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Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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JANUARY 1990

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OR

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VOLUME 95

JANUARY—DECEMBER 1990



By Karma, Jñana, Bhakti and Yoga,
by one or more or all of these
the vision of the Paramātman is obtained

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EDITOR: SWAMI SWANANDA

JOINT EDITOR: SWAMI MUKTIRUPANANDA



Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 1

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

THE DIVINE MESSAGE

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Whatever you dream and think of, you create. If it is hell, you die and see hell. If it is evil and Satan, you get a Satan. If ghosts, you get ghosts. Whatever you think, that you become. If you have to think, think good thoughts, great thoughts. This taking for granted that you are weak little worms! By declaring we are weak, we become weak, we do not become better. Suppose we put out the light, close the windows, and call the room dark. Think of the nonsense! What good does it do me to say I am a sinner? If I am in the dark, let me light a lamp. The whole thing is gone.

All the time you work hard and bless somebody else, because you are superstitious, you are afraid. No more of these superstitions bred through thousands of years! It takes a little hard work to become spiritual.

You want to worship Personal Gods. It is the worship of your own self.

The awakening of the soul to its bondage and its effort to stand up and assert itself—this is called life. Success in this struggle is called evolution. The eventual triumph, when all the slavery is blown away, is called salvation, Nirvana, freedom. Everything in the universe is struggling for liberty. When I am bound by nature, by name and form, by time, space, and causality, I do not know what I truly am. But even in this bondage my real Self is not completely lost. I strain against the bonds; one by one they break, and I become conscious of my innate grandeur. Then comes complete liberation. I attain to the clearest and fullest consciousness of myself—I know that I am the infinite spirit, the master of nature, not its slave. Beyond all differentiation and combination, beyond space, time, and causation, I am that I am.

Compiled from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. VIII, p. 130, 131, 133, 134, 249.

TO OUR READERS

With the arrival of 1990, *Prabuddha Bharata*, the oldest running monthly Journal of India, is entering its 95th year.

This first issue of 1990 comes as a special number of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Many eminent writers of East and West have contributed valuable articles on varied themes, enriching it. We express our gratefulness to all of them. During the last year, 1989, writers, scholars, and devotees contributed dissertations, essays, travelogues and other articles for the various issues. Some have enrolled themselves as life-subscribers of the Journal. Many others have offered donations and help of other kinds, in order to keep the prestigious religio-cultural Journal alive.

Prabuddha Bharata staff wishes to improve the quality, printing and paper of this Journal started under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda in 1896. We hope the general public, especially the lovers of this great country and her precious culture, and the devotees of Swamiji, will come forward in large numbers to help us by enrolling as life-subscribers, by offering donations, and finally, by contributing articles which will help to fulfil Swami Vivekananda's vision of Awakened India.

Prabuddha Bharata wishes all its subscribers, contributors, and admirers best wishes for a happy, peaceful, and prosperous New Year.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is about man, who owing to his limited vision and constricted ideas, has vitiated the atmosphere of the world. In spite of his tremendous progress in all fields, he has not learned to transcend the mind-created barriers. Unless he becomes global in his outlook, the personal and collective sorrow and suffering of mankind will continue.

ROLE OF RELIGION IN WORLD PEACE is based on the talk given by Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in Bhopal. Man has been searching for peace individually and collectively from time immemorial. It is an illusion to think that in olden times there prevailed peace and only in the modern age man is beset with discords and dissensions. Peace always eluded mankind. There was no lasting

peace at any time in the history of the world. Each complains of the other as the disturber of peace. Forgetting his own role and contribution, peace should come first in an individual's life. True religion alone ensures it. It helps us to bring about transformation in our lives and teaches us to become unselfish. Forgetting our narrow self in love is the sure way to peace.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIVINE INCARNATION as revealed in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, a thought-provoking article, is by Revered Swami Tapasyanandaji, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In this article the Revered Swami discusses at length the extraordinary state of *bhavamukha*, the threshold between the noumenon and phenomena. Remaining in this state Sri Ramakrishna functioned in the world of multiplicity without losing hold on non-dual consciousness.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HUMAN EXCELLENCE is based on the talk delivered by Revered Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, at the Emerson Hall of the Harvard University. His talk covers a very wide canvass, revealing the vast and in-depth study of human nature. Excellence does not belong exclusively either to East or to West. It may be found in the combination of both, and yet it goes beyond this combination. Swami Vivekananda was a shining example of this human excellence, combining in his life the best of East and West. In him we find the happy synthesis of *para* and *apara vidyas*.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S INTERACTIONS WITH CHRISTIANITY is a well-documented research paper by Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The paper brings to light many new materials pointing out the close relationship and striking similarities between Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ. The two historic personalities, despite the nearly two millennia gap, are inseparably blended together. So much so, that many Christian devotees in India have seen the manifestation of Jesus of Nazareth in Sri Ramakrishna, and have worshipped him. In all the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Jesus Christ is worshipped as an incarnation of God.

TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE OF INDIA, with illustrations, describes Hindu temple architecture and its evolution. It is a masterly dissertation on the art and grandeur of both ancient and medieval styles. Though masterly, the treatment of this difficult subject is presented in simple and lucid manner. The building of temples for gods and goddesses was governed by strict principles and rules. There were no unplanned and disorderly constructions. Injunctions laid down in the ancient *shastras* were followed

scrupulously by the builders. This scholarly essay is by Mr. G. Venkataramana Reddy, Hyderabad, who is an internationally known architect and town planner. He has been adviser, Department of Town Planning, to the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

WORSHIP OF SHIVA IN THE SICK AND AILING, an illustrated article, is by the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Benares, Swami Shuddhavratanandaji Maharaj. He writes a glowing account of the founding of the Sevashrama and its growth and development down the years. It is a unique story of dedicated souls who were inspired by Swami Vivekananda. Their special form of spiritual *sadhana* was the worship of God in suffering humanity. It is a wonderful saga of sacrifice and down-to-earth religion.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN is the fifth instalment contributed by Ann Myren, a former lecturer in Alameda College, California, U.S.A. Like her earlier articles this one too, touches the heart of every reader. Sri Ramakrishna's keen intelligence and ever-watchful eyes could easily discern the vexing problems women faced in day to day busy life. In his inimitable way he not only suggested solutions to those problems, but directed their minds God-ward. Seldom did he use chiding language. He impressed on all that God-realization alone, and not sensory satisfaction, is the goal of life.

APPEARANCE AND REALITY is a poem by Swami Brahmasthanandaji, of our Hyderabad Centre. How the world of appearances in our everyday life deceive us and thus lead us astray, is his subject. Sense perceptions and knowledge derived from them are not real. In spite of receiving blows in his futile attempts to catch and hold on to shadows, man has not learned to ponder

over the questions of his sorrows and agonies.

J. J. GOODWIN, THE FAITHFUL DISCIPLE
In this brief life sketch of a dedicated soul, Swami Tathagatanandaji, Head of the Vedanta Society in New York, describes vividly the great sacrifice of the western

disciple of Swami Vivekananda, whose life is little known to many. Goodwin's contribution in preserving and faithfully reporting the immortal words of the great Swami is immense. The world owes a deep debt of gratitude to him for his yeoman service. This Ganesha of our age has earned for himself a permanent niche in our hearts.

MAN WITHOUT FRONTIERS

(EDITORIAL)

The young monk Vivekananda who went to America to spread the gospel of love and light, and who tried to knit mankind into one global family, sometimes experienced humiliation and even manhandling. Because of his skin colour many took him for a negro and treated him with contempt. But the Swami never denied that he was not a negro, and bore stoically the insults that were directed towards him. Why? Sister Nivedita gives the answer in her book, *The Master as I Saw Him*:

'When, travelling in America, he had at first in certain southern towns been taken for a negro, and refused admission to the hotels, he had never said that he was not of African blood, but had as quietly and gratefully availed himself of the society of the coloured race, when that was offered, as of that of the local magnates who hastened round him later, in mortified apology for what they deemed the insult put upon him. "What! rise at the expense of another!" he was heard to say to himself, long after, when some one referred with astonishment to this silence about his race, "Rise at the expense of another! I didn't come to earth for that!"¹...

Vivekananda's coming to this earth was for a definite purpose. That was to lift the

hapless man up and help him to realize his immortal nature. Therefore his boundless compassion for mankind flowed ceaselessly. His love knew no discrimination between poor and rich, learned and ignorant, yet one could see it overflowed towards the poor and oppressed. Sister Nivedita highlights this unique characteristic of her master, almost bordering on weakness, sometimes, as he felt great joy in the company of the less privileged:

'Few things ever gave him such pleasure as a negro railway-servant who came up to him on one occasion, in a station, saying that he had heard how in him one of his own people had become a great man, and he would like to shake hands. Finally, it was never possible, in his presence, for the vulgar social exultation of the white man to pass unrebuked. How stern he would become at any sign of this! How scathing was his reproof! And above all, how glowing was the picture he would paint, of a possible future for these children of the race, when they should have outstripped all others, and become the leaders of Humanity! He was scornful in his repudiation of the pseudoethnology of privileged races. "If I am grateful to my whiteskinned Aryan ancestor," he said, "I am far more so to my yellow-skinned Mongolian ancestor, and most so of all, to the black-skinned Negritoid!"²

1. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Calcutta, 1967, Vol. I, p. 153.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

The innate divinity of all individuals, high or low, Hindu or Non-Hindu, was never hidden from his clear Advaitic vision. During the voyage on his second visit to the West, Nivedita saw her master speaking with the greatest delight, of the skilled seamanship and pleasing courtesy of the Turkish sailors and the childlike devotion of the ship's servants to himself had touched him deeply. He said to Nivedita, 'You see, I love our Mohammedans!' Nivedita was highly impressed by his habit of seeing every people from their strongest aspect and she wanted to know if this trait of his was somehow derived from Sri Ramakrishna? Vivekananda admitted:

'It must have been the training under Ramakrishna Paramahansa. We all went by his path to some extent. Of course it was not so difficult for us as he made it for himself. He would eat and dress like the people he wanted to understand, take their initiation, and use their language. "One must learn," he said, "to put oneself into another man's very soul." And this method was his own! No one ever before in India became Christian and Mohammedan and Vaishnava by turns!'³

There are many factors which divide human beings and restrain them from coming closer and establishing affectionate relationships with one another. In the absence of these mind-created divisions which are totally unnecessary, humankind would become one global family. Physically we have come nearer. This is the wonderful gift of modern science. But physical proximity has not helped us to bridge the widening chasm that exists between our hearts. There are many things which have separated man from man—religion, caste, language, racial prejudice, wealth and political dogma, to name a few. All these barriers have brought about devastating effects on the minds of men. Under the evil spell of these deadly religious and political dogmas, man

has drenched this earth with human blood, and as a result of this senseless cruelty, he has lost peace within and without. No nation is happy and peaceful. Each distrusts the other. Uncertainty and insecurity about the future has gripped the hearts of men in steel claws. Why should narrow ideas hold sway over the intellect of man and dim the light of his rationality?

To identify oneself with a group, a language, or a religion is a basic urge of human beings, because such identification gives security and status. Without such identification one suffers anonymity, which is a frightening experience for an individual. Had it stopped only with identification there would not have been so much chaos and violence in the world. If one identifies oneself with his nation or religion, it does not cause any harm to others. But the process does not end there. 'The same man who is kind, good, honest and loving to people of his own opinion, will not hesitate to do the vilest deeds when they are directed against persons beyond the pale of his own religious brotherhood,'⁴ said Swami Vivekananda. The followers start claiming that what they believe is the highest and what they belong to is the supreme. What are dear, holy and important to them, should also become so to others. And they believe those are the only values worth pursuing and the rest are superstitions. This aggressiveness and the illusion of intellectual superiority, have led to the worst kinds of exploitation and been the causes of untold misery.

The killings and cruelty that are going on in the name of religion or in the name of political ideologies, point out a singular lack of wisdom. People forget that all mankind cannot be forced to accept one ideology; it is not possible to thrust one faith or religion

3. Ibid., p. 160.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1989, Vol. III, p. 33.

on to all people. Because variety is the law of nature, it is the beauty of life, whereas oppressive uniformity is death. In this scientific age, computers can be programmed to think and behave alike, but men cannot. If leaders can understand this simple truth, then the earth would be turned into a heaven and life a blessing.

What are the causes of bigotry and fanaticism? It is the lack of understanding by people of what they profess to believe. This obscurity produces obstinacy. When one believes in something unintelligible, he believes in it blindly and has to unquestioningly surrender to authority. Frustration due to forced submissiveness drives one to aggressiveness and cruelty. We have seen in life that with clarity of thought comes the capacity to understand and respect the divergent views and ways of life of other people. Clarity of thought is insight. With insight, respect and love are fostered. Arnold J. Toynbee wrote, 'This recognition of the many-sidedness of religious insight and experience was part of Sri Ramakrishna's message. It was also part of his life, because his life and his message cannot be distinguished from each other.'⁵ The travesty is that many leaders try to keep their followers in darkness and expect mute obedience from them. Such leaders are tyrants and thrive on the weaknesses of their followers.

Therefore it is the foremost task of elders and educators to teach children to respect and love other human beings, nay, even including the life that pulsates in everything—in plants, in animals, rivers and mountains—the whole of the earth and every thing that belongs to her. The attachment to a particular way of life, the foolish hold on certain sets of unexamined beliefs needs

5. *Bhavan's Journal* (article on 'East and West'), Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, October 1971, p. 136.

to be got rid of. Clinging to the rigid way of mechanical and strait-jacketed thinking should go. A recognition must come that if the world situation is explosive, it is we who have created it. What is within expresses without. We must remember, without mankind there is no world of thoughts, feelings and ideas. It is man who creates the mental world of ideas. We create the world outside as we are inside. There is no use blaming any external agency for the chaos and cruelty that are present in the world. We have to take the responsibility on our shoulders and stem the rot. If in every country more men and women realize this truth, instead of waiting for God and Government to come forward, this formidable task would be less difficult.

Transformation brought about in the lives of individuals is bound to affect global consciousness. Modern Quantum physics, and especially the theorem by the famous physicist, John Bell, indicated in 1964 that the universe was based upon non-local and holistic connections which run faster than light. This universe is interconnected and is a multi-dimensional hologram. Every mind is connected with every other mind. This is the hard holistic paradigm of today's science. *No man is an island*. To think that we are separate from the world and from others is an illusion. This truth has been taught and demonstrated by the great Ones of the past and present, and twentieth century science stresses it with such vehemence that it can't be ignored any more. If more individuals start thinking in terms of global family, and global responsibility, the change will surely affect other minds also. This is a fact, which today is scientifically verified by the thesis of 'formative causation' or 'resonance' of impulses in the living world, as shown by Rupert Sheldrake. Transformation always starts with a few individuals and later spreads to others.

Our age has received a tremendous spiritual impact from Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. And it has slowly taken hold in the minds of great intellectuals of the world. If our world is to live in peace and prosperity, then it should produce men without frontiers. It should be the goal of our education and religion. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was for this purpose. Of his Master's historic life without frontiers, Vivekananda wrote on 21 March 1895 to his Western disciple, Mrs. Ole Bull:

'My Master used to say that these names as Hindu, Christian, etc. stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their good powers and now only stand as baneful influences under whose black magic even

the best of us behave like demons. Well, we will have to work hard and *must* succeed'⁶

In Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta, religion and education are not two different fields. They are synonymous. Again and again he spoke of man-making religion and man-making education. In his view, man means man without frontiers, a universal man. Swamiji himself was a universal man, and his mission in life was to create free men, men without frontiers, free from the limitations and bondage of creeds, 'isms', organized religion, and national or caste-culture. Without the ideal of universal man, a man without limitations, all our efforts in religious and secular education will go fruitless.

6. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1981, p. 218.

ROLE OF RELIGION IN WORLD PEACE

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA*

The subject for this evening is 'Role of Religion in World Peace'. World peace is a very big idea which is concerned with the whole of the world that is known to us. And peace is a necessity for the whole world as it is for individuals or collective groups. The word 'peace' also has got many shades of meaning. What do we understand by the word 'peace'? Sometimes we feel that if we get what we are craving for, we shall have peace. But mostly the peace of that kind eludes our grasp and we feel discontented. The word 'peace' may be understood in two ways. One is individual and the other is collective. We are seeking peace for our-

selves individually as also collectively and various methods have been followed to achieve that objective. I cannot imagine a single person anywhere who does not want peace. But at the same time I am yet to see many people who are able to follow the conditions for attaining such peacefulness. It does not come all on a sudden, it does not come unless we play our part properly, individually, and collectively. There is discontent everywhere and we say that it is our lot to suffer from this kind of discomfort, particularly in modern times.

People always think that the days in the past were all golden. But if we go through the pages of history or if we go through the mythological stories, we see that there was hardly any chance for the world to have peace collectively and also for persons indi-

*Based on a talk delivered by Revered Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in Bhopal on 5.4.1987.

vidually. We find always there were discords, dissensions, wars, mutual fighting, one person trying to exterminate another so that man would have no source of discontent or loss of peace. People think that if they are stronger than what they are at present, perhaps they will have peace because those who were hostile, will not have the courage to approach them with an evil intention. We say that is also a sort of peace. When a powerful nation has got so much strength as to dominate over others, we think that particular power is peaceful so far as their country is concerned. But it creates discontent, a psychosis of fear among the neighbours and other races. Now that is the condition that we are facing. It is not merely a product of modern age, it is the trend for all times that we can think of.

In the Vedic days we find there are two groups, the Devas and the Asuras, always fighting among themselves. And then we come gradually to the pages of history. History means mostly records of events and warfares. In our modern times many of us have seen the first world war and the second world war. And today we are apprehending a third world war too. Now that is the condition that we are living in.

We see that accumulation of power does not help to bring about peace. There may be just a temporary truce. Take for instance the case of the first world war. There the powers were supposed to be advanced races, but among themselves they struggled and fought to dominate over one another. The result was that a strife that had begun on a small scale, covered practically the entire world. That may also be a distant event. But the second world war is just in our living memory. Very vividly we can imagine the conditions that we had gone through at the time. How many lives were lost! How much of miseries it inflicted on the people at large! It staggers our imagination to

think of that. And then, every time there was some truce, or some sort of understanding. Even though one party got defeated, and the other party stood victorious, they had to live in peace for sometime at least. So there was a sort of negotiated peace which was, of course, very fickle and temporary. That is why many years did not elapse after the first world war when the second world war broke out. And that also came to an end. People who became victorious, inflicted any amount of misery that can be thought of, on the vanquished. That is how the war ended. But has that ended the strife, the hostility, and the mutual suspicion? Has it put an end to the power-struggle for the vanquished ones for gaining enough strength so that those who were victorious could be dominated in course of time? So it is only a play of seesaw that is going on. And history is a chronicled narration of these events.

There was no lasting peace at any period since the prehistoric days right up to the present moment. We read that in the prehistoric days, before human beings came to the present position they are having today, there were big animals. They were cruel, every one of them, but ultimately they, too, were exterminated for various reasons. And the same animal passion is raging in our hearts today. Only we are trying to hide it with a mask that appears to be very different from what it is really hiding. Brutes are kept under the mask of men who look sympathetic towards one another, although in reality there is no genuine mutual understanding, comprehension and accommodation among them.

We know we are trying through various methods to come to some workable terms so that we can live in peace. But that effort has proved a failure almost always and the little result that we gained was so transitory that from the moment the nego-

tiated peace started, preparation for another world war also started equally with right earnestness. Now that is the condition of us who are supposed to be rational animals, guided by reasons. But what kind of reason is this? It is a reason that suits us, that keeps us in a position of advantage. It is that sort of reason. Reason cannot be used dispassionately, objectively though they are supposed to be so. The result is that causes of conflict are always remaining unresolved, and the result is that we are waiting for the next catastrophe. Everywhere this is the condition. Some people at least think that as we are rational beings. We think that through reasons, through negotiations, through talks, understanding, and accommodation, we may perhaps solve this problem. Attempts have been made but so far the result is not very encouraging. That does not mean attempts should be discarded, but then so far as the ultimate result is concerned the condition is not very hopeful. Some people think that this kind of brutality, this kind of animal passion is to be kept under control. But how? We do not know. We have tried to keep those who are disturbers of peace, under control, but that proved ineffective. Even now such an attempt has not been successful.

Some people at this juncture think that perhaps the instruments we are using for the negotiation of peace, are evil by very nature. If we have to be accommodating, understanding and sympathetic towards one another, we have to change ourselves. But none takes the need of such a change with much importance. Each one thinks that the other fellow should do it. We forget that we must start with ourselves, that it has to be grown within myself, so that we shall be able to contribute our mite first towards the establishment of peace. That usually is not the case. We are thinking in a collective manner. But in a collective life sometimes we behave more prudently than what

we can do individually. That is very clear from the pages of history.

Now what are we going to do about it? Shall we give up all hopes? Well, man lives by hope alone. Without that we cannot even live for one day. Suppose there is no prospect of any lasting peace, are we then going to commit suicide on a mass scale? No, that will not be reasonable. So we must continue our efforts. But we have to be careful about the instrument with which we are doing the negotiations. Our minds are vicious. We have not been able to chasten ourselves and we go to chasten the whole world. That is the tragedy. We have to chasten ourselves. Then only will it be possible for us to understand what we have to do in a collective manner. Individuals are vitiated. We never give that importance to ourselves, when we think of reforms; we want to reform others. And it is said in the Bible that one is trying to remove a straw from the neighbour's eye while one has got a blanket on one's own eyes. Now that is the condition. We do not chasten ourselves and we want to chasten others.

