting mind and the excluding, rejecting mind; the Eastern mind and the Western mind, the spiritual mind and the secular mind, the loving mind and the disciplined mind.

(Concluded)

45. A. and Ikeda D. Toynbee, *Choose Life*, (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 317-319, 325.

46. C. R. Pangborn, 'India's Need and the Ramakrishna Movement' in *A Bridge to Eternity* (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1986), p. 523-524.

INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND HARMONY

K. HUSSAIN

Introduction:

At the outset, I consider it my duty to convey my compliments to the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math, Bombay, for organising on the auspicious occasion of the celebrations of the 125th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, a symposium on the Inter-Religious understanding for highlighting the harmony of different religions and the contributions made by each of them towards the upliftment of society. Indeed, the central theme of every religion's basic teachings is to lay maximum emphasis on the concept of love and service to humanity, as the best means for serving God, and for achieving inter-religious understanding and harmony, through the upliftment of society. I think the symposium, by virtue of its theme, not only conforms with the noble teachings of Swami Vivekananda, and his Mentor Shri Ramakrishna, but also with the age-old Vedic wisdom of ancient India.

"Let noble thoughts come to us from every side"—(*Ano bhadrah kratavo yantu Vishwatah*) so proclaims the Rigveda, highlighting the basic catholicity of the great Vedic philosophy of India. I do not claim to be any authority on Islam or any other religion and I consider myself to be just a humble student of comparative Religion, a student in quest of the eternal truth. I do consider it a privilege to participate in this symposium, and be associated with distinguished representatives of other sister Religions, and know about their noble thoughts on the theme. The views presented by me in this paper may be described as those of an individual trying to grapple with some of the challenges of our modern age, in order to find the relevance and meaning of Religion and the need of Inter-religious understanding and harmony.

Relevance of Religion:

Some of these challenges, as stated, question the very basic relevances of God and Religion in our modern society, which appears to be chronically suffering from mutual fratricidal wars and bloodshed, racial and commercial hatreds and conflicts—all supposed to be in the holy names of God and Religion. Religion has been often described by its critics as the opium of the credulous peoples. Jonathan Swift had lamented that "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to love one another."

Many young people brought up in the modern environment of atheism and materialism, often pose questions to their elders, whether there is any need at all to be religious in the above mentioned context. 'Religion or no religion'—that seems to be the dilemma facing most of the people today. A typical prayer of the Cynic appears to be, "O God (if there is a God) save my soul, (if there is a soul)". Fortunately, the lives and teachings of Swami Vivekananda and his guru Shri Ramakrishna, provide us with a beacon light of hope for dispelling most of the lingering doubts and misgivings of the sceptics about God and Religion in our present age.

Swami Vivekananda, as Narendra in his early youth, like many doubting Thomases of to-day, was himself neither a devotee of God nor follower of any orthodox religious belief or cult. Doubts about the relevances of God and religion, assailing the minds of many of our present day younger generation, had also one day assailed the mind of young Narendra, until he met his Mentor Shri Ramakrishna. "Have you seen God?" Narendra asked his guru Shri Ramakrishna.

“Yes” replied Shri Ramakrishna, and added to the utter astonishment of the young Narendra—“I have seen Him, as I am seeing you. In fact, I have seen Him much more intensely.”

The Master further explained to the disciple—“In a potter’s shop, there are vessels of different shapes and forms, pots, jars, dishes, plates—but all are made of one clay. So God is ONE, but is worshipped in different ages and countries under different names and aspects.”

When the question was asked, “If all religions are basically the same, what made them so different?”, the Master answered—“The difference is in the communication and one’s perception”. Asked, why religions are found to degenerate, Shri Ramakrishna replied, “The rain water is pure, but becomes soiled according to the medium it passes through. If the roof and the pipe are dirty, the discharge is dirty.”

Swami Vivekananda was convinced that one can reach God only through service to humanity, rather than by practising empty rituals. To Swamiji, God was not just an abstract philosophical Being or Entity, to be looked upon and worshipped with a reverential awe, nor was religion a bundle of dogmas and rituals. To him, Religion was an instrument for rendering service to humanity, and to be used as a path for reaching God, who is the Ultimate Reality.

