



Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 94

JULY 1989

No. 7

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

THUS SPOKE SHRI SHANKARACHARYA

The inquirer about the truth of the Atman who is possessed of the means of attainment should approach a wise preceptor, who confers emancipation from bondage.

Who is versed in the Vedas, sinless, unsmitten by desire and a knower of Brahman par excellence, who has withdrawn himself into Brahman; who is calm, like fire that has consumed its fuel, who is a boundless reservoir of mercy that knows no reason, and a friend of all good people who prostrate themselves before him.

Worshipping that Guru with devotion, and approaching him, when he is pleased with prostration, humility and service, (he) should ask him what he has got to know:

“O Master, O friend of those that bow to thee, thou ocean of mercy, I bow to thee; save me, fallen as I am into this sea of birth and death, with a straight-forward glance of thine eye, which sheds nectar-like grace supreme.

“Save me from death, afflicted as I am by the unquenchable fire of this world-forest, and shaken violently by the winds of an untoward lot, terrified and (so) seeking

refuge in thee, for I do not know of any other man with whom to seek shelter.

“O Lord, with thy nectar-like speech, sweetened by the enjoyment of the elixir-like bliss of Brahman, pure, cooling to a degree, issuing in streams from thy lips as from a pitcher, and delightful to the ear—do thou sprinkle me who am tormented by worldly afflictions as by the tongues of a forest-fire. Blessed are those on whom even a passing glance of thy eye lights, accepting them as thine own.

“How to cross this ocean of phenomenal existence, what is to be my fate, and which of the means should I adopt—as to these I know nothing. Condescend to save me, O Lord, and describe at length how to put an end to the misery of this relative existence.”

As he speaks thus, tormented by the afflictions of the world—which is like a forest on fire—and seeking his protection, the saint eyes him with a glance softened with pity and spontaneously bids him give up all fear.

(*Viveka-Chudamani*: 32-36, 39-41).

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is about recent trends of thought in modern science regarding the relation of brain, mind and consciousness.

GURU—THE GUIDE TO PERFECTION is by Dr. (Miss) Rama Ghosh, M.A., Ph. D., Lecturer in Philosophy, Arya Mahila College, Varanasi.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SHRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN (IV) is a brilliantly written article which shows clearly, on the extensive evidence of documents, how Shri Ramakrishna felt the problems of women, and how he led women from all walks of life to a life of perfection and spiritual independence. This is a sequel to the earlier three articles published in *Prabuddha Bharata*.

The writer Ann Myren, a former lecturer in Alameda College, California, U.S.A. is admirably doing this pioneering work which will enlighten women who are in the confusion in this age of sensate culture and religious fundamentalism.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND MODERN INDIA is by Swami Deshikatmananda of Ramakrishna Mission.

NANDA DEVI is a beautiful description of the Himalayan peak as seen on a stormy afternoon. This poem has been contributed by Swami Purnananda.

VIVEKANANDA: PROPHET OF THE MASSES is a one act play by Bodhisattva.

MIND, BRAIN, CONSCIOUSNESS IN MODERN SCIENCE

(EDITORIAL)

Mind is a mysterious thing. From time immemorial philosophers and thinkers have tried to grapple with it. Most of them have failed to catch this elusive entity. Any attempt to approach the mind is like a man chasing his shadow. Arjuna tells Krishna that he knows what is good and what is bad, yet his mind drags him as a helpless slave down to the same suffering that it seeks to avoid. This is an universal phenomenon. Since millenniums people have been, therefore, asking such questions as, "What is this mind? What is its origin? Why does it stoop low and rise high? Why does it drive human beings like slaves? Is there any way to know its origin and then control it? How is it that great spiritual giants have conquered the outgoing tenden-

cies of the mind, have calmed its restless perturbations, and have reached a state beyond mind? Who is it who says, "my mind is not good" or "my mind is cheerful today?" Is the mind something separate from me as 'my hand' or 'my leg'? Who is the 'me' who is searching to know 'my mind'? Is it the mind running after the mind? Is there something non-physical higher than mind, which can know, control and guide the mind, as the teacher knows and guides the student? If so, what is that mind-controlling agency? Where does it exist? What is its power? How to get at the mind-controlling or mind-elevating agency and then be free from the tyranny of an eternally distracting, disturbing, and unsettling thing known as mind?"

In the world of pure materialistic science where scientists assuredly sit on a tool and investigate a separate objective reality such as a metal or a chemical solution, the mind of the scientist was thought to be a completely irrelevant thing for scientific investigation. Einstein's teacher Ernst Mach, a staunch believer in positivism, told Einstein to be free from all things relating to mind, emotions, consciousness etc. regarding scientific investigation. But new discoveries of quantum physics changed this thought-current of the old classical physics. Mind or consciousness of the scientist suddenly emerged as an undeniable factor in scientific investigations since the year 1927. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle discovered in 1927, suddenly made it clear that it is mind or consciousness of the scientists which invariably intervenes, affects, and even determines the ultimate findings in the world of sub-atomic particles. If the scientist wants to see electron as wave, he goes to the electron-diffraction experiment. If he wants to see electron as a particle he chooses those experiments where electrons, or for that matter all sub-atomic particles, behave as a particle. It is the mind of the scientists which ultimately creates the world picture. Since 1927, in the world of quantum or sub-atomic physics a purely objective reality has ceased to exist. Today quantum physicists describe an external objective reality as omnijjective (a combination of the subjective and the objective). Nobel-physicist Eugene Wigner asserts that it is impossible to give a description of quantum mechanical processes 'without explicit reference to consciousness.'¹

On January 25, 1931, *Observer* published an 'Interview with Max Plank' by J.W.N. Sullivan. In answer to the question, 'Do you think that consciousness can be explained in terms of matter and its law?' Max

Plank answered that he did not. 'Consciousness', Max Plank continued, 'I regard as fundamental, I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing postulates consciousness.'²

Wolfgang Pauli, the Nobel physicist famous for his Exclusion Principle, writes in words which are, in fact, interchangeable with the words of Vedanta philosophy.

'From an inner centre the psyche seems to move outward, in the sense of an extraversion, into the physical world...'³

But the biologists and physiologists have, until recently, treated mind in a purely objective and mechanistic way. Newtonian science proved that the external universe moves like a pure machine following rigid laws of motion. Everything could therefore be explained by mechanical laws. Mind like everything else was thought as an object for mechanical investigations. In 1964, Edward Clodd of London wrote in his book *The Story of Creation*:

"And here we pass from what is interesting to what is of serious import to us, because of the phenomena of mind are not capable of the like mechanical explanation as the phenomena of stars and planets and of vegetable and animal life, evolution remains only a speculation to fascinate the curious."⁴

By the middle of 20th century serious doubts began to be raised, whether mind could be treated like a machine. Still the followers of mechanistic science dreamt of success. W. Russel Brain wrote in *GALATEA or Future of Darwinism* (one of the

1. Michael Talbot, *Mysticism and New Physics*, Bantam Books, 1981, P. 34.

2. Quoted in Swami Jitatmananda, *Modern Physics and Vedanta*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1986, P. 36.

3. Ibid., P. 37.

4. Edward Clodd, *The Story of Creation*, Watts and Co, 17 Johnson's Court, London E.C. 1904, Pp. 113-14.

series of books by the most distinguished thinkers of 1950 on the future of science and society), in a humorous way:

"Everything, if we only knew enough, could be explained in terms of electrons and their movements. Life, mind, art, beauty and religion are thus phantasmagoria, fleeting eddies set up by the electronic dance".

Psychoanalysis, still dominated by the determinism of Freud, is engaged in adapting men to their environment without considering their adoption to the universe. Biology, now in the position occupied by physics and chemistry a century ago, is reaping the rich harvest rendered available by the new mechanistic methods all complete confidence that this prosperity will endure indefinitely.

First, however, it is necessary to recognise the autonomy of the sciences of life and mind. There is hope that, thus emancipated, they will succeed in developing new concepts which may be applicable to other realms of experience. Darwin is the Newton of biology: she still awaits her Einstein."⁵

The mechanistic approach to mind, however, lingered in psychiatrists who dreamt of absolute success with mind-controlling drugs. *Time* (April 2, 1979) commented: 'At the very least, the drugs may give psychiatry the bold new tools that will enable it to shake off its own current depression and fulfil the high hopes that Freud and his followers correctly held out for it.' But the euphoria led to total frustration with a total failure of drug-psychology and the global menace of drug-addiction. New avenues were sought to explore mind. E.F. Schumacher wrote in his book *A Guide for the Perplexed* of a 'Yoga of new consciousness' which would help scientists 'to seek self-knowledge in the inner world of scientist himself.'⁶

5. W. Russel Brain, *GALATEA or THE FUTURE OF DARWINISM*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench. Truber & Co, New York, p. 49-52 and 88-92.

6. E.F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Abacus, London, 1982. P. 159.

Professor George Wald, Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, was awarded Nobel Prize for his research in biochemistry of vision. In a paper entitled *Life and Mind in the Universe*, submitted for reading out in the New Delhi Seminar on *Mind, Brain and Consciousness*, (held at NCERT, 25-27 Feb., 1987), George Wald spoke about the latest trends in brain-mind study:

"Some years ago I talked about this with Wilder Penfield, the great Canadian Neurosurgeon. In the course of his therapeutic activities he had unprecedented opportunities to explore the exposed brains of conscious patients, and hoped in this way, to discover the seat of human consciousness. I asked him, "Why do you think consciousness is in the brain?" He chuckled, and said, "Well, I'll keep on trying." When we met again a few years later he said, 'I'll tell you one thing, it's not in the cerebral cortex!'" Prof. Wald then gave his own ideas on the mind-brain-consciousness relation:

"Though consciousness is the essential condition for all science, science cannot deal with it....

Consciousness itself lies outside the parameters of space and time that would make it accessible to science. That realisation carries an enormous consequence. Consciousness cannot be located. But more. It has no location....

So that is the problem of mind-consciousness—a vast unchartable domain that includes all science, yet that science cannot deal with, has no way of approaching; not even to identify its presence or absence; that offers nothing to measure, and nothing to locate, since it has no location."⁷

In the line of all great scientists of the 20th century, like Heisenberg, Schrodinger, or even Einstein, Wald intuitively stumbled on the truth of the primacy of mind over matter.

7. George Wald, Paper on *Life and Mind in the Universe*, submitted in Seminar (NCERT, New Delhi), Feb. 1987.

"A few years ago it occurred to me—albeit with some shock to my scientific sensibilities—that my two problems, that of a life breeding universe, and that of consciousness that can neither be identified nor located, might be brought together. That would be with the thought that mind, rather than being as most biologists suppose, a late development in the evolution of organisms, had existed always; that this is a life-breeding universe because the constant presence of mind had made it so. But very quickly I realised that I was in excellent company. Not alone are rudiments of this kind of thought deeply embedded in millennia-old Eastern Philosophies; it is stated explicitly or strongly implied in the writings of quite recent and some present physicists."⁸

Wald quotes a number of outstanding physicists in support of his ideas. Physicist Von Weizsacker (1971) states as a new and intelligible interpretation of quantum theory what he calls his "Identity Hypothesis: Consciousness and matter are different aspects of the same reality." Prof. Wald prefers most of all Wolfgang Pauli's formulation (1952): "To us...the only acceptable point of view appears to be the one that recognises both sides of reality—the quantitative and the qualitative, the physical and the psychical as compatible with each other, and can embrace them simultaneously—it would be most satisfactory of all if physics and psyche (i.e. matter and mind) could be seen as complementary aspects of the same reality."⁹

This is what Eastern philosophies of Samkhya and Vedanta in hundred different ways said nearly three thousand years earlier that mind and matter are two aspects of the same reality.

"Biologists" says Wald, "tend to be embarrassed by consciousness. As an attribute of some living organisms, they feel that they should know about it and should indeed be in position to straighten out physicists about it—none of which has come their way.

Hence the discomfort, the avoidance, or worse: talking ancillary mechanisms that dodge the essential problem."

Prof. Wald then exposes the basic dogmatism of the scientists who refuse to accept the mind-aspect of physical sciences,

"If I say, with Eddington 'to put the conclusion crudely—the stuff of the world is mind-stuff,' that has a metaphysical ring. But if I say that ultimate reality is expressed in the solutions of the equations of quantum mechanics, quantum electro-dynamics, and quantum field theory—that sounds like good, modern physics. Yet what are those equations, indeed what is mathematics, but mind-stuff?—virtually the ultimate is mind-stuff and for that reason deeply mysterious."¹⁰

Wald concludes his paper with the words which are interchangeable with a Vedanta-philosopher. The ultimate basis of all existence is consciousness. It pervades everything both internal and external. Science must evolve sufficiently in order to know what consciousness is and how to articulate it.

"Of course, implicit in such talk is the recognition that a universe in which mind can eventually achieve such overt expression as in science, art and technology must be its core, from its inception, in some sense a knowing universe; that it must in some sense possess mind as its pervasive and enduring attribute. The stuff of this universe, then, is ultimately mindstuff. What we recognise as the material universe, the universe of space and time and elementary particle and energies, is then an avatar, the materialisation of primal mind. In that sense there is no waiting for consciousness to arise. It is there always. What we wait for in the evolution of life is only the culminating event, the emergence of creatures that in their self-awareness can articulate consciousness, can give it a voice and being also social creatures, can embody it in culture, in technology, art and science."¹¹

In a short paper presented at Princeton, Scientist Dicke humourously spoke about the evolution of higher mind with which

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

philosophers and scientists have come forward to know the mind-matter relationship today. Edwin Hubble and George Gamow calculated the approximate age of our universe. Dicke said that the Hubble age of the universe is not wholly arbitrary, since about that much time was needed for physicists to appear.¹² If physicists came to prominence after Galileo and Copernicus, physicists first entered the non-physical realm of mind from the year 1927, after Heisenberg's discovery of the Uncertainty Principle.

