



Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 94

OCTOBER 1989

No. 10

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

THUS SPOKE SHRI CHANDI

THE CREATOR'S PRAYER TO DURGA

THE DIVINE MOTHER

Thou art the Mantra *Svaha* (uttered in giving oblations to the gods), Thou art *Svadhya* (uttered while giving offerings to the Manes), Thou art the *Vashatkara* (repeated in sixteen different tunes while giving oblations to Indra), Thou art the nectar (of the gods) O Eternal One, Thou art the alphabet and the three kinds of syllabic instants (Matras).

Thou art the short-syllabled immutable consonants which cannot be fully pronounced, Thou art the presiding deity of the Gayatri Mantra, O Devi, Thou art the Supreme Mother of all.

O Devi, by Thee always is everything supported, by Thee always is this world created, sustained, and at end destroyed.

At the time of creation Thou art both the created thing as also the act of creation, and so art Thou during the existence of the world the thing sustained and act of sustenance and at the end of the cycle Thou art the thing destroyed as also the act of destruction.

Thou art the Supreme Knowledge, Maya, intellect, memory, delusion and the great prowess of the gods as well as of the demons.

Thou art the cause of everything, of the three Gunas, Thou art the night of the great dissolution, Thou art the night of Brahma, as also the terrible night of ignorance.

Thou art Lakshmi, Thou art the Supreme Goddess, Thou art bashfulness, Thou art the determinative faculty, modesty, nourishment, contentment as also peace and forgiveness.

Thou art charming, yea more charming than all the charming things and exceedingly beautiful. Thou art indeed the supreme Goddess, beyond the high and low.

O Thou Self of everything, of whatever thing existing at whatever place or time, whether cause or effect, Thou art the power behind that; how canst Thou be praised?

(*Altar Flowers*, p. 145, 147, 149).

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

THIS month's EDITORIAL is on SHRI RAMAKRISHNA—THE TEACHER OF TEACHERS.

ADVAITA FOR THE MASSES is a well-documented article on the subject by Swami Atmaramananda of the Ramakrishna Order.

BOON IN THE RELIGIOUS LITERATURE OF INDIA is by Dr. V. Nuvangul of Baroda University.

THE VISHADA-YOGA OF THE GITA is a modern interpretation on the subject by Swami Bhavaharananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay.

SWAMI ATULANANDA (GURUDAS MAHARAJ) is a first hand write-up on the great Swami

of the Ramakrishna Order from the West, who came in close contact with the direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. The writer Swami Vidyatmananda of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Gretz, France, writes from his own experiences and memories of the great Swami.

WHAT SWAMI VIVEKANANDA DID FOR AMERICA: A NEW REVOLUTION? is a review article by Elva Nelson on the outstanding book on the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's teachings in modern America, entitled *The Gift Unopened: A New American Revolution* by Eleanor Stark of Boston, U.S.A.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA—THE TEACHER OF TEACHERS

(EDITORIAL)

Shri Krishna, Buddha, Christ, and Shri Ramakrishna are among the greatest teachers of humanity. Samkhya Philosophy describes them as *Prakritilina-Purusha*, and Vedanta Philosophy as *Adhikarika-Purusha* or persons especially entrusted to bring a new epoch in which they are the teacher of teachers, all other teachers illumined by their knowledge. Vivekananda wrote on the Yoga Aphorism (1:26) of Patanjali, "Although the capacity to know is inside us, it must be called out, and this calling out... can only be done, yogis maintain, through another knowledge...and that one teacher of infinite knowledge, without beginning or end, is called God."¹

What do these teachers teach? They

teach humanity how to cross the valley of death and ceaseless suffering, and attain that joy and peace which passeth understanding. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and everything else shall be added unto you", said Christ. "Control the fire of desire which engulfeth your life, and thus attain the unspeakable bliss of Nirvana", said Buddha. "Attain devotion to God, then live in the world like a mudfish which lives in mud, but does not accumulate mud", Shri Ramakrishna used to speak to men and women living the worldly life. To those who had developed a little love for God, Ramakrishna's teaching was, "Woodcutter, go deeper, deeper into the woods, until you reach the mines of gold and diamonds." To those who had a glimpse of the Divine, he would say, "There is no limit to God's infinity. He can be realised in countless ways, and he truly knows God who has

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1982, P. 140-141.

learnt to appreciate and respect walkers in all the avenues to Godhead."

All these teachers of humanity, had to pass both in the external life in the world, and in the internal life in the realm of spirituality, through many trials and tribulations.² That is why, they could see into the hearts of myriads of men and women who were battered and bruised in life, understand and sympathise with their pains and penances, and lead them with an unconditional love and unerring judgement to a life of deeper fulfilment, peace, and knowledge.

To the restless seekers after peace and divinity, Shri Ramakrishna would say with a smile, "Whatever is there, is also here (showing his own body)". According to Saradananda, the biographer-disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, 'here' means not only the 'within' of all human beings, but also the greatest manifestation of spiritual power manifested in their Master, Shri Ramakrishna's life.³ Sincere seekers would see in the Master an awful presence of Divinity.

Persons either puffed up by the world's vanity of cerebral scholarship or scorched by the world's fire, would become chastened, humbled, purified and 'whole' by a single word, a touch or even a single glance of his. Ramakrishna himself once revealed, "What the Mother shows to me is that such a power has come into this (i.e. his body), that I need not even touch people any more. *It is sufficient if she asks me to touch anyone, and that one will get awakened even by the touch.*"⁴ Seeing him, his disciples believed for the first time in 'the hidden springs of power and holiness' of the great incarnations like Jesus, Buddha or Shri Chaitanya. Saradananda wrote,

We laboured under the misconception that the record of the uncommon events in their lives were later additions made by disciples with the ulterior motive of adding to their own number. And the incarnations themselves, we inferred, were queer, imaginary, mythical beings, without any significance to the civilised world. We have come to know the truth about this through the holy contact with Shri Ramakrishna.⁵

It was a strange coincidence that whenever Shri Ramakrishna practised any particular doctrine and realised perfection in it, the followers of that very doctrine came to him of themselves, saw in him their perfect ideal, and thus progressed further spiritual development.⁶ During one such period real Paramahansas, the truly enlightened souls, came to him in large numbers. Many of them were to be found in his room day and night, discussing and debating for glorifying their own ways of devotion. Inspired from within, Ramakrishna gave them simple solutions of those knotty problems. "I told them of those solutions and their differences were removed forthwith", Ramakrishna said.⁷

At another period Ramayat 'Babas', monks worshipping Shri Ramachandra, began to pour in large numbers. Their devotion to the Lord inspired Ramakrishna. It was one of these monks who brought the image of Ramlala, the image of child Rama. This monk had been worshipping the small idol of Shri Rama for years. But coming in contact with Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar his worship bore fruit. There the monk had the direct vision of Shri Rama. After the vision, with a sense of fulfilment, the Babaji came one day to Ramakrishna, and said, 'Ramlala has shown himself to me in the way I wanted to have his vision and has thus fulfilled my life's aspiration. Moreover, he said, He would

2. Swami Saradananda, *The Great Master* (Tr.), Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1978, P. 641.

3. *The Great Master*, P. 646-647.

4. Ibid, P. 704.

5. Ibid, P. 768.

6. Ibid, P. 641.

7. Ibid, P. 602.

not go from here ; for he does not like to leave you behind and go elsewhere. My mind is, however, free from sorrow and pain, as I find that Ramlala lives happily with you, playing and sporting all the live-long day. Knowing that, he is happy with you, I too shall feel happy.⁸ He then gave the idol of Ramlala to Ramakrishna and departed. Since then the image of Ramlala was with the Master and as the readers of Shri Ramakrishna's life know, how this image became a living soul by his burning devotion.

* * * *

'There is a special power of God—in those who are adored and respected by many', Shri Ramakrishna used to say. That is why, he himself used to go and meet with all humility the well-known religious teachers, highly respected persons, and men of knowledge and devotion, during his life time.

With this eagerness Shri Ramakrishna went one day to see Bhagavan Das, the highly respected Vaishnava Babaji, then eighty years old. Babaji was at that moment scolding a sadhu with the words, 'I will expel him', 'I will teach people', etc.

Ramakrishna heard him for some time. Then suddenly he stood up and said to the Babaji in an inspired mood: "How is it! Are you so egoistic even now? You are speaking of teaching people, of expelling them, of accepting, or rejecting things! Who are you to teach people? Only He to whom the whole world belongs, could do that. If he does not, could you accomplish it?"

The Babaji was humbled. He felt a far superior presence before him. Later, when he came to know that this man was the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, who under the influence of a spiritual mood had occupied the seat of Shri Chaitanya at the Harisabha of Kalutola, he felt repented and

thought, "Is it this person whom I called names for nothing!" He saluted Shri Ramakrishna with humility and begged his pardon.⁹

Vaishnava Charan, the well-known Vaishnava leader, who came in close contact with the Master said that all the signs of the nineteen kinds of spiritual moods—the co-existence of which has been called in the devotional scriptures as the 'Mahabhava', the great mood, and observed only in the lives of Shri Radha, the embodiment of spiritual moods, and in Shri Chaitanya—were seen manifested in the Master. He also said, "No Jiva (ordinary human being) in the past could sustain the tremendous impact of all of them, and no jiva in the future too will be able to do so according to the scriptures."¹⁰

Pundit Gauri was a great scholar in scriptures and a Tantric Sadhaka who worshipped his wife as the Divine Mother Herself. He developed the strange power of lighting a homa fire of one mund of wood on the palm of his hand. He had also an occult power of silencing his opponents by a powerful and loud chanting of a hymn of the Divine Mother. When slowly Ramakrishna cured him of these occult powers, Gauri realised the incarnation power behind the simple man. He said with all reverence, "My conviction is that you are He, from a part of whom the incarnations come down to the world from age to age to do good to humanity, and with whose power they accomplish that work of theirs."

In Ramakrishna's contact, Gauri slowly developed a dispassion to the world. As his desire for getting final enlightenment got intensified, he secretly prepared to leave the world. One day at an auspicious moment he bowed down at the feet of Ramakrishna and asked leave of him with tears. "Bless

8. Ibid, P. 612.

9. Ibid, P. 669.

10. Ibid, P. 582.

me, so that I may have my desire fulfilled. I'll not return before I realise God." Since then nothing more was known of Pundit Gauri, in spite of a great deal of search.¹¹

Pundit Narayan Shastri, a spiritual seeker and a scholar from Rajaputana was a celibate (an orthodox brahmacharin) and studied various scriptures continuously for twenty five years. He had already mastered the five systems of Indian philosophy in other places and finally came to Bengal to study the Nyaya Philosophy. Eventually he came to Dakshineswar, and met Shri Ramakrishna. Seeing Ramakrishna's frequent flights to samadhi, the highest state of absorption in God, Narayan Shastri realised that he himself had merely read the words like samadhi, immediate knowledge etc., while Shri Ramakrishna was actually experiencing these states day and night. In the Master's divine company, the desire for direct spiritual realisation deepened in Shastri. After taking the vow of sannyasa and getting initiated with a mantra from Shri Ramakrishna one day he begged for the Master's blessings, worshipped his feet and left Dakshineswar for ever in quest of God-realisation. Later findings have shown that Shastri had evolved into an enlightened person at the end of his life in Vashistha Ashrama probably situated in Assam.¹²

Pundit Padmalochan was the court Pundit of Burdwan. When Shri Ramakrishna came to know of his profound scriptural knowledge, his simplicity and genuineness, he himself went to see the scholar. By scriptural practise the pundit attained a supernatural power with which he became invincible in the assemblies of scholars. He used to always have with him a towel and water-pot with a spout filled with water. Just before the assembly he would wash his hands and face with this towel and water, and then

attain victory in debate. One day when the pundit was getting ready to face a debate, Shri Ramakrishna hid the towel and the water pot. When he came to know that it was Shri Ramakrishna who had concealed them, he was astonished, since none in the world knew about this power which was granted to him by Divine Mother. From that day onwards the pundit came to regard him as the personification of his chosen deity and an incarnation of God. When he fell fatally sick, Shri Ramakrishna himself went to see him. Seeing the Master Padmalochan was overjoyed and said, 'When I shall come round, I'll convene a meeting of all the scholars and tell them all that you are an Incarnation of God. I'll see who can refute my word.'¹³

Shri Ramakrishna taught that 'occult power' can give one power, prestige and worldly comforts which ultimately drown the seeker in spiritual quest in worldly enjoyments. One must learn to overcome them in order to attain divine life.

Pundit Shashadhar was the most well-known scholar on Hinduism during those days, who was drawing lots of educated Hindus to his discourses on Hinduism. It was at a time when young Hindus were embracing either Brahmo religion or Christianity. One day the Pundit came to Balaram Babu's house in order to see the Master. When Ramakrishna began to speak to the eminent scholar a flow of words came out of his mouth, as if inspired by God. Seeing the great purity and devotion of Shri Ramakrishna, he realised that despite his scholasticism he was but a baby in the realm of spirituality. Dissolved in tears, he prayed to Shri Ramakrishna with folded hands, "My heart has dried up by discussing philosophy. Please endow me with a drop of devotion." One day in a state of ecstasy, Shri Ramakrishna touched the Pundit. An

11. Ibid. P. 592-595.

12. Ibid. P. 625-630.

13. Ibid. P. 634.

eye witness wrote, 'When Shri Ramakrishna returned to consciousness he saw that he (the Pundit) was weeping ; he was completely changed.'¹⁴

Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), founder of the Arya Samaj movement, was a great scholar in the Vedas. His powerful preachings for a Hindu revivalist movement against the encroachments of Islam and Christianity drew many orthodox Hindu minds towards his movement. When he came to visit Calcutta, the westernised capital of British India, Shri Ramakrishna went to see him. He saw in the scholar a zealous leader with thoughts like: "I'll do something, I'll found a doctrine." What influence Shri Ramakrishna exerted on Dayananda is not exactly known. M., the writer of the Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna, recorded these words of Swami Dayananda probably uttered later on, "We have only read the Vedas and Vedanta, but he (Ramakrishna) has realised their essence."¹⁵

Devendranath Tagore, a highly rich and aristocratic leader of the original (Adi) Brahmo Samaj of Bengal, was already known to the society as Maharshi (a great sage). Shri Ramakrishna, as usual, came to see him. Devendranath recited some passages from the Vedas, describing the universe as a chandelier and each living being a lamp in it. The description tallied with Ramakrishna's own mystic experiences. Ramakrishna formed a high opinion of Devendra as a householder devotee. Devendra liked Ramakrishna, but not his strange simplicity and his incapacity to hold tight his own cloth. Later on Shri Ramakrishna said of Devendranath, "If after enjoying so much wealth, Devendranath had't thought of God, then people would have cried shame upon him. ... There is an ocean of difference

between a real, all-renouncing devotee of God and a householder devotee."¹⁶

Keshav Chandra Sen, the eminent Brahmo leader of 19th century Calcutta, was widely known and respected, both in India and England, where he delivered many lectures on Christ, and was received by Queen Victoria. Due to his influence, young Bengal youth like Narendra and others were drawn to religion. In January, 1880 Keshav founded the new wing of 'Brahmo Samaj' with the name of 'New Dispensation'.