Here comes a new factor to be considered. People think that transformation of the individuals is the business of religion. It cannot be done by public justice, public administration. That only will try to keep the brute in check for some time. But as soon as it will find an opportunity it will come out. So the individual person has to be improved, and religion means the causes by means of which the individual can be chastened and improved. Now that is where the talk of religion comes. We talk of religion so that by that we can chasten ourselves, and through the chastening of ourselves we can transform the world at large. But religion is not much favourite in modern days. Many people think it is an anachronism. Religion was introduced when people were not competent to control others through

policing. It is like—‘If you are not punished here, you will be punished hereafter ; you cannot escape from it.’ So that a threat is always there. If we can drive that idea deep into the minds of people, people will be frightened to think of the consequences when they behave in a manner which will not be conducive towards the peace of mankind.

That is how the idea of religion came. But in that case, there are not one but many religions. So many religions are there! And people think that it is religion that is responsible for more bloodshed than anything else. The word ‘religion’ has become a bugbear, as it were. We are afraid of calling ourselves religious. This is because, somehow the idea has gone deep into our mind that religion means something fanatical, something unreasonable, something which will think of superiority of one set of people over the other. That is how religion has been wrongly interpreted, perhaps. But that is what happens today. That kind of religion is certainly not a very happy prospect. It cannot have a happy prospect for bringing eternal peace. But if we go to the great sayings of different religions, sayings of those who are not merely preachers, of those who have not merely observed the rituals, but of those who lived spiritual life and whose life has been transformed by the process of religion—those sayings will have an urgency which we have to consider. Religion does not mean dissension, does not mean discord. The word religion has got a derivative meaning which means ‘that which binds together’. Unfortunately, a fanatical religion also binds together a group of people, but that is only to fight against the other groups. That is not what religion is meant to be. Religious people who have gone deep into the mystery of religion, particularly those who have experienced the profound meaning of religion in their lives, have lived in such a way that if we try to imitate them, we may be very different from

what we are now. Now, is it not expected of religion in its true sense ? I do not mean this religion or that religion. There are certain aspects in every religion which have ennobled mankind, and which have got elevating influence over mankind ; and there are others again, other narrow views which degrade humanity and transform them into brutes. Religion is not at fault. It is the wrong understanding of religion that has created so much mischief that the word religion has become a bugbear to modern people.

Modern people think that science has taken away the place of religion. In ancient times people did not understand the laws of nature and they invoked religion for that. They thought that the external forces of nature are like gods or demons who are to be appeased to live this life in peace. That is how ancient people used to think of religion. But those days are gone. Religion also has evolved to some higher scales of thinking. Religion has now become chastened. It is true that religion is lived by people who are handful but these few are the salt of the earth. Every religion has got some people like that who are not so much concerned with their rights and privileges or the rituals, but who discard their own selfish motives for the sake of others. Selflessness is of utmost importance in a truly religious life. Religion does not mean merely worshipping incarnations or exorcising ghosts or things like those that bring earthly miracles. Religion has got a chastening influence on everyone who tries to be religious. That religion is not the monopoly of any particular sect. In all religions there are sages whose lives are exemplary instances of this kind of selfless life, selfless living—living for the sake of others. That is what should be understood by the word religion, and that sort of self-sacrifice or selflessness is possible when we have got rid of the degrading factors in us which have limited

ourselves to this physical life only, the physical body only, the physical enjoyments only. That is how religion has to be understood in a sense which will be a chastening factor, which will make a man transformed into his ideal who is his God. The word God we do not understand now a days. But God means the highest ideal that we can conceive of, and every religion has got that sort of an ideal though not understood by the masses. There are people who are really religious and their life shows that they live not for themselves, but for the happiness of others. That is why selflessness has been extolled in all religions. There are many other factors. As for instance, our life is bound by the senses. Religion invites us to go deeper into the regions where senses cannot reach. But that does not mean obscurity, that does not mean something which will not be understood by people. That means something which will be realised just as we experience sense objects. God will be realised in bliss in a more intimate way. We shall be with God and we shall be God ourselves. Now that is what religion has to do. It has to change man into the divine, transform man into God. That is what religion is expected to do.

That right type of religion is necessary for our understanding and for our practice. We should not be scared by the mystical ideas that the truth cannot be stated, cannot be communicated, that God is beyond thought and words. There are expressions which should not confound us. We should know that every innermost feeling is inexpressible and uncommunicable. So, religious experience is one of the highest feelings of individual identity of oneself with the ideal which is the highest. That is what religion has to do. It has to lead us from where we are, to the highest ideal. As we move towards the ideal, the ideal will also undergo change, undergo transformation. Those who are seeking the ideal will also be gradu-

ally transforming themselves, and the culmination will be there when all good is my God and I and my God are one and the same. That is the highest expression of mysticism. It has to be expressed that way. Otherwise simply by elaborating the teachings of religious leaders who were preaching narrow religious ideals, they will bring more dissensions, more bloodshed, more quarrels among races and among nations.

Now it is time for us to think deeply and see how we can chasten ourselves. It is very clearly stated in mystic language in almost all religions. But that language we have misinterpreted and the result is that we are only bogged in a sort of narrowness and parochiality. That is what is the fate of this world. So let us think what the Upanisad says—I AM EVERYWHERE. Now if I am everywhere, if I harm anybody I harm myself. That sort of vision has to be impressed upon everybody, that we cannot live in isolation. It is a feeling of isolation, that one gets when one lives for oneself only. We are living in our small shells, and then we are also fighting with one another. Let us break the shell and let us have that universal truth dawning in everyone of us. That is the scope of religion. Religion will tell us that God is everywhere and is as much in me, as in my enemy. Since everywhere there is the same God, there cannot be any enemy, there cannot be any hostility among ourselves. That is the idea. Religion has to be taught, be pursued and rightly understood. It should be rightly understood that mere rituals are not religion. Rituals need not be discarded. They may be helpful in the beginning. But as we proceed further and further, the kindergarten class should be left behind. We will have to rise higher and higher in order to understand the deeper meanings of religion. The deeper meaning is that it is from Him that the Whole Universe has emanated. Everywhere you will find religious scriptures say the same

thing, that God is everywhere and that He has created the whole world. And He has created the world not like a watchmaker who creates a watch which has nothing more to do with the maker. The world is not created that way. It is the emanation of that Spirit. It is the emanation of God who is everywhere. The same Principle is everywhere. And if we can have a clear conviction of that eternally existent factor everywhere, there cannot be any reason for fights and mutual discords. That is the role that religion has to play in bringing about world peace. You may say that it is Utopian. I say it is not more Utopian than to think that we can establish permanent peace through negotiations, when we are just thinking of finding an opportunity, in order to pounce upon our fellow beings and destroy them. Is it not much more probable that religious ideas, if properly pursued, will be a source of eternal peace, at least of an agreed factor in drawing people to that eternal peace? Whether that eternal peace will ever be achieved or not, we do not know. But we can know this much that it is worth attempting to reach that, worth attempting to transform ourselves into the highest ideal that we can think of. And as we do that, by that very process of pursuit we shall be gradually improving ourselves. We shall thus be a factor towards the uplift of the whole environment. Whole environment will be uplifted by individuals who live a life with real and earnest pursuit of religion by that kind of religion, I do not

mean a religion whose scope is limited. That religion will cover every walk of our life. Everywhere it will have its effect. Once we live really a religious life we cannot live in segments when one part of us will be religious and the other part will remain secular. The distinction will completely disappear. God will be emanated in everything, and whatever we do will be a prayer, will be a worship to God. "Whatever we do, O Mother, it is worship unto Thee." That worship will find expression in every act of ours, every movement of our life. That will gradually be a great force for bringing about a sort of lasting peace among ourselves. Even if it is merely a question of probability, still it is worth trying, because if we try that we shall be proceeding more towards the ideal rather than coming away from it and leaving the world to discord, dissension, and mutual annihilation.

May we all have that sort of vision so that we can have oneness with the whole existence. I will be happy only when everyone is happy, I will be unhappy if anyone remains unhappy. I will be liberated when everyone is liberated. I will be bound when everyone is bound. That is the high truth a truly religious man manifests in his life. His heart will be so much expansive that none will be away from the orbit of his life. That sort of spiritualization of the whole life is what is to be the goal of religion and that religion will naturally have the greatest role to play for the lasting peace in the world.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIVINE INCARNATION AS REVEALED IN THE LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SWAMI TAPASYANANDA

Merged in Advaitic Consciousness

After Tota Puri's departure from Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna spent some six months in *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*, when he was in continuous absorption without awareness of the body and the external world. Of this condition Swami Saradananda writes in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Vol. I p. 411):

'The Master was in that *Nirvikalpa* state continuously for six months. "I was," said the Master, "for six months in that state from which ordinary *jīvas* never return; for the body of one attaining to that state lives for twenty-one days only and then falls like a dry leaf from a tree. There was no consciousness at all of time, of the coming of the day or the passing of the night. Just as flies enter into the nostrils and mouth of a dead man, so they entered into mine; but there was no awareness of it. The hair became matted on account of the accumulation of dust. Calls of nature were perhaps answered unconsciously. It was a miracle how the bodily life was sustained. It should have succumbed then and there. But a holy man came to save it. He recognised my state as soon as he saw it, and came to know that much of the Mother's work was yet to be done through this body, that much good would be done to many if only it could be saved. Therefore he would carry food in time, and by striking the body again and again, would try to bring it back to external consciousness. The moment he saw signs of consciousness appearing, he would thrust some food into the mouth. Thus on some days, a little of food found its way into the stomach and on others it did not. Six months passed that way. Then the Mother's command was heard: 'Remain in *bhāvamukha*! For the spiritual enlightenment of man; remain in *bhāvamukha*!' This was followed by an illness, blood-dysentery; there was a wringing pain in the intestines, and it was excruciating. It was after continually suffering for about six months that the mind gradually came down to the normal body-consciousness. Before that it used to be merged in the *Nirvikalpa* state always.'

What is Bhāvamukha?

The commandment to remain in *bhāvamukha*, which Sri Ramakrishna had heard on three occasions, brings us to an important subject in the Master's life. *Bhāvamukha* is a new expression, unknown to religious texts in Sanskrit. It is for the first time given out by the Master himself, as he heard it from the commandment of the Divine Mother. Literally translated it means 'the threshold' or 'gateway of becoming' or the 'world of change'. The idea is that just as a person sitting at the gate or threshold of a building has access at will to both within and without, and is in close touch with the affairs on both sides, so there is a state of consciousness which is a sort of junction between the Absolute, or God, and the relative world. There is a threshold between the *nirvikalpa* and the *savikalpa* states of consciousness.

The meaning and implication of the attainment of this state of *bhāvamukha* has to be explained in the light of the Master's own teachings, as the concept is very much new and forms a great contribution to Vedantic thought. According to the Master, a *jīva*, if he really attains to *nirvikalpa samādhi*, never returns to consciousness of the relative world. His body remains alive for about twenty-one days in that state and then perishes. It is only the *ādhikārikas* (prophets with a divine mission) and *avatāras* (incarnations of the Lord) that come back to the relative consciousness from the *nirvikalpa* state. They are drawn to the consciousness of the relative world by their love for bound souls grovelling in ignorance, and thus they are the expressions of God's

redeeming love. Sri Ramakrishna explains this in an analogy: Imagine a vast enclosure with high walls, from inside which very delightful sounds and fragrance are being wafted. There is a road around the enclosure, and there are a number of people going along the road, round and round. Some of them are attracted by that delightful sound and with difficulty get upon the high wall and look in at the overpoweringly charming sights spread before them. They are so much taken up with it that they jump within, forgetting everything else, and they never come out again. But occasionally there will be a few among them who remember the tragic fate of the numerous heedless ones going round and round, and so get down to the road again to give them the good tidings and lead them to the higher life awaiting them across the wall. The divine incarnations or *ādhikārikas* are such expressions of divine mercy, and are, therefore, manifestations of God's redeeming power. Such personages have no ends of their own to serve, even personal salvation. They are entirely devoted to the welfare of all created beings suffering in *samsāra*, the merry-go-round existence of the relative world.

The occurrence of such spiritual types finds its explanation in the Master's doctrine that the Ultimate Reality is Being plus Will (compassion) and not mere Being (*Sat*, or Existence), as maintained in the classical Vedānta. Unlike the Master's theory about *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the classical Vedānta maintains that there can be *jīvas* who attain the *nirvikalpa* stage, but yet continue to retain the body. They are called *jīvan-muktas*, the free-in-life. Vedānta explains this by the doctrine of *prārabdha*, the operative *karma*, or the quantum of *karma* (acting in cause and effect) that has brought the present body into existence. While the *sañcita* (stored up) *karma*, and *āgāmi* (accumulating but inoperative) *karma* are burnt up by knowledge (*jñāna*), it is dogma-

tically held that the *prārabdha* remains undissolved until its momentum is exhausted. No argument is advanced for this beyond one useful analogy: An arrow is released from a bow, which stops not till it has struck its target. But Sri Ramakrishna questions this doctrine: He contends that if *karma*, be it *prārabdha*, is real and operative even after *nirvikalpa samādhi*, then the Divine Mother (the Personal God, who even according to the Vedānta, is required to make insentient *karma* operative) must be accepted as a greater reality than *prārabdha*. The classical Vedānta is very much loath to accept such a position, because, according to its teaching, in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, even God is sublated and non-dual Brahman alone is; and this non-dual Brahman, as expounded in the Vedānta, is Pure Being and not Being plus Will, as it would be if this theory of the Master is accepted. According to Sri Ramakrishna, however, the Divine Mother is not sublated in *nirvikalpa samādhi*; what happens is that She reveals Herself as the Impersonal also, holding *personality* in abeyance. Reality is Being-Will. When the creative process is on, Will is dominant, and Being is latent as the substratum of change. When the creative process is withdrawn, Pure Being subsists, Will being latent but not sublated. The Master illustrates this by the example of the snake in motion and the snake at rest. The snake in motion and the snake at rest are only two modes of the same snake. So the Personal and the Impersonal are the modes of the One Being-Will, and there is no question of sublating either.

The Impersonal aspect is realised only when the individual ego and the entire *karma* sustaining it are dissolved. That is *nirvikalpa samādhi*. If the individuality is to be revived, it can be effected only by a factor outside the *karma theory* which presupposes the chain of cause and effect. So the Master maintains that it is only by the

will of the Divine Mother that one merged in *nirvikalpa samādhi* regains an individuality, which however, is not his old one, but a transformed one, God-centred and not body-centred. Emerging from *nirvikalpa samādhi* by the Mother's will, the transformed individuality recognises that the one *Sat-Cid-Ānanda* is sportively manifesting as the *jīva* (sentient being) and the *jagat* (insentient world). To the view of ignorance, the *jīva* and the *jagat* form a multiplicity different from the Spirit. But enlightenment reveals that without Himself undergoing any change, the *Sat-Cid-Ānanda*, who is Being-Will, has manifested Himself into the *jīva-jagat* which forever remain one with Him. In the creative phase, He is God, the Personal, the Cause of the *jīva-jagat* (created beings and created world), and when creation is withdrawn, He remains, the Impersonal Absolute (the attributeless Brahman). The Personal and the Impersonal are recognised as the obverse and the reverse of the same coin—a nondual but coeval existence. The Master illustrates this by the example of the terrace and the steps of the stairs leading to it. Until the terrace is reached, the steps of the stairs are considered as distinct and different from the terrace, and are left behind as not the terrace. But when the height of the terrace is reached, it is found that the steps too are made of the same stuff as the terrace.

Sri Ramakrishna calls one established in this kind of perfect enlightenment, a *viññānī* (one who accepts the whole, rejecting nothing), in contrast to the *jñānī*. The *viññānī* perceives the whole universe not as a delusion of *Māyā*, but as a *līlā* (sportive manifestation) of God, the Personal-Impersonal, the Being-Will Divine. He accepts both the terrace and the staircase as real. In accepting a fruit, he takes the whole of it into account—the seeds, the tasty flesh, and the outer rind; for they all together constitute the whole. Their acceptance is a

prerequisite of complete knowledge. This knowledge of the totality cannot, however, be had by mere talking or philosophizing, but can come to one only through the grace of the Mother of the Universe. And for this one has to yearn and pant. According to Sri Ramakrishna, this yearning and panting for the Divine is the highest form of *sādhana* (spiritual striving), and all the traditional practices given as *sādhana* in Yoga and Tantra are only means for eliciting and strengthening this longing for God in the heart of the aspirant. For this feeling to mature, renunciation of all worldly attachments, or what the Master calls *kāminī-kāñcana* is needed. Then only can the Mother's grace descend upon one.

Now, it has been pointed out that the *viññānī* gains back an ego when he emerges from the *nirvikalpa* state. But this ego or individuality is entirely different in quality from that of the unenlightened man. To put it briefly, the ordinary man's ego is body-centred, while that of the *viññānī* is God-centred. The body-centred ego is based upon a poignant sense of 'difference from others', and expresses itself in terms of 'I' and 'mine' with regard to all objects and individuals. This self-centred sense of 'I' and 'mine' evaluates everything and everyone as contributing to its pleasure and survival. An ego-centred man may love others, but it is always in terms of his narrow self; the preservation of this narrow self and the promotion of its selfish interests are his primary concerns in life. In contrast, the *viññānī*'s egoism is entirely suffused by his sense of kinship with God and His presence in the whole universe. Further, the *viññānī* is possessed of an intimate relationship with God, sometimes like that of a dear son, servant, comrade, or passionate lover. He looks upon all beings as 'friend', irrespective of their attitudes towards him, be it friend, foe or neutral, as manifestations of the Lord to be loved and served, never as

objects for his own enjoyment and aggrandisement.

Apart from these ethical implications, the state of *vijñāna* has its metaphysical and psychological significance. The state of mind of the *vijñānī* is what is called *bhāvamukha*. The mind of the ignorant man is circumscribed by his individuality, and he sees everything else as discrete objects outside, along with other individualities like himself, having their fixed contours. But the *vijñānī* is aware of a cosmic whole, a Cosmic Mind, from Whom the ideation, known as the universe, radiates, and in Whom all beings and objects are like bubbles in a vast sheet of water, or like waves on the ocean's surface. Every individuality he sees as part and parcel of the Whole. The individualities too, he sees not in the old way, but as made of such stuff as fluid or ideas. He is not only aware of the Whole, but also feels himself as part of It or as one with It. So when it is said that *bhāvamukha* is the state of mind of *vijñānī*, it means also that the *vijñānī* is aware of his identity with the Cosmic Whole. As a consequence, one in the state of *bhāvamukha* shares the knowledge and outlook of the Cosmic Whole. Just as a spider, poised to move any direction from the centre of her web, the *vijñānī* can move at will on the wings of ecstasy to any dimension or sphere in the cosmos. He can attune himself with every strata of consciousness, from that of the lowest being to that of the most highly evolved, and share their characteristic experiences at will. Thus, a *vijñānī's* state in *bhāvamukha* enables him truly to be 'all things to all men'.

Being one with the Cosmic Whole in consciousness, he becomes the conduit for the expression of Its powers in the relative world. As the *vijñānī* can traverse the whole gamut of the manifestations of Consciousness, he may behave like the humblest of the humble when he is in the attitude of the devotee. But when his individuality

gets attuned to a sense of identity with the immense Cosmic 'I', his behaviour will be different. As a conduit of the will of that Universal I-Consciousness, he becomes a centre of immense spiritual energy capable even of transforming a sinner into a saint by an act of will. In Sri Ramakrishna, the great Master, this alternation between the devotee-mood and the saviour-mood were veridically ascertained. He lived in fairly recent times and was subject to observation by men of scientific mind, who closely witnessed and recorded events of his life. This was unlike the case of past Incarnations whose lives were clothed in allegory and hyperbole by poets and religious historians, long after their passing from earthly existence. The distortions were partly due to a studied effort on the part of their followers to disguise their human nature, for they felt it might be detrimental to the faith of people if any human weaknesses were allowed to percolate through their Divinity. But an Incarnation is both man and God in one, and the concept loses all its significance, when the Incarnate is made into a Deity. Sri Ramakrishna's life has enabled us to grasp the significance of God incarnation in the proper perspective.

The Immense 'I' or the Cosmic Whole, of which we have been speaking till now, is the junction-point between the Absolute and the relative, the Impersonal and the Personal, the *nirguṇa* (without attributes) and the *saguṇa* (with attributes) aspects of the Divine Mother—the universal Being-Will. To be established in that is to be in *bhāvamukha*, the threshold between relative and Absolute—a state in which the mind can ever dwell in the Divine in both His absolute and relative aspects, and without the least distraction, apply itself actively to everyday concerns. Established in that, the Master was in touch with all aspects of the Divine Mother's evolution in the world of multiplicity and their unity in Her. It must, how-

ever, be noted that one in *bhāvamukha* is not only in touch with the Manifestation of the Whole alone, which the Master called the *Līlā* (play of the Divine), but by his mere wish can come in touch with the Unmanifested Absolute, the *nirguṇa* Brahman, for which he used the term, the *Nitya*. When he is in the awareness of the *Līlā*, his knowledge of the *Nitya* is fully present. That is the significance of his being in the 'threshold state'. But he could also be in the *nirvikalpa* state—that of full identity with the *Nitya*, the Infinite and Absolute as Pure Being, with Will, not sublated, according to the Master, but in abeyance. This is a point on which the Master's doctrine differs from the traditional *Advaita* (non-dualism) represented by Tota Puri, and the point on which Tota Puri got corrected by the Master's company. The Immense 'I', whose play the *Līlā* is, is not sublated but only held in abeyance or in latency in the *nirvikalpa* state. The *vijñānī*, who is poised in the state of *bhāvamukha*, can at will be merged in the *Nitya* with no link with the *Līlā*. This is the state of *nirvikalpa* from which there is no return for the ordinary *jīva*. It is only Incarnations, as the Master insists, who pass from the one state to the other, and who are in touch with both. Hence their uniqueness, expressing itself simultaneously as Knowledge and *Bhakti* (divine love), of the highest order, which a *jīva* cannot attain in one and the same state. It looks somewhat contradictory, but the supreme truth can be expressed, though inadequately, only in the language of paradoxes.