Scientists of many disciplines are today concentrating on the study of an independent evolution of consciousness, parallel with the continuing evolution of anatomy and physiology, and this evolution of mind is accepted today as an intrinsic development in cosmic evolution. Such a study of the evolution of the higher levels of consciousness, or the birth of a higher, transcendent or transpersonal levels of awareness is slowly gaining ground. Science is not only embracing philosophy, but consciously entering into the field of psychology, psycho-therapy and yoga-traditions of East where a systematic investigation of the gradual and higher evolution of mind has been successfully taught and conducted since the last three thousand years. Prof. Wald welcomes such studies of the evolution of higher mind. He says,

"It gives our species here a transcendent worth and dignity, among the many kinds of creatures that inhabit our planet. It tells us our place in the universe: it is to know and create, and to try to understand, as we alone can do under our sun."¹³

* * * *

Today medical scientists and neurosurgeons are slowly discovering newer dimensions of the mind-brain relation. In a paper

on *Neurophysiology and Consciousness: An Integrated Non-Dualist Evolutionary Theory*, submitted in the same NCERT seminar of Feb, 1987, T. Desi Raju, Dept. of Neurophysiology, National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-science, Bangalore, said that scientists today are in a position to present an integrated view of the life state, the brain, the conscious state and the universe. Prof. Desi Raju mentioned the emerging philosophies of Neurophysiology and of other major sciences, as well as the ancient insights of the Hindu Upanishadic and Samkhya-Yoga philosophies which consider the pure all-pervading Primal Consciousness or the Brahman as the ultimate of the cause and the material of the universe.

The scheme of evolution of the living state organisations under the theory of genetics and natural selection, is considered, according to Desi Raju, as the basis for the evolution of the progressively higher Neuronal system acquiring more of the complex molecular organisations embodied with the conscious state of human beings.

"The issue of finding the nature of interrelations between brain and consciousness has emerged", according to Desi Raju, "as a major research interest of discussion and hypothesizing in Neurophysiology since about the middle of this century."

The cerebral cortex of man is unique due to the extraordinary enlargement of the association areas and its capacity to correlate and compute memories and impressions. "The contents of consciousness which are highest developed in man could be attributed," says Desi Raju, "to the mechanisms of the unique expanded areas of brain of man, i.e. the association areas of the cerebral cortex and their interconnections."

How did the human mind of our primitive ancestors evolve to that of Buddha, or Leonardo Da Vinci? From the standpoint

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

of Biology, the phylogenetic branching off of the life stream into the lines of the plant kingdom and animal kingdom, seems to have been the first major event which subsequently led to the evolution of higher possibilities of conscious states through the animal kingdom, to that of man, and finally to the evolution of gigantic intellects of Newton, Einstein or Shankaracharya. The central principle of the story of evolution of animal life appears to be, according to modern medical science, the evolution of more and more complex cerebral associative organisations capable of higher and higher mechanisms or processes generating greater contents of consciousness.

Scientist Sperry rejects the ideas of mechanistic determinism which asserts that body created the mind. On the contrary, he asserts that mind evolved first, expediting, therefore, the evolution of higher brain mechanisms. He says that "this shift from a causal determinacy that is purely physical to one that includes conscious, subjective forces that supersede the physical, makes all the difference when it comes to using the "truths" of science as criteria of ethical values."¹⁴

Any attempt to materialise the mind, or explain mind in terms of matter, is an increasingly difficult problem for matter-based sciences of today. Neurologist Sir Charles Sherrington says, (Introductory to the *Physical Basis of Mind*, edited by Peter Laslett):

"Knowledge of the physical basis of mind is making great strides in these days... Mind, meaning by that thoughts, memory, feelings, reasoning, and so on, is difficult to bring into the class of physical things. Physiology, a natural science, tends to be silent about all outside the physical. And

so the study of the physical basis of mind suffers from falling between two stools." Lord Adrian, who shared the Nobel Prize with Sherrington, spoke as a Neuro-physiologist in 1966 when he said: 'As soon as we let ourselves contemplate our own place in the picture we seem to be stepping outside of the boundaries of natural sciences.'

Wilder Penfield who made extensive experiments with patients undergoing brain-surgery, wrote with reference to his teacher, Sir Charles Sherrington,

"In the end, Sherrington could only say that "We have to regard the relation of mind to brain as still not merely unsolved, but still devoid of basis for its very beginning." Penfield's discovery that mind is not located in brain, but is an independent existence, prompted him to write about the patient's reactions during brain surgery,

"The patient's mind, which is considering the situation in such an aloof and critical manner, can only be something quite apart from Neuronal reflex action....

"The fact that there should be no confusion in the conscious state suggests that although the content of consciousness depends in large measure on Neuronal activity, awareness itself does not....

"During brain action, a Neuro-physiologist can surmise where the condition of potential is being carried out and its pattern. It is not so in the case of what we have come to call mind-action. And yet the mind seems to act independently of the brain in the same sense that a programmer acts independently of his computer, however much he may depend upon the action of that computer for certain purposes...."¹⁵.

Today's medical studies have found the existence of a bicameral mind which is constituted of the left half and the right half of the brain. The right-hand brain is responsible for knowledge, intuitions,

14. T. Desi Raju, Paper on *Neurophysiology and Consciousness: An Integrated Non-dualist Evolutionary Theory*, submitted in the same seminar of NCERT, Feb. 1987.

15. Swami Ranganathananda: Article on *Self Behind The Brain*, printed in *Prabuddha Bharata*, Nov. 1988.

emotions, altruistic feelings, etc., while the left-hand is responsible for reasonings, calculations, domination, fight, confrontation, etc. The left-hand brain touches only the body of knowledge, the right-hand penetrates the soul of knowledge and leads to higher evolutions of mind and brain-function.

In another paper submitted in the same NCERT seminar entitled *States of Consciousness—A Holistic Hypothesis. Supra-cortical Consciousness—An Existing Reality*, Dr. Ashok Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, M.D., Dept. of Pathology, AIIMS New Delhi, discussed more clearly three kinds of brain-functions for the human activities of various kinds, that have emerged out of the latest studies in medical science. He says,

“The human being, evolved after millions of years, through millions of phases from primordial life, the protoplasm, may be visualised as an evolving consciousness which has passed through ‘Brain-stem-consciousness’, ‘Limbic-system-consciousness’ to achieve a ‘Cortical-consciousness’. The human brain has also got the potentiality to tap the inexhaustible ‘cosmic consciousness’ dormant within him. This highest state of consciousness in medical terminology could be called, according to Dr. Mukhopadhyaya, ‘Supra-cortical consciousness’.

The development of the higher and complex functionings of the cerebral cortex of man has occurred late in the course of evolution. The human cerebral cortex has four million nodules, each consisting of 1500 Neurons. Activation of these nodules is responsible for the infinite variety of mind-consciousness patterns in the human brain.

This activation occurs either through the brain-stem or limbic system or it spontaneously originates in the cortex itself resulting in three basic forms of human consciousness, the ‘Brain-stem-consciousness’, ‘Limbic

system-consciousness’ and ‘Cortical-consciousness’.

Brain-stem-consciousness is personified in the strictly mechanical movement of the body like the soldier’s marching according to the direction given by the leader. Security guards on duty may be cited as an example of Brain-stem-consciousness personified.

Limbic-system-consciousness is that aspect of consciousness which drives one to seek pleasure and avoid the unpleasant. Basic motivations of this level of consciousness are thirst (Mediated through osmoregulator centre), hunger (mediated through ‘hunger’ and ‘satiety’ centres of hypothalamus) and sex (pre-optic hypothalamus and other complex connections, yet to be known).

Those who are solely limbic-system-conscious, (if, such a thing is at all possible!), are concerned about their own pleasure. They can do anything for their own sensual gratification. People dominated by this consciousness are generally known as selfish.

Still higher level of consciousness is cortical-consciousness which originates in cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex with two hundred millions of fibres in the corpus callosum, innumerable associations amongst 10,000 billions of Neurons in 4 millions of cortical nodules, spread over an area of 2,500 sq. cm. (1) with a huge synaptic density, is the seat of cortical-consciousness. The manifestation of this level of consciousness is primarily a deeper self-awareness of an individual. All creative imagination and aesthetic activities belong to this cortical-consciousness. Under its dominance people emerge as geniuses or leaders in various fields of science, religion, politics or sociology. The leading ideas of these geniuses in the various fields of human endeavour constitute human values. A pure ‘cortical-consciousness’ is without any motive. That is why artists feel that art is for art’s sake.

It is a joy in itself, and feels no need of satisfying the creator or any body else.

Human evolution has been achieved when men, by self-effort or other factors, have scaled from one level to the other level of these three levels of consciousness. By developing the 'limbic-system-consciousness', 'brain-stem-consciousness' can be overcome. The self-stimulatory experiment with electrode implanted in the 'pleasure centre' of limbic-system has shown that animals could be made totally immersed in pleasure-consciousness, being completely unaware of the surroundings and going sleepless (brain-stem-consciousness) for days without suffering from physical exhaustion of sleeplessness.

Even in talented people, who work mostly at the level of 'cortical-consciousness', lashes of compulsive sensual desire are not very uncommon particularly where necessary control over the limbic-system is not achieved.

The 'cortical-consciousness' abounding in human values can overcome the limitations and excesses of limbic-system completely. Examples are seen amongst inspired nationalists and freedom-fighters fighting for the motherland, making incredible sacrifices, and spending sleepless nights without even the bare requirements of food and drink. The same is true for those who sacrifice their whole life for an 'ideal' or an 'ism'. In the absence of both 'cortical-consciousness' and 'limbic-system-consciousness', a person becomes a lump of flesh and blood, a burden on the society.

By a total control over the limbic-system persons through their 'will' (cortical activities) can become expert at changing the heart-rate or respiration, overcoming thirst and hunger. Some can remain underground in sealed compartment. Examples are amongst Indian Hatha-yogis.

In the history of humanity, only a few have been able to combine profound acti-

vities of the 'cortical-consciousness' and a total restraint over the limbic-system. They are the geniuses, or great men and women with an ideal life.

Today's medical scientists, according to Dr. Mukhopadhyaya, are finding the existence of *A Fourth Dimension*—'Supra-cortical-consciousness'. This is the level of consciousness where man can feel the 'cosmic-consciousness' through his own individual consciousness.¹⁶

Human Being has evolved from a mass of protoplasm after millions of years. In the process, it has passed through many phases: The entire history of mankind is one of evolving consciousness. Today the latest experiments in psychology or yoga are getting ready to systematically tap the supra-cortical or cosmic-consciousness in human beings. The lives of great spiritual giants like Buddha, Christ or Ramakrishna have already demonstrated the practical aspects of a supra-cortical-consciousness.

* * * *

More intensive attention was, however, paid to mind since the emergence of the new science of psychology. It began to treat mind as consisting of two levels only, the conscious and the unconscious or the subconscious. The repressed passions, desires, fears, incertitudes, the past traumatic experiences in life when gathered unresolved or unsublimated in the deeper layers of the unconscious, result in the distortion of the conscious mind culminating in mental or psychological problem, or illness. Freud, the beginner of modern psychology, dealt with the minds of the sick people and advocated free release of the repressed impulses as a means to restoring the mind to normalcy. Freudianism with its constant harping on

16. Dr. Ashok Kumar Mukhopadhyaya: Paper on *States of Consciousness—A Holistic Hypothesis* etc. submitted in the same NCERT Seminar, Feb. 1987.

the libido or repressed sex, dominated half a century of psychology, literature and society in the West. Today, however, Freud stands rejected. Modern psychologists have come to redefine 'normalcy'. What is 'normalcy'? Is it, as some psychologists would put it today, only conforming to the false norms of a false society in a false way? Freudianism failed or even stood rejected for the simple reason that in this psychology there was no provision for raising the mind to the 'superconscious level' or the 'supra-cortical-consciousness'. While Freud believed human mind as a '*tabula rasa*', a clean slate, Jung, the greatest among the post Freudians, came forward with almost an Indian and Vedantic way of thinking. The conscious mind, according to Jung, 'grows out of an unconscious psyche which is older than it and which goes on functioning together with it or even in spite of it'. Jung also developed his 'psycho-analysis' (compared to Freud's 'psycho-therapy') which asserted that the 'personal unconscious' of the individual is connected with the 'collective unconscious' which is universal.¹⁷ 'All minds are parts of one Cosmic Mind', says the Indian Samkhya Philosophy.

In the latest trends of modern psychology, mind is seen capable of rising to a 'transpersonal level' beyond the limits of the ego-centred (body-mind complex). The Humanistic Psychology of Abraham Maslowe speaks not of a psychology of curing, but of a *Psychology of Being*, of *Self-Actualisation*, (compared to Indian idea of *Self-realisation*). The hazy western concept of a 'Self' localised in the body only which was the basic idea behind Western psychology is slowly getting clarified by the increasing impact of Eastern ideas on modern science of psychology. The 'Self' which in

Indian tradition is the real nature of man—the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute—is slowly emerging as the end of Western psychology today. The 'Transpersonal psychology' of Ken Wilber, supported by a host of other psychologists, is deeply influenced by the mystic tradition of the East. This Eastern view is slowly developing psychology as 'a science of soul' to level the mind up by systematic training of yoga, meditation etc. to superconscious level. Oriental and Vedanta ideas are deeply penetrating every branch of modern psychology. Mind is an instrument not to be tamed like a trained dog as behaviourist psychology of B.F. Skinner asserted. Mind on the contrary has got the power to raise itself up to the super-conscious level where the true Self of human beings manifests. Today the aim of psychology is to bring 'inner illumination' as R.D. Laing, the most well-known British psychologist of this century, would put it. The function of psychologists is to bring 'inner transformation' according to well-known American psychologist Jacob Needleman. Jung himself felt the truth of Self long before today's Transpersonal Psychology was developed. He said,

"The Self is something exceeding by impersonal.... If you function through your Self you are not yourself—As St. Paul expressed it, "It is not I that lives, it is Christ that liveth in me", meaning that his life is not his own life but the life of (the Self)."¹⁸ And the dominant trend in today's science of psychology is man's quest to reach the transpersonal level of the mind. This is what is known as 'peak experiences' according to Abraham Maslowe. Modern science of psychology, like modern man, is, to put it in the words of C.G. Jung, in search of a Soul.