When Shri Ramakrishna heard of Keshav, he himself went to see him. He saw in Keshav a divine man (*Daivi Loka*). Later on Keshav came to see the Master who one day said to him, "Your mind, O Keshav, has now attained that state in which you can live in the world as also in Existence-Knowledge-Bliss." A few meetings with Shri Ramakrishna brought a radical change in Keshav's mind. It is Shri Ramakrishna who first bowed low to Keshav and taught the old tradition of showing humble respect to holy persons. Later on Keshav used to salute Shri Ramakrishna with bunches of flowers. He and his followers were slowly attracted towards Shri Ramakrishna's sweet chanting of the name of Divine Mother. Ramakrishna said, 'Keshav and his followers got from here the names of Hari and the Divine Mother.'

Shri Ramakrishna's spontaneous respect to all religions slowly made Keshav, too, respectful to his original fold, Hinduism. Ramakrishna's love of Hari and Divine Mother slowly filtered into his Samaj. New songs were composed by Keshav's followers which are directly inspired by Ramakrishna's love of Mother. Keshav's own followers later on wrote, "Acharya Deva (Keshav) learnt from him to a great extent to address God with the sweet appellation of Mother like

14. Ibid. P. 726.

15. Swami Prabhananda; *First Meetings with Shri Ramakrishna*, Ramakrishna Math. Madras. 1987, P. 70-72.

16. Ibid. P. 43.

a simple child, to pray to her and crave indulgences like a child.”¹⁷

Pundit Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar was an illustrious name in 19th century Bengal. His vast erudition, his spirit of independence, his love and respect for traditional ways of living, and above all his compassion to poor people had drawn Ramakrishna who one day came to see him. Shri Ramakrishna was seventeen years younger to Vidyasagar. To the pundit he said, “You are the ocean of Vidya, knowledge. You are the ocean of condensed milk. Besides, you are already a siddha. And you possess such a tender nature! You are so compassionate! Vultures soar very high in the sky, but their eyes are fixed on rotten carrion on the ground. The book-learned are reputed to be wise, but they are in search of carrion. They are attached to the world of ignorance. Compassion, love of God, and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge.”

To Vidyasagar Shri Ramakrishna brought the revelation that God can neither be attained nor described through book-knowledge. Whatever has been spoken out, said Ramakrishna, by human tongue, is defiled, except Brahman. ‘What Brahman is cannot be described,’ he said. Shri Ramakrishna also taught him that it is due to the higher manifestation of the divine qualities that man becomes greater than others, “And why do all people respect you? Have you grown a pair of horns? You have more compassion and learning. Therefore, people honour you and come to pay you their respects.” Ramakrishna told him that his philanthropic activities, when performed disinterestedly, would make his mind pure in which will grow the love of God, and that love would make him realise God. Finally said Shri Ramakrishna, “There is gold buried in your heart, but you are not yet aware of it. It

is covered with a thin layer of clay. Once you are aware of it, all these activities of yours will lessen.” Could Vidyasagar realise the deeper impact of the message?¹⁸

Pundit Shivanath Shastri, a great Sanskrit scholar and a writer of repute, was a well-known Brahmo leader of those days. In 1875, when Shivanath came to visit the yogi of Dakshineswar, he was a twenty eight year old headmaster of a Calcutta School. At the first sight, Ramakrishna developed a love for Shivanath as a devotee of God. After a few visits to Ramakrishna, Shivanath, however, felt a dichotomy in his mind. On the one hand, was Ramakrishna’s irresistible love and affections for him. On the otherhand, was his desire to lead the Brahmo Samaj. Finally, the latter urge won, Shivanath admitted, “In my nature my love for men prevails over my love for God.”¹⁹

Soon, when Shivanath found that Vijaykrishna Goswami, another Brahmo leader, under Shri Ramakrishna’s influence left the Brahmo Samaj in order to devote himself wholly to spiritual practices, he stopped visiting Ramakrishna. To others he said, ‘If I go there (to Shri Ramakrishna) frequently, all the others of the Brahmo Samaj will do so in imitation of me and, as a result, the Samaj will collapse.’ Shivanath even openly declared to many persons that despite spiritual excellence, Ramakrishna frequently became ‘unconscious’ in his epileptic fit which people mistakenly consider as a state of samadhi. Shri Ramakrishna’s answer to this opinion of Shivanath is well-known, “Shivanath once remarked that too much thinking about God confounds the brain. Thereupon I said to him, ‘How can one become unconscious by thinking of Consci-

17. Ibid. P. 86.

18. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, by M., Tr. Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York, 1942, P. 101-108.

19. *First Meetings with Shri Ramakrishna*, P. 92-103.

ousness ? But Shivanath did not change his opinion. Probably his intellectual conceit did not allow him to dive deep in the realm of God. Later, Shivanath admitted that he had preached Brahmoism at the cost of both his own spiritual progress and the progress of the Samaj. In his later life he used to recite every morning a Sanskrit hymn to gurus, composed by himself, in which he used to salute Shri Ramakrishna as a guru who was a perfected worshipper of Shakti and endowed with the attitude of Divine Motherhood.”²⁰

Shri Ramakrishna saw the utter hollowness of many self appointed religious teachers of those days who were more after name, fame and worldly pleasures than a genuine search for God. To the Brahmo leader Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar who came to visit Shri Ramakrishna, he exposed the utter puerility of such empty words,

One can very well understand the inner feeling of a teacher of your Brahmo Samaj by hearing his preaching. Once I went to a meeting of a Hari Sabha. The preacher of the day was a Pundit named Samadhyayi. And can you imagine what he said ? He said in the course of his sermon: ‘God is dry. We must make Him sweet and fresh with our love and devotion.’ I was reminded of a story. A boy once said: ‘At my uncle’s house there are many horses. Oh, yes! His whole cow-shed is full of them.’ Now if it was really a cow-shed, then horses could not be kept there. Possibly he had only cows.

Just fancy, to describe God, who is of the very nature of Love and Bliss, as dry! It only proves that the man has never experienced what God is like.

Such preachers obviously come to clash for power and position. When Keshav died, quarrels began as to choice of the next leader. To Pratap who was going to step into Keshav’s shoes, Shri Ramakrishna made fun of such quarrels and finally asked him

in inspired words to dive deeper in search of God,

Let me tell you something. You are a learned and intelligent and serious-minded soul. Keshav and you were like the two brothers, Gaur and Nitai. You have had enough of lectures, arguments, quarrels, discussions, and dissensions. Can such things interest you any more ? Now gather your whole mind and direct it to God. Plunge deep into God.” ... “You don’t have to perpetuate Keshav’s name. Remember that he achieved all his success through the will of God. Through the divine will his work was established, and through the divine will it is disintegrating. What can you do about it ? Now it is your bounden duty to give your entire mind to God, to plunge deep into the Ocean of His Love. Saying these words the Master sang in his sweet voice:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of
God’s Beauty ;

If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love.²¹

Pratap realised the greatness of the Master and wrote, “He has no other thought, no other occupation, neither relation, no other friend in his humble life than his God...But so long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality and inebriation in the love of God.”²²

Despite this reverence, Pratap failed to accept the Master’s words. Probably like seeds fallen in thorny bushes, his little devotion was later on overshadowed by his irrepressible antagonism against the rising fame of Vivekananda.

While the self-conceited pundits and preachers failed to accept the Master’s message, the more genuine souls were totally transfigured by offering a spontaneous response to Shri Ramakrishna’s advice.

20. *First Meetings with Shri Ramakrishna*, P. 101.

21. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, P. 115, 615, 454-55.

22. *Shri Ramakrishna in the eyes of Brahma and Christian Admirers*, Ed. Nanda Mukherji, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1976, P. 11.

Vijaykrishna Goswami, another leader of Brahmo Samaj, had his natural way of devotion instantly inflamed after meeting Ramakrishna. While at Dacca, he had a vision of Shri Ramakrishna. Coming in the Master's direct contact, Vijaykrishna left the Samaj and totally devoted himself to spiritual practices. "We are unable to understand you only because you are thus so easily available near home," he said.²³ Vijaykrishna soon realised the great incarnation power in the body of Shri Ramakrishna. One day in front of all Vijay said to him, 'I have now realised who you are.' In ecstasy Ramakrishna replied: "If so, so be it."²⁴ Vijay fell prostrate and clung to his feet, while Shri Ramakrishna stood motionless, a picture. Vijaykrishna emerged a well-known spiritual teacher in later life.

One Mr. Williams, a devoted Christian came to know of Shri Ramakrishna from a brahmo preacher in north western India. He came to meet the Master at Dakshineswar. After a few visits Williams came to believe in Ramakrishna as "Jesus himself, the Son of God, the embodiment of eternal consciousness". In Shri Ramakrishna's contact his orthodoxy was gone. He used to come to salute the Kali in Siddheshwari temple at Thanthania in Calcutta, and later on devoted himself in "practising austerities at some place in the Himalayas to the north of Punjab till death."²⁵

Prabhu Dayal Mishra, an Indian Christian and a Quaker, had a vision of Shri Ramakrishna as a yogi. When Mishra met Ramakrishna he saw his beloved Christ in Ramakrishna, and said, "Since that day (the day of the vision of yogi), I have surrendered to you, my mind, soul, and body." To all present, in the Master's presence Mishra

said, "You do not recognise who he is. He and Jesus Christ are one. ... He is the present Jesus Christ."²⁶

It is only the best of devotees and aspirants, said Saradananda, who could recognise the Master as the 'Incarnation of the Age.'²⁷

* * * *

Shri Ramakrishna's power as a supreme religious teacher becomes more evident when we see his wonderful influence on his own teachers like Bhairavi Brahmani and Tota Puri. Bhairavi Brahmani, the first teacher of Shri Ramakrishna, was a great authority of scriptures and an adept in Tantra Sadhana. She led Ramakrishna like a child in sixty-four types of Tantra Sadhana in all of which he attained success. It is she who first convened a meeting of pundits and declared in front of them that Shri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God.

But when Shri Ramakrishna expressed the desire to practise Advaita Sadhana under the guidance of Tota Puri, she advised him not to go for that lest all his devotions to God should take wings. Despite her spiritual eminence, she could not appreciate the Advaita state of total absorption in the Impersonal Brahman spoken of in the Vedanta. She wanted to have her disciple totally under her guidance only. The Brahmani began to feel jealous if her disciple mixed much with anyone else or showed great respect to any other aspirant or devotee of God. But slowly she realised that her attraction to Ramakrishna, her disciple, was like the tie of a golden chain and she had to break it in order to progress further in spiritual life. At last, she left Dakshineswar and the holy company of Shri Ramakrishna and devoted the rest of her life for God-realisation in Benares.²⁸

23. *The Great Master*, P. 706.

24. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, P. 881.

25. *The First Meetings with Shri Ramakrishna*, P. 169.

26. *Ibid.* P. 408-412.

27. *The Great Master*, P. 623.

28. *Ibid.* P. 545-546.

The incident of Tota Puri is perhaps the most significant one where Shri Ramakrishna, the disciple, ultimately emerged as the guide and teacher of his own great teacher. By an ardent practice of forty long years, Tota had attained the Advaita realisation that Brahman alone is Real, and the world is illusory. Tota had a rare spirit of renunciation and detachment from the world. He developed a calm (*shanta*) mood like rishis. And nowhere did he stay for more than three days, for fear of developing attachment to any place or person. Shri Ramakrishna's rare attraction upset his long habit. Tota lived with him continuously for eleven months at Dakshineswar.²⁹

Tota did not believe in devotion to any Personal God. When Shri Ramakrishna would chant God's name, Tota sarcastically remarked, "Are you fashioning chapatis by clapping your hands?"

Even the Jnani has got human limitations. One day, when someone came to light his smoke from the fire (*dhuni*) Tota flew into a rage. To him the *dhuni* fire was sacred. Seeing Tota's anger at the visitor who came to light his smoke from the *dhuni*, Ramakrishna burst into a roar of laughter in a semi-conscious mood and said, "Ah, wretchedness! Ah, forgetfulness! I see at the same time the depth of your knowledge of Brahman! Just now you were saying, 'there is nothing except Brahman and all things and persons in the universe are merely its manifestations.' But forgetting everything the very moment, you are ready to beat a man! *This is why I laugh, thinking of the omnipotence of Maya.*"

Tota was yet to see the dreadful face of Maya, her "all-devouring form, horrible as the shadow of death." Due to strong physique all along, Tota never knew that terrible physical sufferings can generate even in the strongest person a terrible diffi-

dence regarding one's own power which overwhelms the seeker with a fatal despair and teaches him that it is God's grace alone that can save men during such unspeakable sufferings, and without that, all the efforts of man would only produce contrary results. Soon came a dreadful disease of dysentery which began to eat into the vitals of Tota's body that was now inflicted with agonising pain. Tota struggled for a period, but finally unable to bear the pain, he decided one night to drown himself in the Ganga. That blessed night Tota entered into the water, but nowhere it was more than knee-deep. Even after wading near the other bank, Tota could not drown himself. He stood awed and puzzled. Unable to think any more Tota started back to the shore. All of a sudden, he realised the inscrutable power of Maya whom his disciple Ramakrishna worshipped as Mother, and looked up to as an all-dependent child. His heart was now filled with devotion to Mother. He felt that all the quarters were reverberating with cries: 'Mother! Mother!' His heart overflowed with joy. Though there was pain in the body, there was now no feeling of it. He was transfigured. Quietly he walked up to the *dhuni* fire under the Panchavati, sat there, and spent the rest of the night in meditation and repetition of the name of the Divine Mother. In the early morning when his disciple came, Tota narrated the entire incident. "It is the disease," he said, "that has acted as a friend to me. I had the vision of the Mother of the Universe last night and am freed from the disease by Her grace. Ah! how ignorant I was so long! Well, please persuade your Mother now to allow me to leave this place. I am now convinced that it was she who kept me confined here somehow or other in order to teach me this Truth."³⁰

In the early dawn when the temple music

29. Ibid. P. 549.

30. Ibid. P. 561.

began to ring from the music tower, Tota, along with his disciple Ramakrishna who had now turned into his final guide and teacher, went to Mother's temple and prostrated before the Divine Mother. The long night of suffering was over. Tota's Advaïta realisation—"I am Brahman"—now culminated into his final realisation—Mother is all. She is the wire puller. We are the automata. The final peace is in Her Will. "*La sua voluntade e' nostra pace*" (In His will is our peace).