Unity in Diversity:

It is a well known scientific fact that when a white beam of light passes through a prism it is split into its seven constituents of the spectrum known as VIBGYOR, viz; Violet, Indigo, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange, and Red. It is noteworthy that though each of the seven coloured constituents of light has a distinct identity and beauty of its own, and each is different from the other, yet

they all basically belong to the same single white beam of light. In other words, this is a classic example of “One for All” and “All for One”. Likewise, the Ultimate Reality and the ONE Supreme God has different paths or religions to approach Him.

The Upanishads, which represent the highest Vedantic philosophy, visualise the human race as based on the solidarity of all life. There is also the idea of “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*”, of the world as a single family of God. According to the Holy Koran “the entire humanity, constitutes one community and one family of God.” The almost identical similarities in the two views, only confirm that the divine Truth is but One, and that there is unity in diversity.

Again, the definitions of the divine attributes of the Supreme Being, as conveyed by the Vedantic concepts, and the Koran, bear striking similarities. According to the Hindu concept, the Supreme Being is described as “*Satyam, Sivam and Sundaram*” That is—

- (i) God is Satyam i.e. Truth,
- (ii) God is Sivam i.e. auspiciousness or goodness.
- (iii) God is Sundaram i.e. Beauty.

This is indeed, a most beautiful and a super-intellectual description for comprehending the divine attributes of the ONE, Who by all human accounts is incomprehensible. In the Holy Koran, the same attributes of God are described as—

- (i) God is “Huq” i.e. Truth.
- (ii) God is “Hai and Quayyum” i.e. The Alive and The Eternal.
- (iii) God is “Jameel” i.e.—The embodiment of Beauty.

Contribution of Islam:

Islam aims at the creation of an egalitarian society, where every individual has an

equality of opportunities for leading a life of dignity and honour. The Holy Koran, while affirming the sovereignty of God as one wherein "Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth belongs to Him" asserts that "All Creations constitute one community, and form one family of God." The Islamic teachings of serving God through serving humanity, greatly impressed Swami Vivekananda who declared that we want to-day an Islamic body and a Hindu mind. Some friends trying to understand the precise philosophical implications of the pertinent statement of Swamiji, have asked me, "Why not an Islamic mind, and a Hindu Body?" For the information of these friends, I would like to narrate an anecdote.

A philosopher was asked to define 'Mind' and 'Matter'. To the query, 'What is Mind?', the philosopher replied, "It does not matter." To the query, 'What is matter?' his philosophical reply was, "Never mind."

This may sound to be rather a philosophical and a humorous conundrum, but there appears to be some truth in this enigmatic statement.

I may like to add here that in the light of the famous Einstein's Theory of Relativity, Mass or Matter, could be scientifically stated as inter changeable. Notwithstanding these corollaries, the meaning of Swamiji's statement will become more clear, if the basic philosophy of Vedanta and Islam is considered in conjunction with the concept of Yoga.

It is noteworthy that the Islamic prayers (namaz) in their various postures, incorporate postures or asanas of "Hatha Yoga" which is a preparatory form of Yoga. Yoga itself in Sanskrit means 'Union' connoting the union of mind with God, leading to the ultimate union of 'Atman' or soul with the 'Paramatman' or the Supreme Being. This

philosophy forms the common spiritual foundation of Sufism and Advaitism.

It may be relevant to mention here that Prophet Muhammad had exhorted the believers "to endeavour to see God, while they prayed." And if this was not possible, the devotees were asked "to think that God is seeing them, while they are praying." It is noteworthy that Shri Ramakrishna's experience of seeing God, as narrated to Swami Vivekananda, seems to tally with, and in fact, echo, the basic Islamic concept of prayer.

It is universally acknowledged that Islam made a great contribution to the growth and spread of the Bhakti Cult and movement in India, which produced such eminent saints and mystics like Dadu, Kabir, Guru Nanak and Meera. In this regard, Sufism, which reveals the mystic face of Islam, played a historic role. The eminent Islamic thinker, Al Ghazali, considered the mystic "as the salt which preserves the human society from decay." Great Sufi mystics in India, like Saint Nizamuddin of Delhi, Saint Farid of Shakarganj, Saint Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, and others, through their monasteries, spread the message of love and universal brotherhood among all people, throughout the length and breadth of India, regardless of caste, creed, and community. Sufism, like the Bhakti cult, laid emphasis upon "Loving God," rather than "Fearing God," as taught and practised in the conventional religious sense. Sufism also highlighted the philosophy of "Unity in all creations" i.e. "Wahadat-ul-Wajud," which tallied almost in totality with the basic philosophy of Advaitism.