17. Fritjof Capra: *The Turning Point*, (Flamingo Edition), 1983, U.S.A. P. 398.

18. Frances Vaughan: *The Inward Arc*, New Science Library, Shambhala, Boston and London, 1986, P. 46.

GURU—THE GUIDE TO PERFECTION

DR. (MISS) RAMA GHOSH

Man's journey on the earth begins from animal vitality but ends in a Divine Life (*Divya-jivan*). If one can fulfil the conditions of Self-Realisation, he is sure to enter the Divine Life which ensures that divine qualities will shine in that life in its full glory. Every cell of one's body needs purification in order to attain this stage and as such it takes time and efforts in accordance with a particular spiritual discipline. It needs a total transformation. Only a perfected soul can help the individual enter a divine life. In Indian thinking, God in the form of a perfected soul, a teacher who is known as Guru (Preceptor), descends to lead His devotees in the right path. Complete surrender to the words of such a soul is the way to perfected life.

Indians believe that God by his own creative power (*Kriya-Shakti*) removes, through the guru, the bonds of life and bestows the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. Soul, being in the grip of worldly desires, cannot get rid of the undesirable elements unaided. It is guru only who by the appropriate process of *diksha* (Initiation ceremony), helps the soul remove the bonds of desire and realise its own nature. Hence initiation or *diksha* is a must for spiritual upliftment and attainment of the final goal. It is the way of spiritual self-culture and removing the three kinds of bonds:

"Diyate jnana sadbhava kshiyate teneha kirtita".

Diksha plays a double role—eliminating the worldly desires on the one hand, and attaining the real knowledge of God on the other. God is the only existence who possesses full freedom to bestow the real glory and power of the Self to the individual souls. Hence the guru is acceptable as God

himself. In the Yoga sutras Patanjali also calls Personal God or Ishvara a guru.

In Patanjali Yoga sutras it has been specifically mentioned that there is a fourth stage of consciousness. This is awakened by the guru and leads the aspirant to the feet of God. This is indicated in Shloka no. 4 of *Paduka Panchakam* by the word *Hamsa*, or the Swan symbolising the all-powerful light of knowledge.

Dakshinamurti Vartika (Manasa-ullasa), an interpretation of Shankaracharya's *Dakshinamurti stotra* by the great exponent of Advaita, Shri Sureshwaracharya, a direct disciple of Shri Shankaracharya, says,

The sprouts of the world remain unexposed in the seed but again become visible (exposed) in different forms and shapes due to the play of maya and under the influence of time and space. The said expansion is absolutely dependent on the sweet will of the Lord who descends in the world as the guru assuming the name 'Dakshinamurti' (the right-handed or the kind-hearted God). I bow down unto him.

There may be a thousand holes in an earthen pot through which the light within will shine. Shri guru is that light. The passions, ear, nose, eyes etc. are attracted by things outside, but the light illumined by Shri guru will show things in their true form.

The great confusion and attachment created by Mahamaya can only be destroyed with the help of Shri Dakshinamurti, who is the guru.

It is impossible for a seeker of God to measure the value of such a preceptor. Except surrender to his words there is no alternative. '*Manasa-ullasa*' (9th chapter) in unequivocal language announces,

"Guruprasadallabhate yogam ashtanganam lakshanam"

Shivaprasadallabhate yoga siddhim chashashvatam".

By the grace of guru the disciple succeeds to achieve the eight-fold (*ashtanga lakshana*) yoga which opens the way to the Lord. Here ends the 'samana' sphere where maya has its play (meaning thereby that the soul remains yet in bondage). By the grace of guru dawns the 'unmana' yoga which establishes direct link with his true Self, (*Shivatva*) and the aspirant knows no return from there. The seeker then dwells in eternal bliss.

In Tantra tradition the guru is also identified with *Shabda*. Here the word *Shabda* does not mean only an alphabet. It is *Nada* or vibration, and *Bindu* or primal matter is its stay. The guru initiates his disciple by pouring in his ears a particular word which he finds suitable for the disciple. The Hindus call it '*Bija*' (seed), mantra. With this word he infuses in the disciple a power that vibrates within him, and prepares the internal spiritual field for further advancement. '*Shabda*' in this sense is equated to Brahman Itself. Next comes the question of the condition of the disciple. 'Samskaras' (totality of impressions) born of previous activities of innumerable births, are carried by the aspirant. The guru by his divine power can discriminate them and select the right word, the chanting of which can purge the disciple of the layers of desires hiding the Divine Self within. The guru only can remove these accumulated impressions of many births. Initiation is the beginning of the thorough process in which the advent of *Shuddhavidya* (Purificatory knowledge) takes place. The tantras tell us that *Shuddhavidya*, *Shiva* and *Sadashiva* are various abodes of Shri guru, which the disciple realises according to his own spiritual development reached by cleaning the accumulated desires in the mind.

The Guru-Gita Defines a Guru:

"*Brahmanandam parama sukhadam
kevalam jnanamurtim*

*Dvandwatitam gaganasadrisham
tattvamasyadi lakshyam
Ekam nityam vimalamachalam sarvadhi
sakshibhutam
Bhavatitam trigunarahitam sadgurum tam
namami"*.

(He who dispels all fears in man, who is beyond all doubts, who is completely detached from everything like the sky, who makes no difference between 'You' and 'I' i.e. who equates himself with the Lord, and who witnesses everything, who is one and one only, ever-existent, spotless, changeless and above Sattva, Rajas and Tamas (the three constituents of Prakriti) is the Sad-guru. I with all humility offer my salutations to Him).

Guruvada is traditional not in India alone but throughout the world. Teachership has been prevalent in various countries. There is little difference in people's attitude towards a guru as the attitudes to the teacher vary according to local traditions and culture.

In India the guru has been given a very high position as a helper for the spiritual upliftment of man and attainment of salvation. Human beings in bondage are moving in a whirlwind helplessly under the indomitable power of maya and karma. Yet redemption of the soul from bondage and attainment of freedom are possible. In this attainment of freedom, the guru is the mainstay.

The Vaishnava view is that Brahma is the original guru who gave out the *tattvas* or highest spiritual truths to saints like Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanat Kumara and advised them not to divulge the truth unless approached by a true seeker. Tantra is esoteric in principles which are said to be originating from Mahadeva. We are also told that Brihaspati was the guru of the gods and Shukracharya of the demons and so on. In later periods Buddhas, Tirthankaras, Christ, Guru Nanaka and

others appeared in human form to lead mankind as gurus. They are all gurus, each creating a sect teaching a particular method of his own.

Besides the above, in India, especially in Bengal, there is the traditional family guru system. A particular family is led by a particular guru family running down from generation to generation. This is, however, at present declining. Now-a-days people are free to make a choice, and look for a guru from amongst those who have dedicated their lives in search of Truth.

About guru and *diksha* the scriptures proclaim that there can be no spiritual progress possible without initiation just as there cannot grow a tree from a corn on a stone. But whom to accept as a guru?

The *Skanda Purana* says that there are many gurus who take away the wealth of their disciples. But rare is such a guru who takes away the suffering of the disciples.

*"Guravo bahavah santi
shishyavittapaharakah
Durlabham sadgururdevi
shishya santapaharakah".*

The word 'guru' has been interpreted in many ways. 'Gu' means darkness and 'Ru' means that which destroys darkness. Therefore, the word 'guru' means he who destroys the ignorance in man and thus enlightens him towards the realisation of the Self. Again, the word 'Gu' represents maya or the cause of bondage and 'Ru' means that which roots the maya out and uplifts the soul to realise the Self. Still again 'Gu' means the giver of blessings, 'Ru' means destroyer of sins. All these taken together the word 'Guru' may be interpreted as the one who is the saviour and who raises man from the muds of the world, the sufferings, the pangs and pains, births and rebirths. He brings about an end of the conflicts of life and leads people to enjoy eternal bliss.

The *Guru-Gita* (26) again says ;

*"Gururbrahma Gururvishnu Gururdevo
Maheshvarah
Gurusakshat param brahma tasmai Shri
Gurave namah".*

Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara are the three deities for the purpose of creation, preservation and destruction. Guru represents each of them. Not only that. He is also above these three. He is Parama Brahman—the supreme Lord—the one and only one, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. The world of our existence is his creation. It is his nature or will. He is himself *Sat* (existence), *Chit* (knowledge), *Ananda* (bliss) and there is none equal to him.

The *Guru-Gita* (27) further reminds us :

*"Ajnana timirandhasya jnananjana
shalakaya
Chakshurunmilitam yena tasmai Shri
Gurave namah".*

The bound souls are ignorant about the 'Reality'. Maya with her magic power of concealment hides the truth and causes attachments of various kinds to keep men away from God. The bound souls identify themselves with the body and roam about blindly in search of the so-called pleasures which ultimately throw them to further miseries and pains. The preceptor by his spiritual power makes them conscious about their ignorance and kindles the light of knowledge in them.

About a truly perfected guru a story is current among the Indians :

Ten persons travelled together to a holy place. On their way back they crossed a river by a ferry boat. After landing on the ground they started counting the number of persons in the group. Each of them counted and found only nine present. They were very much perplexed. Fortunately for them there appeared another person unknown to

them. The man enquired of his own about the problem. Patiently hearing them he said, "Thou art mistaken. Everyone of you counted alright but left the counter himself and hence you are the tenth." The story means, "Know thy Self and you will know everything." When we are bewildered and do not find a way out of the impasse, it is the guru only who himself being beyond the realms of maya, can lead us to the right path. The relation between Arjuna and Shri Krishna is that of such a disciple and true preceptor. Arjuna in clear language said, "I am your disciple and I wholly surrender to you." Again from the side of the guru, Shri Krishna, a spontaneous response came.

'Giving up all other considerations of rituals or religious paths, surrender unto me. I will free you from all sins and accumulated karmas.'

*"Sarvadharmā parityajya mamekaṃ
śaranam vraja*

*Aham tvam sarvapapebhyo
mokṣayishyami ma śuchah."*

In *Mundaka Upanishad* we find:

*"Tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevabhigacchet
samitpanih śrotriyaṃ brahmanishtham"*.

With a spirit of complete surrender, the knower-preceptor should be approached. It means that the guru should be a 'knower' on the one hand, and on the other the disciple should be a devotee with a spirit of surrender. In *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* again it has been said:

*"Yasyadeve parabhaktiryatha deve tatha
guru*

*Tasyaite kathitasyaśarthah prakāśante
Mahatmanah"*.

"He who has implicit faith in Paramatman (Supreme Self) and who makes no difference

between the preceptor and the Paramatman, reaches the height of truth within".

The greatest propagator of Advaita Vedanta, Shankaracharya, unequivocally spoke about the need of a guru for the liberation of man in bondage. His oft-quoted eight stanzas on the guru inspire all aspirants to salvation to surrender to the guru. In that he makes it clear that one can never see the truth without surrendering to the feet and words of a true guru:

*"Manaschenna lagnam gurorāṅghripadme
Tatah kim tatah kim tatah kim"*.

The same idea is taught by Shiva in His discourses with Parvati in the *Skanda-Purana*: He who has not received the grace of a guru goes to lower life, despite wealth, knowledge and power.

*"Vidya dhanam valam chaiva tesham
bhagyam nirarthakam*

*Yesam gurukripa nāsti adho gacchanti
Parvati"*.

The *Skanda-Purana* says: whoever is possessed of quick perception, discrimination, knowledge of the science of the soul, and purity of the mind, is a real guru. To him passions are subdued, evil or any kind of desire do not get any indulgence with him. He has full control over himself both in speech and action. Righteousness is his guide in life.

V. *Tiruvatpayan* says:

"The Lord that has been conferring help from within during the state of ignorance and who does never depart, assumes the symbolic form of human preceptor (guru)."

"If the crystal can reflect light without the interference of the sun, then knowledge can dawn without the help of Him (guru) i.e. reflection is dependent on light".

Swami Vivekananda in his usually convincing way said, "The soul can receive the impulse from another soul and from

nothing else. We may study books all through our lives, we may become highly intellectuals, but in the end we find that we have not developed at all spiritually...to quicken the spirit the impulse must come from another soul. The person from whom such impulse comes is called the guru—the teacher”.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SHRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN—IV

ANN MYREN

(The Women Devotees of the 1880's)

At meetings in the devotees' houses in Calcutta more attention was paid to the strict rules regarding the separation of the sexes. When Shri Ramakrishna came to a devotee's house, the women would gather in the women's apartments. Sometimes as many as fifty or sixty women were present to listen to the Master who would talk to them for several hours in "his simple informal way."²⁰ Balaram Bose often brought the women devotees together, both his own relatives and acquaintances from the neighbouring houses. The men would come to the outer apartments. (Balaram also made sure that the women devotees got to Dakshineswar to visit the Master.)²¹ One time the Master asked Balaram Bose to bring to his house Gopal Ma, a brahmin widow in her sixties who had worshipped the child Krishna for thirty-odd years. Balaram sent someone to get her. When she came Shri Ramakrishna was in the outer apartment where he had become full of the spirit of Gopala, the baby Krishna. Influenced by Gopal Ma's one-pointed devotion to Gopala, the Master "assumed the form of Gopala." But Gopal Ma did not like it because his

posture was "rigid" like a "log of wood". At another time, but in similar circumstances, Gopal Ma pushed the Master because whenever he lost normal consciousness, she became afraid.²² Once again we see the strict rules falling aside in these holy gatherings. It is quite obvious that these holy meetings gave women an opportunity to experience more freedom than strict custom allowed.