ADVAITA FOR THE MASSES

SWAMI ATMARAMANANDA

Advaita, the knowledge of the spiritual oneness of everything we perceive, the grandest of discoveries by the Vedic sages, was for some unknown reason never taught to the masses in its purest form. Nevertheless, what little of it did reach them in a 'diluted' form had raised the Vedic civilisation and culture to unparalleled heights. Swami Vivekananda considered it his special mission to broadcast Advaita to the masses, without dilution. He hoped that thereby a fundamental change could be effected over the whole world. It is understanding that guides man. So, if the masses could be given the Truth, then civilisation, culture and values too would be profoundly influenced.

Civilisation, Culture, Values:

Organisation of the production, distribution and protection of the material needs of man leads to civilisation. While it grows in complexity and strives for stability, it develops in culture—people's intellectual understanding about themselves, the things around them (Nature), the relationship between man and nature, etc. increases. Accordingly, the civilisation patterns its activities. Culture, again, leads to the development of values, standards by which are judged the actions and thoughts of man and the worth and desirability of material things etc. Values are the 'essence' of

culture. To the extent that people's comprehension about themselves and Nature is materialistic, their culture and civilisation too are materialistic. So are their values—'mundane'; for they determine the worth of things in terms of material prosperity of the civilisation. Some civilisations, after attaining a fair degree of stability, happen to focus their attention and their fund of knowledge on theological and philosophical questions dealing with life, death, freedom, happiness, the forces controlling Nature, the causes of things, the cause of these causes, etc. The quest ends, on the one hand, in deities, gods, a God of gods, or 'the King of heaven and earth', and on the other, in a further understanding of man as a 'soul', a mind-spirit entity. Existing values then derive a new authority. Some are modified or rejected, and some new ones also get established. The discovery of these spiritual realities, transcending and controlling material Nature, radically changes human perspective. Initially man's relationship with a deity or god or even that Ruler-God is understood only in terms of mere 'this-worldly gains', avoidance of suffering, protection and glorification of civilisation, etc., or at best a life hereafter in heaven in the company of that spiritual entity. These civilisations, though governed by a spiritual reality, have to be called 'materialistic' or 'pseudo-spiritual', because they merely seek

for a heaven on earth, or worse, a heaven up there!

However, those cultures in which a Personal God has been discovered may develop an entirely new, higher and spiritual value, viz, *mukti*, Liberation, Emancipation, when that God is realised by man as one's very own, as love personified, as being transcendental and at the same time immanent in all created things, existing in the hearts of all creatures. Then, cultivation of pure unbargaining love for Him, constant remembrance of Him in the midst of all activities, worshipping Him through tireless service of all His creatures, direct communion with Him, etc. become the sole purpose of human life. Man's activities and the worth of things are judged only in terms of being a means to that goal. By living this life thus, a devotee of God goes after death to His abode—to be in His company through eternity, never to be cast back into this miserable cycle of life and death. This is called *mukti*. In the process of realising God, man finds that he himself is really a purely spiritual entity, an individual soul, a part of God. Desires for a sensate and happy life here, a materially better society, a perfect civilisation, etc., are all cast aside. Different cultures and civilisations have discovered their respective God, each, unfortunately, a protector and benefactor of His own worshippers!

Two points are worth noting at this stage. Firstly, there are two parallel lines of growth—man's understanding about himself, and man's understanding about God. Secondly, with the discovery of a Personal God, theologians invariably try to choke off any further independent development in human knowledge, thereby leading to serious internal tensions in those civilisations.

In India:

Only in India was the nature of that individual soul, Nature and the Personal

God further investigated, leading to the discovery that they are really appearances of one universal, impersonal spiritual Reality, called Brahman, which is the source of all that exists, which, in fact, is all that exists, which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, and Truth-Knowledge-Beauty. Another ideal of *mukti* took roots. Even that deep-seated subtle clinging to individuality, betrayed in the desire for rebirth in heaven, in the abode of God, and the constant company with Him through eternity, was given up! In this case, by *mukti* was meant the realisation of the identity of Brahman and the individual soul (Atman, Self)—Self-realisation, realisation of Oneness.

Value-systems that are derived from the knowledge of such a Reality alone constitute a universal spiritual culture, and this is the highest. What is implied by 'highest culture'? That culture of which the values are derived from a perfect and complete knowledge of the real nature of things: their spiritual oneness. And a 'spiritual culture' is one where man's understanding and, therefore, his activities are pervaded, guided, by that knowledge of Oneness. And, since there can be no further progress in knowledge beyond the absolute spiritual unity of man, Nature and God in Brahman, the universal spiritual culture is the highest. Materialistic civilisations disintegrate after a time unless they are able to obtain higher values from a spiritual truth, or to redefine their existing values in the light of that truth. Certain civilisations, tribal or racial, even though possessing a semblance of spiritual culture, may stagnate and destroy themselves or each other; for where the sanction for values is from a deity, god or a Personal God, and those values are 'mundane', the culture so developed becomes 'this-worldly', and the civilisation 'imperialistic', aggressive and acquisitive. It may also be noted in passing that in such cultures the divisions between man and Nature, and

between matter and spirit (or consciousness), remain unresolved. Only that culture whose basis is that universal spiritual truth is capable of raising its civilisation to great heights.

The Indian civilisation still lives and thrives, notwithstanding great rises and falls, because its cultural values are nourished by that truth of Brahman, which embraces within itself all individual cultures, justifies all values, and also resolves the division between man, matter and consciousness. It is the truth of Advaita, of non-duality, of the spiritual oneness of all these that are perceived as manifold. The highest value, *mukti*, Self-realisation, derived from this truth does not destroy those values that have been developed so far, but it provides a rationale for them: All values—morality, goodness, equality, justice, fearlessness, truth, beauty, individual dignity, unselfishness, etc.—are what they are because 'Brahman is all that exists. This individual soul of mine, I myself, as also all these other entities around me are one with Brahman', and not because some external authority, a scripture or some person says so, or because a deity or God has to be pleased, or merely because these values ensure a better society, a prosperous civilisation. The corresponding culture does not submerge or swallow other existing cultures, but it enriches them. Nor does a civilisation with such a culture destroy other civilisations. On the basic truth of Advaita, all civilisations, all cultures and all values can, without giving up their respective characteristics, co-exist. All human activities are viewed as meant for expressing the divinity of the soul, and are oriented towards realising that truth of Advaita, spiritual oneness.

Thus then, a culture that evolves with the development of a civilisation, meeting the 'mundane' needs of the latter, becomes 'spiritual' when the quest of its people takes a leap beyond the sensate and comes face

to face with the reality that is Brahman. An important fact of this discovery is that it is not 'objective', retaining a distinction between the 'enquirer' and the 'object of enquiry', between the 'observer' and the 'observed'. In the discovery of Brahman, the 'seeker' and the 'sought' become one! In the Vedas, which is a record of the social, cultural and spiritual journey of the forefathers of the Indians, we find such astounding exclamations as, 'All this is verily Brahman', 'Thou art That (Brahman)', 'I am Brahman', 'It is I who have become all this', etc. What an immense ground has been covered! At one end is the primitive man just evolved from the animal, and at the other is the Vedic sage boldly asserting, 'I myself am all this that is perceived as the many. In me are they, and I in them!' This is true spirituality, where man, in quest of higher and higher cultural values, greater and deeper knowledge, ultimately ends in realising, in becoming, the Spirit. We might as well say that a fully cultured person is also a truly spiritual person, and vice versa!

The physical organisation of people and societies is the body of a civilisation, the highest value it has discovered forms its lifegiving spirit, and the various ways in which that civilisation gives expression to its spirit is a measure of its culture. A civilisation that has as its highest spiritual discovery, the basis of all its other values, a Ruler-God who is vengeful, exclusive, and conquering, becomes like him. A civilisation that has as its highest spiritual discovery an impersonal Reality which is all-inclusive, Bliss and Beauty, and which is manifesting itself in infinite varieties that speak of its glories, reflects that Reality accordingly. The Vedic civilisation-culture is the only example in this case.

Rise and Fall and Rise:

Once a culture founds itself on such a spiritual Truth, why does the civilisation it

governs suffer a fall? The most important causes are: (1) Cultural values do not reach the masses. A civilisation is not a monolith that moves en masse. It is a dynamic, changing, growing, gigantic organism consisting of individual human beings, groups, societies, etc., each with a life of its own. Ultimately it is the individual who matters. Now, cultural values are not like commodities which can be moved rapidly through the channels of a civilisation, or like social laws which may spread quickly. Values are discovered and defined by some human minds. Those have to be received by other individuals. This takes more time where a value has to modify or replace a pre-existing one. Further, values are transmitted from its first discoverers through a succession of teachers and students, through education. Where education and, therefore, values, do not reach the masses, the whole civilisation ceases to move in a harmonious way.

(2) The rise of a powerful priestly class: Discovery of deities etc. results in people developing special rituals etc. to appease them for favouring the civilisation as also its individuals. The priests, who specialise in these rituals etc., come to enjoy an indispensable position in society. Time corrupts them with power, money and honour. Through theology and rituals the priests try to retain their hold over the masses—threatening them that they alone, as the sole agents of God and the indisputable interpreters of His intentions, control by proxy the course of man's life from birth to death and, of course, in the hereafter. Culture—a free and fearless struggle for greater knowledge—takes the back seat, and religion takes control. Religion comes to mean a mere belief in the existence of a supernatural Ruler-God whom only a select few have seen at some point of time. This is easier for the masses—no more personal responsibility, no need to think independently

any more. A God up in heaven, an image in the temple, and an ever-willing priest as the agent. Pay the priest, and keep quiet! On the otherhand, to the discomfort of the masses, Advaita puts the whole responsibility on the individuals, leaving no scope for dependence.

(3) Natural differences among, and weaknesses in, human minds: The Vedic teachers had taken a pragmatic view and, considering the multifarious stages through which man had risen to the highest of spiritual knowledge, devised a marvellous scheme¹ by which each person, no matter in which stage of physical or mental development, no matter which insignificant part of the vast mechanism of civilisation he belonged to, could rise by degrees to the ultimate Truth. Even the simplest of activities could be spiritualised, that is to say, an (initially) intellectual conviction about the highest Truth could be made to channel man's actions. 'From the mundane to the sacred, from the material to the spiritual, from the changeful and mortal to the changeless and immortal, from the manifold to the One' was the motto of the Vedic teachers. It is worth referring to the *Bhagavadgita*, which Shankaracharya has called the 'collection of the essence of the purport of the Vedas':

O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as sacrifice, whatever you give and whatever austerities you undertake, (all) that you offer to Me. (9.27.)

A human being achieves success by adoring through his own duties Him from whom is the

1. & 2. The Scheme of *pravritti-dharma* and *nivritti-dharma*. The former required that people perform their well-defined duties enjoined by the sages so as to bring about individual and collective prosperity. The latter was meant for persons, exceptions, who wanted to withdraw from all social obligations and take up spiritual disciplines in seclusion. See Introduction of Shankaracharya to the *Bhagavadgita* and also its Chapters II, III and IV, with the commentaries of Shankaracharya and others.

origin of creatures, and by whom is all this pervaded. (18.46.)

The ladle is Brahman, the oblation is Brahman, the offering is poured by Brahman in the fire of Brahman. Brahman alone is to be reached by him who has concentration on Brahman as the objective. (4.24.)²

The first two verses are relevant in the case of a person to whom a Personal God is the highest spiritual Reality, and the last verse in the case of one to whom Brahman is the ultimate Reality.

Still, over a course of time a growing number of people tend more towards the 'mundane' values as ends in themselves. Brahman, God, *mukti*, spiritual oneness, etc. begin to appear less meaningful as compared with the present tangible life.

(4) The ideal of *mukti* gradually becomes equated with 'withdrawal from society', 'escape from this world' and such other negative ideas. When the truth of oneness—that it is the same Atman, Brahman, that is existing in all—is forgotten, crass materialism, individualism and selfishness overwhelm the civilisation, weakening its cultural bonds. In truth, *mukti* means 'freedom from ignorance about one's real nature', 'knowledge of oneness'. The Vedic sages had related the ideal of Self-realisation with culture and civilisation via the compulsory social duties of the masses (householders).

(5) A great cultural civilisation attracts people from other regions of the world, leading to the influx of intolerant, destructive and imperialistic groups.

The Vedic culture has periodically suffered a set-back, and each time it has risen with new vigour—its highest value intact, but with a new body of civilisation. Every other value-system, and the corresponding culture and religion, has been all but destroyed by that great 'Pope' of the materialistic culture, viz Physical Science. The Vedic culture has contended earlier with worse forms of

materialism, and won—not by destroying them but by giving them also a place in the scheme of cultural development. As mentioned earlier, a materialistic culture is the unavoidable outcome of a perception of the ultimate nature of things as material. It is the stage through which the Vedic culture has already passed. Today's materialistic culture has been built by people who broke away from the rigid value-systems and theological dogmas fanatically protected by civilisations that could not go beyond a personal extra-cosmic God. The Vedic sage is happy that such a development has taken place, and is happier still that the frontier-scientists have already arrived at a point where they have to investigate the 'observer', 'consciousness', 'subject', vis-a-vis the 'observed', 'the universe of material things', the 'object'. It is indeed good for man's growth that science has been able to demolish many of the non-essentials in religion. It is a matter of time before the scientists declare that 'matter is an inexplicable illusion; all that exists is consciousness alone'!