On this point the Master said, referring to his own instance, that the natural state of his mind was towards the *nirvikalpa*, when there is the total obliteration of multiplicity and the I-sense. In that state one is lost to humanity at large, as any kind of communication is out of the question. But the Will of the Divine Mother, which is

operative even in the *nirvikalpa* state, unlike in the teaching of classical Vedānta, would not allow the Divine Incarnation to remain in that state. He is an expression of Divine grace, of God's love for *jīvas* in *samsāra*. As such, in order to keep up his link with the external world, the Master used to create some small artificial desires in his mind, like: 'I want to go to such and such a place', or 'I want to meet such and such a one' or 'I want to eat such and such a thing'. And with the help of such created pulls, he could force the mind to remain at the threshold of relative consciousness, the *bhāvamukha*, from where he could communicate with the world without losing hold on the *nirvikalpa*. In the *bhāvamukha*, he had no will separate from the Will of the Immense 'I', or the Universal Mother. As that Will directed, he could be in complete identification with that Will when he manifested the capacity to give enlightenment and liberation to *jīvas*. He could also be at any lower levels of identification up to that of a humble devotee worshipping Her through images or participating in the weal and woe of fellow human relationships.

It is said that in the days of his intense physical sufferings, Sri Ramakrishna expressed his willingness to take any number of such bodies and stand endless suffering, if he could bring illumination and put an end to the misery of even a single *jīva*.

This expression of all-consuming and universal love is the most significant implication of the Divine command to him to remain in *bhāvamukha*. For one whose natural state was the bliss of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, to come down, in order to serve suffering humanity, to the level of body-consciousness and inhabit a dirty human body, subject to all kinds of ailments, trials, and tribulations, is a far greater act of mercy than anything we can conceive of—even, say, that of an emperor abandoning his

palace and living in a slum with all its filth and privations in order to serve the slum people. Yet this was what Sri Ramakrishna, the greatest lover of mankind that the modern world has produced, did, when he held in abeyance the tendency of his mind to be merged perpetually in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, and forced it to live in the state of *bhāvamukha* in order to serve mankind. Thus he was a conspicuous expression of that redeeming power of God which appears

age after age as the Saviour of the *jīvas* in bondage. That is the implication of calling him a Divine Incarnation, as distinguished from a saint who attains to spiritual realization, helps the few who come into contact with him, and finally attains *sāyujya*, the transcendental state.*

* The above article is a section (with minor changes) from 'Sri Ramakrishna, Life and Teachings' by Swami Tapasyananda Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 1983.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HUMAN EXCELLENCE*

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

1. *Introductory*

I am very thankful to the two Vedanta Societies of Harvard University and M.I.T. for inviting me to address you all, assembled in this Emerson Hall of the Harvard University, this evening. Today's subject is, as you see written on the blackboard: *Swami Vivekananda and Human Excellence*. For any educational institution, the subject of human excellence is most inspiring; for what is education except the turning out of batches and batches of human excellence? And the name of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) added to this subject makes it still more excellent, because he himself is a remarkable example of *an all-round human excellence* which I shall try to present before you this evening.

2. *Vivekananda: The Harmony of All Human Energy*

I specially stress this expression: human excellence, because till now, we have been having excellence limited by either country, subject of study, religion, or region; various cultural backgrounds give us different types

of excellence. But Swami Vivekananda will convey to us something very unique, not just Indian excellence or Western Excellence but what we may call *human excellence*; and many writers on Vivekananda, including his great critical and sympathetic French biographer, Romain Rolland, has specially stressed this comprehensive quality of Vivekananda's greatness. Let me quote Romain Rolland's own words from his *Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (p. 310):

'In the two words equilibrium and synthesis Vivekananda's constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit: The four yogas in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action from the most spiritual to the most practical. Each of the ways that he taught had its own limits, but he himself had been through them all, and embraced them all. As in a quadriga, he held the reins of all four ways of truth, and he travelled

* Based on the Video-taped record of the lecture by Swami Ranganathananda, organized by the Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Vedanta Societies in the Emerson Hall of the Harvard University on 28 May 1985.

towards Unity along them all simultaneously. He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy.'

That is an extraordinary tribute: the harmony of all human energy. He combined within himself the best of East and West. One of my lectures given in London in 1961 is entitled *The Meeting of East & West in Swami Vivekananda* which is included in the second volume of my four-volume *Eternal Values for a Changing Society* published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay-7, India. What is that type of education by which one achieves a type of excellence where one overcomes these limitations of creed, race, language, and religion? In Vivekananda's life there is that education available to us. How did he achieve this wonderful *human* excellence? That question brings to us the beauty of that type of literature known as biography. When you read the biographies of great people, you learn how they developed their personalities, and the formative influences that went into the shaping of their greatness. In the case of Vivekananda, these formative influences were essentially two—firstly, Indian and secondly, the modern Western. So far as the Indian influences are concerned, these came to him primarily from his five-year discipleship under his great teacher Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886). The deepening of his spiritual awareness, the broadening of his human sympathies, came to him from Sri Ramakrishna. His rational mind and his humanism came to him from his modern Western university education.

He himself was to say later on that the world had two great cultures in the ancient past, which have developed philosophies leading to distinct types of human excellence, distinct types of human greatness—one, the ancient Hindu, which has influenced most of Asia, and the other, the ancient Greek, which has influenced the whole of the West. These two have made very dis-

tinctive contributions to human culture. Each of these two cultures has its own uniqueness. Whatever was achieved by the Greeks, and later on by the Romans, is what we find, in an enlarged form, and with modern science added, in modern Western Culture. Whatever excellences we get in this Western culture is found assimilated in Swami Vivekananda, as he had assimilated the excellences of his own ancient and continuing Indian culture and tradition. And he made a unique discovery, that no culture is perfect, each culture has specialized only in some values and neglected other values due to that very specialization, and all these separate world cultures are essentially aspects of one total human culture and are, therefore, complementary and not mutually exclusive. All this he did by the time he was 29 years of age when he came to this country in 1893, started his great work in the West and in India, and passed away at the early age of 39.

But within this short time, to achieve high character excellence and to make an impact on the minds and attitudes of men and women in two sub-continent, was great work indeed. In Indian history, we have the example of Bhagavān Buddha of the sixth century B.C., who attained enlightenment at the age of about 36, and travelled through many areas of north India and imparted his message to thousands till his death at the age of 80; and his teachings peacefully transformed, in the next few centuries, India and much of Asia. Again, we have another such example in the eighth century A.D. and that was Śaṅkarācārya. Just 32 years of human life; and within that short period, Śaṅkarācārya really shook up India intellectually and spiritually. And in the modern age, India produced this great teacher Swami Vivekananda.

He had a great message to deliver to the modern world, for which he came to this country. He himself had said; Buddha

had a message to the East; and I have a message to the West. And when he returned to India in 1897 he conveyed the same message, but with a different stress, to the people of India during the remaining years of his life, with a brief second visit to the West, and passed away on 4th of July 1902. About four years earlier, while in the company of his American friends and disciples in Kashmir, he had written a poem: *To the Fourth of July* on the occasion of their celebration of American Independence.

What are those essential elements constituting human excellence that shine in him and in his teachings? We can deal with this subject from two points of view. One, from the point of view of human character that one gets from a good education. It is understood that education is meant not only to give us knowledge and information but also to build up our character. Here, in this university, we had a great psychologist like William James, and later, another psychologist William McDougall. Both had laid stress on the character-building component of all true education—physical health and well-being, depth of thought, strength of conviction, faith in oneself, the humanistic impulse, and practical efficiency; all these constitute one type of character-excellence, which, along with the virtue of moderation, is found upheld in Greek culture. William James has written many books, one of which—a thought-provoking one, is: *Varieties of Religious Experience*. One of the books written by McDougall is titled *Character and the Conduct of Life*. It is a beautiful book, but does not seem to be current nowadays; but it was a widely read book in the 20's and 30's of this century. Modern Western education gave this wonderful character-excellence to Swami Vivekananda. Through this he assimilated what he later on would designate as the Greek ideal of 'manliness'. The Greeks laid great stress on these values. Modern Western character

types are essentially derived from this Greek and Roman ideal of manliness, along with some other values gathered in the course of history. It is a type of education imparting character-strength to man to enable one to handle efficiently the world of man and nature around him or her.

This is one aspect of education; but there is also another aspect of education, with greater stress on education of man in depth. These two aspects are highlighted in the post-war period by the UNESCO-appointed commission to investigate the nature of education humanity needs in the post-war period. That commission was presided over by the French Minister of Education, who later on became French Prime Minister, namely, Eduard Faure. And that commission submitted a report after investigating the subject of the current systems of education and the demands of the new human situation in the post-war period. What I am impressed with in that report is in its meaningful title: *Learning to Be*. Till now education has been essentially *learning to do*. But this commission says what the earlier thinkers like William James and McDougall had upheld, that while retaining learning to do, post-war education must add also *learning to be*. *What are you?* is equally, if not more, important than what you do. Thus a new dimension to education is added by that phrase *to be*, along with the current phrase *to do*. What efficiency do we need in today's civilization? It is a highly technical civilization. Education must equip one with tremendous work-efficiency; and work efficiency consists of knowledge and translation of knowledge into action.

3. *The Upaniṣads on Efficiency*

This efficiency is the hall-mark of modern civilization; it is a word that is used again and again. When you go into the literature

of the Upaniṣads, produced over 4000 years ago in India, you get a beautiful definition of efficiency in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (1.1.10):

Yadeva vidyayā karoti, śraddhayā, upaniṣadā, tadeva vīryavattaram bhavati—

‘Whatever is done with *vidyā*, *śraddhā*, and *upaniṣad*, that alone becomes supremely efficient.’

What are these three values? *Vidyā* means science or knowledge. If you want to be efficient you must have knowledge, what we today call the technical know-how of a thing. A nurse must have the technical know-how of nursing. Similarly with a doctor, an executive, an engineer, an administrator, and every other professional. But that is not enough. Mere knowledge of a subject does not make you efficient. So a second value is added: *śraddhā*—faith; here it does not mean faith in a dogma or creed or strongly held opinion, but faith in oneself, the impulse from within: I can, I can, and the conviction that the work you are doing is worthwhile and that here is a meaningfulness to life and to the world. And that faith extends to faith in the other members of the work team also. Śāṅkarācārya therefore defines *śraddhā* as *āstikyabuddhi*—the totality of positive attitudes. This faith and conviction increases all work-efficiency. Vivekananda has said, ‘Great convictions are the mothers of great deeds.’ Behind every great work there is this tremendous power of conviction. The world is shaped and moved by men and women of conviction. This can be contrasted with what we call opinion. We may have opinions on any number of subjects. That does not produce the energy of impact on society. But when opinion is transformed into conviction, you find the manifestation of the energy of impact. A passage in a *Home University Library* book by biologist J. Arthur Thomson: ‘Introduction to Science’,

1934, attracted my attention long ago (p. 22):

“‘Opinions,’ (scientist) Gianville says, ‘are the rattles of immature intellects, but the advanced reasons have outgrown them.’”

“‘The longer I live,’ (Thomas) Huxley said, ‘the more obvious it is to me that the most sacred act of a man’s life is to say and feel, ‘I believe such and such to be true.’ All the greatest rewards and all the heaviest penalties of existence cling about that act.’”

Political conviction, spiritual convictions, scientific convictions, social convictions—these all have wonderful world-moving power. Hence Swami Vivekananda places great emphasis on this value of *śraddhā*, faith and conviction. The opposite of *śraddhā* is *aśraddhā*, lack of faith, which is what results in cynicism. We are missing this great value of faith in the modern period, with the consequent spread of this evil of cynicism which sets in when the sharpening of intellect is not accompanied by the humanistic passion. The Upaniṣad considers that *vidyā* and *śraddhā* are not enough, that a third value also has to be added to the two in order to achieve supreme efficiency. This is: *Upaniṣad*—deep thinking, meditative thinking on the subject concerned.

Any work that has behind it these three values of *vidyā*, *śraddhā*, and *upaniṣad* alone becomes *vīryavattaram*, of superior energy. *Vīrya* in Sanskrit means energy. The word *taram* in Sanskrit stands for the comparative degree, and *tamam* for the superlative. So superior efficiency will come when we combine with the energy of knowledge the energies of these other two values; this applies to education also. When all these three energies are combined, you get a type of human excellence which has the power to move the world. The educated citizen is the source from which a modern democratic society receives nourishment. That education must include not only intellectual knowledge but also these other two values

as well. Vivekananda had assimilated, and also spoke highly of, this dimension of human excellence developed out of knowledge-seeking in school, college, and university, and from social interactions. The character that comes out of it is, as I earlier indicated, what Vivekananda termed manliness. This whole development takes place at the normal human level without reference to any trans-sensory or mystical dimension.

Vivekananda considered this as one great aspect of human development which was cultivated in ancient Greco-Roman culture and modern Western culture. He was a great admirer of the character-energy that comes out of this human development, especially the tremendous value of faith in oneself, the daring to overcome all difficulties and establish man's hegemony over his external environment, which no non-human species but only man can struggle for and accomplish. This is the *Promethean* spirit of ancient Greek culture—daring to steal fire from heaven to serve man. Ancient Indian culture also has a similar heroic character in its *Bhagīratha* who brought down the holy Ganges of prosperity and plenty from the Milky Way Galaxy to the earth. The concept of human excellence in ancient Chinese Confucian culture is similar to that of ancient Greek culture. Aristotle said that man is a social animal. Accordingly, this may be called the *political* view of man, of man in a polity, in which even religion is viewed from the political point of view, tending to make it ethnically limited, sense-bound, and communal. Out of this view have arisen all political, economic, and social struggles to improve the lot of man, on the one hand, and aggressive wars and colonial and other forms of exploitation on the other.

4. Greek Specialization in Human Excellence: Its Limitations

But the finest fruit of this view is

humanism, the philosophy and effort to improve the human situation in *this* world. In the words of E. M. Forster's preface to *The Greek View of Life* by Lowes Dickinson:

'Greece hadn't science, it is true, and she had no global commitments, but she encompassed within the tiny circuit of her city states much that affects and afflicts modern man in his relationship to society. And because her writers were intelligent and because they were sensitive, she has been able to send us news on these urgent matters which is still fresh, although it is over two thousand years.'

Vivekananda had also assimilated, through his discipleship under Sri Ramakrishna, the strong and undying elements in India's culture which drew its inspiration initially from the perennial philosophy and spirituality of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, which expounded another dimension of human excellence—beyond the physical and the sensory, beyond the *political*. This philosophy yielded the experience of the *inward spiritual depth dimension* of man, as distinct from that *external political dimension*. It investigated the depth dimensions of the human personality, and in doing so, it investigated not only the phenomenon of life but also the stark phenomenon of death, and did not stop till it had revealed the true nature of man as the immortal and divine Self, the Ātman—'ever pure, ever-illumined, and ever free', as Śaṅkarācārya characterized it, of which, as the ancient *Ṛg-Veda* expresses it, life and death are but two shadows (X.121.2):

*Ya ātmadā baladā yasya viśva
upāsate praśiṣam yasya devah:*

*Yasya chāyā amṛtam yasya mṛtyuh
kasmāi devāya haviṣā vidhema—*

'Unto Him who gives us our individuality, who gives us strength, whose commands all beings, together with the gods, obey, whose

shadows are immortality as well as death, we offer our oblations’.

No culture, no philosophy, can achieve depth without tackling the problem of death. This was one of the major drawbacks of ancient Greeko-Roman culture which failed to assimilate to itself the deeper legacy left by Socrates and the Greek Mystery Religions. This may also be said of the modern Western culture which has failed to rationally investigate and assimilate to itself the deep spirituality of the Christian religion. Says Lowes Dickinson (*ibid.*, p. 68):

‘The more completely the Greek felt himself to be at home in the world, the more happily and freely he abandoned himself to the exercise of his powers, the more intensely and vividly he lived in action and in passion, the more alien, bitter and incomprehensible did he find the phenomena of age and death. On this problem, so far as we can judge, he received from his religion but little light and still less consolation. The music of his brief life closed with a discord unresolved; and even before reason had brought her criticism to bear upon his creed, its deficiency was forced upon him by his feeling.’

By their emphasis on inner penetration by their wholehearted advocacy of what the ancient Greeks centuries later formulated in the dictum: ‘Man, know thyself’, but at which they themselves had stopped half way, the Upaniṣads gave an inner strength to the Indian cultural experiment, and a permanent spiritual orientation also to it, and initiated a scientific and non-dogmatic tradition in the field of religion. Also, to adapt E. M. Forster’s remark about the legacy of Greece to the West: ‘much that affects us and afflicts us’ in India, and the countries influenced by Indian culture, is the fruit of this Upaniṣadic orientation. This philosophy yielded the *spiritual* view of man as distinct from, as was stated earlier, the *political* view of man developed by the ancient Greeks. This stress on inward depth had, however, one special consequ-

ence for Indian culture in that all its expansive outward movements throughout history have been, unlike the expansive movements under the *political* view of man, non-aggressive; every word of its message for mankind ‘has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it...and therefore we live’, as remarked by Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works*, Vol. III, pp. 105-109):

‘The debt which the world owes to our motherland is immense. Civilizations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient and modern times, wonderful ideas have been carried forward from one race to another...But, mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets and the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood. ...Each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows. This, many other nations have taught; but India for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist... Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but *every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it*. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live. ...

‘Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was and, mark my word, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious... India’s gift to the world is the light spiritual.’

The Greeko-Roman and modern Western peoples had achieved a type of human excellence based on this faith in oneself and the promethean spark it ignited in them. With these they have built up a high level of social welfare and the spirit of human individuality and dignity. But Vivekananda

pointed out to the people of the West that this did not exhaust the scope of human excellence, the scope of the science of human possibilities. After presenting India's ancient and ever-perennial philosophy and spirituality of Vedanta to the Western peoples he incited them in a lecture delivered in India in 1897 to shift, in order to evolve a stable and fuller civilization, the basis of their civilization from the sensory and the material to the trans-sensory and the spiritual (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 159):

'The whole of Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation. It is hopeless and perfectly useless to attempt to govern mankind with the sword. You will find that the very centres from which such ideas as government by force sprang up are the very centres to degrade and degenerate and crumble to pieces. Europe, the centre of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within fifty years if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground, and make spirituality the basis of her life. And what will save Europe is the religion of the Upanishads.'

The view of man as a social individual, and the efforts to make that individual happy and content at that sensory level, is legitimate and productive of good in the early stages; but carried too far, it is bound to generate diverse tensions in the individual and society and lead to unfulfilment, *due to the stagnation of human creative energy at the sensate level and arresting the onward movement of that energy to the higher spiritual levels of the human personality.*

Not only is man a member of a social community, not only has he or she a 'political' personality (using that word as the Greeks used it, in the sense of living together in a polity) there is also a second and higher dimension of human development and excellence. That is called the spiritual dimension of human growth and excellence. If the first one is a horizontal and lateral

growth, this second one is a vertical and inward growth. Aristotle said that man is a social animal. This is true; we need that gregarious background for our own growth; but man has a vertical dimension, which calls for a deepening of his awareness, for a spiritual growth within. This is a wonderful truth about man, says Vedanta; it is not a creed or a dogma but a veritable truth which has been realized by many sages in East and West and can be verified by all. Even in ancient Greek culture this higher dimension of excellence was placed before man in the famous dictum of the Oracle of Delphi: 'Man, know thyself.' It is not enough that you know the external environment. There is a profound inner environment also to be investigated and realized.

There was only one great Greek who understood this truth and realized it; and that was Socrates. He realized himself as the infinite and immortal Atman; and the Greeks, who knew only the socio-political dimension of man, the horizontal dimension, could not understand him. It was something beyond their comprehension. They well knew man wrestling with forces outside, and establishing his hegemony over the external world. But the greatness of Socrates was something deep, something subtle. It is a great tragedy that the Athenian state could not appreciate the high spiritual dimension of Socrates; and therefore he was condemned to death. He was described by the judges as a corrupter of the Athenian youth. What a sad description! And what human excellence and greatness! But the socio-political philosophy of the Greeks could not grasp that character excellence. Whenever I take the example of Socrates I refer to Jesus Christ also. Jesus also gave a tremendous message of man's spiritual inwardness. But the socio-political philosophy of the Jews of the time could not comprehend it and condemned him to death. Socio-political character

excellence the Athenians and the Jews could understand and appreciate; but not anything higher than that. That illustrates the truth of the remark of Bertrand Russell: If you teach people faster than they can learn, you are in for trouble!