Shri Ramakrishna visited the home of the widow Golap Ma, the Brahmani of Baghbazar. Golap Ma lived not far from another great woman devotee, Yogin Ma who had introduced her to Shri Ramakrishna. When the Master came to Golap Ma's house she was beside herself with joy. And while the other guests were eating in one room, she took Shri Ramakrishna to another room and offered him sweets and other refreshments.²³ Clearly, she wanted to have the pleasure of waiting on the Master in private, and in this informal setting it was quite proper for her to act that way. This is the way the village women in Kamarpukur acted toward the Master.

20. *Shri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, p. 116.

21. *Great Master*, p. 649.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 650-1.

23. *Gospel*, pp. 822-3.

In Shri Ramakrishna's village, Kamarpukur, there were fewer social restrictions than in the city. In the evening Shri Ramakrishna would sit by the door of his mother's house and watch the people as they walked along the road. The house was on the route to the water tank so the women had to pass by at least daily. When they saw the Master, they would sit down with their jugs, forget about their worldly duties and listen to the Master talk of God.²⁴ However, if Shri Ramakrishna was not satisfied with the sincerity of all of the women, he would make witty, off-colour remarks. Some of the women were convulsed with laughter while others would run away when they heard these earthy comments. We must remember that Shri Ramakrishna was totally free and could ignore social conventions if he chose to. He said, on this occasion, "The weeds have been removed. Now be seated. I shall talk to you."²⁵ Coming close to a God-man does require nerve. One must be daring, and no group around Shri Ramakrishna showed more daring than the women.

The women who were attracted to the Master felt his divinity, the high regard he had for them and his interest in their well-being. Women visited the Master at different places, Dakshineswar and Cossipore, at devotees' homes in Calcutta and in his own village, Kamarpukur. The customs governing a woman's behaviour varied from place to place. But the real factor in determining the behaviour of women was the Master's presence. When sincere truth-seeking women came to Shri Ramakrishna, the power of his pure mind transformed them, causing them to rise above many social restrictions. Shri Ramakrishna lived

in such a high state of consciousness that he saw the Self or the Divine Mother in every woman. He experienced the infinite, eternal truth, rather than gender, as the first "characteristic" of a woman. Now, when women were in the presence of the Master, their minds were raised to a higher state of consciousness, and they lost much of their body consciousness. The fact that Shri Ramakrishna's form was male did not enter their minds. So they lost their usual shyness, which was a traditional feminine trait.

But one day when the Master had left his cot and sat near a woman, she showed her shyness by moving away from him. He then instructed the women by saying that the realization of God was not possible as long as shyness, aversion and fear remained. He said, "I am verily what you are. But (showing the hairs of his chin) you feel shy because these are there. Is it not so?"²⁶ He continued talking, giving various instructions, while the women forgot the distinction between man and woman and freely asked him questions. To our knowledge Shri Ramakrishna never directly criticized the social conventions which governed the behaviour of women. He did a more revolutionary thing. He made women go beyond social convention by giving them a taste of their true Self.

There are two points to note—first, the effect of the Master on the women. Their minds became free from the sense of gender simply by their being in his presence. Here we have a living example of the power of truth. Second, in other instances when women came in contact with Shri Ramakrishna, their lives changed in a very noticeable way—their behaviour as women changed. The Master brought about a kind of "liberation" for these women. Women from the "respectable" classes never went out on foot, or visited strangers' homes, or

24. Swami Chetanananda, "Lakshmi Devi", *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 91 (July 1986), p. 310.

25. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), p. 53.

26. *Great Master*, p. 345.

stayed in the presence of men other than those very close to them. However, their acquaintance with Shri Ramakrishna produced some very non-traditional actions. At the Master's request very respectable ladies walked on foot to the bank of the Ganga or took boats to Dakshineswar to visit him. The Master took good care of all of the women who came to him, rich or poor, counselling them as to the best way to travel to Dakshineswar, when to come, when to leave, and what to bring.²⁷

His power of attraction was so great that women dared to seek him out at houses where they were not known when he visited in Calcutta. And once having found him, they might act contrary to custom. For example, at the chariot festival at Balaram Bose's house, the Master got ready to leave and went to the inner apartment to salute Shri Jagannatha. The women, seeing the Master, followed him to the edge of the roof when he was leaving, but one woman became so intent on the Master that she followed him downstairs to the verandah where the men were gathered. Her consciousness was so elevated that she completely forgot social restrictions being captured by the Master's spiritual mood.²⁸ With his mind absorbed in God, Shri Ramakrishna walked along unaware that a woman was following him. When he did see her he saluted her saying, "Blissful Mother", again and again. The woman bowed down, placing her head on the Master's feet and saluted him in return.²⁹

This woman was about thirty years old and had never travelled unless it was in a palanquin. She was so caught up in the mood of the Master that she ran back to the women's quarters, announced that at his bidding, she was going to Dakshin-

eshwar with him. She got a friend to go with her and followed Shri Ramakrishna in a carriage to the boat which would take them to Dakshineswar. With Yogen, Junior Naren and other young boy devotees, the two women got on the boat where they sat outside the covering of the boat on the plank floor. As they went up the river, the woman said that she felt like calling on Him and applying her whole mind to him but that her mind would not obey. She asked the Master what she should do. He replied:

Why not surrender yourself to Him? One should live in the world like a leaf before the wind...One should depend on Him and live one's life—the mind should move as the wind of divine consciousness moves it. That's all.³⁰

What a wonderful teaching! No compromise here. After all, she was a householder, yet she was told to have absolute reliance on God right then.

When the party arrived at Dakshineswar, the women went off to the Nahabat, the quarters of Shri Sarada Devi, who was Shri Ramakrishna's wife. Later Shri Ramakrishna discovered that no food had been bought for the devotees. He considered whom he would send to the market, and after some thought asked the two women who had come from Calcutta with him to go. It is quite likely that marketing was something they would not ordinarily do. They went and purchased greens, potatoes and two large brinjals which Holy Mother cooked and with the prasada from the temple everyone was fed.³¹

The Master encouraged women to act in free and fearless ways. Not only did he send women who never went out of their houses to the market for him, but in an even more startling practice, he had women beg

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 624.

29. Ibid., p. 626.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p. 628.

from door to door in order to root out their pride and egoism.³² Of course, the case might be made that these women were simply reacting to the social changes which were very, very slowly creeping into Bengali society. But we have the actual words of one woman devotee which indicate that it was the effect of Shri Ramakrishna, not social changes, that caused the new behaviour. Swami Saradananda quoted her as having said:

Even we ourselves do not know or understand how we all used to go to him and do all those things. Why, we cannot go in that manner on foot anywhere to unknown people's houses without informing anybody, to see a holy man or listen to words on spirituality. Such things have vanished with him by whose power we acted that way.³³

These women did many new things, such as going with the Master to the religious fair at Panihati, because they became less aware of differences in rank and gender. It is the recognition of these kinds of differences which makes behaviour artificial. By their contact with the Master the awareness of gender and social differences was "for the time being washed away by spiritual consciousness."³⁴ Because of his high state of consciousness, the women who came to Shri Ramakrishna experienced a new freedom.

Shri Ramakrishna was really the model for everyone who came to him, woman or man. Besides manifesting the perfect ideals of everyone's spiritual moods, he also embodied all of the ideal and noble womanly moods as well as perfect manliness. Every-

one saw in him the traits of both man and woman. Girish once asked the Master, "Sir, are you a man or a woman?" He laughingly replied, "I do not know."³⁵ Swami Saradananda gives two interpretations of the Master's response. First, he might have spoken from the viewpoint of a man of knowledge who had transcended the effects of his physical body. In that case he meant that he was neither male nor female. Or second, Shri Ramakrishna might have meant that he was a perfect, harmonious blending of both female and male genders.³⁶ Actually both are true and express Shri Ramakrishna's experience at different levels of consciousness. We may not know exactly what he did mean, but we do know one effect of his power on women was to cause profound changes in their behaviour. These examples certainly lead us to reflect and speculate on the influence of spiritual power in the social world.

Shri Ramakrishna's Attitudes toward Women

Having seen how Shri Ramakrishna experienced his own sense of gender, we must now examine the Master's response to the women he mixed with. Let us go back to a specific statement he made to women, "I am verily what you are." Here the Master states a fundamental truth—that he is identical with the women he is instructing. That is, he is the Atman, he is the Self, women are the Self. To perceive gender is to experience body consciousness. Is it any wonder then that Shri Ramakrishna, who always dwelt in the consciousness of the oneness of all, could lift women above their own limited conceptions of themselves? We

32. Ibid., p. 347. The two women were not identified in *Great Master*. However, Swami Chetanananda identifies two women who were sent out to beg by Shri Ramakrishna as Lakshmi and Nikunja Devi, the wife of M. (Chetanananda, "Lakshmi Devi", p. 313.)

33. *Great Master*, p. 347.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 348.

36. Ibid. Also the blending of genders by Shri Ramakrishna was discussed by the author in "The Meaning of Shri Ramakrishna for women, Parts I and II", *Prabuddha Bharata*, March and April 1988.

must keep this fact in mind as other examples of the Master's attitude toward women are explored. He was first and last an Advaitin, a fact which is easily lost sight of when specific cases are examined. He once said:

Look here; when I am in the Nirvikalpa state of consciousness, nothing remains—neither 'I' nor 'you', neither seeing nor hearing, neither speaking nor keeping mum; even when I come down two or three steps from there, I have so much of divine intoxication that I cannot turn my attention to a multitude of persons or things. If I sit down to take my meal at that time and I am given a meal of fifty dishes, my hand would not go towards them all; it will take food to the mouth from one spot only of one plate. Such states come, when rice, pulses, vegetables, rice-porridge—all must be mixed together.³⁷

These significant words give us a special insight into the Master's spiritual consciousness. We see that his mind cannot accept multiplicity. His natural state was to dwell in the consciousness of the One. He could not stand the slightest deviation from that experience. Thus we see his reaction of combining the many dinner dishes into one, and his mode of eating, eating from "only one spot of one plate", are the spontaneous extension of his steadfastness in the One.

We may well wonder if this instructive incident of eating from "one spot of one plate" is not the metaphor of the Master's life at Dakshineswar. How could someone as pure as the Master remain untouched by the press of devotees? He saw everyone—those who sought his blessings earnestly, those who sought worldly advantage, those who were crazy or crooked, those who had impure desires, and yet he remained concentrated on the divine. His mind, one-pointed, never deviated from the One. Everyone was mixed together, but just as

the various dishes in his meal were brought together by the one plate, and his attention fixed on one spot, so was his perception of the various devotees unified by his continuous experience of the One. Not only were all unified by the One, but even various religions in which they believed were unified. The Master said, "I find that all opinions point to the One. All views—the Sakta, the Vaishnava, the Vedanta—have that One for their center. He who is formless is again endowed with form."³⁸ His living experience of the world is expressed by his statement:

The Primordial power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving, and destroying in play, as it were. This Power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kali. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call it Brahman. But when It engages in these activities, then we call it Kali or Shakti. The Reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form.³⁹

What was Shri Ramakrishna's perception of the world? Clearly, he saw forms, the many, but within the manifold he perceived Brahman, Oneness. Keeping this in mind, let us examine some of his many meetings with women and identify the attitudes he expressed toward them.

He saw the Divine Mother in Rati's mother⁴⁰, in Ramlal's mother⁴¹, in Brinde, the maidservant⁴², in virgins⁴³, prostitutes⁴⁴, in fact, he said that "all the women you see are only she, the Divine Mother."⁴⁵

38. M, *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, trans., Swami Nikhilananda, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), p. 490.

39. Ibid., pp. 134-5.

40. Ibid., p. 175.

41. Ibid., p. 393.

42. Ibid., p. 425.

43. Ibid., p. 393.

44. Ibid., p. 776.

45. Ibid., p. 425.

37. Swami Saradananda, *Shri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans., Swami Jagadananda, Madras: Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1952), p. 625.

In the case of Ramlal's mother, who was Shri Ramakrishna's sister, and Brinde, he could not scold them because of the presence in them of the Divine Mother. At one time the Master invited maidens to Dakshin-eshwar to worship them, and he found them to be the embodiments of Divine Mother.⁴⁶ At another time two sisters-in-law visited him. They had prepared for their visit by fasting. Shri Ramakrishna instructed them in worship and also told them not to fast. He said, "Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer." Shri Ramakrishna's mind was at peace when the two sisters-in-law were given offerings from the Kali temple.⁴⁷ When the Divine Mother appeared to him in the form of Rati, he was instructed through her to remain in *bhava*.⁴⁸ Although Rati was the instrument for giving a divine message to the Master, when she saw him eat the prasad from the Kali temple, she left the temple never to come back. Shri Ramakrishna said, "She is a bigoted Vaishnava. She used to visit me very frequently, and none could outdo her devotion."⁴⁹ Although Rati was not sufficiently broad to totally accept the Master, he loved her devotion.

No doubt his continuous vision of the Divine Mother coupled with his attitude toward his own mother, whom he used to worship with flowers and sandal-paste,⁵⁰ caused his protective response to the mother of Ramprasanna. Ramprasanna's mother did not have enough to eat. Ramprasanna said that Manu enjoined one to serve holy men, so he bought opium and milk for a

hatha-yogi. Shri Ramakrishna commented on his behaviour in a straight-forward disclosure of his feelings, saying, "It makes me very angry."⁵¹ After all, the Master had said, "It is the Mother of the Universe who is embodied as our earthly mother."⁵² To abuse a woman was to abuse the Divine Mother.