The Vedic Prophet

The periodic resurgence of the Vedic culture has always been preceded by the coming of men who reauthenticated through their personal realisation the truth of Brahman, of oneness, and taught a method suitable for the masses under the prevailing circumstances to take up the ideal once more. We call them prophets, *avatars*. Shri Ramakrishna was the most recent of such *avatars*. Once more have the deities, the gods and God been brought down from heaven into the human heart, the identity of the individual soul and Brahman revealed, and the spiritual oneness of everything proclaimed. Shri Ramakrishna said,

'Formal worship drops away after the vision of God. It was thus that my worship in the

temple came to an end...One day it was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door-frame—all Pure Spirit. Then, like a mad man, I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped.³

The remote ideals of Brahman, *mukti*, direct communion with God, etc. have been made more comprehensible and intimately relevant by emphasizing the potential divinity of every soul. Once more has it been shown that the message of the Vedas is that human life finds its fulfilment only in attaining the highest spiritual truth of Oneness; that everyone, irrespective of caste, class, race, religion and nationality should take up the quest; that what are essential in this 'seeking' are a firm conviction in the Truth and a genuine aspiration to directly realise It—temples, books, rituals, priests are all dispensable. Decrying religious fanaticism, which is totally opposed to the truth of Advaita, he has said, very significantly, that (more than national borders) religious or racial labels—'I am a Hindu', 'I am a Christian', 'I am a Mussalman', etc.—are the greater obstacles to a genuine spiritual life. When one wants to imbibe and practise the more important teachings of his own religion, where is the time and energy for reforming other religions, for bringing light to others when one's own heart is still dark? Or to slaughter the infidels, or convert the heathens, or to try to reconvert the converted, when one's own co-religionists are exploited and held down in abject poverty and misery?

Practical Advaitism of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda

It may be imagined that Shri Ramakrishna's life and teachings convey the idea

3. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, Swami Nikhilananda (Trns.); (Madras, Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1944), p. 322; also see *Shri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (1970), p. 764-6.

that people have to take to a 'secluded life within the precincts of a temple' in order to attain the Truth. No one who thoroughly reads his teachings as recorded in the *Gospel* and, more particularly, as elaborated in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, can fail to hear the ancient Vedic message that life is itself religion; that it is a ceaseless, conscious, or unconscious quest for the ultimate in equality, freedom, happiness, perfection and knowledge; that, from his own station in life, through his own works, each can proceed towards the Goal.

The individual, society, civilisation, culture and value—all these the wisdom of the Vedic sages had interwoven through the truth of Advaita. And so, the prophet too has to cover the whole range. Thus we may say that Shri Ramakrishna's cryptic saying, '*Shiva-jnane jiva-seva*: worshipful service of creatures, looking upon them as Shiva', is his principal teaching through which he sought to make mankind absorb into their lives the universal Advaitic value. Shri Ramakrishna used the words 'Shiva', 'Kali', 'Brahman', 'Pure Spirit', etc., without meaning any substantial difference among them. To him there was only one supreme Reality which appeared to different human minds in different ways, because of differences in them. It was that Reality itself which appeared as the various gods, the deities and the sentient and insentient world. It was Swamiji alone who had grasped the world-wide relevance of that simple utterance: how Advaita could be brought to the masses, the repositories of culture. This is how he expressed his vision:

In whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of man; knowing Him, and therefore the Universe, as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to infinite freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being of individuals or numbers,

it has been through the perception, realisation and the practicalisation of the Eternal Truth—the *Oneness of all Beings*. 'Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness.' The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.

Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large....⁴

Swamiji gave a name to that profound idea of Shri Ramakrishna: Practical Advaitism. This was to be the best discipline for mankind—to perform all of one's activities and conduct one's life with an initially (intellectual conviction about the truth of spiritual Oneness. And his was quite in keeping with Shri Ramakrishna's teaching, 'Keep the knowledge of Advaita in your pocket, and then act as you like in the world.'⁵ Swamiji, in his own life time, demonstrated the practicability of the method by enthusing his followers to take up such conventionally 'secular', 'non-spiritual' and 'unreligious' activities as running dispensaries, orphanages, schools, relief works; he even expected them to run polytechnics.

Thus did he set rolling the wheel of cultural revival, so that there would come about, in due course, a fundamental change in man's intellectual understanding about the world around him, and also about spiritual life. In the process he swept away the general notion that Shri Ramakrishna was wholly a 'man of religion'; that his message could have no meaning for the modern man to whom 'religion' was anathema, who was proud of his 'secularism', confident of

his scientific knowledge and already in the clutches of materialism. He also nullified the entrenched belief that Advaitism was world-negating, and only an individualistic spiritual discipline meant exclusively for monks. He exposed, too, the pettiness of the practice of conducting such service activities with a view to winning converts to one's own religion. As for this last, Swamiji had warned his followers that service should be extended to all, without consideration of caste, religion or colour. He taught that Shri Ramakrishna, the 'person', was secondary, but the principle he stood for, was the foremost. If his followers were to be fanatical at all, it was to be in the matter of asserting universalism and Oneness of all existence.

Every Shoulder to the Prophet's Cross:

Considering the time needed for a value to permeate the thoughts and actions of the masses, every prophet has, consciously or unconsciously, left behind him a group of followers through whom his inspiration worked. Shri Ramakrishna, too, through Swamiji and others had initiated a movement for the perpetuation of his mission. That Swamiji established an organisation is now history. Through it he sought to consolidate the movement and gradually cover the whole ground from 'feeding hungry mouths' to 'feeding hungry souls'.

But what is worth remarking is that his founding the Organisation disproves the widely held opinion—'The prophetic mission is for the prophet alone.' As Shri Ramakrishna said, "What can we puny creatures do for the world?" "Let others live and progress as best as they can according to their fate. Ours is to take the most of what we can from the teachings of these prophets and fly towards the goal, towards *mukti*, away from this miserable world!"—Such ideas are totally unspiritual, anticul-

4. Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1974), p. 636.

5. Op cit, P. 127.

ture and selfish. This is perhaps why prophets have to come again and again, in order to remind us not only that the ideal of human life is attaining God, but that it is also helping each other in all possible ways to progress towards the goal. The prophet shows the way, but it is the people who have to implement the teachings. Each one of us has a part to play in the prophet's world-mission..

It is that very attitude of self-seeking which, taking the forms of desire for personal joy, for personal safety, for individual promotion, for personal privilege, and for individual liberation, rouses jealousy, hatred, intolerance, oppression and unfair competition, gradually slowing down and almost reversing the prophetic purpose! And evil and wickedness grow. Had teaching personal salvation been the sole, or even the cardinal, message of prophets, one cannot explain Shri Ramakrishna's ecstatic utterance, 'Service to the *jivas*, the individual beings, looking upon them as Shiva', or Swamiji's motto, '*Atmano-mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*: for personal liberation and for the benefit of the world'. We can perceive the inspiration of Shri Ramakrishna working through Swamiji as we read his own words:

It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body—to cast it off like a worn-out garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.⁶

My disciples are to emphasize work more than austerities.⁷

Therefore has Swamiji laid stress on Practical Advaitism, to relate spiritual life to an allround cultural revival through collective effort and responsibility. What

does all this mean to the masses in the midst of the hard realities of the world? Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swamiji, has clarified the idea behind the method a little further:

This is part and parcel of the still greater and more simple doctrine that the many and the one are the same Reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes...It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing Jnana and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. 'Art, Science, and Religion,' he said once, 'are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita.'⁸

In a more concrete language, people may train their thoughts thus: they can say—We are, in truth, divine. We are the Atman that is identical with Brahman. We, in reality, are immortal, free, self-fulfilled, all-Bliss and infinite. Though at present we feel otherwise, we shall, through our unselfish thoughts, words and deeds, try to assert our innate divinity. No act is secular or demeaning. Through each action, from mending shoes to governance, from ploughing the fields to probing the mysteries of space, shall we manifest our divinity. Those

6. Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (1974), p. 757.

7. Swami Shraddhananda, *The Story of an Epoch*, (Madras, Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), p. v.

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1989), vol I, p. xv-xvi.

of us who are stronger shall give a helping hand to the hungry millions to rise, to be strong like us and march towards the goal supreme—realisation of Oneness. We shall break down the barriers of castes, classes, sex, colour, language and nationality, and we shall allow each existing culture, each religion, each sect, to work out the ideal in its own way.

They can further say: We shall ourselves practise, and also teach our children, the forgotten truth that living in a society automatically entails a responsibility to serve it; that in times of trouble of a 'neighbour' we shall help as far as possible, and not run to the 'safety and peace' of our homes, for our service is but a practice to experience the omnipresence of God, of the Atman. We shall ourselves remember, and then teach our children also, what our forefathers practised, that truth, justice and straightforwardness are more important than one's life and money, and that a protest against injustice, falsehood and exploitation is a better way of honouring a prophet, a more honest expression of our faith in God and assertion of the purity and freedom of the soul, than merely worshipping his portrait, or worshipping in temples, or seeking the Atman in our secluded cloisters. We shall remember ourselves, and then teach our children also, to cherish character, to be fearless and unbending before mere status and corrupted power, because 'it is the person that sanctifies a chair' and never that 'the chair sanctifies a person'; besides, character and fearlessness are the characteristics of one who has faith in the divinity of the soul. To us, perfection in work is an expression of the Perfection that our Atman is; unselfishness—of Oneness; fearlessness—of immortality; honouring others—of our faith in the omnipresence of the Atman...and so on.

Doubts of the Conventionalists

Such new ideas are difficult to practise!

Yes, as difficult as any of the yogas or other spiritual disciplines, or for that matter, as difficult as mastering any discipline that requires a radical change in perspective, self-abnegation, hard work and will.⁹ In fact, here in Practical Advaitism, too, one has to begin with an intellectual conviction, just as in, say Bhakti-yoga, one begins with a *faith* in God. May not egotism grow through work? Yes, but the egotism in the form, 'I am more spiritually advanced', may also grow in persons engaged in exclusive spiritual practices! This is far more deadly. On the contrary, at least some good work for others will be done. And, surely, the ego that says, 'I have served so many beings', is nearer to the infinite Ego of the Atman that identifies itself with all creation through love than the hypocritical 'ego of humility and self-surrender' of those many who pose as devotees of God and the touchy 'ego of self-sufficiency and indifferences' of those others who claim to be Jnana-yogis! Precisely because there are dangers of egotism etc., 'work' is essential. A life in a community is the best testing-ground to verify claims to enlightenment. The sure signs of spiritual growth along any path, as much as through Practical Advaitism, are equal love for all, service, fearlessness, feeling pain at the suffering of others, etc. So, Swamiji's method has got an inbuilt check against false notions about one's spiritual accomplishments. Besides, when it is

9. Swami Vivekananda: 'This Advaita has so long been kept hidden in the forests and mountain-caves. It has been given to me to bring it out from seclusion and scatter it broadcast before the workaday world and society. The sound of Advaita drum must resound in every hearth and home, in meadows and groves, over hills and plains. Come all of you to my assistance and set yourselves to work.' *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (1974), p. 609-10. So the question should not be, 'Is Practical Advaitism possible?' But, 'How best can we participate in the prophetic mission?'

accepted that the outwardly observed behaviour-characteristics of a man of real enlightenment are themselves a part of the disciplines to be undertaken by one aspiring to attain his (the former's) inner state of Self-knowledge,¹⁰ what is illogical in proposing that 'every person should follow the prophets in worshipful service of mankind, bearing in mind the Advaitic truth'?

Advaita Alone:

On the one hand we see that the theological religions with their promise of a paradise here or hereafter are at unremitting war against one another at different levels. They are trying, as if, to first of all expand their respective boundaries before doing anything to start building the paradise. They are also frantically trying to keep their 'flocks of sheep' from the invasions of Science. And, where it is difficult to 'pen up the sheep' even through force of threats of hellfire, what ingenious methods these 'preachers of God' invent! They have failed to bring any real fraternity even among their own followers in different parts of the world, simply because of differences in skin-colours, or languages, or social customs. The hope of 'one God in Heaven, and a paradise on earth' has proved to be mere wishful thinking. On the other hand we see Science, still incomplete in many respects, battering the priests and their archaic theologies, and destroying values that were painstakingly developed through a belief in God and heaven. It has set loose materialism on an unprecedented scale, and everywhere man is scoffing at the ageold imposed beliefs.

Then there is the necessity of maintaining world peace, of bringing people together, protecting individual liberty, encouraging freedom in thought, etc. Countries that pride themselves in being the most advanced

and cultured are at their wits end, having failed to find any lasting ideal through which to bind together peoples from other cultures and religions.

The solution will never come through external means. Advaita alone provides the answers. There is something within each individual being that will not tolerate for long any kind of uniformity, bondage and external authority. That is the divinity of the soul. Unlike the theological or political stewards of mankind, prophets are content in educating people to remember the divinity of the Atman. It is the prerogative of the individual to choose the details of the manner in which to realise that divinity through his life.

Past centuries have proven the futility of the other methods, born as they were of a materialistic or pseudo-spiritual culture. Why not try Advaitism? In any case, today there is a worldwide awakening of the sense of individuality and personal dignity, of equality and freedom. Practical Advaitism will give this awakening a deeper meaning and direction. Why not give up vain imperialistic hopes of enforcing one kind of social life, one religion, or one political ideology, and now try to cultivate the universal spiritual culture of Advaita? After all, it ensures variety in unity, leaving each nation free to work out the ideal in accordance with its own genius. Of course, Advaita does not make a false promise of ushering in a paradise on earth, or a grand world civilisation that will last through eternity. All that it expects of mankind is to base itself on Truth. As Swamiji said, 'Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay homage to Truth or die.'¹¹ And to the individual it says: You are potentially divine. Struggle to manifest this divinity

10. Shri Shankaracharya's commentary on *Bhagavadgita*, II. 55.

11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1989), vol. II, p. 84.

through service of others as divine. Let the truth of Oneness be evident in all your thoughts, words and deeds. A day will come when your nature as the omnipresent Atman will stand revealed as a fact.

Man must ultimately arrive at the Truth of Advaita, be it through the life-discipline of Practical Advaitism or through Science. Salutations to the sages who first discovered the Truth!