5. *Indian Specialization in Human Excellence: Its Limitations*

Vivekananda realized the beauty and relevance of the Greek concept of excellence, and its complementarity with the Indian concept of excellence, treating both as two aspects of human spiritual development. He therefore preached this message of the promethean spirit, of the *bhagīratha* spirit, in India in order to educate his people to achieve that manliness which Western culture has as its special characteristic. He exhorted his people to wake up from their sleep of centuries and to act with courage and with humanist concern to achieve total human development in India in the modern period. He said to the people of India that their nation in the recent centuries had failed because they had faith in gods and goddesses but had not cultivated faith in themselves and in other human beings. He told his countrymen that first one must cultivate faith in oneself; then only can one have faith in others or faith in God; there will be dynamism in such a faith. If this primary faith in oneself is not there, faith in others and in God will be unproductive, and one will become weak and ineffective. This is stressed again and again by him in his Indian lectures and in his letters to Indian people. He did not stress this in the Western context. He saw it already present in the people of the West, but he taught them to shift the focus of that faith in oneself from the genetically conditioned ego to the Ātman, the one Divine Self in all.

If what Socrates said was too high and beyond the grasp of his Greek compatriots,

it was perfectly in tune with the teachings of the Upaniṣads of India which were already over a thousand years old by that time. Inspired by a search for truth about man, and endowed with a pure and penetrating mind, the sages of the Upaniṣads, by *āvṛttacakṣu*, or 'turning the unified energies of the psycho-sensory system inward', as the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, (Chapter IV, opening verse) terms it, discovered the infinite man behind the finite man, the immortal man behind the mortal man revealed by sensory cognition. And a galaxy of the Upaniṣadic sages, including Buddha over a thousand years later, re-verified and re-confirmed this truth about man, about the depth dimension of the human personality. We can take it for granted that if Socrates and Jesus had been born in India, they would not only not have been killed but would have been adored and worshipped. The Indian philosophy of Vedānta understands the divine dimension of the human personality over and above his or her socio-political externally-oriented dimension.

But in course of ages, lured by the former, India steadily neglected the latter. The correction of this neglect, which became cruel in later centuries and which dwarfed much of Indian humanity, is the great contribution of Vivekananda to the re-shaping of modern India; and here he pays his tribute and expresses India's indebtedness to the ancient Greeks and to the people of the modern West.

Introducing the first issue of his Bengali journal *Udbodhan* to the public in January 1899, Vivekananda wrote on *The Problem of Modern India and Its Solution* (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 404):

'What we should have is what we have not, perhaps what our forefathers even had not—that which the *Yavanas* (ancient Greeks) had; that, impelled by the life-vibration of which, is issuing forth in rapid succession from the great dynamo of Europe, the electric flow of that tremendous

power vivifying the whole world. We want that. We want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirst for improvement. Checking a little the constant looking back to the past, we want that expansive vision infinitely projected forward; and we want that intense spirit of activity (*Rajas*) which will flow through our every vein, from head to foot.'

This stress on modern India assimilating Greek and Western talents and capacities was not meant by Vivekananda to replace India's inherited spiritual talents and capacities but only to fortify them and make for wholeness. India had specialized in investigating and discovering the profound divine mystery lurking within man. You may study man from the outside; but that won't exhaust his possibilities. One of our own French scientists who came towards the end of the last century, Alexis Carrel, has written a book whose title itself is significant: *Man; the Unknown*. Man, the known, is the subject of our physical science while man, the unknown, is the subject of the science of spirituality; this is a more challenging study than the first one. In this science India forged ahead in the Upaniṣads. By discovering the immortal in man and in nature, the Upaniṣads made themselves and the culture they fostered in India also immortal. When you study that immortal literature, you will find that some of the beautiful passages in the utterances of Plato's Socrates can easily be incorporated as chapters in some one or other of our Upaniṣads. Here is one such passage which I particularly like:

Socrates is drinking poison. His disciples are sitting around him weeping. He consoles them and says: Let me die in peace; do not weep. Then one of them, Crito, asks a question to Socrates: Socrates, how shall we bury you? Socrates smiles and says: You must first catch me, *the real me*, before

you ask that question. Be of good cheer, Crito; for you ask about the body; as to the body, do with it what you do with other people.

This can be a fitting passage in any one of our Upaniṣads. It refers to his realization of an eternal and immortal dimension of the human personality. When you realize that truth you become utterly fearless; you become gentle; you become compassionate; you feel your oneness with all. It was that spiritual depth-excellence that Socrates had embodied in himself. Greek culture could not understand this human depth-dimension and therefore could not incorporate it into its classical culture.

The British intellectual, Edward J. Urwick, in his book, *The Message of Plato: A Re-interpretation of the Republic*, has strongly emphasized that without understanding the Vedanta of India, it would be difficult to understand Socrates and much of Plato. Says he in his Preface:

'I have attempted in this book the very bold task of presenting a new interpretation of Plato's teaching, as contained in his masterpiece, *The Republic*. The interpretation is based largely upon the philosophic thought of ancient India—or rather, upon the Indian religious thought since for the Indian sages, as for Plato, philosophy had little meaning except in relation to what we call religion.'

In the first chapter entitled *The Ancestry of Plato's Faith*, Urwick says (pp. 13-14):

'It is usually maintained that the Platonic or Socratic philosophy, like the rest of Greek speculation, was original, indigenous, owing very little to any outside influence. But the quest and life and faith of Socrates were as un-Greek as anything could possibly be; that was one of the reasons why the Greeks killed him; the essence of his life belonged to a world unknown to them and therefore dangerous in their eyes. The Platonic Socrates is never tired of asserting that he stands alone; that he differs from both predecessors and contemporaries in thought, in aim,

in interest, in method, in belief. "I alone among the Athenians hold this view"—that is his constant attitude. ... There is only one "philosopher" whose doctrines, both practical and theoretical, appear to have resembled Plato's in spirit and aim as well as in substance; and that one is Pythagoras. It is noteworthy that Pythagoras is the only great thinker of Greece whom Plato never criticises, but of whom he speaks with the greatest deference and respect ... And in reference to the quest of Socrates, his character and his faith, I will be content to let the resemblance to the quest and character and faith of the ancient Indian sages speak for itself. ... But I affirm very confidently that if any one will make himself familiar with the old Indian wisdom—religion of the Vedas and Upaniṣads, will shake himself free, for the moment, from the academic attitude and the limiting Western conception of philosophy, and will then read Plato's dialogues, he will hardly fail to realize that both are occupied with the selfsame search, inspired by the same faith and drawn upwards by the same vision.'

6. Vivekananda's Education in Total Human Excellence under Sri Ramakrishna

Today, Sri Ramakrishna has purified and strengthened and re-authenticated the age-old spiritual heritage of India and established its kinship with the cultural heritage of Greece and the modern West. Out of their union in his disciple Vivekananda there developed a character excellence, neither specifically Eastern nor Western, but just human and truly universal. It is here that man overcoming all narrowness, intolerance, and violence reaches out to a mankind awareness. When Vivekananda requested Sri Ramakrishna to bless him with long immersion in *samādhi*, Sri Ramakrishna chided him saying: What a small mind is yours! Can't you experience the Divine with eyes open in work and inter-human relations as well as with eyes closed in the trans-social experience of meditation? And Vivekananda did just that and preached just that.

The philosophic and spiritual vision of Advaita or non-duality of the Upaniṣads,

which includes the vision of the unity of the One and the many, and which Sri Ramakrishna imparted to Vivekananda, had a profound impact on the subsequent career of the latter and the history of modern India. For it soon began to translate itself into action with a pervasive sweep, unprecedented in the five-thousand year old history of India. As this Advaita is based on the Ultimate Reality as Brahman-Māyā, as Śiva-Śakti, as the Impersonal-Personal, it also synthesizes the diverse paths of action and contemplation, work and worship, the secular and the sacred, in a comprehensive spirituality. In it the Godward passion pours out also as a manward love and service. 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' said Jesus about the truth or otherwise of man's ideological convictions. Such convictions have produced as history has shown in religious, political and other fields of human life, character-fruits of diverse quality from the sweetest to the bitterest, with any number of strands in between: Pathetic withdrawal or energetic action, pessimistic resignation or optimistic daring, egoistic self-assertion or spiritual self-denial, intolerance or universal acceptance, violence and aggressiveness or non-violence and gentleness, universal love or blind hatred, selfishness and exploitation or renunciation and service—all these are the character-fruits of man's philosophies, well thought-out or ill.

Sri Ramakrishna has coined a new term for this comprehensive philosophic and spiritual vision of Advaita, namely *vijñāna*. Explaining the nature of this *vijñāna*, Sri Ramakrishna says (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, English translation by Swami Nikhilananda, New York edition 1942, pp. 801-802):

'Both *Lila* (manifestation) and *Nitya* (the Absolute) belong to the same Reality. In one form it is the Absolute and in another, the *Lila*. Even though the *Lila* is destroyed, the *Nitya* always exists. Water is water whether it is still

or in waves ; it is the same water when the waves quiet down. ...

'What does Vedanta teach ? Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. Isn't that so ? But as long as God keeps the "ego of a devotee" in a man, the Relative is also real. When He completely effaces the ego, then what is remains. That cannot be described by the tongue. But as long as God keeps the ego, one must accept all. By removing the outer sheaths of the plantain tree, you reach the inner pith. As long as the tree contains sheaths it also contains pith. So too, as long as it contains pith, it also contains sheaths. The pith goes with the sheaths and the sheaths go with the pith. In the same way, when you speak of the *Nitya*, it is understood that the *Lila* also exists ; and when you speak of the *Lila*, it is understood that the *Nitya* also exists. ...

'The devotees—I mean the *vijñānis*—accept both God with form and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Impersonal. In a shoreless ocean—an infinite expanse of water—visible blocks of ice are formed here and there by intense cold. Similarly, under the cooling influence, so to say, of the deep love of Its worshipper, the Infinite reduces Itself to the finite and appears before the worshipper as God with form. Again, as, on the rising of the sun, the ice melts away, so, on the awakening of knowledge, God with form melts away into the same Infinite and Formless.'

The fruit of this *vijñāna* is a character-excellence which signifies the rare synthesis of the virtues and graces of the cultures of East and West. This was the extraordinary achievement in the character and personality of Vivekananda. This explains the unprecedented sweep and range of its energy resources. This alone explains also its tremendous impact during its brief ten-year public ministry, and the silent expansion of that impact all over the world down the years. This is the fruit of that luminous philosophy and spirituality which dared to comprehend, in one sweep, time and eternity, the many and the One.

In the preface to his *Life of Ramakrishna*, Romain Rolland refers to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as 'the splendid symphony of the Universal Soul' (p. 8):

'For a century in new India, Unity has been the target for the arrows of all archers. Fiery personalities throughout this century have sprung from her sacred earth, a veritable Ganges of peoples and thought. Whatever may be the differences between them, their goal is ever the same—human unity through God. And through all the changes of workmen, Unity itself has expanded and gained in precision.

'From this magnificent procession of spiritual heroes whom we shall survey later, I have chosen two men, who have won my regard because, with incomparable charm and power, they have realized this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul. They are, if one may say so, its Mozart and its Beethoven—*Pater Seraphicus* and Jove the thunderer—Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.'

Vivekananda who sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna had earlier assimilated the best of modern Western thought through his education at the Calcutta University. India had been brought in touch with modern Western culture through her British political connection. But that political connection was a temporary connection. Yet India's contact with Western culture through that connection did not end with the ending of the political connection in 1947. Vivekananda taught India to assimilate this Western culture. All through history, except during the past eight centuries, the mood of Indian culture has been one of acceptance. Nowhere in the non-Western world will you find that appreciation, intelligent and hearty, of Western culture and Western literature as you find in India. Through that appreciation comes a conscious and deliberate effort at assimilation of Western cultural values, in the full knowledge that the socio-political excellence of Western culture is not only not contradictory, but is truly complementary to the spiritual excellence upheld in Indian culture. This is revealed in a unique phenomenon in modern India—the intimate relationship of Sri Ramakrishna, the very embodiment of the spiritual heritage of India, with Narendra, the pre-monastic name of Vivekananda, an

embodiment of Western culture. Out of that five-year relationship of the two, emerged Vivekananda, whom more than one writer has described as a synthesis of East and West. Romain Rolland, who described him as 'the harmony of all human energy', as quoted earlier, also says (*Life of Vivekananda*, p. 192):

'I shall try to show how closely allied is the aspect of Vivekananda's thought to our own, with our special needs, torments, aspirations, and doubts, urging us ever forward like a blind mole, by instinct, upon the road leading to the light. Naturally, I hope to be able to make other Westerners, who resemble me, feel the attraction that I feel for this elder brother, the son of Ganges, who, of all modern men, achieved the highest equilibrium between the two diverse forces

of thought and was one of the first to sign a treaty of peace between the two forces eternally warring within us—the forces of reason and faith.'

No two persons in history, brought together into an intimate relationship, have ever been more dissimilar in body and mind than Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath. Yet they found a deeper point of union of souls between themselves. After passing through the modern education, which the *Mundaka Upaniṣad* calls *aparā-vidyā*, ordinary or positivistic science given in the Calcutta University, Vivekananda went to Sri Ramakrishna to complete his education in the university of what the Upaniṣad calls the *parā-vidyā*, 'the higher science'—the science of man in depth.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S INTERACTIONS WITH CHRISTIANITY

(Illustrated)

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Despite the Second Vatican Council Decree on Ecumenism (1964) referring to members of other communions as 'separated brethren', rather than as heathens or persons outside the Church, the climate of the Christian world today is perhaps not yet congenial enough to fully appreciate the Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna's adventures into the domain of Christian experience. Orthodox people sometimes question whether Sri Ramakrishna had really become a Christian or had gone through a Christian experience of God at all. Some even question whether one can truly have an experience of God without the rites of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. Such questions cannot, however, nullify the historic facts of Sri Ramakrishna's successful

experiments in the verification of God in different religions. In the context of today's strife-torn society and religious dissension these pluralistic experiments are of historic importance. And no one concerned with human welfare can afford to ignore them.

Sri Ramakrishna is unique and so is his life-story in the history of hagiography. Scholars of various shades of opinion may debate on what made him unique, but none can question that he was a man of singularly pure and noble character and that he was a mystic par excellence, having repeatedly had direct and immediate experience of God through various religious disciplines, indigenous and foreign. A master of religious experiences, the child-like and simple Sri Ramakrishna had a passion for God,

that guided and permeated his life. He was, in his own words, like the man living under the tree where a chameleon had taken shelter, and the man knew that it had different colours at different times and sometimes no colour at all. To many Sri Ramakrishna appeared like a miracle, a personality which was extraordinary, inexplicable, and sometimes baffling. He spoke of himself as the same soul that had been born earlier as Rāma, as Krishna, as Jesus, or as Buddha, and now born again as Ramakrishna.¹ In a world beset with dilemma of religious plurality, this God-man's great contribution was to demonstrate the unity of God and the validity of the different approaches to God. Many may cherish such ideas but there are few who have the curiosity, spiritual passion, perseverance and capacity for self-criticism, so necessary for even experimenting with such ideas. Sri Ramakrishna had all these and something more. He succeeded in his experimentations. He summed up the result of his experiments by declaring that different approaches to God are all true. They are needed to suit the various mental constitutions of the aspirants. The same God has many forms and aspects. Not only did he lay bare his own experiences to others, he also spoke to others of his unique methods, and invited them to test these methods empirically. He would say, 'Test me as the money changers do their coins.' A steady flow of Divine bliss in him used to draw people irrespective of caste and creed. He used to say, 'I have practised all the disciplines; I accept all paths. ... Therefore people of all sects came here. And everyone of them thinks that I belong to his school.' He advocated not merely tolerance but also the acceptance of other religious faiths.

Why did Sri Ramakrishna, 'the spirit of

1. F. Max Muller: *Ramakrishna. His Life and Sayings*, 1984, p. 58.

old India', chose to have an encounter with Christ, and for the matter of that, with Christianity? We come across the following possible explanations:

(a) In Sri Ramakrishna lived a child beaming with curiosity and creative ingenuity. He was always eager to reach out for the unknown. Sri Ramakrishna had reached the acme of religious pursuit which 'satisfies the great majority of saintly personalities', yet his curiosity for God's infinitude remained undiminished. This insatiable inquisitiveness goaded him to cross the boundary of Hinduism in order to verify, by valid direct experience, God in Islam and Christianity, the two other major religions in India.

(b) For every genuine seeker of God Sri Ramakrishna recommended, 'One should follow various paths. One should practise each creed for a time.' As a sincere hermeneutician, he himself crossed the boundaries of Hinduism and entered into the fields of Islam and Christianity.

(c) Some people think that Sri Ramakrishna's encounter with Christ and Christianity was but an aspect of liberal Hinduism. Francis X. Clooney claimed that Sri Ramakrishna's encounter with Christ was an outcome 'of his effort to confirm his fundamental religious experience of his Divine Mother by finding her in as varied a set of situations as possible',² including Christianity. No doubt Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Christ, but he was through and through a Hindu and showed that Christ was 'something other than a Hindu deity or symbol of a Hindu value'. Some fundamentalists among the Hindus share similar points of view, although on other grounds.

(d) Entirely dependent on the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna did whatever he

2. *Studies on Sri Ramakrishna* (1988), Published by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, p. 89.

was guided by Her to do. Otherwise, he did nothing, much less, these religious practices with the ulterior motive of establishing a harmony of religions. This was authenticated by no less a person than Sri Sarada Devi. According to this view, Sri Ramakrishna, as a sensitive instrument in the hand of the Divine Mother, practised Christianity to serve some divine purpose. Swami Saradananda, who knew the Master closely, enumerated two such purposes: (i) To make of Sri Ramakrishna a world teacher the Divine Mother wanted him to get acquainted with the spiritual practices of all religions and their ultimate goal; and (ii) by producing a natural way in the life of this unlettered person, through his practices, the spiritual states recorded in the scriptures, 'the Divine Mother proved to the modern age the truth of the Vedas, the Bible, the Purāṇas, the Koran, and all other religious scriptures.'

(e) To do justice to the different religious faiths Sri Ramakrishna sincerely practised those religions. To justify his role as a world teacher, as it were, he said of himself to Kedarnath Chatterjee, 'One should know a little of everything. If a man starts a grocery shop, he keeps all kinds of articles there, including a little lentil and tamarind. As expert musician knows how to play a little on all instruments.'³ And Sri Ramakrishna as a harmonizer of religions, wanted to know the essence of different religions so that he could fulfill the needs of people of all sorts who used to visit him. He ventured on this experiment only to gather direct knowledge of the essence of Christianity.

Born in 1836 in an orthodox Brahmin family in Kamarpukur, a remote village of Bengal, Sri Ramakrishna had no contact with English education. There was no church or Christian family in or around

Kamarpukur. At 17 he left for Calcutta. Prior to this he had no exposure to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. He spent about two years and a half at Nather Bagan and Jhamapukur in Calcutta before he settled at Dakshineswar Temple in June 1855. During this period it is very unlikely that he had known much about Jesus Christ although he must have seen churches from outside and pictures of Christ in the houses of aristocrats where he was serving as a priest. A divine fever was consuming him and he practised discipline after discipline, all within a period of twelve years at the end of which he performed *Sodāśī Pūjā* on 25 May 1867. After practising various disciplines of different sects in Hinduism, Sri Ramakrishna successfully practised Islam in 1867. But, as he practised Christianity some eight years later, some may question why he did not include Christianity in the series of his spiritual disciplines. At this late stage, we may only say that probably he had not enough exposure to have created in himself an active interest in Jesus Christ.

Sri Ramakrishna's first significant contact with Christianity was his visit to a church. Once, Mathurmohan Biswas, son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, on his way to his Janbazar house, or to Dakshineswar, therefrom took Sri Ramakrishna to the Wesleyan Methodist Church at 56A Surendranath Banerjee Road, Calcutta. This was a British Protestant Church established in 1868. No doubt, Mathurmohan did so at Sri Ramakrishna's behest. Both of them saw the mass from outside.⁴ There is, however, nothing on record to show its immediate impact on the Saint. We can only assume that the congregation had pleased him.

Following Mathurmohan's death on 16 July 1871, Shambhucharan Mullick, an

3. 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, New York, 1984, p. 690.

4. Swami Nityatmananda: *Sri Ma Darshan* (Bengali), Vol. 11, p. 54.

upper middleclass dandy of Sinduriapatty, Calcutta, became an admirer of Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, the latter had identified Shambhucharan as his second 'supplier' appointed by the Divine Mother, to supply his daily necessities. Sri Ramakrishna used to visit Shambhucharan at his garden house called Shambhu-villa at 96 Hastie Road, Alambazar. There he heard from Shambhucharan, an ardent champion of Christ, the Bible, and learnt about the pure life of Jesus Christ and the faith founded by him. Spontaneously there sprang up in his heart deep love and regard for Jesus. It is not unlikely that because he learnt *something* of the Bible and heard about Jesus Christ from Shambhucharan that he resented Shambhucharan's addressing him as 'Guruji' (honoured preceptor). Annoyed, Sri Ramakrishna chided him, 'Who is the Guru and who is the disciple? You are *my Guru*.'

Even earlier than this he had direct encounter with some Christians. To cite an example, we may refer to his meeting with the well-known poet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, a convert to Christianity, sometime in July 1868, who had visited Dakshineswar temple as a lawyer. In the beginning Sri Ramakrishna felt reluctant to talk to him. Being questioned he confessed, 'I want to speak. But my mouth is being pressed, as it were, by someone, and I am prevented from speaking.' Michael was very disappointed. Soon, however, Sri Ramakrishna's mood changed and he sang a few beautiful songs of the Divine Mother. They assuaged Michael and he felt happy. Thus, though Sri Ramakrishna had no formal English education, the Christian thoughts came to him by several channels.