One day the Master saw two prostitutes who appeared to him as the "embodiments of the Divine Mother Herself." Seeing their real nature, Shri Ramakrishna saluted them.⁵³ At another time when he was meditating in the Kali temple, he noticed Ramani, a prostitute, and said, "Mother, I see that Thou art in that form too." He went on to say that one never knew how God will reveal himself—herself, we might say in this instance—so one must accept everything.⁵⁴ Still another time the Master saw a prostitute and instantly he had the vision of Sita. He saw that it was Sita on her way to meet Rama after she had been rescued from Ravana. This vision put him in a samadhi which lasted a long time.⁵⁵ As stated previously, the Master still had the experience of the One even when he came down two or three steps. So with these high states of consciousness, it does not seem that he always dwelt only in a *bhava* centered on Divine Mother but that he also experienced the unity of the One. After all, his experience was that "Brahman is Shakti; Shakti is Brahman. They are not two."⁵⁶

Once the Master was asked by a woman who had been a prostitute if prostitutes would be saved. He replied, "Yes, they too will be saved, if only they cry to God with a yearning heart and promise not to repeat their sins.... One must weep sin-

46. Ibid., p. 231.

47. Ibid., p. 432.

48. Ibid., p. 175. "A rare state of divine exaltation, when the devotee, after realizing the Absolute, remains in the borderland between the Absolute and the Relative; in this state he sees that both the Absolute and the Relative, as the two aspects of the Godhead, are real."

49. Ibid., p. 490.

50. Ibid., p. 813.

51. Ibid., p. 425.

52. Ibid., p. 813.

53. Ibid., p. 776.

54. Ibid., p. 577.

55. Ibid., p. 231.

56. Ibid., p. 271.

cerely.”⁵⁷ By asking such a revealing question, this woman demonstrated her confidence in the Master’s broadmindedness. Surely she must have known that the Master was aware of her past life although she had since become a member of a very noble family.

There was at this time a very great actress, Benodini Dasi, who was a public woman or prostitute. She performed at Girishchandra Ghosh’s Star theater. Girish, a devotee of Shri Ramakrishna, had arranged for the Master to come to his theater to see a performance of *Chaitanyalila*, the divine sport of Chaitanya. Benodini had the star role, that of Chaitanya, a sixteenth century Bengali knower of God. When the Master was told that public women were playing the parts he replied, “I shall look upon them as the Blissful Mother Herself. What if one of them acts the part of Chaitanya? An imitation custard apple reminds one of the real fruit.”⁵⁸ The Master was so moved by the drama that his voice became filled with emotion, and he wept as he watched Nimai, the young Chaitanya, played by Benodini, hold on to Shrivasa’s feet, and declare that he had not attained devotion to Krishna. After it was over Shri Ramakrishna went to meet the actors and actresses who came to salute him. Benodini wrote about her experience:

In a dancing posture Shri Ramakrishna said ‘Hari Guru, Guru Hari’. He then purified my unholy body by placing both of his palms on my head. He blessed me saying, ‘May you be blessed with spiritual awakening!’⁵⁹

Needless to say, Benodini did not expect anything like this. In fact, according to Benodini who regarded herself as a “lowly

person”, the Master also bestowed upon her freedom from fear,⁶⁰ which from one point of view might be seen as the ultimate blessing.

Shri Ramakrishna also had encounters with women whose lives had at one time or another been immoral. When the reformed Bhagavati, a maid servant who had lead an immoral life, touched his feet, he suffered excruciating pain. He leapt as if stung by a scorpion and then washed with Ganga water the spot on his feet which had been touched. Bhagavati was completely immobilized by his reaction to her touch. The Master gently asked her to salute him from a distance. Then to relieve her embarrassment and console her, the Master sang a few songs for her.⁶¹

Not every reference to an immoral woman has a negative connotation. To illustrate the proper way for a householder to live in the world and fix the mind on God, the Master chose the simile of an immoral woman who performed her household duties while her mind was fixed on her sweetheart.⁶² This is really a very interesting choice of simile. Certainly a wide world of experience was available to the Master, yet he chose the intensity of love of an immoral woman as an illustration, showing his appreciation for intense love even though it was outside the bounds of morality. And further he made it clear that women have great capacity for uncompromising devotion.

The fact that Shri Ramakrishna could bless weak and immoral women and could use their intensity as a metaphor of devotion came not merely from his compassion or his own identity with female nature, but from his ever present consciousness of “one spot of one plate.” However, this power

57. Ibid., p. 740.

58. Ibid., p. 546. Quoted in Swami Prabhānanda, *First Meetings with Shri Ramakrishna*, (Madras: Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1987), p. 340.

59. *First Meetings*, p. 341.

60. Ibid.

61. *Gospel*, pp. 234-5.

62. Ibid., p. 903.

with which he blessed women, high or low, was the power of the Mother. It is one grand circle of power, the expression of the Shakti that is made manifest from Brahman. "What is Brahman is also Shakti",⁶³ he said. Here again we find perfect non-duality. It is no wonder that the Master could look upon all, high and low, pure and impure, straight and crooked, female and male as the One. It is consciousness of the body that causes the perception of duality.⁶⁴ Shri Ramakrishna had, many years before, gone beyond consciousness of the body; there was no duality for him between Brahman and Shakti.

Another facet of the Master's attitude toward women is the high place he gave to woman's spiritual capacities. For example, one day when discussing Gopal Ma's visions, he remarked about himself saying:

Formerly I too used to see many visions, but now in my ecstatic state I don't see so many. I am gradually getting over my feminine nature; I feel nowadays more like a man. Therefore I control my emotion; I don't manifest it outwardly so much.⁶⁵

He made three points in this comment. First, he told us that he had a "feminine nature", which allowed him to be openly emotional. He apparently thought that this expression of the feminine side of his nature had genuine value because he spent years in this mode. Second, that when he was in an emotional state which stemmed from his feminine side, he had visions. Thus the capacity for visions seems to be a feminine characteristic. And third, when he felt like a man, he suppressed his emotions. This comment was recorded in 1885 when he was seeing and teaching many devotees, both women and men. It is possible that during the last two years of his teaching he felt the

expression of the masculine side of his nature was more suitable.

At another time the Master commented on the value of the feminine by saying:

I spent one year as a handmaid—the handmaid of the Divine Mother, the Embodiment of Brahman. I used to dress myself as a woman. I put on a nose-ring. One can conquer lust by assuming the attitude of a woman.⁶⁶

Here we see the pragmatic application of the feminine mode of action. He looked upon himself as a woman friend of the Divine Mother and served her as such.⁶⁷ He decorated her with flowers and new gold ornaments which Mathur had ordered at his request. He fanned her, and sang and danced before her while wearing women's clothes.⁶⁸ By expressing the feminine side of his personality, he forgot that he had a male body.⁶⁹ Indeed he felt that he was a woman and in the attitude of a woman he was free from lust. This mode of worship by the Master certainly illustrates the value of the feminine for Shri Ramakrishna in his own *sadhana* as well as his knowledge and appreciation of female relationships.

The Master appreciated the relationship of woman to woman, as in the case of the Divine Mother and her handmaid. But he saw a special value in the devotion a wife feels for her husband. He said, "Bhakti is single-minded devotion to God, like the devotion a wife feels for her husband."⁷⁰ Here the Master defined bhakti, devotion to God, by analogy. Once again he has elevated the feminine, pointing out that a wife's love for her husband is "single-minded." He has given a very high value to the constancy of the love a wife has for her husband by saying in the next sentence, "It is very

63. Ibid., p. 269.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 798.

66. Ibid., p. 701.

67. *Great Master*, p. 206.

68. Ibid., p. 211.

69. Ibid., p. 206.

70. *Gospel*, p. 315.

difficult to have unalloyed devotion to God.” Again we see that in the Master’s judgment women, because they are women, have distinctive qualities.

These examples of the Master’s feminine side show his high regard for women. He had experienced visions which appear to be more natural to women than men. He felt that the expression of his divine emotions was more feminine than masculine. When he took the role of a handmaid of the Divine Mother, he was free from lust. And he likened a dedicated wife’s love to bhakti, the highest love for God. With this background, let us examine still other attitudes that Shri Ramakrishna expressed toward women.

Yogin Ma, a brahmin widow in her mid-thirties and a neighbour of Golap Ma, said that when talking with Shri Ramakrishna she felt that “he was not a man but one of us [women].” We can see that his feminine aspect was predominant then, because the women lost their shyness which they customarily felt in the presence of men. So at ease were they that they “used to speak to him about very intimate things without any scruple or hesitation.”⁷¹ In other words, the Master could meet women on their own ground in an atmosphere of warmth and intimacy.

A wonderful example of this closeness was the relationship of Nikunja Devi, the wife of Mahendra Nath Gupta, author of the *Gospel*, to Shri Ramakrishna. Nikunja Devi was not as well educated as many of the women who came to the Master, but he paid just as much attention to her. Further, when “M” spoke of his wife as ignorant, the Master defended her and put “M” in his place by saying, “You think that she is ignorant and that you are very wise?”⁷²

71. Swami Aseshananda, “A Holy Woman of Modern India”, *Vedanta and the West*, No. 110 (November-December 1954). p. 59.

72. *Shri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, p. 110.

According to Sister Devamata, Shri Ramakrishna would sit with her for two or three hours at a time discussing household problems. They discussed such matters as the ailment of her children, and the shortcomings of her servants. M’s wife would ask the Master’s advice about disciplining her children, the best food to purchase at the bazaar, and how to make her husband more contented. The Master gave so much attention to her problems that it seemed “he himself was a housewife and mother.”⁷³

It is very significant that the Master paid attention to the details of women’s lives, and not solely to their spiritual efforts. This is the attitude of the perfect teacher—to pay attention to every detail of a disciple’s life. The Master could enter into the world of women without the consciousness that he was male or that the women’s world was foreign to him. Shri Ramakrishna having lost his own body-consciousness freed women from their body-consciousness. Actually it was the Master’s nondual realization which made possible his unlimited ability go beyond gender, to meet and talk with women openly and freely without the usual distinctions based on gender.

Never at a loss for knowing what would satisfy a devotee’s heart, Shri Ramakrishna expressed the attitude of an affectionate child when he let the wife of Navagopal Ghosh feed him sweetmeats. At Cossipore she “stood hesitatingly before him” and he asked: “What do you want?” She replied, “I want to give you some sweetmeats.” He said, “Very well,” and let her put some in his mouth. Then the Master asked if she were satisfied, and she said that she wanted to give him more. He allowed her to feed him a little more with her own hand, and asked again if she were satisfied. She again asked to feed him, but he said, “No, no more now. Wait. In my *Sukshma Sharira*

73. *Ibid.*

(subtle body) I shall take all the sweetmeats you and everyone can offer me.”⁷⁴ Obviously she wanted to feel that the Master was her child ; and he made a reality of this pure and intimate relationship by taking the attitude of a child.

In the case of Smt. Krishnapriyngini the Master’s attitude was both playful and serious. Smt. Krishnapriyngini was the wife of Kalipada Ghosh who led a life of dissipation. She became quite desperate because he was neglecting his family. One day while at the Dakshineswar to worship at the Kali temple she met Shri Ramakrishna. Always sympathetic to women, he listened to her tale of woe. In a playful mood he teased Smt. Krishnapriyngini by telling her to go to the *nahabat*, a music tower where Shri Sarada Devi lived in the ground-floor room, and seek out the woman who knew mantras and charms and, who, in this matter, was superior to himself. She went to the *nahabat*, but Holy Mother returned her to Shri Ramakrishna. She was sent back and forth three times before Holy Mother took pity on her and gave her a Bilva leaf from the offerings which would fulfill her desire. Finally the Master assured her by saying, “Kalipada belongs to this place. Don’t worry at all. He will come back here in the near future.”⁷⁵ And he did.

Again we see this playful attitude of the Master when three young women hid under his cot. This unusual event came about at M’s house where a party of five women, two elderly and three young, had gone to visit the Master. This in itself was unusual because none of the women knew M. However, after failing to find Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, they decided to seek him out although finding M’s house was difficult. When they got to M’s house, they found the Master sitting alone on a cot in

a small room. No one was there ; so they entered and began to talk with the Master who was very happy to see them. But their good time was interrupted when Prankrishna Mukhopadhyaya, ‘the fat Brahmin’, came. The two elderly women moved to a place near the door while the three younger women hid under the cot. They stayed there for about an hour. When the ‘fat Brahmin’ left, they came out from under the cot covered with mosquito bites, but nevertheless laughing.⁷⁶

Shri Ramakrishna was in no way tied to a set of static attitudes. His ability for responding in different ways to different women and situations seems without end, an advisor for one woman, a child for another, a teacher for yet another, a saviour for another, and so on, treating each woman in a special way. The Master’s experience with a Brahmin lady, who had, according to Shri Ramakrishna, “many good traits” shows us yet another response to a woman. This unnamed woman came to him a few days after his first experience of God-intoxication at Dakshineswar. When a garland of flowers was put around her neck and incense was burnt before her, she went into samadhi. She was filled with bliss, and tears streamed from her eyes. While in this condition, the Master saluted her and said, “Mother, shall I succeed ?” She replied, “Yes.”⁷⁷ In this case Shri Ramakrishna’s attitude was one of reverence and worship.

Why, we must ask, did the Master worship her with a garland and incense ? The answer is in his comment about Purna, one of his young disciples, an *Ishvarakoti*.⁷⁸ He said that if a garland of flowers was put around Purna’s neck, or his body smeared with sandal-paste or incense burned before

74. Ibid., pp. 158-9.

75. *First Meetings*, p. 346.

76. *Great Master*, pp. 346-7.

77. *Gospel*, p. 797.

78. Ibid., p. 1036. Shri Ramakrishna said that a person born with some of the characteristics of an Incarnation is called an *Ishvarakoti*.

him, he would go into samadhi. "Then he will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that Narayana himself dwells in his body, that it is Narayana who has assumed the body," the Master said.⁷⁹ We can infer that this test for divinity which the Master described also held true for the unnamed woman. She too went into samadhi, so we must conclude that she too knew that God dwelt within, not in the general sense that all women are Divine Mother, but in a specific sense—that God had assumed a body, her body. If this is the case, then his question to her as to whether he would succeed makes perfect sense. The Master revered and worshipped her as Divinity and expected a divinely inspired reply to his question.