BOON IN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE OF INDIA

DR. V. NUVANGUL

The idea of '*varadana*' or giving of boon is exemplified through various incidents described in the Vedic, Upanishadic, Epic, Pauranic, and classical literatures of India. From the study of the ancient Indian literature we know that such 'boons' were received by deserving persons by propitiating, worshipping, or serving holy persons, men of realisation, or the Supernatural Powers embodied as gods and goddesses. The word '*vara*' is derived from the Sanskrit root '*vri*' which means to desire or to choose. When a deserving person desires or chooses something from a powerful giver or when a superior person gives blessing to a man, it becomes true. It is well-known that ancient seers possessed such remarkable powers. Men of realisation are totally based on the practice of Truth, in mind, speech and action. Through austerities and the constant practice of Truth, they developed super-human power of will. On account of the power born of truthfulness whatever they spoke, became a reality.¹ The meaning of the word '*vara*' comes nearer to the word '*ashirvada*' or blessing. But there is a subtle difference between '*vara*' and '*ashirvada*'. Blessing is an expression of one's good wish towards someone who is going to be its recipient, whereas a boon is an act of grace

which invariably becomes realised in action.²

The genesis of the idea of boon or '*vara*' can be traced to the Rig Veda where the various verbal forms of the root *vri* (to choose or request) like '*vrinite*', '*vrinute*', '*vrinimahe*' etc., occur.³ The seeker generally expects protection, friendship, rewards like heroic sons, wealth, cattle, horses which would be helpful to him. Only in the 10th Mandala of the Rig-Veda a rishi is seen praying for removing darkness of ignorance from the heart. In the Rig-Veda, a rishi himself sometimes chooses something for himself. Herein we do not have situations where somebody is made to be pleased by a person.

In Yajur Veda also the verbal forms of the root '*vri*' occur.⁴ It narrates some stories in brief. In this narration the boon is indirect and conditional.

The Brahmana portion of the Vedas throws more light on the idea of '*varadana*'. The Brahmanas relate different sacrificial rites for attaining 'boons'.⁵

2. Vide Gode P. K. and Karve G. G. 'The Practical Sanskrit Dictionary'—P. 1370.

3. Rigveda—9.66.18, 3.12.3, 1.141.6, 1.117.3, 1.67.1.

4. Yajurveda—6.1.5.1, 6.2.3.2, 2.1.2, 2.5.12.

5. Aitareya Brahmana—1.2.1, 2.3.12, 3.9., Shata-patha Brahmana—4.1.1, 21, 3.14.18, 1.1.3, 84.

1. Uttara Ramacharitam—1.10.

According to the Brahmanas the boon is granted by laying down a condition to a seeker. It is not a mere process of giving and taking, but the giver of the boon asks some kind of work to be done by the receiver and then the giver agrees to offer boons to the receiver in exchange according to his wish. The recipient of the boon does not ask for wealth, cattle, land etc., as in the Samhitas. On the contrary, they ask for having a share in the sacrificial rites. They are satisfied with the offerings of the oblations. Aitareya Brahmana narrates a boon as a reward or payment. It is done in response to the service.

In the various Upanishads there are several stories dealing with the idea of 'boon'.⁶ The stories involve a giver who is either a god or a sage or an eminent Brahmin or a king. The choosing of the boon was not obligatory, but the receiver had full freedom in choice. Most of these Upanishadic receivers having an earnest desire for deeper spiritual knowledge, approach an elevated soul and express their desires which are fulfilled. Sometimes the seeker, an enquirer into eschatological knowledge, asks to know how a soul passes away, and by which path does it proceed and the place where it reaches.⁷ These boons are related to the knowledge of rebirth, and liberation of an individual soul. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad we find Shvetaketu's father, already well-versed in scriptures, approaching the king Pravahana Jaivali (the son of Jivala) for a knowledge about how and where the soul passes away after the death of the body and how is it reborn. (6:2). The king, who had already instructed the son, received the father, a genuine seeker, with all respect, offered him a seat, water, and reverential

offering. Then the king said to the seeker, 'Venerable Gautama, we offer you a boon'.

When Gautama asked for the knowledge of the soul of man, the king said, "Please be not offended with us, Gautama, just as your paternal grandfather was not (with ours). Before this, this knowledge never dwelt with a Brahmana. But I shall impart it to you; for who can refuse you when you speak thus."

"Heaven is verily fire, O Gautama. The sun himself is its fuel, his rays its smoke, the day its flame, the four directions its sparks. In this fire, the gods offer faith as libation. Out of that offering King Moon is produced." The king then gave him the secrets of the eschatological knowledge by which one can know where the immortal soul goes after the mortal body is dead. The same story is repeated again in Chandogya Upanishad (5 : 3) in a little more elaborate way.

The 'boon' story of the Katha Upanishad, one of the most widely read Upanishads, is well-known. It gives a vivid description of the nature of Brahman and the way to attain it. It begins with an ancient story.⁸ A Brahmin-king called Vajashravasa performed a sacrifice in which he gave away all his possessions. Amongst them there were many feeble cows which were offered as a gift to priests. Disturbed at the sight of such undesirable gift his son Nachiketa then asked his father to whom he would be offered. When Nachiketa repeated the question, his father became angry and said, "To Death I give you". The honest Nachiketa took this as a command and gladly went to the abode of Yama, the God of Death. But Yama was absent and Nachiketa had to wait at his door for three days and nights before he came back. In order to pay off the compensation for the delay and

6. Chandogya Upanishad—5.3.6., Brihadaranyaka Upanishad—6.2. 1.5, 1.3.20, 4.3.1., Katha Upanishad—1.1., Kaushitaki Upanishad—3.1.

7. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad—6.2.5., Katha Upanishad, Kaushitaki Upanishad—1.1.

8. Katha Upanishad : 1.1.22

discomfort to this guest, especially a Brahmin boy, waiting patiently at the door of the abode of Death, Yama promised him three boons.

As the first boon the King of Death assured Nachiketa that his father will "bear no anger" against him for his desperate coming to the house of death.

Nachiketa then said, 'You know, O Death, the Fire-sacrifice which leads to Heaven. Explain it to me, for I am full of faith. The inhabitants of Heaven attain immortality. This I ask as my second boon.'

As the second boon Yama taught him the secrets of the Fire-sacrifice which lead to Heaven and which is the support of the universe, and which is hidden in the hearts of the wise.

Being well pleased Yama then said to Nachiketa : "I will now give you another boon : this Fire shall be named after you".

For the third boon Nachiketa said to Yama, "There is this doubt about a man when he is dead : some say that he exists ; others, that he does not. This I should like to know, taught by you. This is the third of my boons." Yama asked him to pray for other boons since the nature of the Atman is subtle and since it is difficult to understand this secret. Yama said, "Do not press me. Release me from that boon. If you deem any other boon equal to that choose it : choose wealth and a long life. Be the king, O Nachiketâ, of the wide earth. I will make you the enjoyer of all desires".

Nachiketa said, 'But, O Death, these endure only till tomorrow. Furthermore, they exhaust the vigour of all the sense-organs. Even the longest life is short indeed. Keep your horses, dances, and songs for yourself. Tell me, O Death, of that Great Hereafter about which a man has his doubts.

Nachiketa will surely not choose any other boon but the one so wrapped in mystery."

Yama then proceeded to give him the knowledge of the Immortality of the Soul, the undying Self, which is the central theme of all the Upanishads.

In the Puranas, however, we find boons are being prayed for more mundane needs. But in all these cases where boons have been offered, the receivers are persons of great service, sacrifice and austerities, and the givers are persons of realisation.

In the Mahabharata there are several stories dealing with 'boon'. The same Yama, the King of Death, offered boon to Savitri who impressed him by her unflinching faithfulness to her husband Satyavan even when the husband lay dead. Savitri's chastity and sacrifice inspired Yama to give her a boon. Savitri utilised this opportunity to regain the life of her husband, and, therefore, prayed to Yama for a 'boon' for becoming a mother of hundred sons. Yama gave back the life to Satyavan, and thus his boon became true.

In the Ramayana we see Ravana propitiating Brahma, the Creator, with his super-human austerities. Brahma was pleased to offer him a 'boon'. But when Ravana prayed for 'immortality', it was *not* granted, as Ravana was not fit for receiving immortality like Hanumana or Nachiketa. With all the power of austerities. Ravana's mind was for worldly enjoyments. Rama, pleased by the service, purity, and sacrifice of Hanumana, offered him the boon to live through all the ages, and sing Rama's glory.

Kunti, the chief queen of Pandu, served with all devotion, the angry ascetic Durvasa. Pleased, the sage taught her, as a boon, the sacred 'mantra' by which she could have immediate vision of any god or goddess whom she would worship. Through the visions of these gods and the fulfilment of many prayers through the grace of these gods, Kunti, along with her five sons, survived a whole life of incessant sufferings and

obstacles, and lived a life of perfect righteousness.

Draupadi, the daughter-in-law of Kunti, similarly worshipped the Sun-god with all her devotion. Pleased, the Sun-god offered her the *Akshaya-Patra* (the inexhaustible pot) from which food could be given to any number of guests in her house. Only there was one condition for this 'boon'. The supply of food would continue so long Draupadi herself remained without food.

The moment she took her food, the pot would cease to supply any more food. Probably the boon story is symbolic. It is the spirit of austerity, renunciation, and personal sacrifice, which inspires the spirit of blessings, benediction and offering of boons from realised souls, sages, and seers. Always the right kind of 'boons' has been offered to right sort of recipients for different kinds of merits, austerities or sacrifices on the part of the recipients.

THE VISHADA-YOGA OF THE GITA

(THE ETERNAL STORY OF HUMAN DILEMMA)

SWAMI BHAVAHARANANDA

Poet Shelley said once that our sweetest songs are those that tell of the saddest thoughts, and how true it is can be particularly evinced from our epic literatures and mythologies. Surprisingly the first chapter of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita has also been titled as ARJUNA-VISHADA YOGA, The word 'YOGA' meaning here the treatment or subject matter of the chapter, like all the other chapters of this most prominent scripture of Hindu tradition.

But a question may naturally arise in the modern mind. Is it really 'Vishada', the doleful, defeatist and melancholy tone of Arjuna that can or has become somehow or other, an inappropriate name for the contents of this chapter? Even if the divided and the confused Arjuna is accepted as a very typical character reflecting with a Hamlet-like psyche vacillating about action, war and politics, or sunken in the muddy water of religious and cultural confusion, how could it be, therefore, an emulative and exemplary factor so as to find such an

important place at the very outset of the GITA? Is there some hidden intent and purpose of the author of the GITA (Gita-kara) to prove the hopelessness and helplessness of man in *Daiva* situation or sudden tragedies which we suffer from, and which too often baffle our enterprise, individual dynamism, and Purushartha in life? Is it to prove the destiny or cosmic (*Daiva*) power as the final and deciding factor in life, urging us to believe only in favour of a philosophy of surrender (SHARANAGATI) and unconditional Bhakti? But we should also know that Bhakti or pure devotion cannot be in any way consequent of this weakness, fear and complete breakdown of such a valiant and heroic Arjuna, who has already many records of proud personal achievements and performances mentioned in the Mahabharata itself.

It was also not at all normal to expect that such a heroic Arjuna would suddenly turn out to be a pacifist and non-violent so as to plead that 'victory is always more

catastrophic for the vanquisher than for the vanquished'. Obviously it could be a statement by the pacifist Romain Rolland to Sigmund Freud, urging him to join a no-war campaign. But it is never suitable to Arjuna and his Kshatriya (warrior) type. Rightly, therefore, it has surprised even Shri Krishna who could not desist himself from asking him the reason for this, "Whence has this unworthy weakness, O Arjuna, come to you in this trying situation, (a weakness) which is loved by the ignoble (non-Aryans) only and which bars their attainment of Swarga totally and which brings about disgrace to them?" (Ch. II/2, GITA). Surely it was not a befitting conduct of Arjuna to bemoan the possible loss of his near and dear ones, that too in a righteous war, in the comradeship of Shri Krishna himself. That is why Shri Bhagavan told him very sternly, "Do not get into unmanly weakness, O Arjuna (son of Pritha), that does not become you. Give up this base weakness of heart and mind and arise! O vanquisher of enemies!" (Ch. II/3, GITA).

In fact, Arjuna echoed the voice and repeated almost the same line of argument that Sanjaya had put up as an emissary of Dhritarashtra to Yudhishtira and his court, as a last minute bid to stop Kurukshetra war that is narrated in the Udyoga-Parva of the *Mahabharata* (section 22-27). May be Arjuna was influenced or touched by it.

Shri Bala Gangadhar Tilak has mentioned in his *Gita-Rahasya*: "Shakespeare has described another similar occasion in a drama of his called *Coriolanus*" (where the hero) "was a brave Roman potentate, who had been driven out of Rome by the citizens of Rome and on that account had gone and joined hands with the enemies of Rome, whom he promised never to forsake..." Arjuna never took the side of the enemies, but he was pleading like someone belonging to the enemy camp. The Pandavas were

thrown out of their rightful place and kingdom wrongly by their counterparts, though not by the citizens exactly. And the Pandavas themselves resolved to combat a battle with their co-brothers for the sake of justice and righteousness.

Pointing out further, Tilak said, "There are numerous other similar examples of persons being puzzled as to duty and non-duty in the ancient or the modern history of the world. But it is not necessary for us to go so far. We may say that our epic *Mahabharata* is a mine of such critical occasions". And that it was just "for the sole purpose of explaining it to ordinary persons in the simple form of stories, how our great ancient personages have behaved in numerous difficult circumstances of life; for otherwise it would not be necessary to write 18 Parvas (cantos) for describing merely the Bharata war."