It is not known how soon after the Bible-reading sessions at Shambhucharan's garden house Sri Ramakrishna decided to turn to Christianity. But it may be presumed that his various religious experiences and his

knowledge of Christ had already predisposed him to try for the Christian experience. As was his wont, from the moment he made a firm resolve, he put his heart and soul to the task. Sister Devamata (Laura Glenn) claims that 'Sri Ramakrishna worshipped before a Christian altar,⁵ or that 'he assisted at worship in a Christian Church'.⁶ These claims cannot be verified now. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that Sri Ramakrishna used to call Jesus Christ 'Rishi Krishta' (Krishta as a seer, or Rishi).⁷

Suffused with the thought and spirit of Jesus Christ, one day he was sitting alone in the parlour of Jadunath Mullick's garden house adjoining the estate of the Dakshineswar temple. There were on the walls of the room some good paintings including one of the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms. Sri Ramakrishna felt drawn to this picture. Musing upon the glories of *Ishamashi*, as the Bengalees call Jesus, he gazed in deep absorption at this painting. As he was looking intently at it, he felt that the picture became living and luminous, and that rays of light struck forth from the Mother and the Child and entered his heart. The new thought wave radically pushed aside his old, pet beliefs and ideas just as it had happened at the time of his initiation into Islam. However much he tried, he failed to resist the powerful thoughts of Christ which now purged him of all inborn Hindu impressions. And he cried out, 'Oh Mother, what is that Thou art doing to me?' To narrate what happened next we quote from *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*: 'Rising with a great force, the waves of those impressions completely submerged the Hindu ideas in his mind. His love and devotion

5. Sister Devamata: *Days in an Indian Monastery*, 1929, p. 263.

6. Sister Devamata: *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, 1928, p. 49.

7. Sashi Bhusan Ghosh: *Sri Ramakrishnadeva* (Bengali), p. 180.

to the Devas and Devis vanished, and in their stead, a great faith in and reverence for Jesus and his religion occupied his mind, and began to show him Christian padres offering incense and light before the image of Jesus in the Church and to reveal to him the eagerness of their hearts as is seen in their earnest prayers.⁸

Overwhelmed by this experience, Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room in the premises of the Dakshineswar temple. He was already a changed man. His heart had no room for anything but Christ and Christian way of life. He was full of Christian thought and Christian love. Seized by the tide of these ideas he was fully absorbed and could not do anything contrary to this for three days.⁹ He became a staunch devotee of Jesus. Here it would be worthwhile to quote Swami Vivekananda who told Sister Nivedita, 'He (Sri Ramakrishna) would eat and dress like the people he wanted to understand, take their initiation, and use their language. "One must learn," he (Sri Ramakrishna) said, "to put oneself into another man's very soul." And this method was his own! No one ever before in India became Christian and Mohammedan

8. But, according to the *Gospel*, Sri Ramakrishna saw Jesus coming down from the picture and merge in his body (p. 826). Whereas, according to Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, one day Sri Ramakrishna was walking in the garden belonging to Jadulal Mullick, the tall airy figure of Jesus merged in him, making him transcend all his senses and taking him to the same goal which all other religions aim at. (*Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission*, 1966, p. 38.)

9. 'These few days he did not even utter words like Kāli, Krishna, Śiva, Rāma, nor their thoughts appeared in his mind'. (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Jivanvrittanta* (Bengali), 5th edition, p. 53.) According to Akshay Kumar Sen, Sri Ramakrishna's disciple and biographer, the Saint's deportment and demeanour became like that of a Christian during this period. (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* [Bengali], 10th edition, p. 123.)

and Vaiṣṇava by turns!' No doubt, this method was unique to Sri Ramakrishna, a historic prophet of the harmony of religions.

At the end of the third day, as Sri Ramakrishna was strolling in the Panchavati at Dakshineswar, all the while engrossed in the thought of Jesus Christ, he had a vision. He saw a luminous figure approaching him, regarding him steadfastly as he himself did so. He realized that the visitor must be a foreigner, for he was of a very fair complexion, had long eyes with uncommon brilliance, and the tip of his nose a little flat, which however in no way marred the comeliness of his face.¹⁰ Charmed by the unearthly divine expression of his face, Sri Ramakrishna wondered who the stranger might be. As the figure drew nearer, he heard within himself a cry of recognition, 'Jesus. Jesus the Christ, the great Yogi,¹¹ the loving Son of God, one with the Father,

10. After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, Swami Saradananda discovered that there were three extant descriptions of Christ's physical features. According to one of them the tip of his nose was a little flat. (*Great Master*, p. 296) According to Mahendranath Dutta, Swami Saradananda had searched into (a) Cunningham Geikie's *The Life and Words of Christ* and (b) Frederick William Farrar's *Life of Christ*.

Farrar tells us that Jesus was a man of middle size on whose face the purity and charm of youth were mingled with the thoughtfulness and dignity of manhood. His hair, which legend had compared to the colour of wine, was parted in the middle of the forehead and flew down over the neck. His features were paler and of a more Hellenic type than the weather-bronzed and olive-tinted faces of the hardy fishermen who were his apostles. Everyone looked moved and awed on the divine expression of that calm and patient face. (*The Life of Christ*, published by Cassel, Petter, Galpin & Co., London, pp. 237-38.) The portrait of Christ reproduced on page 596 of this book shows the tip of Christ's nose a little flat.

11. Swami Abhedananda said, '...The powers and works of this meek, gentle, and self-sacrificing Divine man, who is worshipped throughout Christendom as the ideal Incarnation of God and the Saviour of mankind, have proved that he was

who gave his heart's blood and put up with endless torture in order to deliver men from sorrow and misery.'

Presently, the figure of Jesus Christ approached Sri Ramakrishna, embraced him and became merged in him. In this way Sri Ramakrishna realized his identity with Christ, as he had already realized his identity with Kālī, Rāma, Hanumān, Sitā, Rādhā and Kṛishna. Thereafter he entered into Bhāvasamādhi, lost his outward consciousness, and communed with Brahman with attributes.

Beautiful as this experience was in itself, it led Sri Ramakrishna to draw some conclusions of far-reaching consequences. Here, it may be borne in mind that religious experience is mystical in nature, rooted as much in the non-rational as in the rational. Also religious experience is such that it cannot be entirely rationalized and described even by those who have had the experience. This is perhaps true in this case of Sri Ramakrishna. However, his conclusions were:

(a) That Jesus Christ was an Incarnation of God.¹² And that devotion to Jesus Christ was a pathway to God-realization. However, unlike the Christians who believe 'Christ as the only Son of God', Sri Ramakrishna held that 'the Incarnation is always one and the same. Having plunged into the ocean of life, the one God rises up at one point and is known as Krishna, and when after another plunge, He rises up at another point, He is known as Christ.'¹³

a perfect type of one who is called in India a true Yogi.' (*How to be a Yogi*, San Francisco, 1902, pp. 168-69.)

12. 'Students of Vedanta recognize in the sublime character of the Saviour Christ the manifestation of the universal Yogas, or the words of God, as do in other incarnations, of the same almighty Being.' (Swami Abhedananda: *Great Saviours of the World*, p. 240.)

13. Suresh Ch. Dutta: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna-dever Upadesh* (Bengali), No. 941, p. 364.

(b) That the religion of Jesus the Christ is a valid path. But Sri Ramakrishna warned against dogmatism which prompts some people to think, that one can't be saved without accepting Christian religion.

(c) That the religion of Christ is a distinct and different path which guides its sincere followers to the goal. But for that reason there should be no disharmony and lack of amity between the people of Christian faith and people of other faiths. Sri Ramakrishna advised, 'Don't turn up your nose in hatred and say, "Oh, this man believes in the formless God and not in God with forms. This man is a Christian. This man is a Hindu. And this man is a Mussalman." It is God alone who makes people see things in different ways. Know that people have different natures. Realize this, mix with them as much as you can. And love all.'¹⁴

However, it is to be noted that during practices of most of the spiritual disciplines of Hinduism and also of Islam, Sri Ramakrishna in his superconscious experience merged his identity into that of the Absolute but his Christian experience culminated with his realization of God as *Saguna Brahman*, formless God with name, qualities and attributes. Is this because the Godhead in Christianity is what has been termed in the Indian philosophy as *Saguna Brahman*?

Nonetheless, this moving experience like all such other experiences of his was determinative, and its effects lasted as long as he lived. Above all, it put the final seal of confirmation on his hypothesis that there were as many paths as there were religions.

To indicate the significance of this experience, Swami Vivekananda observed in the course of a lecture, that by 'following the true religion of Jesus the Christ, Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the same result he had

14. *The Gospel*, *ibid*, p. 637.

already attained, and thereby he concluded that the goal of every religion is the same, that each is trying to teach the same thing, the difference being largely in method and still more in language.'

Christian experience is communion with God in Christ. A Christian is a follower of the religion founded by Jesus of Nazareth. The basis for Christian catechisms is—'And now abideth faith, hope, love (charity), these three'.¹⁵ This guides the belief, worship, and life of the Christians. Although Sri Ramakrishna had faith in Jesus as an incarnation of God, questions have been raised if he had a Christian experience at all. Did he really become a Christian? He did not like Christian emphasis on sin. He did not believe that Christ was the only saviour of man. Thereupon, Nalini Devdas in her book *Sri Ramakrishna* (1966), published by the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, concluded; 'Sri Ramakrishna took Christ into the Hindu experience of seeing all beings as manifestations of Brahman, receiving direct experience of Brahman through devotion to an *avatāra*, where divinity is clearly and graciously expressed.'¹⁶ Her surmise was that Sri Ramakrishna's experience was a Hindu experience and nothing more.

Edmund Davison Soper, who held that the Vedanta philosophy was the greatest challenge to Christianity, emphatically said, '...to conclude that Sri Ramakrishna had really entered into the meaning of Christ and Christian faith, is impossible for one who has any understanding of the New Testament.'¹⁷

Closer to facts and more incisive is the interpretation of Francis X. Clooney, S. J.,

15. *The Holy Bible*, I Corinthians XIII, 13.

16. Nalini Devdas; *Sri Ramakrishna*, published by the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1966, p. 27.

17. Edmund Davison Soper: *The Inevitable Choice*, New York, p. 141.

Department of Theology, Boston College, Massachusetts, who opined, 'Ramakrishna thus claimed a Christ experience and was filled with love toward Him, without becoming a Christian or claiming that Jesus was merely the symbol of a Hindu deity or that the Mother and Jesus were merely appearances of an underlying primordial religion. He claimed simply that his Mother was everywhere and this enabled him to travel for a time the Christian paths; he never made further equations or hypotheses unwarranted by his own experience.'¹⁸ These observations, in fact, aim to assert that Sri Ramakrishna remained all through a Hindu to the core and repudiate the claim that Sri Ramakrishna had crossed the boundaries of Hindu faith. But Sri Ramakrishna himself said, 'I had to practise each religion for a time—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity ... I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.' Swami Vivekananda, too, opined that Sri Ramakrishna had followed 'the true religion of Jesus the Christ'.¹⁹ Without being formally initiated into Christian doctrines, Sri Ramakrishna did realize the ideals of Christianity. His overwhelming love of God prompted him to go beyond the doctrinaire formalities, and love Christ as a Son of God.

Nonetheless, such critical appraisals need not shroud the fact that Sri Rama-

18. *Prabuddha Bharata*, December 1986, p. 535.

19. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, 1955, p. 174. Here it is worth considering the observation of Claude Alan Stark: 'From the highest viewpoint, direct experience never contradicts the scriptures but confirms them in all religions. Herein lies the power of the life of Sri Ramakrishna. For example, in Christianity he verified the existence of Jesus by experiencing him directly. No amount of theology could do the same, for theology itself as Christology rests on the premise of Christ's verity, and cannot demonstrate it except by faith.' (*God of All*, 1974, p. 84).

krishna's interaction with Christ and his faith was certainly more than 'chance-directed' or 'chance-erected'. Evidences of his not too infrequent contacts with Christian representatives, institutions or literature stretching over his remaining life-span are not all readily available, but the extant reliable materials are enough to testify to Sri Ramakrishna's versatility, consistent catholicity, and insistence on the true spirit of Christianity and for that matter of every other religion. Rooted in mystical experience, Sri Ramakrishna had a clear understanding of the essence of every religion he had practised. He could also perceive the limitation of each path of religion and suggested a solution. We hear him say in ecstasy, 'Mother, everyone says "My watch alone is right." The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Mussalmans, all say, "My religion alone is true." But, Mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path.' Over and over again, he exhorted that the aim of human life was to realize God by any path and thereby attain to complete freedom, unalloyed joy and eternal life. Religions are but different paths leading to the same goal.

Sri Ramakrishna's prodigious memory and his fair acquaintance with the contents of the Bible helped him to make good use of the holy text. To cite an example we may quote the experience of Śaśi and Śarat (later Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swami Saradananda respectively) who had gone to Dakshineswar to meet the Paramahansa. One of the boys asked him, 'Sir, is it wrong to marry? Is it against the will of God?' Sri Ramakrishna asked him to take down the Bible from the shelf and read aloud two select portions from the same. He read out, 'For there are some eunuchs, which were

so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.'²⁰ The youngman then read out St. Paul's injunction, 'I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.' Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna gave his comments emphasizing on celibacy and its importance. Curiously enough, Charles H. Tawney, Director of Public Instructions, Bengal, found traces of influence of *The Imitation of Christ* upon the mind of the Hindu saint.²¹

The Saint came across several Europeans and Europeanized natives 'of the boot and pantaloons' type. Of them, our study is limited to those who professed Christianity or who were deeply influenced by Christ and his faith. The first to mention was the great Brahmo leader, Keshub Chandra Sen, who himself was deeply absorbed in the thought of Christ,²² and Christianity so much so that *The Indian Christian Herald* said of him, 'Christians looked upon him as God's messenger, sent to awaken India to the spirit of Christ.' On 15 March 1875, Keshub made his acquaintance with the Saint. Sri Ramakrishna's charismatic personality as well as his compelling message of religious harmony made an indelible impression on his mind. Keshub deeply admired the God-intoxicated Saint of Dakshineswar. Sometimes he would come to Dakshineswar,

20. *The Holy Bible*: St. Mathew, 19:12.

21. Charles H. Tawney: *A Modern Hindu Saint*, 1896. Quoted in *A Bridge to Eternity*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, p. 401.

22. In Easter 1879 Keshub in his lecture on 'India asks, Who is Christ?', said, '...My Christ, my sweet Christ, the brightest Jewel of my heart, the necklace of my soul—for twenty years I have cherished Him in this my miserable heart.'

sometimes he would invite Sri Ramakrishna to his house in Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna's influence penetrated deep into his heart. A staunch follower of Keshub remarked, 'Paramahansa's simplicity, sweet childlike faith and devotion influenced Keshub's Yoga, dispassion, ethics, devotion and pure religious ideas.'²³ Keshub again shared some of his thoughts, particularly on Christ, with the Saint. He presented Sri Ramakrishna with a framed picture of Christ rescuing the drowning Peter. The picture used to adorn the southern wall of the Saint's room at Dakshineswar. In keeping with the tradition of the Christians, Sri Ramakrishna would not worship Christ with incense every nightfall or offer red powder on 'Dol Purnima' days. Surprisingly, Keshub sometimes mentioned that Sri Ramakrishna was John the Baptist.

The illiterate Brahmin of Bengal had contact with Western Christianity too. He had a brief encounter with the Rev. Joseph Cook, a representative of New England Protestant Orthodoxy. He was the same Rev. Cook who later on participated at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 along with Swami Vivekananda. Rev. Cook and Miss Piggot had come on a tour of the Orient in 1882. Keshub sent word on 23 February 1882 to Sri Ramakrishna that he would bring with him an Englishman, and take him in a steamer for a trip on the Ganges. On the appointed day Sri Ramakrishna was seized with a fit of nervousness. He was going again and again towards the tamarisk trees to ease himself.²⁴ When the steamer came, Sri Ramakrishna was taken on board. After introduction and a few preliminary words, he found himself in a

high spiritual state. Of this he himself narrated later, 'Something crept immediately afterwards towards the head, and fear vanished in no time. I became completely overwhelmed; the face turned upwards and I felt a flow of words gushing out of my mouth. The more the words came out, the more were words pushed forward and supplied, as it were, by someone from within.' Those present, also saw that the Paramahansa 'successively went through all the phases of spiritual excitement which was characteristic of him. Passing through a long interval of unconsciousness he prayed, sang and discussed on spiritual subjects.'²⁵ Observing his deep ecstatic mood another Brahma leader, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, who was also on board, commented, 'Good heavens! It is as if he were possessed by a ghost.'²⁶ All these left a strong impression on the American evangelist. *The Indian Mirror* on 10 September 1886 reported that Mr. Cook expressed his great surprise and remarked that he was not aware before that a man could become so much immersed in divine spirit as to lose all perception of the external world.

In all probability William Digby had seen Sri Ramakrishna. He wrote in 1901 in his book *Prosperous British India*²⁷ that Robert Browning and John Ruskin, the finest fruit of British intellectual eminence in the 19th century, were mere gropers in the dark compared with the uncultured and illiterate Ramakrishna of Bengal. W. W. Hastie, the Principal of the General Assembly's Institution met Sri Ramakrishna. One day, in a literature class, he was discussing ecstasies mentioned in William Wordsworth's 'The Excursion'. He exhorted his students, 'I have known only one person who has achieved such meditation, and that is Rama-

23. Chiranjib Sharma (pseudonym of Trailokyanath Sanyal): *Keshub Charit* (Bengali), 3rd edition, p. 247.

24. Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, tr. by Swami Jagadananda, 4th edition, p. 632.

25. *The New Dispensation*, dated 26 February 1882.

26. *The Gospel*, *ibid*, p. 833.

27. *Prosperous British India*, p. 99.

krishna of Dakshineswar. You will understand it better if you visit the saint.'

Williams, a Protestant Christian, came to Dakshineswar on Good Friday, 1881, in the company of Kedarnath Chatterjee. As Sri Ramakrishna stood merged in deep *samādhi*, Williams reverentially knelt before him, with hands folded, tears rolling down his face. Looking up at the Saint, he kissed his feet and his tears wetted them. Williams later told that he was blessed with a direct vision of Christ in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. On being asked by the Saint, 'Well, what's your idea about me? Who am I?' Williams replied, 'You are, Sir, Jesus himself, the Son of God, the embodiment of eternal consciousness.'²⁸ The Christian devotee met Sri Ramakrishna several times at Dakshineswar. According to Swami Saradananda, Williams finally renounced the world on Sri Ramakrishna's advice, and engaged himself in practising austerities at some place in the Himalayas to the north of Punjab.

As mentioned earlier the great intellectual, Keshub, was captivated by the personality of the Saint of Dakshineswar, and many bright youngmen followed his suit. One among them was Shivanath Shastri who came to the Saint, and Sri Ramakrishna showed special love for this gifted youngman. Shivanath, too, greatly admired Sri Ramakrishna's deep longing for God which was comparable to that of Jesus Christ's²⁹. Shivanath once brought his acquaintance, Rev. Harihar Sanyal, to Sri Ramakrishna. Rev. Harihar Sanyal³⁰ was a devout Christian

28. Swami Prabhananda: *First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 164-69.

29. Ramachandra Dutta: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivanvrittanta* (1357 B.S.), pp. 202-3.

30. Better known in Christian circle as the Rev. Harihar Sandel, he was appointed a missionary of the Church Missionary Society on 1 October 1857. Rev. Sandel began to hold services in Bengali at the St. Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta, and gradually built up a small congrega-

who used to take care of a congregation at Bhawanipur. This meeting took place, in all probability, in the later part of 1875. About this meeting wrote Shivanath Shastri, 'There was a conversation during which the Saint illustrated, in his well-known homely way, many spiritual truths which quickly struck my Christian friend as something very noteworthy.'

Perhaps the Saint's most significant encounter was with Prabhudayal Mishra, 35, a born Christian belonging to the Quaker sect. The stranger, clad in European dress, first visited Sri Ramakrishna at Shyampukur on 31 October 1885. Mishra used to practise Yoga. He narrated his several visions. Addressing the devotees at Shyampukur he said, 'Jesus is not the son of Mary. He is God Himself. Now he (pointing to Sri Ramakrishna) is as you see him—again he is God himself. You are not able to recognize him. I have seen him before, in visions, though I see him now directly with my eyes.' Mishra admitted that since that day he had surrendered to Sri Ramakrishna his mind, soul and body. In an ecstatic mood Sri Ramakrishna shook hands with him and said, 'You will get what you are seeking.'³¹ Next day Mishra called on the Saint again. While taking leave of Sri Ramakrishna, Mishra said, 'Whenever you may advise, I shall see you again.'³²

tion of Bengalee Christians. When it was decided to build a separate Church for its use, the Rev. Sandel collected a fairly large sum of money and purchased a plot of land in Pipalputty in close proximity of the girls' school, now known as St. John's Diocesan Girls' Higher Secondary School. Rev. Sandel passed away on 4 September 1887 and his successor Rev. Aghore Nath Banerjee built the present St. Mary's Church and it was consecrated on 16 February 1889. Its present address is 45 Lala Lajpat Rai Sarani (former Elgin Road). By its side stands Harihar Sandel Home for the Aged.

31. *The Gospel*, *ibid*, p. 922.