It is recorded that on two occasions Shri Ramakrishna was asked by two different men for his blessing. He responded by saying that it was God alone who blessed.⁸⁰ This comment raises an interesting question in the case of Gopal Ma, because he asked for her blessing. Gopal Ma looked upon the Master as her own Gopala, the baby Krishna. On Krishna's birthday in 1885, Gopal Ma brought some food to the Master. He liked her cooking very much, but on this day he was not well and could not eat anything. Of course Gopal Ma was disappointed. When she asked him "to take a little in his hand", he replied, "Please give me your blessing."⁸¹ In light of the Master's assertion that God alone could bless, and the fact that the Master always acted from the truest of motives, we must conclude that Shri Ramakrishna thought Gopal Ma a very special woman, a God-woman.

In addition to Gopal Ma there were also two other women who were so striking in their attainments that they evoked very distinctive responses from Shri Ramakrishna.

These were Yogin Ma and Lakshmi, Shri Ramakrishna's niece. Let us begin with Yogin Ma who was quite independent in a certain way. She came from a rich, influential family. She was married to Ambika Charan Bishwas who was from an aristocratic family. However, the marriage was a disaster because her young husband was a profligate. Yogin Ma became filled with intense renunciation and she left him to return to her father's house at Baghbazar, Calcutta. This was the neighbourhood where Balaram Bose, who was related to her, lived.⁸² As we have seen, Balaram used to make sure that his women relatives and friends, had a chance to see Shri Ramakrishna. Balaram took Yogin Ma to the Master at Dakshin-eshwar where she eventually became devoted to the Master and Holy Mother.

Shri Ramakrishna once said, "Yogin is not an ordinary woman—she is like the bud of a thousand-petalled lotus which slowly blossoms and delights all with its beauty and fragrance."⁸³ We see here the extraordinary development of Yogin Ma under the guidance of the Master as well as Shri Ramakrishna's judgment of her attainments. At another time he said, "She is a Gopi perfected by God's grace."⁸⁴ But the comment of the Master's which gives the best idea of the development of Yogin Ma was, "Among women devotees Yogin has the characteristics of a Jnani."⁸⁵ She must have had the steady wisdom of a jnani otherwise would Shri Ramakrishna have dared to express these attitudes toward Yogin Ma which were so openly complimentary?

The day that the elderly Gopal Ma and her widow friend came to visit Shri Ramakrishna, was indeed a red letter day for

79. Ibid., pp. 796-7.

80. Ibid., pp. 323, 560.

81. Ibid., p. 840.

82. *The Disciples of Shri Ramakrishna*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1955), pp. 470-1.

83. *First Meetings*, p. 280.

84. Ibid., p. 287.

85. *The Disciples of Shri Ramakrishna*, pp. 476-7.

Gopal Ma. The Master took the two women into his own room, gave them instruction about devotion, and sang to them. He said:

Ah how beautiful is the expression of their faces and eyes! They are, as it were, floating on the current of the love of God. Their eyes are full of intense love of God. Even the Tilaka on the [bridge of] the nose is beautiful.⁸⁶

Of course, Gopal Ma was a very special case. The Master always fed her and one day when she went to Dakshineswar, she asked the Master why he liked to feed her so much. He replied, "For you fed me so much in the past." She said, "In the past? When did I feed you?" He said, "In a previous life."⁸⁷ The Master knew that their relationship was rooted in a time past which made depth, openness, and intimacy possible in perfect kinship.

The Master felt so close to Gopal Ma that when she came to him one day he went to stand beside her. Then like a child he began to express his love for her. With his hand he touched her body all over from head to foot. He pointed to Gopal Ma and said, "This case is filled with Hari only. This consists of Hari alone." Although he touched her feet, Gopal Ma did not shrink.⁸⁸ She looked upon the Master as her very own Gopala, the child Krishna, and he, of course, had adopted the attitude of a child.

On another day Gopal Ma, intoxicated with divine love, went to see Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. She was in such a high state that she had no awareness of her body. When she left to go home, her cloth became loose and was dragged along the ground. Seeing her condition, the Master raised her cloth from the ground. And in order to calm her down, he passed

his hand over her heart.⁸⁹ Between these two unusual lovers of God, conventional barriers often fell.

One of the most unusual attitudes the Master demonstrated toward a woman was that of worshipping his niece, Lakshmi, as the goddess Shitala. Shri Ramakrishna's father had three family deities and one was the goddess Shitala. Shitala told the Master in a dream that she dwelt in one form in a waterpot and in another form in his niece Lakshmi. Shitala also said that it would be equivalent to worshipping her if he fed Lakshmi. After that dream whenever some special food was given to the Master, he would feed Lakshmi some with his own hand.⁹⁰ Later at Cossipore the Master performed a worship of the Goddess Shitala in the form of Lakshmi.⁹¹

The Master always expressed his feelings clearly and directly. One time he said, "It would be nice if Lakshmi becomes a widow. Then she would be able to serve the family deities." Later when he heard that she had been married to an ordinary man, he said, "Lakshmi will be a widow." Then he went into samadhi. After he came back to normal consciousness, Hriday, his nephew and attendant, scolded him for not blessing Lakshmi. He responded to Hriday, saying, "What can I do? The Divine Mother spoke that through me....Lakshmi is a partial incarnation of Shitala who is a spirited goddess, while the person who has married her is an ordinary human being."⁹² Among the women devotees three widows, Gopal Ma, Yogin Ma and Lakshmi, were especially distinguished by their spiritual attainments. Widowhood made possible a lifestyle in which a woman could pursue spiritual life to the exclusion of other distractions. We

86. *Great Master*, p. 634.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 656.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 655-6.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 650.

90. Swami Chetanananda, "Lakshmi Devi", p. 309.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

know also that the Master had loved the idea of becoming a Brahmin widow when he was a youth so that he could give a lifetime of devotion to Krishna. The fact is that Shri Ramakrishna considered widowhood a positive condition for a woman if she turned her mind toward God.

There are several incidents that reveal the Master's attitude of affection and concern for little girls. In the first of these incidents he was distressed by Lakshmi's predicament, and in the other incidents he showed both concern and playfulness. When Lakshmi was a child about ten years old and was living in her village, Kamarpukur, she was sent to get rice for the family deities, but none was available. Weeping she came home, where she found her uncle, Shri Ramakrishna. He was moved by her tears and the fact that she had had to go to Mukundapur, one of the neighbouring villages, for rice. To bring an end to Lakshmi's unhappiness, the Master purchased some land for her family so that they could have the income from it. He said to Lakshmi, "Henceforth you won't suffer from lack of food. And you won't have to run to Mukundapur for rice any more."⁹³

Lakshmi told the following story to an American devotee many years after it happened. The women of the village used to gather around the Master in the evening on their way back from the tank. One day Shri Ramakrishna wanted one of the women to sing, anyone. But no one would. Finally, a girl, whom the Master loved very much, sang a song in a "high-pitched, quavering voice." There was laughter from the other girls. But the Master was delighted and said, "See so great is her devotion! Just because I asked her she has sung so frankly and simply. She alone among you has true devotion."⁹⁴ The Master often seemed to

empathize with children, understanding their distress.

At Dakshineshwar children came with their parents when they visited the Master. His playful mood, one of the moods of a paramahansa, is well illustrated by the incident of Vishvambhar's daughter who was six or seven years old. The Master was returning from the porch when he began talking to her and her little companions. Vishvambhar's daughter said, "I saluted you and you didn't even notice it." Shri Ramakrishna replied that he hadn't noticed. The child said that she wanted to salute him again, this time the other foot also. He laughed, sat down, returned the salute, bowed to the child and touched the ground with his forehead. Then he asked her to sing, but she was adamant in her refusal. Shri Ramakrishna then sang "light and frivolous" songs to entertain the children.⁹⁵

Then there was a child who was called Habi, which means stupid. This child was actually a distant cousin of the Master, and she also was related to Holy Mother who was her maternal aunt. She had this name Habi because her mother, who before Habi's birth had lost three children, did not feel able to give her a proper name because she felt she would only lose this child as well. Shri Ramakrishna was distressed that she had such a degrading name, so with her mother's permission he named Bhavatarini, the name of Kali at the Dakshineshwar temple. Shri Ramakrishna loved this child, and when he came to Calcutta from Dakshineshwar, he always went to her house first. He would play with her, tie a sari around her waist, and she would lie on his lap with her arms around his neck. Often he took her to Dakshineshwar where she would stay with him for two or three days.⁹⁶

93. Ibid., p. 309.

94. Ibid., p. 310.

95. *Gospel*, p. 490.

96. Gayatri Devi, "Divine Joy at Play, (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1985), p. 32.

When Bhavatarini was about eight, the Master became concerned about her future, that she should be married, (*i.e.*, betrothed) and that the marriage should be a good one. For her husband-to-be, he selected Upendra Nath Mukherjee, who, although he had little education, would have good luck because Bhavatarini was a "Lakshmi".⁹⁷ Here Shri Ramakrishna indicated that Bhavatarini had something of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and an aspect of Divine Mother, within her. As it turned out, Upendra did become a very successful publisher. In this instance, with regard to marriage, we see the Master followed the traditional customs of the Bengali culture.

Liberality was one of the foremost attitudes of Shri Ramakrishna. However, he was not liberal for the sake of being liberal, but rather for the sake of destroying in the devotees narrow, bigoted, or intolerant attitudes which were based on ignorance. For example the Master liberalized his niece Lakshmi's eating habits in one stroke when he threatened her with rebirth if she would not eat a piece of fish which was Kali's prasad. Generally Hindu widows were strict vegetarians. The Master taught that realization of God was not possible as long as the aspirant had shyness, aversion or fear.⁹⁸ He taught in such a way that the habitual behaviours which stood in the way of God realization were changed, liberalized.

The actions of a woman called Pagli, who was crazy, give us another insight into the breadth of the Master's liberality. At Cossipore Pagli wanted to see the Master, but the devotees in the past had beaten her, and Shashi, a direct disciple, wanted to shove her out of the room.⁹⁹ But Shri

Ramakrishna said to let her come. She came and the Master asked her what her attitude was. She said, "Madhur", wife or sweetheart of God. The Master replied, "But I look on all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother. All women are mothers to me." She was not satisfied with his answer and persisted in her own way of thinking.¹⁰⁰ But the point is that Shri Ramakrishna did talk to her, did treat her with respect, giving his disciples and the world an example of the liberal outlook which can be extended even to the unbalanced.

The liberal attitude of Shri Ramakrishna worked wonders in removing narrow attitudes and behaviours of certain women. For example, Golap Ma, who was filled with grief from the death of her daughter, was brought to the Master by another woman disciple, Yogin Ma. Golap Ma had lost her entire family, first her husband and son and then later, after her daughter's marriage, her daughter. She was very orthodox, full of caste prejudice and the sense of purity and impurity. Through her association with the Master, she became very tolerant and liberal. One time at a Brindaban temple she tore off a piece of her cloth and cleaned up after a child who had soiled the floor. The other pilgrims stood by criticizing the child's mother for her carelessness. When the steps of the Ganga were dirty she would clean them with rags and water. Her contact with Shri Ramakrishna had broadened her outlook so that her sense of purity and impurity was replaced by devoted service to all. Everyone regardless of social status received her "love and worship."¹⁰¹ The Master's teachings had made her liberal and tolerant in her views and behaviour.

97. Bhavatarini, "My Reminiscences of Shri Ramakrishna", trans. Swami Yatiswarananda, *Vedanta and the West*, No. 193 (September-October 1968), p. 48.

98. *Great Master*, p. 345.

99. *Gospel*, p. 952.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 958.

101. Swami Madhavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India*, 2nd edition, (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Pithoragarh, Himalayas: 1982), p. 452.

Gopal Ma, the oldest close woman devotee, had worshipped the baby Krishna, Gopala, for thirty years before she visited the Master. She was very orthodox. When she first visited the Master at Dakshineswar, Holy Mother had to purify the hearth three times with cowdung and Ganga water before Gopal Ma would "condescend" to cook there.¹⁰² This gives us an idea of her turn of mind. However, after her association with the Master everything changed. Swami Saradananda wrote in the *Great Master*:

Again strolling together with some eminent devotees of Shri Ramakrishna or moving with them with especial intimacy, in the presence of His mother, [Divine Mother] He convinced her [Gopal Ma] that He and they were not different—the devotee and the divine were one. Therefore, the hesitation she felt in eating things touched by them gradually vanished.¹⁰³

For example, one day she cleaned up the remains of goat meat, prasad from the Kali temple, which Naren (later known as Swami Vivekananda) had eaten. When the Master saw this he was pleased and he said: "Just see how liberal she is daily becoming."¹⁰⁴ And when, after the death of Shri Ramakrishna, Western women came she treated them as if they were her nearest and dearest. Actually she spent her last two years in the

care of Nivedita.¹⁰⁵ These two orthodox widows, Gopal Ma and Golap Ma became free from caste distinctions. The Master said, "The caste-system can be removed by one means only, and this is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste."¹⁰⁶ These two women are the proof of his liberal teachings which replace false barriers with love and service.

We have seen how women's behaviours were affected by their different settings, city and village, and how the Master's influence overrode all custom and tradition. And we have seen the range of attitudes the Master expressed toward women, intimate and loving, serious and playful, instructive and liberalizing. But most important for woman is his revelation of her divine nature.

What was it that gave him such mastery over persons and circumstances? What is it that conquers our minds and hearts as we come to know this story of the Master and his women devotees? It is the absolute grounding of his life in divinity, his perfect expression of divinity, his vision rooted in the One which coursed into the world of women. Always an Advaitin, his heart went out to woman who desperately needed strength, power, and self-knowledge to fulfill her divine destiny.

102. *Great Master*, p. 636.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 653.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 662.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 661.