Mahadev Desai writes in his submission on the Gita, that according to Gandhi, "Instances are not wanting of genuine works of history containing imaginary dialogues. Thucydides, the most conscientious historian known to antiquity, did not hesitate to introduce such imaginary dialogues for historical characters in order to elucidate situations and has himself said that he had deliberately done so. As for poetical works, many poets of a transcendental vision have picked up historical or semi-historical incidents and used them for depicting imperishable visions of the soul of man struggling with grim facts of life. To take only one instance—that of the master painter of human passions, Shakespeare. We see in his dramas men and women thrown into situations as profoundly tragic as that in which we find Arjuna in the first discourse of the Gita." Then Desai quoted the following dialogue of Lady Blanch in *King John*, "Which is the side that I must go withal/ I am with both: each army has a hand;/ And in their rage, I having hold of both,/"

They whirl asunder and dismember me. Husband, I cannot pray that thou mayst win ;/Uncle, I needs must pray that thou must lose ;/Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose ;/Assured loss before the match be played." According to Desai, Shakespeare tossed Hamlet on the boisterous sea of a devastating indecision and made Brutus lose his sleep and suffer the sufferings of an insurrection, almost in the same manner as Arjuna in the Gita.

Maybe Arjuna was torn with doubt and despair and anguish at a time when he was to have enough faith on himself and the innermost Divinity. But another question that still shocked us was that, 'Vishada' or despair of Arjuna led him to collapse in anticipation of an would-be grief that has not yet come actually and was still to occur. This anticipation and unnecessary suffering of a grief that was still in the womb of the future, is really abnormal, possible only in some exceptional cases of schizophrenic fits. Naturally, Shri Bhagavan snubbed him by saying, "...You are lamenting for those for whom you should not lament and yet talk about knowledge! Knowers do not lament (whether) the dead or the not-dead." (Ch. 2,11, GITA).

Here, Tilak went a step further and commented, "out of these, lamenting over one who is dead is natural ; and it is proper to give advice not to do so. But a doubt having arisen as to why and in what manner it is possible to lament the fact of some one not being dead, commentators have indulged in a considerable amount of discussion on this point ; and may have said that it is a matter of lamentation, that the fools and ignorant people should be spared." But surely nobody would like to spare Arjuna as a fool or a knave.

Obviously, therefore, in order to solve the doubt, Tilak himself has remarked, "But instead of hair-splitting in this way we should interpret the word 'lament' in a

broad way as meaning 'to feel happy or unhappy' or 'to mind'. All that is intended here is, that the Jnanin looks upon both these matters as one and the same." What he meant was that in a state of real knowledge and its realisation all such contradictions melt away. Hopkins is not correct in his statement that the Gita "is an ill-assorted cabinet of primitive philosophical opinions." This grief of Arjuna in the mythic style can be best understood in the language of Nikos Kazantzakis in the following manner: "The cry is not yours. It is not you talking, but innumerable ancestors talking with your mouth. It is not you who desire, but the race of men from which you come is a huge body of the past, the present and the future. It is the race itself, you are a passing expression. You are the shadow, it is the meat...You are not free." Arjuna was possessed perhaps in this sense. In the mythological notion of time the past, present and future, all are mixed up ; and one can go back into the past and as well come back and march forward towards a future in the same manner. A myth can very well anticipate an would-be situation and be involved and get affected by itself psychologically. It was the collective unconsciousness (i.e. culture from the depth of its own) of the eternal dilemma of human mind that spoke through Arjuna's mouth.

Indeed, here is a situation where mythologies, history, Utopias, Phantasies and dreams all combine and get confused. The danger of it is that, as Jacques Ellul has put it, "whenever men have taken Utopian descriptions seriously, the result has been disastrous." No doubt, it was disastrous for Arjuna too. His body started trembling, hairs stood on end and the mighty hands of his own lost all the grip over his famous Gandiva and his dilemma also started scorching him. Poor Arjuna was caught within him and outside also. Very appropriately another author has pointed out that "rarely have Utopians and visionaries built escape

clauses into their characters for the future. One can enter their Utopias, one cannot emigrate from them. Most Utopias fear thoughts which may sabotage them, features which acknowledge their mortality and situations which make them irrelevant."

Thus the Gita hereby wants to have a universally shared Utopia, along with Arjuna. We have already quoted Tilak's comment saying, "Commentators have indulged in a considerable discussion on this point." One such interpretation can also be added here that Arjuna has foreseen certain consequences of the Kurukshetra war and was temporarily seized by these visionary or semi-visionary schizophrenic attacks that were all about to be, all yet to take place. But it all came out from within him like fits.

Arjuna has also turned into a complete bio-physical dystopian character mainly because of his high emotion and sudden depth of his feeling for his own people (SWAJANA)—a type of possession or obsession caused and effected by inter-organic human bond and volitional nature of the issue. And most of us fail to understand this, because, "A Utopian is to be understood in the context of the strengths and crisis of the way of life in which it is rooted". Naturally, therefore, the effect of this type of Utopia and its meaning are lost to many of us today, in our changed circumstances of life and socio-cultural situation.

Margaret Mead wrote in an essay titled *Towards More Vivid Utopias*, "Utopias may be seen from very many points of view—as projections from individual experiences stamped by the point of view of a particular period: as sterile blue prints too narrow to confine the natural varieties of the human mind for very long; as when they are lived out by small cult groups who pare and mould the individuals born within them to confining and crippling mode, or they may be seen as those visions of future possibili-

ties which lead the minds of men forward into the future, giving life a meaning beyond the grave or beyond the simple domestic perpetuation of one's own life in the lives of one's children, with an interest in the trees in one's neighbour's garden. The Golden Age, a retrospective Utopia of the days when all men lived like Gods and talked with Gods—the days before death, or work or separation into the world—may also of course play a significant role in keeping the whole people caught in a dream unrelated to the requirements of the contemporary world." These observations may help to form new reflections on the first Chapter and Arjuna's psyche at that hour. Arjuna needed a vision which can activate those aspects of human personality which constantly seek certainty—that is, a vision which links up with the unconscious defences of mind which endorse every search for certainty. Such a vision was granted to him later on by Krishna. Such a vision is likely to push the human mind towards totalism. A Utopia should be able to free its partisans from its own pattern and to survive in them only as a certain quality of thinking and living. This is how man overcomes dilemma and finds fulfilment in life.

Explaining the need of such a true vision Mead wrote, "yet the world today is surely in need of a vision which endow our lives with meaning and responsibility and will make safe the terrible power of destruction and almost the limitless power of construction which scientific research has put into our hands."

We all get exposed, some time or other, to such a deep tragic experience and weakness like Arjuna. We all experience in the same manner and feel shocked when the most primitive elements of our human love and social feeling get nowhere, and occasionally a deep chasm, gap or split is followed by violence and war. Yet the fact is that we all aspire towards a mystic trans-

cendence in the alternative vision of a more cosmic unity and universal character of our being as it is found in the vision of Vishwarupa in the GITA itself. But the real difficulty of such vision is "...that in most of the cases heaven and all the pallid Utopias are in fact like NIRVANA, blank white spaces—or spaces a little tinted with pastel and furnished with plastic gadgets and are given reality only by contrast with fear, pain, agony of some other state." Naturally the question arises, "How to force life to grant us such a visionary paradise?" Some will go the pauranik or the mythological way,

some the philosophic, some political or otherwise. But as far as Asia is concerned we know the solution and emphasis is in Self-realisation.

Fortunately, Arjuna had comprehended Krishna as a totally dependable personality and thus his melancholy, fixed between his Utopia and a distorted psyche, gets resolved in Krishna's message that the end of life is to be established in a state of calmness or equanimity when the Bliss of Self within reveals unhindered, and man feels himself fulfilled beyond all desires.

How They Came to Vedanta

SWAMI ATULANANDA
(GURUDAS MAHARAJ)

SWAMI VIDYATMANANDA

Swami Atulananda, more-known as Gurudas Maharaj, was a Hollander who became a Swami of the Ramakrishna Order, and recognized by members of the Order as a holy man. He linked Europe and America with India at a period when this concourse was far less frequent than it is now. He took up Indian religious thought at a time when Hinduism was generally regarded by western people as heathenism, and through it reached a wonderful universality of view. In his last years, in his eighties and nineties, he allowed his daily thoughts and recollections to be noted down, and these made up a book which I had the joy of editing, entitled "Atman Alone Abides". He said in one of his conversations printed in this volume: "If you put these small incidents together they will become a book."

Gurudas Maharaj interests us for at least three reasons. He knew intimately and received the grace of most of the first disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. Secondly, he occupies a particular place in the history of the early days of the Ramakrishna movement in the West. And, finally, he himself was a man of real spiritual attainment—a superior, convincing example and evidence of the faith.

I should like to take up these three factors one by one.

Gurudas Maharaj was born in Amsterdam on February 7, 1870, the son of a prosperous tea merchant. He was the seventh of eight children. His name was Cornelius J. Heijblom. The religious background of the family was Protestantism, strict and serious. The boy graduated from an agricultural

college and before the turn of the century, as was so common in those days, emigrated to the United States. He lived in and around New York City, gaining his livelihood as office worker, and at times as coachman and farm hand.

In the nineteenth century Indian thought had penetrated American life to a very modest extent through the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and the New England Transcendentalists. It was only in 1893, with Swami Vivekananda's success at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, that Hindu ideas became known to the public at large. Vivekananda's lecture tours in the United States, and England during the following years resulted in a certain acceptance of Indian thought and the formation of several Vedanta study groups. To look after these groups, Vivekananda dispatched others of the first disciples of Shri Ramakrishna to the West: Swami Abhedananda, Swami Saradananda, and Swami Turiyananda. The fifth direct disciple of Shri Ramakrishna to come to the West was Swami Trigunatitananda, who taught in the United States from 1903 until 1915.

Some twenty-five years after the events, Gurudas Maharaj wrote about his original contacts with these Swamis in articles which became a book entitled "With the Swamis in America". He tells how in 1898 he became a student of Swami Abhedananda, how he met Swami Vivekananda briefly in 1899 and 1900, and how during that same year he went to California to live in the ashrama of Swami Turiyananda. In succeeding years in India, Gurudas Maharaj kept up his relation with Swami Turiyananda, also making the acquaintance of several of the other direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna: Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, and Swami Shivananda. Indeed, Gurudas Maharaj met all the direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna except Swami Yogananda and Swami Niranjanananda. And,

as we shall see, he knew Shri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother.

As Gurudas Maharaj explained it, he had from the beginning found his own Protestantism confining and illogical. Thus when he heard the Vedantic teaching of Swami Abhedananda he was attracted. As he says, "It was as though a sudden revelation had opened up. I knew all at once that this was Truth." Instructed by Swami Abhedananda, he commenced regular religious practices. Being single, he was able to devote his spare time to helping out at Swami Abhedananda's small centre. In due course, the Swami gave this young man the vows of brahmacharya, the first vows of a Hindu monk. He received the name-in-religion of Gurudas, which means "servant of the guru". The word Maharaj came to be added years later, a title of respect often applied in India to those who have renounced the world.

Although he was now a Brahmachari, Gurudas Maharaj continued to earn his livelihood and live in his own quarters. But through Swami Turiyananda a brand of monastic life became possible. Swami Vivekananda had been given some uninhabited acreage in the San Antonio Valley, a day's hard travel by the transport of that period from San Francisco. Swami Turiyananda, although carrying on some public work at San Francisco, decided to put his major effort toward building up a center of study and meditation on this acreage, which he called the Shanti Ashrama, or peace retreat. In 1900, Brahmachari Gurudas was there.

The story of this pioneering effort has been told by Gurudas Maharaj in his "With the Swamis in America"; also by a California woman who was among the original members, Ida Ansell (Ujjvala) in a vivid account originally published in the review "Vedanta and the West" in 1952. In recent years this sojourn of Americans in the

desert with their Indian teacher has been recounted by Swami Ritajananda in a book entitled "Swami Turiyananda". It was a bold experiment to take a dozen Americans into the California wilderness. The climate and geographical factors were not very favourable; the epoch of the Wild West was not very many years in the past. Facilities had to be built up from scratch. The most elementary concepts of Hindu thought had to be imparted to these pioneers. What Swami Turiyananda was apparently aiming for was the establishment of the forest hermitage existence of ancient Hindustan, where people lived in a simple way, worked as capable of working to sustain the community, devoting themselves to study and to personal advancement. Shanti Ashrama bore some resemblance to the so-called Utopian communities such as the Mennonites, whose inception had been a part of the American scene from the earliest days, even to the so-called hippie communes of the recent past. A similar colony, called the Lord's Farm, existed for a time on the east coast of the United States, of which Gurudas Maharaj had been a member briefly before going to the Shanti Ashrama. The feature that marked Shanti Ashrama was the presence, as director, of an advanced spiritual leader, and when he went back to India, as he did in 1902, Shanti Ashrama was no longer a retreat for continuous living.

Gurudas Maharaj was at Shanti Ashrama from the beginning and continued to live there even after its brief golden hour was finished. He was the right-hand man of Swami Turiyananda, and Swami Turiyananda's friend. One of the most valuable features of "Atman Alone Abides" is the portrait and interpretation Gurudas Maharaj gave concerning Swami Turiyananda.

Although Gurudas Maharaj wanted to be a monk and, technically, was a monk, there were in the early days of this century no Ramakrishna monasteries in the West. Today

there are several. So in 1906 he went to live in India, to take up his place in the Order inspired by Shri Ramakrishna in 1886 and founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897. When I met Gurudas Maharaj for the first time in Kankhal in 1953 (I had a second meeting with him at the same place ten years later) we talked—somewhat as two expatriots might when finding themselves far from home—about the problems the westerner encounters in trying to live in India. This is a difficult transition to make today; and it was much more so in 1906. Gurudas Maharaj found the manners strange, the food not at all good for him, conveniences he would consider fundamental simply nonexistent. He could not stand India physically and at the end of two years was forced to return to the United States. But, as he told me in his characteristically amused manner, "the call of the orient" again became strong; and in 1911 he tried the transfer again, again at the end of five years with the same result.

Finally, in 1922, Gurudas Maharaj made the third effort, and this time he stayed, until his death on August 10, 1966. By the time of this third try he had learned prudence. As he explained it to me, he finally decided not to try to be the complete Indian. Some modest financial aid from a brother in London allowed him to provide for himself enough comfort and sufficient food of the sort suitable for him so as to be able to maintain his health even in India. He chose to live in the north, in winter at a big center at Kankhal, 22 kilometres down from Rishikesh, and at a mountain station in Barlowganj, near Mussourie, in summer.

I asked Gurudas Maharaj in 1953: "Do you think you made the right choice in 1922? Do you ever feel homesick for the West?"