32. Swami Prabhananda: *Sri Sri Ramakrishner Antyalila* (Bengali), Vol. I, 2nd edition, p. 81.

Almost equally interesting was his meeting with Dr. J. M. Coates, the Principal of the Calcutta Medical College, who had come to see the ailing Sri Ramakrishna on 15 March 1886. Ramachandra Dutta, Chemical Examiner of the Calcutta Medical College, had arranged this visit.— While entering the patient's room at Cossipore, the doctor did not receive from Śaśi (later Swami Ramakrishnananda) the expected courtesy. He flared up and shouted at Śaśi. However, the dignitary was soon pacified by the Saint's inimitable and kind treatment. A happy Dr. Coates sat on Sri Ramakrishna's bed comfortably and remarked, 'He (Sri Ramakrishna) is naturally a gentleman.' After careful examination of the patient, the renowned physician prognosticated the imminent fatality of the case. A devout Christian that he was, Dr. Coates wanted to hear religious discourse from the Saint. The latter could not oblige him as he had practically lost his power of speaking. Nonetheless, he told him by signs that God was one and that he was immanent in all beings. The topic itself threw Sri Ramakrishna into a deep ecstasy. Dr. Coates was amazed and considered himself fortunate for he had never seen such ecstasy although he had learnt from the Bible of similar experience of Jesus Christ.³³

Some years earlier Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to another church. On 11 March 1882 the devotees heard Sri Ramakrishna speaking to the Divine Mother in ecstasy, 'Mother, show me sometime how the Christians pray to Thee in their Churches. But Mother, what will people say if I go in? Suppose they make a fuss! Suppose they don't allow me to enter the Kali temple

³³. Dr. J. M. Coates, MBBS, MD, LFPSG, was the ninth Principal of the Calcutta Medical College from 1880 to 1890. Formerly he was in military services and was elevated to the rank of Brigadier Surgeon. (*Sri Ramakrishner Antyalila* [Bengali], Vol. II, pp. 198-99).

again! Well then, show me the Christian worship from the door of the Church.' Thereafter, Sri Ramakrishna visited the Holy Trinity Church at 33-8 Raja Rammohan Sarani, Calcutta. Established in 1826, this British Protestant Church is popularly called the 'Church of Long Sahib'. Here too, Sri Ramakrishna stood outside the door and observed the devotees offering their prayers to him. It is not known who had accompanied Sri Ramakrishna on this occasion.

All such Sri Ramakrishna's interactions with Jesus Christ and some Christians of different denominations, some at conscious level and others at superconscious level, had considerable impact on his own followers as well as on others, during his lifetime and much more as years rolled by. To cite a few instances we may mention the following.

Strangely enough, some of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees held that Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ were one and the same. The erudite scholar 'M', the chronicler of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, believed that the exalted character of Sri Ramakrishna was but a realization of Christ's message, 'Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' In the course of his conversation with Sri Ramakrishna, as well as with others, 'M' alluded to Sri Ramakrishna's similarities with Christ. Sri Ramakrishna did not prescribe any hard and fast rule about food. Christ's disciples did not observe the sabbath and Christ supported them saying, 'They have done well to eat. As long as they are with the bridegroom, they must make merry.' Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'The youngsters are not yet touched by woman and gold; they will be able to assimilate instruction. It is like keeping milk in a new pot; the milk may turn sour if it is kept in a pot in which curd has been made.' Christ also said, 'If new wine is kept in an old bottle, the bottle may crack. If an old cloth is patched with new cloth, the old cloth tears away.' Sri Rama-

krishna used to say that he and the Mother are one. Likewise Christ said, 'I and my Father are one.' Again, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'God will surely listen to you if you call on him earnestly.' Similarly, Christ said, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.' On the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's visit to the Brahmani's at Baghbazar the amazing devotion of 'the Brahmani and her sister' prompted 'M' to narrate before Sri Ramakrishna the story of Martha and Mary in the company of Christ. And 'M' finally told Sri Ramakrishna of his conviction, 'I feel that Christ, Chaitanyadeva, and yourself—all three are one and the same. It is the same person that has become all these three.' In response, Sri Ramakrishna pointing his finger to his own body, exclaimed, 'Yes, yes! One! One! It is indeed One. Don't you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way.' Evidently for such treatment of his subject matter 'M' has been accused of imitating 'the Christian Gospels so carefully in many minor points that one wonders how far the assimilation has gone.'³⁴

Swami Saradananda too found in the lives of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna many striking similarities. His *magnum opus, Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, is replete with illustrations of such similarities. Both of them condemned lust and greed, emphasized purification of the heart, love of God, and declared that realization of God was the supreme goal of life. Sri Ramakrishna's particular emphasis was on the goal of life, and Jesus Christ's, on the way of life. But there was no essential difference in the inner spirit of their words and actions. Both of them demanded inner transformation of human being leading to illumination of the heart. The author of *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* several

times alluded to Jesus's vicarious atonement in explaining Sri Ramakrishna's throat cancer. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna had had a vision at Shyampukur. Therein the Divine Mother had explained to him that many people who had committed evil deeds had touched him. Their bad *karma* had been transferred to him. This explained why he had sores on his body.³⁵ Swami Saradananda also held that the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna helped people to understand and appreciate the life and teachings of great souls like Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, etc. and vice versa. Thus it is quite evident that many of the ideas of Jesus and Ramakrishna could be equated.

Such attempts to find out certain basic similarities between Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna were not confined among the latter's devotees only. Hiranand Shaukiram Advani, the Editor of *Sind Sudhār* in Gujarati and the *Sind Times* in English, himself a confirmed Brahmo and an admirer of Sri Ramakrishna, travelled 2200 miles to Calcutta to see the ailing Saint of Dakshineswar. He believed that Sri Ramakrishna's suffering from throat cancer was comparable to Christ's crucifixion.

Inspired by Sri Ramakrishna's message of religious harmony the Brahmo leader, Trailokyananth Sanyal composed the following among many others. It was very much liked by Sri Ramakrishna:

Oh Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?

... ..

Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Gauranga,
Are all drunk with the Wine of Thy love.

^{34.} J. N. Ferquhar; *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 1929, p. 188.

^{35.} Ramachandra Dutta, a senior householder disciple and biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, held a similar view and wrote, 'Jesus gave his own blood to save the sinners. Paramahansa's illness too, was to serve a similar end. This was stated by Sri Ramakrishna himself.' (*Jivanvrittanta*, *ibid*, p. 219).

The composer, himself a good musician, entertained Sri Ramakrishna by singing this song. So also did Narendranath.

A devout Christian J. N. Farquhar in his book *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1915) reproduced a symbolic picture, originally produced in 1882, in which Sri Ramakrishna and Keshub Chandra Sen were standing in front of a Christian church, a Mohammedan mosque and a Hindu temple. It was specially painted for Suresh Chandra Mitra, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. In the picture Sri Ramakrishna was calling Keshub's attention to a group of figures, in the middle of which Christ and Chaitanya were dancing together and a Muslim, a Confusian, a Sikh, a Parsee, an Anglican clergyman, and Hindus of various sects stood around them. Worth quoting is Farquhar's observation, 'It seems to me that nothing could be more fitting than to dedicate this interesting piece of theological art to the versatile author of *Reunion all Round*.³⁶ Sri Ramakrishna, when he saw the picture at Nanda Bose's house, remarked, 'This is the ideal of modern times.'

These bare facts belong to history. They are not just opinions. And these facts drive us to understand that Sri Ramakrishna's exposure to Christianity was more than skin-deep. A sincere seeker of truth as he always was, Sri Ramakrishna verified God in Christianity as well as in other religions and finally came to the firm conclusion, 'Hindus, Mussalmans, and Christians are going to the same destination by different paths. A man can realize God by following his own path if his prayer is sincere.' But he could not appreciate the over-emphasis placed on sin in Christianity. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Once a man gave me a Bible.

A part of it was read to me,³⁷ and it was full of that one thing — sin and sin! One must have such faith that one can say: "I have uttered the name of God, I have repeated the name of Rāma or Hari, ... how can I be a sinner?" One must have faith in the glory of God's name.'³⁸ As against this an orthodox Christian points out that in Sri Ramakrishna's God moral distinctions had been obliterated,³⁹ for Sri Ramakrishna thought, 'God tells the thief to go and steal, and at the same time warns the householder against the thief'. This was a radical distinction between Christianity and Hinduism. Again one day Bhavanath, a young disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, remarked that great souls like Christ and Chaitanya had admonished men to love all beings. Sri Ramakrishna gave a practical hint saying, 'Love you must, because God dwells in all beings—but salute a wicked person from a distance.' Sri Ramakrishna hinted that the teachings of the great ones needed to be interpreted in their proper context.

The world of Christ and his apostles was not a mere history to Sri Ramakrishna. It was supported by his own mystic experiences too. The devotees got startled to hear Sri Ramakrishna announce one day, 'In a vision I saw that Śaśi⁴⁰ and Śarat had been

37. It perhaps refers to the incident narrated by Rāmlāl, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew. One day while returning from Alambazar, Rāmlāl received a booklet, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (in Bengali) distributed by a Christian preacher. When Sri Ramakrishna's eyes fell on it, he asked Rāmlāl to read it out. Rāmlāl obliged but could not proceed for Sri Ramakrishna did not like the emphasis given on sin. (Kamal Krishna Mitra: *Sri Ramakrishna O Antaranga Prasanga* (Bengali), 2nd edition, p. 80).

38. *The Gospel*, *ibid*, p. 627.

39. *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 1929, p. 196.

40. Sasi (later Swami Ramakrishnananda) admitted, 'I always had a strong feeling for Christ even in my boyhood.' Sister Devamata wrote that the Swami knew the Bible from cover to

36. *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1915), pp. 198-99. The author of *Reunion All Round* was Knox Ronald Arbuthnot (1888-1957) and it was published in 1914.

among the followers of Christ.' Thereupon, it was natural that some enthusiasts tried to trace a transcendental relationship between Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna, though historically separated by more than eighteen hundred years. Also, as it could be expected, Sri Ramakrishna's great love and adoration for Jesus gradually made room for new rituals. On the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna a special worship was offered in later days to Sri Ramakrishna in the form of Jesus. This holy tradition is followed even today.

As the mystic experiences of Sri Ramakrishna became rather paradigmatic for his disciples they acquired greater significance with the passage of time. Christmas Day was being celebrated at the residence of Sister Devamata in Madras. Swami Brahmananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda and others were attending. When Sister Devamata was reading the story of Christ's nativity according to St. Luke, Swami Brahmananda went into an ecstasy. Later he disclosed that he was blessed with a vision of Christ who suddenly stood before the altar, dressed in a blue cloak. He talked with the Swami. It is said that while visiting St. Peter's Cathedral on his way to London in 1896, Swami Saradananda fell into an ecstasy and became oblivious of his surroundings. Now, does this experience confirm the remark of Sri Ramakrishna that Swami Saradananda had been a companion of Jesus Christ in a previous incarnation? Swami Vivekananda's deep regard for Jesus Christ found expression when he remarked that if he had been present before Christ in the days when he lived in Palestine, he would have washed his feet not with tears, but with his heart's blood.⁴¹

cover and expounded it in a spirit and with an understanding which were rare even in Christian countries. (*Days in an Indian Monastery*, p. 22).

41. Sister Nivedita: *The Master as I Saw Him*, p. 276.

Four months after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, there happened an incident which wrought upon the mystical feeling of nine all-renouncing disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. It was late in the evening when Narendranath and eight other direct young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were sitting for meditation around a fire. This was in the courtyard of the house of Matangini Ghosh at Antpur. The stars sparkled overhead. After meditation Narendra began, with an apostolic fervour, to narrate the life of Christ. He exhorted his brother disciples to live like Christ who had had 'no place to lay his head'. Inflamed by this call of the leader, they all stood up in a body and making God and the sacred fire their witnesses, they pledged themselves to renounce the world. Later they discovered that it was Christmas Eve.

In the sequel, the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna began observing Christmas Eve in their monasteries. Now, all branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission celebrate Christmas Eve which reminds the followers of the Monastic Order of its divine purpose. More than this, the Christmas Eve symbolizes to them the Christ-spirit born anew in the heart of the devotees — the love, the light, the redeeming power, transcending all material consideration. Since the early days of the Order, Christ has been honoured and revered by the Swamis of the Order as one Incarnation of God. Of their many writings worth mentioning are Swami Akhilananda's *Hindu View of Christ* (1949), Swami Prabhavananda's *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta* (1964) and Swami Satprakashananda's *Hinduism and Christianity* (1975). The writers found an essential unity between the Christ's message and the message of Hindu saints, both propagating an uncompromising spiritual gospel. They in their turn have evoked deep interest among Christian scholars.

To the devout Christian thinker, Romain Rolland, Sri Ramakrishna was the 'younger brother of Christ'. In the French savant's words, 'It is because Ramakrishna more fully than any other man not only conceived, but realized in himself the total Unity of this river of God, open to all rivers and all streams, that I have given him my love.'

Sir Francis Younghusband, Chairman, Society for Promoting the Study of Religions, London, said, 'I speak as a Christian, and what profoundly moved me was the way in which that great saint entered into our Christian religion, entered into the very simple life and teachings of Christ. In a way, we Christians were able to understand our own religion better, by the way in which he had entered into it...it will be exceedingly good for men of spirit and men of religion to come together...and see in what way they can bring into the life of the world that spirit of which Sri Ramakrishna was the apostle.'⁴²

Francis X. Clooney, S. J., writes, 'Ramakrishna teaches us that the very basis for meeting believers of other faiths is our own Christian faith. Devotion to Christ, not a vague theocentrism, is the motive and stimulous for reverence towards and interest in non-Christian religious experiences. Ramakrishna might say that the deeper we journey into Christ the more we will understand that He wants us to seek Him beyond the boundaries of our religion.'⁴³

It is not surprising that even a Russian scholar, Dr. R. B. Rybakov, concludes, 'There is in Ramakrishna's teachings an attempt to resolve distinctively the internal contradictions of Hinduism and other religions, above all, Islam and Christianity.'⁴⁴

42. *The Religions of the World*, 1938, Vol I, pp. 134-45.

43. *America*, dated 29 March 1986.

44. *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union*, 1987, p. 368.

As expected, the responses from different quarters varied, but all of them, nonetheless, contributed to a better understanding among believers of different faiths.

More significant than the impact of Sri Ramakrishna's verification of God in Christianity and other religions so far perceived, is the bright future they portend. Those acquainted with the grim realities of the present strife and dissensions all over the world, cherish great hope that Sri Ramakrishna's message will come to man's rescue. According to the historian Arnold J. Toynbee, Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions, based on a true vision of spiritual reality, is one of the important elements of the 'Indian way' which can save the humanity from the disaster, that nuclear weaponry has threatened today.

'M' himself an ardent student of the Bible, almost unconsciously mentioned 'The Universal Catholic Church of Sri Ramakrishna' as the heading of the fourth section of the proceedings of the 5th October 1884 in the original Bengali *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. In this section 'M' recorded Sri Ramakrishna saying, 'I keep men's own ideals intact. I ask a Vaiṣṇava to hold to his Vaiṣṇava attitude and a Śākta to his. But this also I say to them: "Never feel that your path alone is right and that the paths of others are wrong, and full of errors. Hindus, Mussalmans, and Christians are going to the same destination by different paths. A man can realize God by following his own path if his prayer is sincere."

The visionary 'M' could foresee the rise of a world movement inspired by the unique life and catholic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Giving expression to his mystical feelings he placed before his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, he said, 'It will be fine if a current flows from this place. Everything will be carried away by its force. Nothing that comes out of this place will be mono-

tonous.' Sri Ramakrishna's silence to the suggestion indicates, at least indirectly, his approval. Today we are in the high tide of this movement. This movement, initiated by Sri Ramakrishna, is advancing in different directions, gathering momentum and percolating such noble ideas as 'help and not fight', 'assimilation and not destruction', 'harmony and peace and not dissension' into the world psyche. Christian attitude too has undergone a sea-change in recent years. And it is no wonder that Christian priests are participating in week-long inter-religious retreats, Christian monks are joining inter-monastic conferences and the Catholic Churches are offering their places of worship to be used for prayers by other religious groups.

WORSHIP OF SHIVA IN THE SICK AND AILING

(The Story of the Benares Home of Service)

(Illustrated)

SWAMI SHUDDHAVRATANANDA

Several years ago a group of western television journalists came to visit India in order to review Hinduism in modern India. Eventually they came to the holy city of Benares which harbours picturesque temples and monasteries of almost all the sects of Hinduism. In one such monastery Hindu monks of high spiritual culture and learning were found running a first-rate hospital. When journalists entered the campus of the ashrama, they were struck by a different kind of atmosphere in the place, one they had not experienced before. Nearly two dozen monks were working silently in and around the hospital, some in the operation theatre, some in the outdoor departments, some serving the patients in bed in the indoor departments, some preparing medicines, others bandaging post-operative patients. The journalists then met one young swami treating patients at the outdoor department, and asked him: 'What kind of Hinduism is it that you practise here?' The young doctor-swami answered, 'Like all Hindu monks we, too, worship Lord Shiva in the Viśwanātha temple in

early morning. Then we come to this temple of living gods who are sick and suffering. When the patients come, we try to receive them with the same respect we show to God in the temple. We wash their sores as we wash the *Śiva-linga* in the temple, offer medicines as we offer flowers, and finally, we speak a few encouraging words to them just as we offer prayers to Lord Śiva.'

This is the historic orientation given to Hinduism by its modern prophet, Swami Vivekananda. And the first practical shape of this re-vitalized Hinduism was given in this very holy city of Lord Śiva, by the prophet himself in 1901. The spirit of service in the early days of this temple of *living gods* continues up to the present. Even now, when a visitor enters the hospital compound of the Benares Sevashrama, one may see a venerable old swami of over eighty, bandaging wounds and sores of patients. On his face one may see joy and calmness of one who has served God face to face, for he has served God's children.

This Institution is the well-known Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service (Sevash-

rama) at Benares. The story of the genesis of this new temple of Hinduism is the story of a few inspired souls who, one blessed morning, found the face of God, not exactly in the temple of Lord Viśwanātha (Śiva), but in that of a dying woman waiting helplessly and forlorn for her last moments to come. She was lying near the holy temple.

It was a June morning of 1900. Jaminiranjan, a near penniless youth, living on charity as a student of Sanskrit, was going to take his bath in the Ganges. Suddenly he heard a feeble voice: 'I have not taken anything for four days. Oh, my son, give me some boiled rice.'—the piteous cry of a dying widow lying in a lane in Bengali-tola, near the *satra* (alms house) of the Maharani of Puntia. The pathetic scene struck Jaminiranjan with a strange passion. Persons who passed that way thought the woman was dead and Jaminiranjan to be her relative. Seeking help he addressed the first gentleman he met: 'Sir, I beg of you a four-anna piece (quarter rupee).' With the four-anna silver piece, Jaminiranjan rushed to his friend, Charuchandra, and told him about the dying woman. Both of them rushed to her rescue, collecting old clothes, articles of food and some money by begging from door to door. They collected one rupee in cash. The patient was carried to the Bhelupura Hospital, which cost annas eight, and the remaining eight annas was spent for her diet that day. They themselves took up the responsibility of nursing and feeding the old woman, Nrityakali Dasi. In the ancient city of Śiva, Benares, was sown on that memorable day, a new seed which was in time to sprout and blossom into a mighty Institution for serving God in the distressed and the diseased.

Charuchandra had been one of the fortunate ones who had welcomed Swami Vivekananda in Calcutta after his triumphal success in the West, when he returned in 1897. The young men had unhitched the

horses drawing the Swami's carriage, and pulled the carriage themselves in an exuberance of joy. Soon Charuchandra resigned from his job at an attorney's office in Calcutta, bundled his favourite books and the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna, and accompanied his parents to Benares, to serve them in their old age.

In Benares Charuchandra came in contact with Jaminiranjan, who introduced Charuchandra to Kedarnath, another youth inspired by the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna. The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna drew near, and it was celebrated at Kedarnath's place, at which time Swami Niranjanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, worshipped the Master. Sometime after this, Swami Kalyanananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, arrived at Benares as a guest of Kedarnath. It was he who introduced the inspired utterance of Swamiji—*Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*, 'For the liberation of the Self, and the good of the world'—to this circle of young men at Benares, and inspired them to adopt service of humanity as the aim of their life. Charuchandra started a dispensary and began to serve poor patients in his own way.

Kedarnath soon renounced the world, hired a small house at Khemeswarghat at Rs. 3/- per month and took there the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna, which had been earlier installed in his house by Charuchandra. This was really the first temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Benares. Kedarnath now regularly began to come to Charuchandra's dispensary to work there and serve the patients. This small dispensary attracted the notice of many persons including Rai Pramada Das Mitra Bahadur, an admirer of Sri Ramakrishna. Soon the new organisation of the group came to be known as the Poor Man's Relief Association.

The small space of the Association could not cope with the increasing demand of poor patients and was found too small for

effective work. On June 2, 1901 the Association occupied a bigger house, No. 38/153 Ramapura at Rs. 10/- per month. The house was big but old, and hence could be hired at a cheap rent. Within eighteen months no fewer than 330 men and 334 women received some relief or other from this Association. Of these 625 were Hindus and 21 Mohammedans.

After touring parts of the South and North India, and after his second trip to the West, Swami Vivekananda finally arrived at Benares in February, 1902. The city of Śiva honoured him like the living Śiva of this age. The group heretofore inspired by his ideas now gathered round their ideal, Vivekananda in person.

To them Swami Vivekananda said: 'Devoted service to God in the form of helpless man is the final goal of human life, equally for the pure-hearted brahmacharin, for the *karmi* (man of action), and for man in general'. Swamiji continued: 'Who are you to render relief? Nothing beyond service is within your scope. The pride of rendering help to others goeth before a fall.'