106. *Gospel*, p. 155.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND MODERN INDIA

SWAMI DESHIKATMANANDA

Greatness of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda requires no glorification with trumpets and drums nor a person to introduce him to the world. Whoever has eyes, sees his work; whoever has ears hears what our great Avatara Purusha did for raising the motherland from the bottom

of the ocean of Tamas to the present condition of Rajas or activity. His words and teachings come like Amrita, nectar for dying humanity. It was like Swati rain for the Chatak bird. It was life-giving and man-making. He was a complex personality being a lover of humanity, a world teacher of religion and a great patriot. He was

condensed India. When he moved, Mother India moved and when he spoke, ancient India spoke through him. His words were an all-consuming fire; his look a great vision; and his actions all for the good of humanity. His life was as deep as the ocean, as vast as the sky, and by meditating on this, the Supreme Reality is as near to us as anything else in this phenomenal world. His name was Narendra which itself indicates that he was Narayana. He became Vivekananda to dispel the ignorance of man by showing the way to ever-lasting Bliss by keen discrimination.

Condition of Our Motherland

Let us analyse the condition of our motherland around the period of the advent of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The after-effects of the first war of independence of 1857 were disastrous. Princes and the people alike were terror-stricken. The kings and the educated few had become puppets in the hands of the British. Reforms and revolutionary ideas according to European civilisation had already been set afoot. They were asserting their influence in every walk of our nation's life. Young India had lost its faith in our ancient traditions, culture and scriptures. They were aping the Europeans in every respect. The life-blood of the poor, down-trodden masses was being drained jointly by the rich and the rulers. Orthodox reformers were quarrelling over the shell oblivious of the kernel. Superstitions had come to stay in the name of religion. There was no unity among Indians and the British resorted to the policy of "Divide and Rule".

Heralding of a New Awakening

The groans and cries of despair from suffering humanity must have touched the heart of the Most Compassionate One.

He always comes to raise humanity to levels of divinity by destroying the prevalent ills and ignorance. History tells us that the nineteenth century was a period of renaissance. Wave after wave of a great spiritual current lashed and inundated the land. The whole nation was to be awakened from its age-old lethargy. The task was not a simple one. So the whole band of Shri Ramakrishna had to take birth for this purpose. Great cultural and reform societies like the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, the Theosophical Society, etc. had also come into being, working towards this end. The signs of revival were to be seen everywhere. But it was to Swami Vivekananda that the main task of reawakening of the whole nation was entrusted by the Divine and we see how he was moulded by the great master, Shri Ramakrishna, for this purpose.

Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

We cannot understand Shri Ramakrishna and his teachings unless we understand Swami Vivekananda's doubts, whether spiritual or secular, were solved by direct realisation or experience. The Master said to him: "Do not accept anything because I have said so, but test everything for yourself. It is not by assent or dissent that the goal is to be attained, but in concrete realisation."¹ And this Narendra did though often times this required infinite patience on the part of the master. The Master said, "He is a burning roaring fire consuming all impurities to ashes".² One day in a semi-conscious state the master defined the meaning of compassion for all living beings according to the Vaishnava sect. On coming to the conscious plane he said with much emphasis that what is required is not compassion for others, but rather service to man

1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (p. 133 ; vol. 1 ; 5th ed.).

2. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (p. 134 ; vol. 1 ; 5th ed.).

recognising him to be the veritable manifestation of God. None but Swami Vivekananda could gauge the meaning of these words. He said that the day would soon come when he would proclaim this grand truth to the world at large. Once Swami Vivekananda told Shri Ramakrishna that he would like to be merged in Samadhi days together only to come down occasionally to take food to preserve the body. But the Master chided him saying that he was small minded. The Master also said that there was a state even higher than this and that Swami Vivekananda was to be a huge banyan tree giving shade and happiness to many. Another day the master had told him that religion was not for empty stomachs. So, though Swami Vivekananda's message was delivered in the terminology of the popular Vedantic speculation, it was really the message of the Master to the modern world. Socialistic and Vedantic ideas took shape at the feet of the Master himself.

Great Men and Swami Vivekananda's Influence on Them

Many great men were powerfully influenced by Swami Vivekananda during his lifetime and even after his passing away he continues to do so. "Truth is greater even than the Prophet and the Prophet lives in that truth even more vividly than if he had been alive".³

Mahatma Gandhi, Shri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and many other eminent men of the world were among those who were influenced by Swami Vivekananda's writings and works. Rabindranath Tagore was two years older to the Swami; Mahatmaji and Shri Aurobindo were seven and nine years younger to the Swami, respectively. Swami Vivekananda did not live to be forty years of age. Mahatmaji

3. *A Bridge to Eternity* (p. 212; Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, first edition).

said, "I have gone through his works very thoroughly and after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became thousand-fold."⁴ Tagore said, "If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative."⁵ Subash Chandra Bose wrote, "He laid the greatest stress on character building. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet. Modern India is his creation, if I err not."⁶ Dr. Radhakrishnan said that in his college days the students used to read Swamiji's lectures in manuscript form in secret and they used to circulate the same from hand to hand. Thus they used to feel proud of their great culture and ancient traditions. Jawaharlal Nehru said, "He was, I think, one of the founders of the national modern movement of India. Directly or indirectly he has powerfully influenced the India of today. And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire that flows through Swami Vivekananda."⁷

National Movement and Swami Vivekananda

The national movement, in a way, was inaugurated at the Parliament of Religions in 1893 in America. His untiring labours in two foreign continents for about four long years brought the desired effect in India. British Rule continued in India, but the Indians had become proud of their culture, their religion and their past. They ceased to be misguided by the missionaries. They began to consider their great heritage and ennobling truths mentioned in the Vedas and the Puranas, in proper light. This entered the political sphere also. The Indian National Congress began to demand "Swarajya", self-rule, from the year 1906.

4. *Prabuddha Bharata* (May 1963; p. 170).

5. *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda* (p. 34; R. K. Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta; 2nd ed.).

6. *Prabuddha Bharata* (July 1932; p. 352).

7. *A Bridge to Eternity* (p. 211; 1st ed.).

What was needed for the national movement was self-esteem, self-confidence and self-respect; and this was gained through Swami Vivekananda's efforts.

The Theme of Swami Vivekananda's Nationalistic Lectures and Modern India

What did Swami Vivekananda teach us for the building of a new India? The Swami returned from the West in January 1897, landing at Colombo. The grateful nation accorded him a rousing reception there and a similar red carpet welcome awaited at every place that he blessed by his visit. He awakened the slumbering nation with the lion-roar "Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is reached". "Up India," exhorted the Swami, "and conquer the world with your spirituality!... The only condition of national life,...is the conquest of the world by Indian thought."⁸ The theme of these lectures from Colombo to Almora is the building of a modern India based on her spiritual inheritance, assimilating Western scientific and technological culture. He pointed out the duties and responsibilities of the orthodox Brahmins on the one hand and of the rich on the other and bade both of them to contribute their might for raising the masses from their wretched condition; setting the need for social reform through change of outlook, education, the removal of untouchability and other social ills, etc. He also emphasised that the masses must have access to the cultural and spiritual treasures of the motherland and that the toiling masses have a share in the wealth that their labour generates. One can well imagine the thrill with which these words were received when they issued forth from the lips of the great patriot-saint.

Swami Vivekananda left the mortal soil on 4 July 1902. Since then the country has witnessed great political movements

initiated by leading men, all trying to realise his dreams and visions. Modern India bears the indelible impress of this towering personality. The words of a prophet cannot but come true. Swami Vivekananda had prophesied, "India will be raised not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love ... one vision I see as clear as life before me, that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on her throne rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction."⁹ The whole world knows that India attained her independence not by war nor by much bloodshed but mostly by peaceful methods, through self-sacrifice and suffering. This is the first time in the history of the world that a country's independence has been earned in this fashion.

Swami Vivekananda says, "No civilisation can begin to lift its head until we look charitably upon one another; and the first step towards that much-needed charity is to look charitably and kindly upon the religious convictions of others."¹⁰ So ours is a secular state where religious freedom without the interference of the government is allowed. The stalwarts who framed the Indian Constitution knew very well that no civilisation could long exist unless universal toleration and acceptance envisaged by Swami Vivekananda, is practised.

Swami Vivekananda had once said, "You must not depend on any foreign help. Nations, like individuals, must help themselves. This is real patriotism."¹¹ Mother India, depending mostly on indigenous sources, has become almost self-sufficient in

9. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (pp. 352-53; vol. 4).

10. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (p. 18; vol. 3; 11th ed. 1973).

11. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (p. 298; 4th new ed. 1966).

8. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (p. 277; vol. 3; 13th new print, 1984).

various fields. In the field of space-research, India has made laudable strides with very little of foreign technological know-how. The satellites we have launched into space, *Insat*, *Bhaskara* and *Rohini*, prove the capability of Indian scientists.

A pressing need, according to Swami Vivekananda, was the raising of the standard of living of the masses and the spreading of education among them, particularly the women folk. Today the country provides free education to boys and girls up to the seventh standard. The backward classes enjoy a number of privileges and concessions. Women are becoming more and more conscious of their rights and their duties towards the rebuilding of our motherland. Their participation extends to all fields; they have proved their mettle in politics, in administration in the private and the public sectors, in factories and in the schools and colleges. What Swami Vivekananda wanted was the reemergence of *Gargis*, *Maitreyis*, *Sitas* and *Savitris*.

Swami Vivekananda cautioned us, "But mark you, if you give up that spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materialising civilisation of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an

extinct race. ... Religion and religion alone is the life of India and when that goes, India will die, in spite of politics, in spite of social reforms, in spite of Kubera's wealth poured upon the head of every one of her children."¹² So until all the activities of the country are backed by righteousness, morality, patriotism and religious fervour, all round development of the country can never be achieved. It is the individuals who make the nation. Until each individual becomes religious, patriotic and moral, corruption, craving for self gain and other forms of evil can never be wiped off the country.

We shall conclude by quoting Swami Vivekananda's great benediction for raising New India: "Let New India arise... out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler and sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and ... from groves and forests, from hills and mountains."¹³

12. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (p. 146; vol. 3; 13th reprint, 1984).

13. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (p. 327; vol. 7; 6th ed. 1964).

NANDA DEVI

SWAMI PURNANANDA*

(Composed on a stormy afternoon at Mayavati which overlooks a magnificent view of the Himalayan snow-peak, Nanda Devi).

It was an afternoon at Mayavati,
My vacant mind wandered adrift.
Where? In search of what bliss unalloyed?
In quest of what treasures immortal?
Not sure; no answer came from within.
Sitting near the window of my nook,
I gazed and gazed at, with unblinking eyes

* Translated from the original Bengali poem by Swami Jitatmananda.

The matchless face of Mayavati.
There, who knows what charm hides ?
What power abides ?
What spell of the Finite ?
What lure of the Infinite ?
With myriad faces Mayavati comes
At every stroke of the hour
And binds with all her love and charm
The silent seeker to her mountain-bower.

All at once broke the stream of thought.
A mighty tempest burst forth,
Sweeping the earth with thunder and fire.
Roaring, whirling wind blew
Uprooting tall cedars and mighty Oaks,
Like an elephant mad trampling the trees.
Or a hungry tiger among the lambs,
Or Time, the all-destroyer, with burning wrath
That threatens to devour all, life and earth.

The storm whirled and moved around
With thunderous thud and swinging sweep.
With laughter loud and tempest-rhythm
Like death stalking mad with joy,
Like Shiva dancing with his trident sharp
That brought ruin on Daksha's holy fire
And burnt the universe in his ire.

The darkening clouds threatened to eclipse,
The setting sun in mild ease
A wild wind blew, freezing and cold
A terrible rain lashed the forest-hold,
Hailstones fell and pierced the earth.
Bringing dusk ominous, an extinguishing hearth.
Like veil of death, it descended and heard
The last breathings of a dying earth.

Suddenly fell my eyes on the horizon far.
There stood Nanda Devi, the towering queen,
Sublime, with her white mantle of unmelting snow,
Touching the lofty height of heavens.
Hidden so long behind a blue shroud of clouds
She reared now her head, majestic and proud.
Tearing the veils of mists and cloud
She stood there, the stately queen
In gorgeous splendour of gold and white
In the Creator's vast, expansive court.
Speechless and awed, I stood and watched
The golden glow that touched the heavens far and wide,

And bloomed the green earth with a crimson mild.
I gazed and gazed with unquenched thirst!
Ah! where was it from? This splendour so vast
That outshone the forms of goddesses and gods,
And the charms of ever-green garden that immortals sought?

From deep down the gorges floated now
Foam-like mists, incense of the woods.
A thousand crickets sang to spell
The evening prayers with conch and bell.
The golden sun cast its eye,
Paying homage to Her majesty.
The murmuring sound of wood's waterfalls,
Final song of the flying birds parting soon
Raised incantation of praise in unlettered verse,
And rang together to sound the evening tune.

The clustering clouds that circled the majestic peak
Now bowed low to touch her feet.
On the right stood Trishul, the snow-peak
That looked like the trident in Shiva's grip.
On the left stood the younger peak, Nanda Kot
Waving a feather of foam, white and deep,
The golden clouds built the canopy bright.
The cloudlets made for her the milk-white bed
On the mountains green, for the approaching night.
The chain of clouds, shedding snow and light
Wrapped her with a girdle of gems, gold and white.

The quiet sun began to set below the hills,
The descending dusk drew the veil of dark
With clandestine steps, steady and slow,
Parting for the night with the hope to raise,
Nanda Devi, from slumber at morrow's dawn
With the primal songs of early birds.

But what am I dreaming?
Since the dawn of creation, Nanda Devi,
The great goddess is buried in meditation.
Never did she open her eyes, nor see the moon and sun.
Through the ages thunders, that echoed far and wide.
Clouds melted and torrents flowed, with all their might.
Yet neither she awoke nor broke her meditation.
The stars sent flowers of fire, sparkling and bright.
The heavens sent the dewy mantle of night.
Sun and moon circled her in awe and fear.
From the sky blew the breeze mellow and soft.
Raindrops showered melting her attire white.
Birds sang on earth incantations of Sama, sonorous and sweet.