He replied: "Even if I had had regrets about never seeing the West again, I could have none now at eighty-three. It is nice to

be elderly in India. In the good old U.S.A. you're not wanted when you are aged. But here elderly people are respected. Look at the way they love and spoil me! In India old age is really an advantage."

Perhaps this is a good place to describe Gurudas Maharaj. He had the white skin and blue eyes of a Hollander—very striking in a country where dark eyes and dark skin are the norm. What was visible of his hair—for he kept his head shaved as most sadhus do—was reddish. He was small, and it seemed a wonder that he was able in his youth to have worked as a coachman and farm aid. A fall from a horse had given him a permanently injured back. When I saw him in 1953 he walked with a cane. Years before in the U.S.A. he had been fitted with a leather brace for his back, and in 1953 he was still making it do. He told me: "Now it is a race. My brace is awfully old. It's become a question of which will hold out longer. Will I give before the brace does, or will it give out before I do?"

During his first two sojourns in India, Gurudas Maharaj had had the good fortune to associate with several direct disciples—that is to say, men of realisation—of Shri Ramakrishna, as well as other persons of spiritual and historical eminence. Although he had taken brahmacharya from Swami Abhedananda years before in the United States, Gurudas Maharaj realised that he had never been given a diksha mantram. It was arranged for him to receive this initiation from Shri Sarada Devi during his second sojourn in India. On his first visit Gurudas Maharaj travelled through Kashmir and up to the famous Amarnath shrine in the company of Swami Turiyananda, Swami Premananda, and Swami Shivananda. In 1907, he attended the *surya-grahana* mela at Kurukshetra in the company of Swami Turiyananda. Some of the time during the first stay in India he lived at Swami Vivekananda's Himalayan monastery at Mayavati;

there exists a historic photograph of him taken there, probably in 1907, together with Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine, Mrs. Sevier, Sara Bull, and Swami Virajananda, all disciples of Swami Vivekananda, and all important figures in the early history of the Ramakrishna movement.

In 1923 Gurudas Maharaj was given his final vows, of sannyasa, and became Swami Atulananda. This occurred at Belur Math, in the presence of many swamis, including Swami Abhedananda. It is the president of the Order who administers these vows. Swami Shivananda was then the President. But when it came Gurudas Maharaj's turn, Swami Shivananda stepped aside in favour of Swami Abhedananda, requesting him, who had initiated Gurudas Maharaj into religious life twenty-five years before in New York, to confirm him in the austere engagements of sannyasa.

As the years went by, other historical figures died, and Gurudas Maharaj himself became a celebrity. Indians, both monastic and lay, planned for years to go on a pilgrimage to the Himalayan foothills, in order to see him. And devotees from the West, hearing of him and feeling for him a kind of patriotic pride, as was my case, made a point to journey up to Kankhal when visiting India. One American, who visited Gurudas Maharaj in 1966 and recorded his impressions, was Swami Yogeshananda. Following are excerpts from his account:

It was in the summer of 1966 that I made my way to Barlowganj to make a pilgrimage visit to Swami Atulananda....By this time the cancer on his face was far advanced, he had become very silent, and one could understand it would not be long before he would take his leave. I stayed in the room sometimes when his wound was being dressed (he had a cancer on the forehead which eventually affected one eye), and saw the difficulties with which he contended in

the daily routine of living, and the only thing which made it bearable for me as witness was the distinct feeling that he was himself the witness, patient, enduring, detached. Truly, his forbearance seemed marvellous. He said that he was not in much pain; this was difficult to believe from the nature of the case.

Often I had just to sit in his presence, because it was rare at that time that he would speak more than a few sentences. Nevertheless, I will give here what little conversations I had with him, in substance.

Gurudas Maharaj told me that he had never tried to go through a summer in Bengal. He had arrived at Belur Math in June, and Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) had told him it would be too hot for him, so he should go to Mayavati. When I said that I was having difficulties even now, in these more convenient days, he said, "Oh, baba!" and laughed heartily. Then he added, "And I wore western clothes!" (In which certain functions of the day become complicate). More laughter. He first adopted Indian dress at Almora. When he went to Mayavati, Mrs. Sevier was there. He characterised her for me in four words:

short, active, intelligent, kindly. He remembered his talk with the famous missionary Fr. E. Stanley Jones, which the latter reported in his book "Christ at the Round Table", and he spoke of him as a great preacher. He remembered Ujjvala, and remarked that she had got along very well for one with a physical handicap.

In answer to questions, he said that the Holy Mother had talked to him through an interpreting brahmachari, that he had seen Sister Nivedita in Calcutta and in New York, and also had seen Sister Christine.

He asked about the view from my room (the southernmost, which looked out over the valley below and down to Dehradun). I expressed my appreciation of it. Kankhal, he said, had no such view.

"Now comes a very important question," he said with gravity, but also with a twinkle in his eyes, "Which is better, the American doughnut, or the Scottish one such as this lady made for me?" (A devotee had brought some she had made). Everyone laughed at this. Then I told him several funny incidents about Swami Madhavananda which he enjoyed.

(To be concluded)

WHAT SWAMI VIVEKANANDA DID FOR AMERICA: A NEW REVOLUTION?

(A REVIEW ARTICLE) ON *The Gift unopened; A New American Revolution*
By Eleanor Stark, Boston, U.S.A. 1988 Publisher Peter E. Randall

BY ELVA NELSON

Will there be a new American revolution? Certainly there is something new abroad in the land: a recognition that there is a need for a new type of leadership above and beyond political leadership. At the time of the Class Day Exercises in the summer of 1988 at Harvard College, one of America's

most perceptive social and literary critics, Tom Wolfe, said in Cambridge, Mass: "If there happens to be some great philosopher in the making, capable of creating a higher synthesis on the order of a Rousseau or a Jefferson that will light up the sky and lead mankind into a new era, never has there

been a moment in history for such a person to succeed more brilliantly."¹

How could he have missed Swami Vivekananda?

"Do we need a revolution?" asked Bill Moyers, America's premier interviewer, of a guest on PBS television in February, 1989. It would seem so, if keen minds, such as Tom Wolfe's and Bill Moyers' can think alike. Another report along a somewhat similar line: following the very successful six part series on PBS of Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*, which had 2.5 million viewers each week, a Boston newspaper came out with a story entitled "Religion seen on rebound as material world returns to spirituality."²

Obviously there are many who see the need and many who feel the need of a spirituality that will inspire and bring out the best in everyone. They want certainty, that which is true. Americans are looking, or so it appears, for someone of the stature of a Lincoln to supply this spiritual stimulus.

At a time like this, what could be more natural than Swami Vivekananda being led out into the mainstream of American life by an American devotee? This is what Eleanor Stark is striving to do with her book, *The Gift Unopened*, an original and remarkable first attempt to present Swami Vivekananda to American citizens. Many have come to the shores of America bearing their gifts. A Smithsonian Institution publication, *Abroad in America*, describes Vivekananda as "one who left an indelible mark on America's spiritual development."³

If John F. Kennedy, stopping in Berlin, could say, "Ich bin ein Berliner", so could Swami Vivekananda have said, "I am an American". He had as much right, for he adapted so well and was so loved. And did so much.

The Gift Unopened was an outgrowth of a remark by the late Swami Budhananda, who felt that there was no book on the American Heritage and Swami Vivekananda's contribution to it. Mentioning this to the Starks, Archibald and Eleanor, they immediately began to get material together to present to the Swami. Not finding anyone in the U.S. to undertake the task of writing an original book and conveying this to Swami Budhananda, he replied to them in a very short letter: "get to work". Which is what Eleanor Stark did, doing her first writing at Vrindavan.

It was in Annisquam, Mass. that Vivekananda gave his first public talk in English at the Universalist Church. He was sojourning there for a weekend in August, 1893, having been invited by Professor John Wright of Harvard, who was so helpful in giving him credentials for the Parliament of Religions. "The talk that was given that Sunday in the little church in Annisquam was the first gleam of lightning that heralded the approach of a spiritual storm," writes the author, "that gathered force and power from the first rumblings of a triumphant recognition at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago to a full crescendo in an odyssey through cities and towns and homes across the land...and then slowly dies away after having watered and revived the parched spiritual earth of America."⁴ He had, of course, a message for the West, and he "spoke to our condition."

The impact that Vivekananda had at the Chicago Parliament was immediate. Aside from his concern to help the material condition of India, the author raises the question: "What brought Vivekananda to our shores at the turn of the century to expend his life-force in a few gruelling years that eventually broke his health and led to his early death at the age of thirty-nine? Was it America's

1. Harvard Gazette, Alumni issue, June, 1988.

2. Boston Globe, Nov. 7, 1988.

3. Smithsonian Institution, *Abroad in America*, Addison-Wesley, 1976.

4. *The Gift Unopened*, p. 3-4.

possibilities or her need? It was probably both."⁵

The author goes on to say: "...we need to explore our heritage, our founding ideals and values to discover what he saw as possibilities in the regeneration of a people. We also need to look courageously at ourselves today to understand where we have failed and thus why the need is great."⁶ Vivekananda foresaw the need.

What happened to America? Eleanor Stark enumerates: "We face the nuclear age burdened by social and political institutions too large to comprehend and deal with as individuals, an environment rapidly deteriorating from overuse and abuse, a pervading dependence on the market-place as the arbiter and guide of all our attitudes and opinions and rumours of wars of a possible magnitude that could quickly solve all problems by annihilation...We have become a nation of consumers: statics in schools of business and marketing. We play the game of 'getting and spending' and we pay the price, not realising its dimensions. We have been 'packaged' as consumers along with products, filled with sugars and chemicals of preservatives so that we may live as long as possible and look as young as possible while we age....Something deep within us says something is wrong, but not what—our deepest needs as human beings are untouched, unquickened, left dormant."⁷

Henry Steele Commager, noted historian, in a television interview⁸, recently pointed out that the country is going through a bad period right now with dishonesty, crime, and inequality; and the emergence of poverty as a class. People do not look to the U.S. as a success. They look to Japan and Sweden, the latter often termed mate-

rialistic, but whose people are willing to be taxed so that they may have the best day-care centers for children in the world and the same level of gracious caring for the elderly.

The drug situation and the crime situation are frightening. It was reported earlier in the year that 135,000 school children are packing a gun daily going to school.⁹ This America is not the America we knew while growing up before the second World War and the immediate years thereafter.

As the author says: "For those who cannot be duped and who are profoundly troubled by our national posture and by their own cynicism, there is a gift to open, an awakening to anticipate in the ringing words of Vivekananda, a prophet...who spoke out of a deep love for us as a nation, as a people, calling 'upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes'. All power, glory, goodness, purity and all things excellent will come, he said, 'when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'"¹⁰

At the time of Vivekananda's visit, religion in the U.S. meant ethnic religion. The religious climate of that era is well brought out in the book. What is needed now, the author maintains "is an understanding of religion that goes beyond ethnic limitations, which is scientific, rational, inclusive, and universally acceptable. Vivekananda came in the name of that kind of religion."¹¹ He laboured intensely to put Advaita Vedanta into a simple language, poetic, and scientific and practical as well. Quoting Marie Louise Burke, "...The message he brought was drastic. It was also very simple. He taught the Vedantic doctrine of Oneness, than which nothing could be less complex."¹² As Vivekananda defined religion in New York, "Religion is realisation, not talk, nor

5. Ibid., p. 15.

6. Ibid., p. 15.

7. Ibid., p. 17.

8. PBS TV Feb. 8, 1988, interview with Bill Moyers.

9. Today Show NBC TV Jan. 30, 1989.

10. *The Gift Unopened*, p. 20.

11. Ibid., p. 38.

12. Ibid., p. 38.

doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes."¹³

What is meant by spirituality? In two masterly chapters, Vivekananda's views of what a universal religion should be are presented. "If there is anything in the universe, it must be universal," said Vivekananda, "there is not one movement here that is not universal, because the whole universe is governed by laws. It is systematic and harmonious all through. Therefore what is anywhere must be everywhere. Each atom in the universe is built on the same plan as the biggest sun and stars. If one man was ever inspired, it is possible for each and everyone of us to be inspired; and that is religion."¹⁴

Summing up his ideal of what a universal religion should be, Vivekananda said, "What I want to propagate is a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds; it must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic, and equally conducive to action....To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions is *my* ideal of religion....As every science has its methods, so has every religion."¹⁵

The various spiritual disciplines and yogas are the quickening factors in our evolution. This is what has been termed psychosocial evolution, and the author has quoted from Swami Ranganathananda's unpublished manuscript, *Man in Depth* about the possibilities for mankind. She says: "The disciplining and conquering of the lower mind is essential to the path of spiritual evolution as well as the future of the world."¹⁶ And then goes on to describe the qualities and aspects of the four yogas,

noting that karma yoga is perhaps most suited to the ever-working, workaholic Americans. As she says, "The secret of work is how to work freely, with joy, no matter what the work is. We work like slaves when we could work like masters." She brings up another aspect with the question, "What is it that makes our actions so repetitive, so unavailing, so unproductive?" and gives Vivekananda's answer: "We are attached, we are being caught...How? Not by what we give but by what we expect. We get misery in return for our love; not from the fact we love, but from the fact we want love in return. Desire, want, is the father of all misery. Desires are bound by the laws of success and failure."¹⁷

Interspersed in the text are a number of personal vignettes to illustrate a point. There is one to illustrate the power of love. Eleanor Stark tells of a woodcutter who lived all his life on their mountain in New Hampshire. He had a hard life and he was rough and stubborn. "But we loved him", she says, "and he responded with the loan of an axe, long stories about the woods, and vivid descriptions of his dreams and experiences."

"At that time we were on the town School Board and were preparing to consolidate the town's one-room schools into a large central school. Milford, uneasy and resistant, growled that the little school down the road was a good one and had always been there. But the plans went on. Finally, he could stand it no longer; he roared up to our door, said his piece, spat in the snow, and departed. For almost a year he never spoke to us, turning his back when we smiled and waved. People shrugged and said, 'Oh, that's Milford. He's as stubborn as a mule, he'll never change.'