These words left a profound impression on the youths. Soon they affiliated the Association with the Ramakrishna Mission and changed the name from *Poor Man's Relief Association* to *Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service (Sevashrama)*. Swamiji himself now began to inspire the group with his direct guidance. Before leaving Benares, Swamiji, at the request of the members of the Sevashrama, dictated for them the following appeal to the public on behalf of the Home of Service:

THE RAMAKRISHNA HOME OF SERVICE,
BENARES
AN APPEAL

Dear—,

We beg your acceptance of the past year's Report of the Ramakrishna Home of Service,

Benares, embodying a short statement of our humble efforts towards the amelioration, however little, of the miserable state into which a good many of our fellow-beings, generally old men and women, are cast in this city.

The poor who come here to die have voluntarily cut themselves off from any help they could have received in the places of their birth, and when disease overtakes them, their conditions we leave to your imagination and to your conscience as a Hindu, to feel and to rectify.

Brother, does it not make you pause and think of the marvellous attraction of this wonderful place of preparation for final rest? Does it not strike you with a mysterious sense of awe—this age-old and never-ending stream of pilgrims marching to salvation through death?

If it does,—come and lend us a helping hand.
Ever yours in the Lord of the Universe,
Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda's appeal for the Sevashrama acted like magic and awakened in the public a desire to render help in some form or other to this cause of self-sacrificing service. Soon after, Swamiji passed away on July 4, 1902, but his inspiration and blessings began to work in a still greater way in the Sevashrama. Distinguished people were drawn more and more to this new temple of service to *living gods*.

Sister Nivedita often visited the Sevashrama at Benares. She stayed in the Sevashrama and sometimes accompanied the monks for begging from door to door. Following the footsteps of her master, she delivered several public lectures also for the improvement of the Sevashrama. Her impressive writings gradually helped make the ideals and activities of the Sevashrama known far and wide.

Later on, Swami Shivanandaji asked these youths to purchase a garden plot of fertile land for establishing the Advaita Ashrama in the name of Sri Ramakrishna where it stands today. The remaining portion of the garden plot not used by the Advaita Ashrama would be allocated for the use of the Sevashrama and run by the

Mission. Swami Vivekananda's wish was to see monks offer prayer, perform religious rites, worship God in traditional ways, and then serve Him through service to the poor, the diseased and the destitute. To give a concrete shape to this idea, the desired land was finally purchased and on the bright auspicious morning of sixteenth April, 1908, Swami Brahmanandaji, the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission laid the foundation stone. Thus in a picturesque setting the establishment of the Advaita Ashrama, dedicated to the adoration of the Supreme Unqualified Absolute; and the Home of Service, dedicated to the service of God in humanity, came into existence side by side.

Within two years the construction work of the Sevashrama was completed under the guidance and supervision of Swamis Vijnananandaji and Sacchidanandaji, with liberal help from donors and utmost sacrifice of monks. Especially helpful were the devotees of Kedarnath who was now known as Swami Achalananda. On May 16, 1910, Swami Brahmanandaji performed the opening ceremonies for the historic Institution.

In the beginning the Hospital Department of the Sevashrama consisted of six general wards and three quarantine wards with a total capacity of forty-six beds. Mr. Gaskell, then the Collector of Benares, took an active interest in the Sevashrama, for which he secured from the Municipality an annual subscription of Rs. 120/-. This was later increased, and the Municipal tax remitted, at his instance.

Charuchandra, now known as Swami Subhananda was now leading the Sevashrama. He resolved to train up a band of local workers. Beside the regular monastic workers (sevakas), some youths, mostly students of schools and colleges, rendered part-time service to the Institution. Even this could not cope with the volume of

work. More and more people came seeking help. Attention was soon diverted to providing accommodation for widows who were living helplessly and alone in Benares. With the generous help of a donor, a house was rented at Jangambari in February 1912 for this purpose. Twenty aged widows were admitted there with arrangements made for their food, clothing and other necessities. All difficulties were removed through the untiring zeal of the workers and sympathetic contributions from the public.

A short time after the establishment of this Branch, an unexpected help came from the famous publisher and merchant, Sri Nibaran Chandra Das of Benares, who towards the end of his life, made over nearly all his property to the Sevashrama in 1913. The running concerns in this property, in addition to rents from his own residence near Dasaswamedh Ghat, yielded a decent income. His gift was originally and specially intended as charity for indigent helpless women.

In October, 1912, the Sevashrama was blessed by the visit of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, who came to Benares. 'M' (Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta), the renowned author of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)*, noted down in the visitors' book what the Mother said on the occasion of her visit:

'The Holy Mother paid a visit to the Sevashrama today. After obtaining the sight of Thakur at the Advaita Ashrama, she came to the Sevashrama at 7 in the morning. Many devotees, both men and women, including Srijut Rakhal Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Mission, Hari Maharaj, Charu Babu, Dr. Kanjilal and others were present.

'She said: "Thakur Himself lives here, and Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) has chosen this place as Her abode... Well, how did it start?"

The Holy Mother felt very glad and said: "This place is so charming that I am almost inclined to stay here permanently." When the

Holy Mother returned, a devotee came to see the President and handed over to him a ten-rupee note as her gift to the Sevashrama.'

The currency note sent by the Holy Mother is to this day carefully preserved as a sacred treasure and heavenly blessing to the Sevashrama from the Goddess of Fortune Herself.

In April, 1914, about 25 bighas of land adjoining the Sevashrama were purchased at a cost of Rs. 15,000/-. This newly acquired big piece of land was allotted for the several buildings of the quarantine department and for residences of honorary doctors and *sevakas*. Swami Vijnananandaji worked out the details of the construction plans and estimates.

In the beginning of 1915, Swami Shivanandaji and Swami Premanandaji performed the dedication ceremonies for starting the construction. With the help of generous donations, in the beginning of 1916 the different wards of the Segregated Department were constructed. They were duly consecrated on November 7, 1916, by Swami Shivanandaji and Swami Premanandaji. In 1919, Swami Turiyanandaji stayed for some time at the Sevashrama, during which its members greatly enjoyed the elevated spiritual atmosphere created by the saint. The Swami was to pass away here soon after in July of 1922. A few days before he breathed his last in Benares, Swami Turiyananda inspired the monks of the Sevashrama with the words:

'Dispel all doubts, devote body, mind and soul wholly to His work; there is no room for doubt; go on with your work which will lead you to the

Goal. Swamiji once told me at Darjeeling: "Brother Hari, this time I have chalked out a new path; so long people believed that salvation is obtainable only through contemplation, reasoning and telling the beads. Youths of the present age will get salvation in this life by doing His work. It is His injunction; banish all doubts."'

The dream of the prophet Vivekananda, his brother disciples, and the blessings of the Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, all came true in the course of time. Today the Sevashrama has grown into a large hospital, well-known in Uttar Pradesh and North India. During 1988-89, the Sevashrama treated 1,30,839 cases, conducting major and minor operations in the indoor and outdoor departments besides treating 6,191 patients in the eight different sections of the indoor departments. The two-hundred indoor beds cater to the needs of patients admitted into the eight sections, which include the Medical ward, Surgical ward, Eye ward, Orthopaedic ward, Paediatric ward, E. N. T. ward, Dermatology, and Gynaecology. The outdoor departments have all these sections, plus three more: the Dental, X-Ray-Electrotherapy-E. C. G., and Homoeopathy Departments.

What sustains this huge temple of service is spontaneous help coming in different ways, and donations from the generous public. But the real power behind this multidimensional Institution of Service is the inspired dedication of the handful of doctors, nurses, dedicated workers, *sevikās*, and the monks of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, who give their best to continue the old tradition of service as worship of God, as a sure way to attain enlightenment in this very life.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR WOMEN—V

(*The Women Devotees of the 1880's*¹)

ANN MYREN

Introduction

On the first day of Durga Puja in 1884, Sri Ramakrishna went to the temple of the Brahma Samaj, a reformed sect of Hinduism. There the Master chided Vijay, one of his devotees, and Narendra, later known as Swami Vivekananda, both of whom belonged to the Brahma Samaj, for having narrow ideas about members of other faiths. He said:

Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Saktas, Saivas, Vaishnavas, the Brahmajnanis of the time of the rishis, and you, the Brahmajnanis of modern times, all seek the same object. A mother prepares dishes to suit the stomachs of her children. Suppose a mother has five children and a fish is bought for the family. She doesn't cook pilau or kalia for all of them. All have not the same power of digestion; so she prepares a simple stew for some. But she loves all her children equally.

Do you know my attitude? I love all the preparations of fish. I have a womanly nature. (*All laugh.*) I feel myself at home with every dish—fried fish, fish cooked with turmeric powder, pickled fish. And further, I equally relish rich preparations like fish-head, kalia, and pilau. (*All laugh.*)²

Yes, the Master had, by his own admission, 'a Womanly nature,' the inclination

to look after everyone, to love, to serve all, to give to all the dishes that best suited them. Sri Ramakrishna was in his metaphor a great cook, in action a great teacher. Women got from the Master what they could digest spiritually. He gave them practical household advice, spiritual instruction, specific practices of worship and meditation, general principles to live by, and blessings of many kinds, including direct spiritual experience. His relationships with women not only reveal women's spiritual capacities but also reveal both his own remarkable personality and wide knowledge.

Much of this divine drama went on at Dakshineswar in the Master's room on the north side of the courtyard. The whole area was filled with gardens which surrounded the different temples. In those days going to Dakshineswar from Calcutta was really very much like going to the country. The gardens, the panchavati, the gentle breezes blowing from the Ganga, the clear blue sky, the air of holiness, all created a sublime sense of infinite calm, peace and joy in the hearts of the devotees. The women who came to him were caught up in this wonderful mood.

Another mood captured them too. When they visited the Master, they were seldom aware, the way they were with ordinary men, of his being different from themselves. The Master's effect on women was to eliminate the awareness of gender from their minds by raising their consciousness. As a result, women felt as free with him as they did in the company of another woman. To ease the shyness of a woman, he once said, refer-

1. This article is a continuation of 'Reflections on the Meaning of Sri Ramakrishna for Women', Parts I, II, III and IV, *Prabuddha Bharata*, March and April 1988, June and July 1989, respectively.

2. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans., Swami Nikhilananda, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center), 1952, p. 559.

ring to the Atman or Self, 'I am verily what you are.'³

Of course, the Master lived in divine moods which were expressed in different ways. Women saw him in heightened states of consciousness, in his *samadhis* and *bhavas*, but they also participated in his outward joy. We get a picture of the Master's moods in the story of Gopala, which will be discussed in more detail later in this article. However, to give an example here of his *bhāvas*, one day in the divine mood of Gopala, the child Krishna, he sat on a woman's back like a child. Later, still in the mood of a playful child, he sat in the lap of the elderly Gopal Ma just like a child.⁴ This playfulness did not surprise Gopal Ma ; for her the Master was the child Krishna, Gopala, so he would act exactly like a child. Not only do we get a glimmer of the intensity of the Master's mood from these actions, but we also learn how absolutely pure these two women were ; Sri Ramakrishna could touch only the purest person when in a divine mood. On occasion, when he was not in *samādhi* he expressed his playful moods by acting out religious dramas for women. He would act all of the parts himself. Characters, situations, worships and prayers leaped into life with the dramatic skills of Sri Ramakrishna.⁵ What delicious times the women must have had with the Master!

Sri Ramakrishna Instructs Women

Of course, Sri Ramakrishna was for his devotees first and foremost a spiritual teacher, the great master of all things divine.

3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans., Swami Jagadananda, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952), p. 345.

4. Saradananda, *The Great Master*, p. 641.

5. Pravrajika Atmaprana, ed., *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1967), vol. I, p. 108.

He taught not just for his time but for all times. His teachings were grounded in his own realization ; his life proved the scriptures. His words have breadth, depth and weight ; his instructions to women invite the test of truth, their actual practice.

For example, Sri Ramakrishna taught that the life of married woman should be a 'life of faithful service to her husband'.⁶ This was practical for two reasons. First, in nineteenth century Bengali culture, there was simply no other way of life open to most women except marriage. Even if a woman were widowed, she was expected to live a life of strict discipline, devoting herself to God-realization. So her 'life of faithful service' became a life of service to God. Second, for the spiritual aspirant, service is an indispensable practice which leads to detachment. A good wife had ample opportunity to learn detachment as she served her husband, her children, her whole family, for that matter, everyone. We must remember that the Master taught that ordinary daily life is the field of action for spiritual life.

Judging from the kind of advice that the Master gave women, it is obvious that Sri Ramakrishna had a very clear understanding of women's lives. For example, he said, 'Women must be active. They should not sit idle, otherwise useless and injurious thoughts will fill their minds.'⁷ To counteract idleness, he instructed women to serve others. This was realistic advice, because women were confined to the home. The joint families were often very large and there were plenty of relatives to serve. In such complex families the relationships among the various family members could be troublesome. A woman needed a mature attitude

6. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Pavitrananda, pub., (Mayavati, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1948), p. 525.

7. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), p. 57.

of detached service as protection against the emotional tensions. By the practice of detached service, she would use her mind in a way that would leave no room for 'useless and injurious thoughts.' For that matter, a woman, by following the Master's advice, would develop two necessary spiritual qualities, strength and detachment.

In this culture where there were many limitations placed on women, the Master suggested another useful occupation, cooking. He said, 'Sita was a good cook, and so were Draupadi and Parvati. Mother Lakshmi [the goddess of fortune] would herself cook and feed others.'⁸ Although the women Sri Ramakrishna addressed were neither wandering in forests nor dwelling on Mount Kailas, these heroines and goddesses made inspiring role models for women. Furthermore, to point out to women that this common housekeeping task of cooking, was also the work of goddess-women illustrates how striking the Master's teaching was. Any woman who heard that an ordinary household activity like cooking had such transcendent status must have felt heartened.

However, Sri Ramakrishna did not want women to become absorbed in cooking to such an extent that their minds were distracted from God. One day at the bathing ghat of Haldarpukur in the Master's village, the Master observed some women from the aristocratic Halidar family talking. He said to Hriday, his nephew and attendant, 'Look, those women are talking only about how they prepared different fish curries.' Always the teacher, the Master asked, 'Shall I go and tell them not to talk such nonsense?' Hriday discouraged him from interfering in the talk of these aristocratic women. But as soon as Hriday left, the Master rushed to the pond and said, 'Do you want to pass your precious life talking only about fish

preparations or about God?'⁹ Unfortunately, we don't know what they answered, but they no doubt knew they had been reprimanded for their idle chatter.

In the Master's view, cooking was a constructive activity for women, but talking idly about it was worthy of a scolding. We get still another glimpse of the Master's attitude toward women and cooking when he makes it the center of fun. He was very particular about whose cooking he ate. The food had to be prepared and served by a pure person. One of his favorite cooks was Gopal Ma. One day Gopal Ma visited the Master. She said, 'I am shedding tears of joy.' (She viewed the Master as the child Krishna, Gopala.) Then she bowed before the Master who said, 'What is this? You address me as "Gopala" and still you salute me! Now go into the inner apartments and cook some curry for me. Put some spicy seasoning in it so that I may get the smell from here.'¹⁰ Everyone laughed at his remark. Here we see the kind of intimacy that Sri Ramakrishna frequently had with women. He questioned the formality of the traditional salutation by Gopal Ma, sent her to cook, and then playfully anticipated the enticing aroma which would drift out from the kitchen.

For a married woman keeping house for family was all important. Therefore, the Master gave practical instruction which would make both routine chores and family relationships smooth. But by far the Master's most fundamental instruction to women was *puruṣakanchana*,¹¹ literally 'man and gold', a parallel teaching to *kāminī-kāanchana*,¹² 'woman and gold'. For woman

9. Ibid., p. 310.

10. M, *Gospel*, p. 804.

11. 'Reminiscences of Swami Ramakrishnananda,' *Vedanta and the West*, 190 (March-April 1968), p. 52.

12. M, *Gospel*, p. 82.

8. Swami Chetanananda, 'Lakshmi Devi,' *Prabuddha Bharata*, 91 (July 1986), p. 311.

'man and gold' was a warning to woman not to be caught in either the snare of physical enjoyment or of greed for material things. Of course, the teaching about greed is quite easy to understand. If a woman is greedy then her whole mind will go with force toward getting hold of material wealth, thus destroying the peace of mind so necessary for God-realization. Now, if a woman is married, as most of the women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were, unrestrained greed will also have a terrible effect on her husband who will be forced to work hard and, consequently, not have the 'leisure to think of God.'¹³ He called the woman who was a good wife a *vidyāśakti*, which literally means 'power of spiritual knowledge'. That is, a woman who was a *vidyāśakti* was endowed with spiritual attributes. The Master said:

Householders do not know who is a good wife and who is a bad wife, who is *vidyasakti* and who is an *avidyasakti* [a bad wife]. A *vidyasakti*, a good wife, has very little lust and anger. She sleeps little. She pushes her husband's head away from her. She is full of affection, kindness, devotion, modesty, and other noble qualities. Such a wife serves all, looking on all men as her children. Further she helps increase her husband's love of God.¹⁴

It seems as if Sri Ramakrishna put the whole burden of having a spiritually successful marriage on the wife. To have taught that woman must constantly practice being selfless, virtuous, and noble may seem unrealistic, but the stakes were the very highest—God-realization, no less. Always the teacher, Sri Ramakrishna naturally would teach his women devotees the highest ideals of married life. In this connection, the Master said:

A woman endowed with spiritual attributes leads a man to God, but a woman who

is the embodiment of delusion makes him forget God and drowns him in the ocean of worldliness.¹⁵

Clearly, the Master has put the burden of a family's spiritual life squarely on the shoulders of woman. It was, in the Master's judgement, the woman who determined how her husband would behave, what goals he would aspire to, what kind of a life he would lead. When he said, 'Householders do not know who is a good wife and who is a bad wife....', possibly he was referring to the fact that marriages were arranged when the children were young, so the boy had no knowledge of his future spouse. But more than likely, when considering Sri Ramakrishna's recognition of feminine power, he meant that whether she was a *vidyāśakti* or an *avidyāśakti*, her influence would determine the direction of the husband's life.

The Master taught many married women; he had the highest expectations for them—God-realization. He said that after the birth of one or two children, the husband and wife should live like brother and sister. It was the duty of the husband to make his wife the mother of one or two children, and if she were a chaste woman, to support her.¹⁶ Here we see the Master's consideration for women. Most women have a deep desire to be mothers, so married life was to combine the satisfaction of this desire with spiritual life. Behind the Master's rules for married life lay the simple fact that he wanted women to realize their divinity, their oneness with God. To accomplish this supreme goal, a woman must have a calm and pure mind. Nothing is so disturbing to the mind as sex. Thus, if a woman truly wants to pursue God-realization, renunciation of sex is necessary. Behind 'man and gold' is the highest spiritual principle,

13. Ibid., p. 702.

14. Ibid., pp. 701-2.

15. Ibid., p. 216.

16. Ibid., p. 701.

restraint of the senses. By practicing restraint in married life, women could progress to higher states of consciousness and ultimately to the truth of the Atman, the Self, or God-realization. And furthermore, by the actions of a *vidyāśakti* the door was opened for the husband to pursue a life leading to the same high goal.

More than one hundred years have passed since the Master's *mahāsamādhi*; the world has changed. But the intrinsic value of these teachings remains the same. Caught in the wild activity of modern societies, men and women have lost their inner stability and peace because they have lost the desire to control the lower self. The cornerstone of restraint is the control of lust and greed. If these two tendencies, lust and greed, are checked, the individual person can gain control over the lower self. Then there is the possibility of a happy, contented life, and an ordered society. A good society is based on women and men who struggle to bring carnal desire and greed under their control. The practice of restraining one's self opens the door to a wider practice of selflessness. In this context we can see how these fundamental teachings of 'man and gold' and 'woman and gold' are vital for the women and men of this age.

We can also see that by the practice of these two teachings, *puruṣkānchana*, man and gold, and *kāminīkānchana*, woman and gold, a mutuality is established in marriage, and the behaviors of wife and husband become complementary. When these two fundamental teachings are viewed together, we get a very clear picture of Sri Ramakrishna's attitude toward woman. This attitude, full of respect, reverence and affection, shows up throughout his individual instructions.

These teachings varied greatly, touching spiritual practices, personal problems, and even suicide. One day two women who were

already known to him visited him. These were two veiled sisters-in-law, the wives of two brothers. They were about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, and mothers. The Master said:

Worship Śiva. This worship is described in a book called the *Nityakarma*. Learn the rituals from it. In order to perform the worship of God you will be preoccupied for a long time with such religious duties as plucking flowers, making sandal-paste, polishing the utensils of worship, and arranging offerings. As you perform these duties your mind will naturally be directed to God. You will get rid of meanness, anger, jealousy, and so forth. When you two sisters talk to each other, always talk about spiritual matters.¹⁷

It seems apparent that these two women had servants to do much of the housework and to take care of the children otherwise how could they spend long hours in the practice of religion? The Master's instruction affirms his injunction that women should keep busy, never be idle.

However, it is not only to give them productive work that he recommended worship, but to bring them to God. He continued by saying, 'The thing is somehow to unite the mind with God. You must not forget Him, not even once.' We see how strict the Master's instructions were when he said that the two sisters-in-law should 'not forget Him, not even once.' He continued with, 'Your thought of Him should be like the flow of oil, without any interruption. If you worship with love even a brick or stone as God, then through His grace you can see Him.'¹⁸ Obviously, he expected the sisters to develop high states of meditation where the mind flows toward God as smoothly as oil pours. He further told them that worship done with love will bring God regardless of the object worshipped.