The Himalayas sounded the unstruck 'OM',
 To worship her in the immutable home.
 Homages of gods and men poured like oblations
 On the great goddess, the mother of mountains,
 From whose feet flowed the Ganga adored by angelic saints.
 But nothing broke her meditation ; no psalm
 Rippled the peace eternal and majestic calm
 Of Nanda Devi, buried for ever, Shiva's consort,
 In transcendent Self, far beyond words and thought.

The round of birth and death goes and comes
 In the universe of inert and life.
 From insects to men, from gods to titans,
 All play awhile the game of life
 To be thrown for ever by Death
 Into the abyss of all-destroying Time.
 The deathless peak sees the ebb and flow of life
 As eternal witness, and dreams of the Self
 That stands far above the joys and sorrows,
 The birth and death, revolving round and round.
 The winds of happiness raised in her no ripples of joy,
 Neither sorrow dared to break her blissful dream.
 The same calm she had in wintry cold and warm summer,
 Cursing no foe, and pleasing no praiser with boon.
 Thunders and meteors, quakes and tremors, returned
 Fruitless and pale, from her adamant vane.

Rivers meander and get lost in deserts,
 Oceans move breaking shores and making isles.
 The myriad faces of the mother earth,
 Rise and fall, change and evolve,
 Through peace and wars, struggles and fights.
 Immutable and silent for ever she remains unruffled,
 Through the phalanx of time, past, present, and future.
 In majestic calm there she stands, the great mountain,
 Nanda Devi, buried in bliss of eternal meditation.

PROPHET OF THE MASSES : VIVEKANANDA

BODHISATTVA

(A one-act play on Swami Vivekananda)

Scene: Early morning. Birds' chirpings corner of the stage. In the background is are heard in the background. Swamiji is sung *Chidananda Rupah Shivoham*, sitting and meditating under a tree. In the *Shivoham*). background, the whistling sound of trains is heard. A sweeper is quietly working in a motherland, India, from which this great

message of the divinity of man will one day go out to the world. This message will bring new life to people in this materialistic age. But today India is sleeping like a giant, a prehistoric animal. The eternal religion of the Vedas, the Sanatana Dharma, is covered with local customs and don't-touchisms. The essential divinity of men is forgotten and that is why India has gone down for centuries. But Shri Ramakrishna is born in this age to bring back the glory of the Sanatana Dharma, the religion of the divinity in all beings. And India shall rise not with the help of mortars and guns, but with the flag of renunciation and service, with the ochre cloth of the monk.

(Enter two priests and address the sweeper)

Senior Priest: Hey, get away, get away, you fool. My goodness, so very early in the morning I have to swallow the dust from the sweeper's broom.

(Turning towards the Jr. Priest) These fools will never learn that we are the real custodians of God.

Jr. Priest: Hey, get away. Don't you see that he is a venerable priest? He will have to take one more bath if even your shadow falls on his holy self.

(The sweeper gets embarrassed and withdraws himself in a corner. Just at this moment Vivekananda opens his eyes and rises up from the seat. He is wearing the dress of a wandering monk).

Vivekananda: (Affectionately looks at the sweeper and then sternly at the other two) Each soul is eternally divine, holy Self. In every being there is infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite divinity. Man is the Taj Mahal, the highest among all living beings. He is the visible manifestation of God. There is, therefore, no essential distinction between man and man, high and low, a priest and a sweeper.

Sr. Priest: (Surprised, to the Jr. Priest) Who is this strange monk?

Jr Priest: (To the Sr. Priest) He seems to radiate knowledge like Shiva.

Sr. Priest: But, Sadhu Baba, you certainly know that Hinduism means casteism.

Vivekananda: No, never. Caste is simply a crystallised social institution. For thousands of years it has served India. But today it has become the instrument of privilege and separation between man and man. Today it is filling the atmosphere of India with its stench and it can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost individuality.

Sr. Priest: We cannot understand what you mean by all these words, Babaji? A priest is the only doorway to heaven. ... Today is Monday, the day of Lord Shiva. I am the chief priest of the Shiva temple. This morning I took my holy bath and then took my holy vibhuti and am proceeding to the holy temple. ...

Jr. Priest: And this sweeper stood callously in his way!!! Fool! He does not know that he should maintain at least ten feet distance from the holy priest.

Swamiji: Brothers, holiness is not outside. It is inside. A holy mind is free from hatred, lust and greed. This is the gist of all worship: to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased, really worships Shiva and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples. This sweeper is my brother as much as you two are my brothers. He is the Shiva Himself in flesh and blood, as much as you are.

(The sweeper kneels at the feet of Swamiji in deep veneration)

Sweeper: Holy Sir. No one ever spoke to us like this. From our birth we have only heard from others "Do not touch me. I am holy, Do not touch me, I am holy." We received only hatred and neglect. This love, this sympathy for us, never did we

get before. You are Shiva Himself who has come to save us.

Swamiji: (Affectionately) No dear, I am a begging monk. Shiva is the God of all gods. But my master Shri Ramakrishna has taught that the same Shiva resides in me and in you. (Swamiji raises his hand as blessing towards him and turns to the priests) A man of God sees all men as his own brothers.

(The Sr. Priest and the Jr. Priest look this side and that side, embarrassed)

Sr. Priest: (To the Jr. Priest) Hey, let us proceed. If we listen to this strange Babaji, all the prasadam and the offerings, all will vanish from the temple. Let us hurry without any further delay. (Both of them hurry out).

(Swamiji looks out towards the heaven)

Swamiji: Ah, how unfortunate! Nobody remembers that the nation lives in the cottage. None ever did anything for them. (to the sweeper) But dear brother, I see clearly that a new India will arise from your huts, from the cottages of farmers and labourers, from the forests, jungles and slums. And all of you have the same potentiality as that of university professors or a prince. Your work is as much a worship of the Lord as the brahmin's worship in the temple. My master taught that all work is worship. (The sweeper stands, working in a corner)

(Swamiji rises from his seat and walks impatiently to and fro)

(slowly) I am feeling hungry. For the last two days they have made me talk. But no one offered me a morsel of food. I will not beg. I have taken a vow of not begging from anyone and not cooking food with fire. If He wills, the Lord Himself will send me food or I will be glad to die here.

(The sweeper approaches Swamiji)

Sweeper: Babaji. Forgive me. You look very hungry and tired. For two days the venerable pundits and scholars talked to you. But no one gave you food, neither did

you ask anyone for it. Will you kindly accept a little food from me? Please Babaji, I will bring clean food for you.

Swamiji: (To the heavens) O Lord! Like an angel he offers me food today. To the sweeper) Yes brother, bring, bring whatever you want to bring. The fire in my stomach is now burning me.

(The sweeper goes hastily out and some other gentlemen enter in European dress)

Ist Gen: (To the other): Yes, yes, it is the same Babaji with whom we discussed a lot of philosophy yesterday. (to Swamiji) Holy sir, what are you waiting for here? May we discuss a little of religion with you?

(The sweeper enters with some food)

(And Swamiji immediately proceeds towards him and takes a little food and eats it with relish.)

Swamiji: Ah, it tastes like nectar, the sacred prasad of Shiva Himself.

2nd Gen: (To the Ist gentleman) Look, look. A sadhu eating from a sweeper's plate? Swamiji, how is it that you are taking food from a pariah? (Pointing to the sweeper) Is he a gentleman?

Swamiji: (At once sharply reacting) Are you gentlemen? Two days passed. You made me talk like a machine and none cared to know if I were hungry or not. Is it like a gentleman? Is it your love for religion? Are you human beings with conscience? I would rather choose to live and die with these poor illiterate brothers than discuss dry philosophy with you. Go and develop a little heart before you come to discuss philosophy.

(They retreat in shame and leave the stage)

Swamiji: O India, Thou needst a prophet to knock poor children out of this stupendous ignorance, this terrible narrowness and this shocking heartlessness. These moustached babies? Ah, they do not know what the great religion of the rishis is. (To the sweeper) Dear brother, today the Lord has offered me food at this moment of unbear-

able hunger through you. May you be blessed!

Sweeper: Holy sir, today, I have served Lord Shiva (He bows his head at Swamiji's feet).

(Enters Munshi Jagamohan, the Dewan of the Raja of Khetri, and gets simultaneously surprised and overjoyed to see Swamiji).

Swamiji: Dear Dewanji, how is my dear Raja?

Jagamohan: (Bowing down deeply in reverence) Swamiji, your dear disciple, the Raja of Khetri, Maharaja Ajit Singh is searching for you after you left us on the 4th morning and did not allow us to follow you. Since then we were trying to trace you out. But, Swamiji, why are you taking your food on this railway platform?

Swamiji: Jagamohanji, I am a monk. The whole world is my house. Generally, I do not like to stay anywhere more than three days. Here, also, today is the third day. For two days, the Lord had not sent me any food. Today, out of His infinite mercy, my sweeper brother has offered me this food.

Jagamohan: Holy sir, What a shame for us! You are hungry for two days. No one offered you food? Swamiji, it is just heartrending! The Maharaja, your disciple, will die if he hears of it. But you could have sent word through somebody to us?

Swamiji: (Smilingly recites in magnificent voice) Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend?

The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food.

What chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not.

No food or drink can taint that noble Self.

Which knows Itself. Like rolling river free.

Thou ever be, Sannyasin bold! Say—"Om Tat Sat, Om!"

Jagamohan: (To the audience) Yes, we have seen him absolutely free from all ties. He is, indeed, a born monk, a wanderer on

the face of this earth.

Swamiji: Jagamohanji, I will move out again. Movement is my life. These mute millions of India call me out. I will offer my life in order to save them from hunger and degradation. This I will do or die. I hear their silent cry.

I feel the power of a prophet tormenting my soul. (To the audience) a prophet is honoured everywhere save in his own country. India will not listen to me unless I get the approbation of the world outside. (Turning to Jagamohan) The Raja of Khetri asked me to attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. At that time, I declined. But no more shall I decline. If necessary, I will go to Chicago via Europe, walking over Afghanistan.

Jagamohan: But Swamiji, you have no money, no credentials. No one knows you either in India or in the West. You must take the help of kings, scholars, and eminent Indians for this great journey to the West.

Swamiji: No dear Dewan Saheb, all my life, whether in Himalayan forests or Rajputana deserts, I always depended only on the Lord for all help, and He sent me whatever I required. I will move alone, alone with God. Come what may. I will wait on the last rock of Kayakumari. And then I will meditate in order to receive the direction of my Master, my God. If future India wants a prophet out of me, if the destiny of thirty three million downtrodden Indians rests on my life, then I am sure the Lord will help me and I will flood the West with the eternal message of Hinduism, the message of the divinity of man. (Turning to audience) Don't you see that ignorance, narrowness, heartlessness and superstition have covered India like a dark cloud? Time is short. The way is long. In the core of my heart, I hear the Lord calling me to go to the West. I have not a day to spare. The entire West, beyond the seas, I believe, is waiting for the life-giving message of Hinduism. Let me move out and follow the

light of God within. (Swamiji raises both his hands towards the dark sky) *Lead kindly light amidst this encircling gloom.*

(Munshi Jagamohan and others leave the stage).

Swamiji comes forward, looks up dreamily at the sky and then bursts into a Sanskrit chanting:

Shrinvantu Vishwe Amritasya Putrah!

A ye dhamani divyani tasthuh
Vedaham etam purusham mahantam

Aditya varnam tamasah parastat

Tvameva viditva ati mrityum eti.

Nanyah pantha vidyate ayanaya.

(Swamiji slowly opens his eyes from deep meditation and then recites in magnificent voice)

Hear ye, children of immortality! Even those who live in the heavenly spheres. I have known that great Being who is like the effulgent sun. Knowing Him alone man conquers death. There is no other way. There is no other way.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA: 90 YEARS AGO

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

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Following each other in quick succession, two well-known Hindu Saints, both having large followings, shuffled off their mortal coils during the last May and June. The Swami Vishuddhananda Saraswati of Benares passed away early in May in his own place at Benares and Goswami Vijoy Krishna of Calcutta breathed his last in the first week of June at Puri, Orissa, where he had gone on pilgrimage. The former was better known, perhaps, as a savant who had few equals in the department of Sanskrit philosophy and the latter, probably as a Bhakta, a god-drunk man of a very high order. The former attained the ripe old age of ninety, while the latter was only fifty eight.

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In Sunday Magazine for December there is the following summary of the work of Mr. George Muller, of Bristol:—

Mr. George Muller, the founder of the Ashley Down Orphan Homes, delivered at a meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association a wonderful testimony of answer to prayer. He is now in his ninety-third year, and says that whenever he has felt he might ask a blessing of God he invariably went on praying till he got the answer. Every stone of the Homes was the result of prayer; every particle of timber was the result of prayer; for he had never asked a single human being in the wide world for a penny of the 115,000 which the buildings alone cost. Year after year now for sixty-two years he had been going on in that way, without asking for a shilling. In this way he had obtained more than 1,400,000. God had enabled him to found schools in

different parts of the world in which he had had 122,000 scholars. From amongst these God had given him 20,000 souls. Poor man as he was, he had been able, in answer to prayer, to send 257,000 to the missionary brethren. They might see from such figures how much could be accomplished through prayer. He took up his orphan work especially with the object of giving a visible demonstration to the whole world and the Church of God of what prayer could do.

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A WRITER in Italia Termale, quoted by The National Druggist, (American) December, is not much in favor of the theory that late suppers are injurious. "He declares, in fact," says the latter paper, "that many persons who remain thin and weakly, in spite of all precautions in regard to diet, etc., owe the fact largely to habitual abstemiousness at night. He says, very truly, that physiology teaches us that, in sleeping as in waking, there is a perpetual waste going on in the tissues of the body, and it seems but logical that nourishment should be continuous as well. The digestion of the food taken on at dinner time, or in the early evening, is finished, as an usual thing, before or bedtime, yet the activity of the processes of assimilation, etc., continues for hours afterward; and when one retires with an empty stomach, the result of this activity is sleeplessness and an undue wasting of the system. 'All other creatures,' says the writer, 'outside of man are governed by a natural instinct which leads those having a stomach to eat before lying down for the night.'