"The months rolled on over his silence but we never stopped waving when we passed. One day a near-hurricane toppled

13. Ibid., p. 40.

14. Ibid., p. 45.

15. Ibid., p. 53.

16. Ibid., p. 49.

17. Ibid., p. 58.

a big tree across the road between his house and ours. We met, axes in hand, to clear the road. He glowered, but began to cut. 'We've missed you, Milford!' we said. That spark of love deep in his battered heart ignited. 'Let's get to work,' he grumbled, 'and get this thing cleared away.' He never stopped talking for a week."¹⁸

This brings us to bhakti yoga, the realisation of divinity by means of love of God. That love and devotion directed to a Jesus or Krishna or some other holy personality transforms our lives and our character, has been attested to many times. The experience of savikalpa samadhi is the goal and then realisation of God without form. Quoting the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, the author remarks, "We forget ourselves in the inexplicable joy of an all-loving consciousness."

Extolling Raja yoga, Romain Rolland "felt that it was the path that should be able to unite the West and the East by an 'exploration and conquest of the ultimate... through the mind.'" ¹⁹

"Raja yoga is psychology-in-depth on a profound awareness of the power and sensitivity of the human mind," writes the author. "Unfortunately, some of our Western psychologists equate man in terms of his lowest nature and advise him to express his instincts freely. Much harm has been done to individuals and society by this advice which equates control with repression... Vivekananda, in calling this yoga the psychological path, implied that it is scientific and based on reason and experience, in spite of the final leap of intuition that carries us beyond the mind. He called it 'the only science of religion that can be demonstrated, and only what I myself have proven by experience, do I teach. The full ripeness of reason is intuition, but intuition cannot antagonise reason.'" ²⁰

18. Ibid., p. 69.

19. Ibid., p. 72.

20. Ibid., p. 72, 73.

The ethical and moral preparations for meditation, the subconscious mind, the necessity to watch our thoughts, and our lack of understanding of the mind are all brought out.

The same perceptive analysis and description is given to Jnana yoga. "The knower and the known are one", said Meister Eckhart.²¹ This discipline is suited and appeals to those who are philosophically inclined, analytical, and possessed of a strong will.

"The goal of Jnana yoga is absolute union; the seeker finds he must rise above all duality; beyond good and evil, beyond pleasure and pain, beyond joy and sorrow. This demands an effort of mind and will that may seem almost superhuman... One must have the desire for freedom from the limitations of natural existence."²² Analysing for us what is meant by "good", she writes that it must be "from the point of being rather than action, otherwise we will become 'do-gooders.'" The follower of the path of Jnana yoga needs to strip away the illusions of "I" and "mine". "There he finds within himself, in his own being, That for which he searched. 'I am He' is the ultimate in religion, in spiritual life. 'I and my Father are One.' This is Advaita Vedanta, or non-dualistic Vedanta; God without name or form, the Absolute, beyond time, space, and causation."²³

What does this wonderful gift of Vivekananda mean to America? "...the Western world has yet to assimilate Swamiji's message", writes Marie Louise Burke.²⁴ It is not as well acquainted with Vivekananda's name as it could be. Marie Louise Burke is correct in her statement, but a beginning has been made. Swami Akhilananda, in his

21. Ibid., p. 78.

22. Ibid., p. 80.

23. Ibid., p. 82.

24. Burke, M. L., *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. Vol. 6, p. 82. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1987.

books and lectures during the 1940's and 1950's until his death in 1962, stressed meditation. "Meditate, meditate, meditate", he would say. In the first week of December, 1953 the question of America's need for meditation was brought up. "Wait twenty-five years and you will see," he said. We now can observe all around us various groups meeting for meditation. Other Eastern thought groups are ever springing up. Even the courageous Thomas Merton could say to a friend: "You have to experience duality for a long time until you see it's not there. In this respect I am a Hindu. Ramakrishna has the solution."²⁵ Thomas Merton at that point was speaking in regard to prayer.

Can we see the influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in what Prof. Huston Smith has to say in the opening paragraph of his book, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, or are we reading too much into it? "Quietly, irrevocably, something enormous has happened to Western man. His outlook on life and the world has changed so radically that in the perspective of history the twentieth century is likely to rank—with the fourth century, which witnessed the triumph of Christianity, and the seventeenth, which signalled the dawn of modern science—as one of the very few that have instigated genuinely new epochs in human thought. In this change, which is still in process, we of the current generation are playing a crucial but as yet not widely recognised part."²⁶ Even if we see and read into this statement too optimistically about Vedanta, we can't help but believe that the fingerprints of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Sarada Devi are there.

It might not be out-of-place to consider here what Swami Shivananda had to say

towards the end of 1922: "The manifestation of divine power we see in Shri Ramakrishna in this age is unique....The wave of spirituality will roll on unimpeded over all the world for a long time."²⁷ Again, towards the end of 1932, he said: "It is not yet fifty years since the Master's passing away and yet what a spiritual revolution is taking place throughout the world, because of his personality. We are blessed that we can see these things. You will see even greater things."²⁸

All these happy prognostications of a great spiritual teacher are for everyone, everywhere. In the second part of *The Gift unopened*, Eleanor Stark would like to see the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States enlarged to include the whole world. As she writes: "Because of her power and influence, America has a great opportunity to begin the process of healing the divisions of mankind by defining her own national purpose along grander and more universal lines than a national defense stance or an international dollar diplomacy. She can work for a gradual union of East and West, a beneficial exchange of philosophy and practicality. She can envisage, and foster, a union of science and spirit which can lead to more meaningful personal lives thus advancing the welfare of humanity."²⁹

This would mean that the national purposes would be broadened and reinterpreted as guidelines for peace and order on a global basis as the author puts it. The philosophy of Vivekananda would have practical implications, both for the West and the East and could bring about their union for the betterment of each. This would also include a reconciliation between science and religion...By bringing Advaita Vedanta to the West Vivekananda "struck at the root of

25. Thomas Merton, *Monk*, Ed. by Brother Patrick Hart, p. 89. Sheed and Ward, 1974.

26. Smith, Huston, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*. p. 4, Crossroad, 1982.

27. Shivananda, Swami, *For Seekers of God*. 3rd. ed., p. 12, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1972.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

29. *The Gift Unopened*, p. 88.

this dogmatic belief in a personal God in Heaven when he said: 'What is the idea of a God in Heaven? Materialism. The Vedantic idea is the infinite principle of God embodied in every one of us. God sitting upon a cloud! Think of the utter blasphemy of it!...God is spirit and he should be worshipped in spirit and truth.'"³⁰ Today's scientists like David Bohm, Rupert Sheldrake and others are exchanging ideas with representatives of Eastern religions as we find in Renee Weber's *Dialogues with scientists and sages: the search for unity*.

Americans need to improve their system of justice and this endeavour will need better men and women, who will be people of character and vision. To go a step further our concept of justice might be expanded to include reincarnation. Many Westerners believe in it, and many more do not. Eleanor Stark maintains that "In order to establish justice in the realm of our lives on earth and among nations and peoples we need to have an awareness of the higher laws of the universe....I am my own keeper as well as my brother's keeper must become an accepted fact of life before human justice can at least parallel the divine."³¹

The condition of women, armaments among nations for war, poverty, disease, exploitation are problems that must be resolved. If not, America will have failed in her constitutional ideals. National politics, personal inter-actions between people in government and positions of trust, should not operate in a vacuum of values. "To merit the role of leadership, we must choose to become a great people. To become a great people, we must embark on a new revolution, a revolution in morality and personal responsibility; a revolution of character and concern."³²

The meaning of freedom, the blessings of

liberty, and the need for better education of the young with man-making as the aim and goal of our education are some of the topics which are explored. "Vivekananda saw the present systems of education all over the world as inadequate: 'The mind is crammed with facts before it knows how to think. Control of the mind should be taught first.'"³³ The author pursues in depth Vivekananda's educational ideals and their value for mankind. As she says: "Up to now, our education has been career-making rather than character-building. Vivekananda repeated again and again that what the world needed was character....In Los Angeles he said: 'The ideal of all education, all training should be this man-making,... the end and aim of all training is to make the man grow.'"³⁴

America faces choices. "It is clear that we stand at a vantage point in history. Time has brought us unexpected possibilities. We can transform ourselves and our world if we choose. But what will we choose? This will depend on our acquired wisdom."³⁵

Will there be a new revolution? In time. Not only do we need great scholar-saints dressed in gerua, we also need great householders. The latter may or may not have had any influence in ancient cultures, but in a democracy with a voting public and political representation, great householders nourish, foster, and help to disseminate through all levels of society, personal idealism and responsibility through person to person contact. Swami Vivekananda didn't want the spiritual power of Shri Ramakrishna to be locked up in temples as it had been in the past. He wanted it to be given to the masses. Householders as well as monastics will need to put their shoulders to the plow for a new growth to be harves-

30. Ibid., p. 100.

31. Ibid., p. 125.

32. Ibid., p. 192.

33. Ibid., p. 169.

34. Ibid., p. 174.

35. Ibid., p. 208.

ted. A new civilisation to be built.

Will only America have a new revolution? India also will feel it. Swami Ranganathananda writes in his *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*, (vol. III, p. 98): "Our people have been more concerned with their relationship with god, or with an image of god in a temple or other religious places, than with man the next door neighbour, with whom our people would more often collide than co-operate for general human well-being. Our education today must help us to develop in our people a new type of excellence that would make for the *grihastha*, or householder, *spiritually growing into the citizen*; a genetically limited individual growing beyond his or her genetic limitations of outlook and sympathy and response, and growing into a national and human awareness and responsibility."

Although *The Gift Unopened* is concerned primarily with America, its giver came from India, whose attainment of freedom is one of the amazing things in the twentieth century. As Eleanor Stark writes: "There can be no true freedom without knowledge."

In an Epilogue Vivekananda's life in India

after his final return from the West is sketched. He had done his work and had bundled his things and was waiting for the great deliverer. After his death, his broken-hearted devotees in San Francisco wrote: "Vivekananda has shaken the whole world with his sublime thoughts, and they will echo down the halls of time until time shall be no more."³⁶

At the end of the book there are a number of appendices: one, describing Vivekananda's appearance and personality; a second, retelling the story of Vivekananda meeting Rockefeller; the third, on Vivekananda refusing the chair of philosophy at Harvard, and the fourth, on Americans who believed in reincarnation and their testimony thereto.

In wending one's way through this book, you know that Eleanor Stark has been a teacher. To read it is not only a learning experience, but a renewing one as well. "Think something!" said Vivekananda. Our friend has done so. What next? *Tatah kim? Tatah kim?*

³⁶. Ibid., p. 212.

NEWS AND REPORTS

Ramakrishna Math
New Natham Road,
Madurai-625-014

AN APPEAL

Ramakrishna Math, Madurai, is a branch of the well-known Ramakrishna Math with its headquarters at Belur, near Calcutta. As a part of its educational activities it has been running the *Sarada Vidyalaya* for the last six years in a thatched shed. To cater to the needs of the local people this year the school opened the VI standard and drew

up a plan for constructing a pucca building and, for buying a van and other equipments, estimated to cost about nine lakhs of rupees.

Ramakrishna Math, Madurai, a charitable institution, appeals to the generous public to donate liberally towards the development fund so that it can successfully complete the project taken in hand.

Donations are exempted from income tax under section 80-G. of the Income-Tax Act, 1961. Cheque/Draft or M.O. may be drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Math, Madurai', and sent to the above address.

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

Brahman alone addressed as Mother, because a mother is an object of great love.

Have firm attitude: I have chanted Mother's name. How can I be a sinner? I am Her child, heir to Her powers and glories.

God is your own Mother. Not a stepmother, nor artificial relationship.

To him alone who is grief-stricken for Her vision, Mother comes running, leaving all Her other duties.

One's own mother, the embodiment of Brahman, should be adored.

Man is born with debt to mother.

Gopis wanted to enjoy God, looking on themselves as His mother, friend, etc.

No harm (is) in earning money for one's mother.

Destruction of 'woman and gold' happens instantly thinking of Divine Mother as your own mother, not god-mother.

A true son cannot be away from his mother. The mother knows everything.—Tulsi said that

one who looks on woman as his mother will realise God.

Holy man never forgets to look on woman as mother. Looking on woman as mother is very pure attitude. To me every woman is mother. Looking on woman as mother is like fasting on ekadashi day without drop of water. I worshipped Shodashi as mother, looked on all parts of her body as those of my mother. I regard all woman as mother. How can I have a son?

One must look after, show highest respect for, one's mother for she is embodiment of Blissful Mother of the Universe.

One must have firm attitude of: I am Mother's child, heir to Her powers and glories.

To regard woman as your mother, and yourself as her child is a very pure attitude.

(Compiled from: *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*)

PRABUDDHA BHARATA: 90 YEARS AGO

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

Vol. IV.

OCTOBER 1898

No. 39

NANA KATHA

The Swami Vivekananda, who we are glad to inform our readers kept excellent health on board ship all the time, reached England with the Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita on the 31st July last, and was met by many friends and disciples on landing. Quarters were taken at Wimboldon, where the Swamis stopped till the middle of the following month,—no work of course being taken on hand.

On the 16th August they left for America, Sister Nivedita following a week later. It is probable that Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita will stop in America for Vedanta work, the Swamiji returning shortly to England to do some work, if not incapacitated by indisposition.

We have since received news of Swamiji's arrival at New York. He is now staying at the countryhouse of Mr. Leggett, the President of the Vedanta Society.

* * * *

We are glad to hear that Babu Dinabandhu Mozumdar, B.A., Headmaster of the Dacca Imperial Seminary has joined the local Ramakrishna Mission, and has begun to hold classes

in Gita, which will continue to sit more regularly after the Dussera vacation. The Mission, we are told, is progressing rapidly under the energetic guidance of Dinabandhu Babu. We congratulate the members of the Dacca Mission on their acquisition.

The Swami Akhandananda expresses his heartfelt gratitude to those kind-hearted ladies and gentlemen who have lately come to the help of the Murshidabad Orphanage by making voluntary contributions towards its support. His best thanks are due to Babu Upendra Narayan Deb of Entally for raising the sum of Rs. 58-8 as monthly subscription since April and to Babu Hirendra Nath Dutt who has remitted Rs. 20 to the treasurer, the Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nundy of Cossimbazar, as contribution to the Orphanage Building Fund. During his recent stay in Calcutta, the Swami collected the sum of Rs. 103 as donations, and Rs. 86-8 as monthly subscription inclusive of the amounts stated above. He has also received a Homeopathic chest of medicines, two medical books, an atlas with two geographical readers, a few pictures and a few Bombay-made cloths for the orphans.