I would like to conclude my today's talk with a recital of a solemn prayer from the Holy Koran affirming faith in the Uniqueness of God and Universal brotherhood of men:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful,

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds (Creations)

The Beneficent, the Merciful,
owner of the Day of Judgement,

Thee (alone) we worship. Thee (alone) we ask for help ;

Show us the straight path,

The path of those, whom Thou has favoured

Not (the path) of those, who earn Thine anger.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE ONE-WORLD IDEA

DR. NIROD BARAN CHAKRABORTY

Due to the development of science and technology, different parts of the world appear to be very close to each other and the inhabitants of the different parts are standing almost face to face. Physical distance has been removed. We have been bound by different international agreements. Business and Commerce have spread beyond the boundaries of a country. We have taken up different cultural exchange programmes. Under these circumstances we have developed the idea of the One-world.

But strangely enough, though we are physically very close to each other, mentally we are yet far off from one another. That is why, small and big disputes leading to regional battles of different magnitudes, have been almost the order of the day. Even the possibility of a third world war cannot be ruled out. If such a possibility is actualised, total destruction is inevitable and none will be able to win such a war.

In this context people all over the world are crying for peace. But how to get it? Here the message of Shri Ramakrishna appears to be very pertinent. Shri Ramakrishna was not an academic thinker. He was a saint and a man of realisation. We have to construct his view about one world from his preachings.

Shri Ramakrishna conceived of the brotherhood of all human beings under the Motherhood of God. Thus to him the whole world is one home—*yatra vishvam bhavatyeka nidam* (where all men and women live together). This agrees well with our traditional conception of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' (all are relatives), of course the Christians also conceived of the brotherhood of human beings under the Fatherhood of God. The difference is that to Shri Ramakrishna God is the Divine Mother, whereas to the Christians God is the Heavenly Father.

The conception of God as Father is not unknown in Indian tradition. The Vedic seer prays to God—'You are our father' (*nohso pita*). He also calls human beings 'children of immortality' (*amritasya putrah*). The Buddhist conception of *Vishva maitri* or Universal friendship is a different idea, no doubt, but it is indeed a very noble idea. The peculiarity of this concept is that friendship of human beings here is not based on God either as Father or as Mother, because in early Buddhism perfect silence is maintained about the existence of God.

Shri Ramakrishna later on goes further than the ideal of universal brotherhood. He ultimately preaches essential oneness of all

human beings. This is an Advaita approach. Advaitins find Brahman everywhere and to them all human beings are essentially Brahman. The Upanishadic text *Tattvamasi* (That thou art) testifies to this insight. Shri Ramakrishna tells us that every man is essentially divine, and in this fundamental divinity different men and women exhibit their oneness. But he admits human differences in colour, language, dress, taste, temperament and the similar non-essentials. What he means is that there is unity in diversity. The unity or identity of human beings lies in their essential divinity and the diversity or difference is apparent in their externalities like colour, caste, creed and country. Thus Shri Ramakrishna comes to conceive of one world inhabited by human beings who are essentially one. This is an insight based on his own realisation. We think that this alone can save the world from the impending catastrophe. As a normal man cannot hit himself, so also a man should not hit another man as in that case he will be hitting himself. The ultimate insight is that my self and your self are non-different (*mamantaratma tava cha ye chanya dehisamjnitah*).

Shri Ramakrishna compares human beings to pillows and he tells us that pillows may be of different size and colour but the same cotton is inside all of them. In the same way human beings may have external differences but internally they exhibit unity or identity. One day a boat man slapped a boy in a boat on the Ganga near the Dakshineswar temple, Shri Ramakrishna screamed in pain and the devotees found the marks of slashing on the body. This is what is known as realisation of oneness of human beings.

Here a question arises—Can all human beings rise to the height of the realisation of Shri Ramakrishna? Shri Ramakrishna is an ideal incarnate. Ordinary human beings at least can try to approximate that

ideal. Even in that case the idea of one world will take a concrete shape. We can gradually realise our divinity within in the form of longing for truth, devotion to duty, honesty, love, sincerity and purity or in other words we can try to realise certain ethical and spiritual values. Such an honest and sincere attempt alone can put an end to war psychosis. The instinct for combat is an animal instinct. If we can manifest our potential divinity by inculcating ethical and spiritual values we shall be able to rise above our animal existence. Then and then alone a world free from war will emerge, and surely that will be a better place to live in. In this context other two ideas of the one-world may well be discussed. One is of Hitler and the other is of Karl Marx. Hitler conceived of one-world under his feet. He considered Germans with 'blue blood' superior to others and had a dream of one-world under their military supremacy. This is an idea of one-world based on brute force. Human beings with divine heritage can never accept this idea. Hitler's dream, of course, was shattered. Any future emergence of fascism specially when dangerous nuclear weapons have been discovered, will fail to establish one-world. It is sure to bring its own destruction.

In the Communist Manifesto the workers of the world have been asked to unite and rise in revolt against the capitalists in order to establish one socialist world free from poverty, hunger, illiteracy and exploitation. But such an international revolt cannot succeed in recent times as even the capitalist countries have come to possess nuclear and other sophisticated weapons. This will definitely lead to a third world war which will end in total annihilation of human existence.

So for a peaceful one-world, Shri Ramakrishna's insight alone can be our guide. We shall have to rely on our essential unity in divinity or spirituality. But human

differences cannot be neglected. Differences of opinions or ideologies are sure to exist as divergence of colour, taste and temperament cannot be obliterated. We shall have to co-exist peacefully with all our differences. Our disputes are to be settled through negotiation and adjustment with broad outlook and good intention. We should not forget that Truth is One, but there may be different ways to attain It. Goodness is also one but there may be different approaches to It. The contention that my approach and my path is the best one is as unjustified as the claim that my religion is the best one. With the difference of taste and temperament it is but natural that different people will follow different ideologies as they practise different religions. Alternatives are to be allowed. Differences are not to be obliterated by force. We shall have to follow Shri Ramakrishna's idea of harmony and symphony.

In harmony or symphony the different musical instruments are played in such a

way as to create the impression of a single tune. Similarly human lives different in various ways are to be spiritually tuned to One Reality behind all. Then alone human harmony will be realised and one world which has been feasible on the physical plane due to scientific and technological advance, will really be an ideal world inhabited by good men with good intentions and aspirations. This is the only 'alternative to destroying ourselves.'

Let us pray in our Indian way—

Ya eko varno bahudha shaktiyogat

Varnan anekan nihitartho dadhati ;

Vichaiti Chante vishvamadau sa devah,

sa no buddhya shubhaya samyunaktu.

'He who is One, who is above all colour distinctions, who dispenses the inherent needs of men of all colours, who comprehends all things from their beginning to the end, let him unite us to one another with wisdom, which is the wisdom of goodness.'

They Lived with God

SURENDRA NATH MITTRA

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

There is a saying, "Sin and mercury cannot be digested." They come to light either today or tomorrow. When a person does something wrong his conscience begins to bite him and a mist of shame covers his face. At that time it is extremely difficult to stop the momentum of his bad tendencies. He loses discrimination, self-esteem, and even his family members do not trust him. He slowly becomes isolated from others and

leads a lonely life, himself a victim of his own evil actions. When compunction is aroused, he broods, laments, and cries in solitude. Some people then, out of desperation, try to take their lives. Others go to a holy person and surrender themselves to him. Surendra Nath Mittra tried both.

Surendra seemed to be a typical young man of his day—open-minded, carefree, and

indifferent to religion. He was handsome and well built. As a commercial agent of the Dost Company, a large British firm in Calcutta, he had a well-paying job. He was married but had no children. Most of his friends were of the bohemian type, and like them, he often got drunk and was sexually promiscuous. At the same time, however, he was frank, out-spoken, large-hearted, and extremely generous. Surendra was born probably in 1850 and met Shri Ramakrishna when he was thirty.

Although Surendra was quite affluent, his licentious conduct was ruining his mental peace. He even thought of killing himself with poison. One day during this period, a Bhairavi (a Tantric nun) of imposing appearance accosted him in passing, saying, "My son, God alone is true and everything else is false." These words touched Surendra's heart and gave him strength to rouse himself from his hell of mental agony.

Ram Chandra Datta was a neighbour of Surendra's and he knew about his mental anguish. Ram had been visiting the Master at Dakshineswar for some time, and, wanting to help Surendra, he asked him many times to accompany him. But Surendra always refused. He said: "Look, it is very good that you respect him, but why should you take me there? I shall be a misfit there—like a crane among swans.¹ I have seen enough of that." Ram was hurt by this sarcastic remark about his guru, but he did not give up. After much persuasion Surendra finally said: "All right, I shall go. But if that holy man of yours is a fake, I shall twist his ears." Such was the attitude with which Surendra approached Shri Ramakrishna.

It was probably in the middle of 1880 when Surendra first went to Dakshineswar

with Ram and Manomohan. That day the Master's room was full of devotees. Surendra was determined to preserve his critical attitude, so he sat down without showing any sign of respect to Shri Ramakrishna. The Master was saying: "Why does a man behave like a young monkey and not like a kitten? The monkey has to cling to its mother by its own efforts as she moves around. But the kitten just goes on mewling until its mother comes and picks it up by the scruff of its neck. The young monkey sometimes loses its hold on its mother; then it falls and is badly hurt. But the kitten is in no such danger, because the mother herself carries it from place to place. That's the difference between trying to do things for yourself and giving yourself up to the will of God."

The Master's words made a deep impression on Surendra, and this meeting became a turning point in his life. "I behave like the young monkey," he thought, "and that's the cause of all my troubles. From now on I'll be satisfied with any condition the Divine Mother puts me in." He then felt great relief and inner strength. When he was about to leave, the Master said to him, "Be sure to come again." Surendra had by this time been humbled, and he willingly bowed down to the Master. On the way home he said to his companions: "Ah, how he turned the tables on me! It was *he* who twisted *my* ears! How could I have dreamed that there could be such a man? He read my innermost thoughts. Now at last I feel that my life has some meaning."

From the very first meeting with Shri Ramakrishna, Surendra became extremely devoted to him and went to Dakshineswar almost every Sunday. His friends were amazed to see the change in him and his yearning for God. But this did not mean that Surendra immediately gave up his old bad habits. He would still visit houses of ill-fame from time to time, and then he

1. Surendra was making a pun on the word *hamsa*, which means either a swan or the soul. The word *parama-hamsa*, means a sannyasin of a high order, or, sarcastically, a great swan.

would be so ashamed of himself that he would stay away from the Master, pretending to be busy at work. When someone reported to the Master what Surendra had really been doing, Shri Ramakrishna did not seem to be at all worried or shocked. "Oh yes," he said, "Surendra still has some desires. Let him enjoy them for a while longer. He will become pure soon enough." Surendra heard from a friend what the Master had said about him, and he was bold enough to return to Dakshineswar the following Sunday. Since he was a little hesitant to sit in front of the Master, he took his seat in a corner of the room. Shri Ramakrishna affectionately called him: "Why don't you come and sit near me? Why do you sit aloof, like a thief?" Surendra obeyed. Then, in an ecstatic mood, the Master said: "Well, when a man goes to a bad place, why doesn't he take the Divine Mother with him? She would protect him from many evil actions." Surendra was probably the only one there who understood for whom the Master had made that remark. His conscience was stinging him like hornets. The Master continued: "A little manliness is necessary for everyone." At this Surendra thought to himself: "But that is my disease. Lord, save me from it." The Master suddenly turned to him and said: "I do not mean that struggle for pleasure which only debases a man, and which lower animals have. I mean the manliness of a great hero like Arjuna—to be able to stick to an ideal to the last breath of one's life!" Surendra was afraid that the Master might expose his faults before the group of devotees, but Shri Ramakrishna stopped there and said nothing

further. This advice greatly helped Surendra to fight against his passions.

Surendra was very devoted to the Divine Mother Kali. He set up a shrine to Her in his home and worshipped Her with much love. One day the Master said to Surendra: "The devotee of the Divine Mother attains dharma [righteousness] and moksha [liberation]. He enjoys artha [wealth] and kama [fulfilment of desire] as well. Once I saw you in a vision as the child of the Divine Mother. You have both—yoga and bhoga [enjoyment]; otherwise your countenance would look dry."

Although Surendra had now diverted his energies to spiritual practices, he could not stop his drinking habit. Ram Chandra did not like the idea that one of Shri Ramakrishna's prominent devotees was a drunkard. He thought the Master's reputation would be tarnished if this became known. But whenever he tried to talk to Surendra about it he was rebuffed. Surendra was a worshipper of Shakti, so to him it was not a sin to drink liquor. One day he said to Ram: "Why are you so bothered about it? The Master would certainly warn me if he thought that it was bad for me. He knows all about it." "Very well," said Ram, "then let's go and visit him today. He will surely tell you to give it up." Surendra agreed to this, but he asked Ram not to bring up the subject. He said, "If the Master refers to it of his own accord and tells me to stop, then I promise I will stop."

(To be continued)

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

MEDITATION

Meditation and contemplation should be kept up always.

Throwing away all work, you must meditate upon God in the evening. The thought of God naturally comes to the mind at dusk. Everything was visible a while ago, but ah! now it is all shrouded in darkness. Who has done this? Such thoughts come to the mind. Haven't you marked how the Mohammedans give up all work and sit down to pray in the evening?

As it is very difficult to gather the mustard seeds that escape out of a torn package and get scattered in all directions, so it is not a very easy affair to ingather and concentrate the mind which runs after worldly things in diverse directions.

Meditate on God either in an obscure corner, or in the solitude of forests, or within the silent sanctuary of your own heart.

In the beginning a man should try to concentrate his mind always in a lonely place; otherwise many things may distract him. If we put milk and water together, they are sure to get mixed; but if the milk is changed into butter by churning, the transformed milk (i.e., butter), instead of mixing with water, will float upon it. So when a man has gained the power of mental

concentration by constant practice, his mind will always rise above his environment and rest in God, wherever, he might stay.

Before beginning your meditation, think of this (me) for some time. Do you know why I say so? Because, on account of your faith in this (me), your thoughts, if directed towards this (me), will at once turn Godward. It is just as a herd of cows reminds one of a cowboy; or the son, or the father; or the lawyer, of the law-court. The mind that remains scattered over a thousand and one objects will be collected together when you will think of this (me); and if the mind, thus concentrated, is then directed towards God, meditation in its true sense will be possible.

Well, my boys, in those days, before meditating upon God, I would imagine that I was thoroughly washing the mind of all the various impurities (evil thoughts, desires, etc.) that were there, and then installing the Deity therein. Do like this.

During meditation you should imagine that you are tying your mind to the lotus feet of the Deity with a silk thread, so that it may not wander away from there. But why must the thread be silken? Since His lotus feet are too delicate, any other band will give Him pain.

Shri Ramakrishna



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

Vol. IV No. 32

MARCH 1899

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF PAVHARI BABA

In India, for everything we want a Guru. Books, we Hindus are persuaded, are only outlines. The living secrets, must be handed down from Guru to disciple, in every art, in every science, much more so in religion.

From time immemorial earnest souls in India have always retired to secluded spots to carry on uninterrupted their study of the mysteries of the inner life, and even today there is scarcely a forest, a hill, or a sacred spot which rumour does not consecrate as the abode of a great sage.

Then again the saying is well-known—
“The water is pure that flows,
The monk is pure that goes.”

As a rule, those who take to the celibate religious life in India spend a good deal of it in journeying through various countries of the Indian continent, visiting different shrines,—thus keeping themselves from rust as it were, and at the same time bringing religion to the door of everyone. A visit to the four great places, situated in the four corners of India, is considered almost necessary to all who renounce the world.

All these considerations may have had weight with our young Brahmacharin, but we are sure that the chief among them was the thirst for knowledge. Of his travels we know but little, except that, from his knowledge of Dravidian languages, in which a good deal of the literature of his sect is written, and his thorough acquaintance with the old Bengali of the Vaishnavas of Sri Chaitanya's order, we infer that his stay in Southern India and Bengal could not have been very short.

But on his visit to one place, the friends of his youth lay great stress. It was on the top of mount Girnar in Kathiawad, they say, that he was first initiated into the mysteries of practical Yoga.

Vivekananda

NANA KATHA

Another orphan boy from Jessore Dist. has come to the Murshidabad Orphanage, making the total of eight. The authorities of the Orphanage ask us to say that they are prepared to take any others without distinction of caste or creed. Lessons in tailoring are now being given to the boys: a local Mahomedan Zemindar having very kindly promised to bear the expenses. During December last, Swami Akhandananda accompanied by a boy from his Orphanage, visited many villages in the district and was invariably received with cordiality. Each village they passed through extended its quota of help, in food grains, cloth or money, and Swami Akhandananda has received promises of substantial help in building the Orphanage. This is, as it should be. The Bengali adage says, “the walking sticks of ten make a load for one.” The poor and the helpless are everybody's wards, and if everybody does his duty towards them, poverty no longer remains a problem.

From a brief account sent to us, we notice that the gross receipts of the Murshidabad Orphanage during the months of May to December 1898 amounted to Rs. 434. 3. 3, and the expenditures to Rs. 362.8.10½, thus leaving a balance of Rs. 71.10.4½.