Next he explained to the sisters-in-law

17. Ibid., p. 431.

18. Ibid., p. 432.

that formal worship, such as Shiva worship, is necessary only as long as the mind is immature. When the mind becomes mature, formal worship is no longer necessary. The mind then is always united with God in meditation and contemplation. These two women apparently asked for initiation, but the Master said he had been placed in the state of a child by the Divine Mother. So he told them to worship Shiva and come to him now and then, and later on he would see what the will of God was. Next, the Master asked if they were chanting the name of Hari at home as he had previously taught them to do. The elder sister-in-law replied, 'Yes.' Finally, Sri Ramakrishna asked them not to fast before they came to visit him, because he could not bear to see them suffer. So we know that they were going to come to the Master again.¹⁹

These two unnamed women were, no doubt, representative of numerous women who came to Sri Ramakrishna, whose stories do not appear anywhere in the Ramakrishna literature. We should note how thoroughly and carefully the Master instructed them. And although they were women, he did not slight them either in instruction or in the hopes he held for their spiritual progress. Without exception, the Master instructed women with special care and felt genuine sympathy for those who suffered.

For example, Nikunja Devi, M's wife, had lost a seven-year-old son, probably in 1884. As a result she 'was almost mad with grief... Sometimes she laughed and sometimes she wept.'²⁰ One day when M was visiting the Master, the Master inquired about his wife. M replied, 'She becomes quiet whenever she is here; but sometimes at home she becomes very wild. The other day she was going to kill herself.'²¹ Sri

Ramakrishna looked worried and suggested that she not cook (the kitchen was very hot) because it would 'heat her brain all the more.' He advised M to see that she was always with people so that they could watch her.²²

The idea of suicide was not new to Nikunja Devi. We see from a question M asked in 1882, a few months after his first meeting with the Master, that Nikunja Devi had probably threatened suicide long before her son had died. M had said to the Master, 'What should one do if one's wife says: "You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide."' The Master had replied in a serious manner,

Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life. Let her commit suicide or anything else she likes. The wife that hampers her husband's spiritual life is an ungodly wife.²³

In spite of those hard words, a little later the Master whispered in M's ear:

Sincere love of God on the husband's part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example.²⁴

It is worth noting that this appears to be the *only* place in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* where the Master attributes to a husband the power to influence a wife toward living a spiritual life, which, on the one hand, is a tribute to M's character and on the other, an admission of the weakness of husbands in general. As we have previously seen, in the Master's view, it is the woman who has the power to determine the course of a marriage.

19. Ibid., p. 432.

20. Ibid., p. 721.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 126.

24. Ibid.

To continue the story of M and his wife, one day Nikunja Devi entered the Master's room and sat down to the side. The Master suddenly addressed her and said, 'By unnatural death [suicide] one becomes an evil spirit. Beware. Make it clear to your mind. Is this what you have come to after hearing and seeing so much?'²⁵ These words tell us that Nikunja Devi must have been a frequent visitor of the Master's. And we see that the unbalanced state of Nikunja Devi's mind troubled the Master. As M and his wife were leaving the Master's room, Nikunja Devi 'spoke in whisper' to the Master, who then asked her if she wanted to stay at Dakshineswar. She answered, 'Yes, I want to spend a few days with the Holy Mother at the *nahabat*. May I?'²⁶ The Master said she could, and also said that he was frightened when she talked of dying. The Master took Nikunja Devi's mental condition very seriously.

About a year later at Cossipore, the Master asked M to bring Nikunja Devi to the garden house where she could have her meal. Although the Master could no longer talk because of throat cancer, he indicated by signs that she should come to Cossipore, bring the baby, and stay a 'couple of days'. M suggested to the Master that it would help his wife if she developed 'intense love of God.' But Sri Ramakrishna, aware of the condition of her mind, answered by signs, 'Oh, grief pushes out devotion. And he was such a big boy.'²⁷

A week later M, his wife and their seven-year-old son came to the garden house. By this time their family was complete, consisting of two sons and two daughters. Nikunja Devi had the joy of waiting on the Master. Later Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's wife, brought the Master his meal and M's

wife accompanied her with a lamp. Then the Master, excellent psychologist that he was, asked Nikunja Devi many questions about her household. He also invited her to come again, bring her baby daughter, and spend a few days with Sri Sarada Devi. And finally, after M's wife had removed the plates, Sri Ramakrishna chatted with her for a few minutes.²⁸

To finish the story, Nikunja Devi did not commit suicide; she lived a long life and served her husband faithfully, predeceasing M, who died in June 1932, by a few years. Sri Ramakrishna expressed his sympathy for her by his care and the practical instructions he gave her. Because of his concern she was invited to enjoy holy company and a change of scenery. She could come and stay with Holy Mother, and talk to the Master when there was an opportunity. Then he could keep an eye on her and discuss her most important concern, her household. Always the ideal teacher, Sri Ramakrishna adapted his teaching to the needs of his students, but he never, even for a moment, lost sight of the ultimate goal, God-realization.

One day the very devout daughter of Manilal Mallick, a Brahma devotee, came to the Master for advice. It seems that during her meditation she was very distracted. To solve this problem, the Master asked her whom she loved most in all the world. Her nephew, the child of her brother, came the reply. So the Master instructed her to meditate on that child, thinking of him as the baby Krishna. She followed his teaching and soon had divine visions.²⁹ Visions have reality; the baby Krishna was real to her, just as her nephew was. What practical advice he gave this young woman!

Another example of the Master's practical

25. Ibid., p. 723.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., p. 959.

28. Ibid., p. 973.

29. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 529.

instruction was what he said about dying to Jadu Mallick's mother. The Master was a frequent visitor to Jadu's house, which was close to the Kali temple. Very likely Jadu's mother lived there. She appears several times in the *Gospel* and on at least one occasion invited the Master to visit her. One day the Master recounted what he had told Jadu's mother:

In the hour of death you will think only of worldly things—of family, children, executing the will, and so forth. The thought of God will not come to your mind. The way to remember God in the hour of death is to practice, now, the repetition of His name and the chanting of His glories. If one keeps up this practice, then in the hour of death, one will repeat the name of God. When the cat pounces upon the bird, the bird only squawks and does not say, 'Rama, Rama, Hare-Krishna.'³⁰

Advice about how to die is universally useful. But rarely does one find such wisdom joined so neatly to a colourful and instructive metaphor.

The Master not only talked about how to prepare for death, but also about the nature of death. One day the young Golap Ma came to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Golap Ma was a twenty-one-year old widow who had lost her son when he was young, and more recently, her daughter, who had married the wealthy, cultured Sourindra Nath Tagore. Because of Golap's intense grief, Yogin Ma, a disciple of the Master, had brought her to Sri Ramakrishna. She then began to visit him often, and one day he spoke the following instructive words without referring to her directly:

Birth and death are like magical phenomena—now are people born and now they are not. God alone is true, and all else is chimerical. Now try by all means to have love for Him and to realise Him—what will you gain by sorrowing?³¹

30. M, *Gospel*, p. 309.

31. *Disciples of Ramakrishna*, Swami Gambhirananda, pub., (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1955), p. 479.

Just imagine the effect on his listeners of this teaching of renunciation. What the Master wanted his devotees to do was to put birth and death out of their minds, give up joy and sorrow and struggle to realize God. It is just this kind of challenge which brings out the best in people, and Golap was no exception. Later while serving the master at Shyampukur and Cossipore, she became well-known for her forbearance.³²

We can also feel the power of the Master's words when he instructed the elderly Brahmin widow, Gopal Ma, about renunciation. Gopal Ma had been initiated probably by her family teacher with the mantra of Gopala, God as the child Krishna, long before she met Sri Ramakrishna. As a matter of fact, she had spent thirty years in her room at Kamarhati doing japa endlessly. One day she was at Balaram Bose's house when her guru, the Master, was there. Because she was very poor, Balaram's family had given her some clothes, cooking utensils and other useful things. When she was returning to Dakshineswar on the same boat with the Master, he made a very pointed comment, which she was sure to hear, to his younger woman disciple, Golap Ma, about the practice of renunciation:

One who is a person of renunciation realizes God. One, who after taking one's food in people's houses comes away empty handed, sits leaning against the body of the divine Lord, that is, can exert force, so to say, on the Lord, because of his renunciation and dependence on Him.³³

This teaching pierced the heart of Gopal Ma, who went right to Holy Mother. Gopal Ma told her that Gopala, as she called the Master, was angry with her for accepting the gifts. Holy Mother replied that she should keep all the things because she needed them, and that there was no one else to give them to her. Going partly against the wishes of

32. Ibid., p. 482.

33. Saradananda, *Great Master*, p. 652.

Holy Mother, Gopal Ma gave some of the things away, but kept a few necessities for herself. Still deeply concerned about the Master's opinion of her, she cooked some curries for him and took him his dinner. He knew her heart, so he said nothing more.³⁴ The divine child Gopala dwelt in the heart of Gopal Ma, and knowing this, the Master was confident of her purity. But nevertheless the Master was very strict about renunciation. Even though Gopal Ma was a poor woman with real need, he had instructed her through the younger Golap Ma to live ideal renunciation and give up material things. In this case the Master expressed ideal renunciation while Holy Mother took a more practical approach.

There were times, however, when the Master was very practical and his instructions were absolutely down to earth. For example, Gopal Ma was afflicted with the 'humour of wind', that is, gas. Sri Ramakrishna told her that her meditation was the cause. His cure was quite simple and practical. She was to eat when she felt flatulent.³⁵

Sri Ramakrishna also instructed Gopal Ma to eat for him on certain occasions. The tale of the thickened milk tells us about one of the times when Gopal Ma ate in place of the Master. One day some thickened milk especially prepared by devotees was brought to the Master. But he had asked for milk from the market which was thinner and easier to digest. He could not eat the thickened milk, so he gave it to Holy Mother and instructed her to give it to Gopal Ma. He said, 'It is a thing given by the devotees; Gopala is there in her heart; her taking it will be the same as my doing so.'³⁶ We see from this incident that the Master saw no difference between himself and the God-woman, Gopal Ma.

Because Gopal Ma was a very highly advanced soul, she received correspondingly advanced teachings from the Master. One day he was at Holy Mother's *nahabat* where Gopal Ma was doing japa. The Master said that Gopal Ma had already attained so much—visions, devotion, *bhavas*, the living presence of the child, Gopala—as he said 'everything', so that japa for her own sake was no longer necessary. He then said that she could do japa for 'this body', his body, so that it might keep well. She replied, 'It's yours, yours.' Then she threw her beads and rosary bag into the Ganga, but continued to do japa on her fingers for Gopala, Sri Ramakrishna.³⁷ During the last ten or twelve years of her life she considered herself a nun and wore the ochre cloth of a *sannyāsinī*.³⁸

Gopal Ma had many spiritual experiences and visions. From the time of her first meeting with the Master, she had told him everything about her inner life. One day she began to tell something to Sri Ramakrishna and he stopped her, telling her not to reveal these things even to him.³⁹ No reason is recorded for this advice, but it is widely held by spiritual people in India that talking about their own spiritual experiences weakens their effect. Divine experiences are to remain a secret between God and the devotee.

Although the women close to the Master enjoyed divine realizations, he also wanted them to love devotional singing, which would add depth to their spiritual life. After all, if instructions were to become living principles for action, there had to be a steady undercurrent of emotion to give life to the principles. The Master was aware that women were not so free in their movements, not being able to visit his room as

34. Ibid., p. 653.

35. Ibid., p. 639.

36. Ibid., p. 660.

37. Ibid., p. 643.

38. Ibid., p. 663.

39. Ibid., p. 656.

casually as men did, so he made special provisions for them. For example, when there was devotional singing, he would tell Ramlal to open the door of his room to allow the women in the *nahabat* to hear the singing. He said, 'A current of devotion and bliss will flow here. If the women do not see or hear, how will they learn?'⁴⁰

Another woman the Master taught was Lakshmi, his own niece, who had come to live at Dakshineswar in 1878. Her husband had disappeared three years previously, so she became part of Sri Sarada Devi's family. Sri Ramakrishna told Sri Sarada Devi to look after her, keep her with her, and that she, Lakshmi, would not be a burden. The Master instructed Lakshmi to do her duties, practice religion, and not to travel alone to holy places for fear of being harmed. He told her that life in the world was not safe. A thorough teacher, he was concerned about all aspects of her life, instructing her to rise early and also to eat meat. Further, he told her that many people would come to her to hear about God. He knew that she would someday become a spiritual teacher, so in preparation for her teaching, he told her many stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which are filled with instructive tales. The Master made sure that she understood the stories by having her repeat them to him. Her renditions must have been letter-perfect because he called her a '*suka*', a parrot.⁴¹ Later, some time after 1905, Lakshmi began to initiate people and a group of disciples formed who looked after her.⁴² Although she believed that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation, she followed his liberal outlook and initiated some of her disciples with mantras of other deities. Altogether she had slightly more than one hundred disciples.⁴³

Of course, all instruction from Sri Ramakrishna was spiritual; however, some teachings dealt with the conditions of life and others with strictly spiritual matters. To Lakshmi and Nikunja Devi, the wife of M, he gave a rather unusual spiritual instruction. He asked them to go out and beg for food from the poor. He cautioned them that people would criticise them, but nevertheless the value of their deed would outweigh the criticism. The homes of the poor, he said, will 'get a touch of your blessed feet, and this will bring good to them.'⁴⁴ It certainly seems that the Master thought highly of these two women, otherwise why would the touch of their 'blessed feet' bring good to the poor? Incidentally, Lakshmi was so beautiful that one woman wanted to take her in as her daughter-in-law.⁴⁵

One day the Master asked Lakshmi which deity she loved the most. She replied, 'Radha-Krishna.' Then Sri Ramakrishna wrote a mantra on her tongue and also said the mantra aloud to her. Holy Mother told the Master that Lakshmi had already received a mantra from a monk, Swami Purnananda, who had initiated her. On hearing this, the Master replied that he had now given her the correct mantra.⁴⁶ At another time, disclosing his own divinity, the Master said to Lakshmi, 'If you cannot remember God, think of me. That will do.'⁴⁷ He had said at still another time with regard to God and the guru, 'He is the Guru and He alone is the *Ishta*. He alone gives us knowledge and devotion.'⁴⁸

Yogin Ma was also initiated by Sri Ramakrishna. Actually, he confirmed and strengthened the mantra which she had received from the family guru of her in-laws. Yogin Ma had shown her strong

40. Chetanananda, 'Lakshmi Devi,' p. 312.

41. Ibid., pp. 312-3.

42. Ibid., p. 314.

43. *Disciples of Ramakrishna*, p. 498.

44. Chetanananda, 'Lakshmi Devi,' p. 313.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., p. 315.

48. M, *Gospel*, p. 843.

and independent nature when she refused to live with her profligate husband. She left him and returned to her father's house to live. Balaram Bose, who was a distant relative of hers, brought her to Dakshin-eswar where she met the Master and was 'reinitiated' by him.⁴⁹

One day when Sri Ramakrishna was in an ecstatic mood he said to Yogin Ma, 'Look, your *Ishta* [Chosen Deity] is within this. Think of this form; it will lead to the thought of your *Ishta*.⁵⁰ Here again, as with Lakshmi, the Master indicated his own divinity as well as the relationship of the guru to the *Ishta*. Further, he told her that faith was the root of everything; if she had faith, she would surely reach her goal in her lifetime.⁵¹ The Master also taught Yogin Ma the two very basic practices of spiritual life—how to count her beads and how to meditate.⁵² In addition to a wealth of instructions received directly from the Master, Yogin Ma was given yet further instructions by means of two visions.

In the first vision Sri Ramakrishna's instruction made Yogin Ma think of the Master and Sri Sarada Devi as 'one undifferentiated being'.⁵³ This experience indicates just how intimately Sri Sarada Devi and the Master were related. As for the effect of the vision, Yogin Ma served both the Master and Sri Sarada Devi until the end of Sri Sarada Devi's life. Yogin Ma must have been very advanced spiritually to have had

this experience. But Yogin Ma had an even more unusual vision after the Master's death.

Sri Sarada Devi and Yogin Ma were in Vrindaban mourning Sri Ramakrishna, when he appeared in a vision which both of them saw, and said, 'Here I am. Where have I gone. It is just like passing from one room to another'⁵⁴ Already the dedicated servant of Holy Mother, Yogin Ma must have felt renewed dedication to both the Master and Holy Mother after that experience. One evening while meditating at Lala Babu's temple in Vrindaban, Yogin Ma attained *samadhi*. About this experience she said:

Then my mind had plunged so deep into meditation that I had totally forgotten the existence of the world.... I could see the presence of my *Ishta* (chosen Deity) everywhere. This lasted for three days.⁵⁵

Exactly who her *Ishta* was cannot be precisely determined. Perhaps the Master had become her *Ishta*, but on the other hand, her *Ishta* may have been one of the traditional Gods or Goddesses of India.

The instructions that Sri Ramakrishna gave to women covered all manner of subjects: how to live, how to die; whom to worship, how to worship; what to do in the house, how to treat one's husband; who was a *vidyāśakti* and what was a *vidyāśakti*; how to live to reach the ultimate aim of life, God-realization. Each of the Master's instructions was in itself a blessing. However, he not only blessed by teaching, but also by giving direct spiritual experience.

(To be continued in Part VI.)

49. Swami Prabhananda, *First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1987), pp. 278-83.

50. Ibid., p. 283.

51. Swami Asehananda, 'A Holy Woman of Modern India,' *Vedanta and the West* 110 (Nov.-Dec., 1954), p. 56.

52. Prabhananda, *First Meetings*, p. 283.

53. Ibid., p. 284.

54. Ibid., p. 286.

55. Swami Ghanananda and John Stewart-Wallace, eds., *Women Saints of East and West*, (London: Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 1955), p. 131.

TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE OF INDIA

[*Illustrated*]

G. VENKATRAMANA REDDY

India is a country wherein several cultures have been harmoniously blended during the course of over eight thousand years of its history. It will be a difficult exercise to trace their beginnings and as to how, and when, they got blended with its indigenous culture. From time to time in the past, though India came under the rule of emperors like Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Chandragupta Vikramaditya, and Harsha Vardhana, during most periods of Indian history, there were several kingdoms ruled by the kings and their vassals. But one fact is clear, that the basic unity in the practice of religion, and respect and love of various forms of arts and literature of the people, induced the rulers of kingdoms to welcome and honour the reputed scholars, artists, musicians, dancers and *sthapatis* (master builders), irrespective of the fact that they were from the kingdoms which might have been ruled by their political rivals. Here again it would be befitting to recall one of the poems of Avviayar, the great Tamil poetess, which reads as follows:

Compare the king and the man of learning ;
The scholars dominion is greater than the kings.
The King's glory is limited to his domains ; but
The scholar is esteemed wherever he may go.
(Translated by Sri C. Rajagopalachari).

In 7th century A.D. the powerful Chālukya King Pulakeśin-II was ruling the whole of Deccan, and his contemporary, Mahendravarma, the great Pallava, was ruling the whole of South India. These powerful rulers were constantly at war, though both of them were great lovers of art and literature. Once Bhāravi, the reputed poet of the royal court of Pulakeśin, visited the royal court of

Mahendravarma, who welcomed him and honoured him appropriately. After enjoying the hospitality of the Pallava ruler, when he returned to Vātāpi, Pulakeśin enquired about his impressions of Kāñcī City which was the capital of the Pallavas. Being aware of the fact that his patron and the Pallava king were at war, he never hid his admiration for the beauty of Kāñcī City, which was admired even by the famous Chinese pilgrims. He answered his patron king through the following poem in chaste Sanskrit:

“Puṣpēṣu Jāti, Puruṣēṣu Viṣṇu,
Nārīṣu Rambhā, Nagarēṣu Kāñcī”

It means that among the flowers, the Pārijāta is the best ; Viṣṇu is the symbol of the best of male form ; the best of female forms can be found in Rambhā, the celestial dancer ; and the city Kāñcī should be ranked as the best among the then known Indian cities. Wars between the Hindu rulers were mostly confined to their armies and rarely affected the people, the wandering holy men, travelling traders, men of art and pilgrims. Thus it could be seen that in ancient India there had been happy and harmonious interaction among the men of art of several regions and this had enabled the aesthetic fusion of architectural forms which originated and blossomed in one region with those that flourished in other regions. It is not uncommon to find several of the architectural forms and idioms of Central and Northern India, in the temples and palaces built in the South.

Out of the various intermixtures of art and architecture, of religion and devotion to deities, have emerged a few distinct types

of architectural patterns in India. A brief history of each form of architecture is given below.

NĀGARA: Many of the Śilpa Śāstras including *Mānasāra*, *Mayamata Kāśyapa Śilpa* and *Ajitāgama*, defined "Nāgara" as the Prāsāda (Temple), having all limbs, which is square from the *karṇa* (sub-plinth) upto the *stūpī* (circular *āmalasāraka*). This Hindu temple form was derived from the free-standing Buddhist temples which existed in Central and Northern India. This form of temples of the early period with striking similarity to each other is to be found in the region extending from the banks of River Kṛṣṇā, right upto Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Western parts of Orissa. The temples of Alampur near the confluence of Kṛṣṇā and Tuṅgabhadrā and the main Mahānandi Śiva temple at Kurnool, have early Nāgara form. They were built in the 7th Century A.D. when the Chālukya Dynasty ruled over Deccan. During this period, similar temples had been built at Aihole, Mahākūṭa and Paṭṭadakal which were close to Bādāmi (Vātāpi) which was the capital of the early Chālukya rulers. During the next three centuries this form of architecture was perfected and its fully developed form is found in the 11th century Khajurāho temples in Madhya Pradesh and many of the Jain temples at Mount Abu, Palitana, Girnar, etc., which came into existence after the 12th century. This fully developed Nāgara form has been defined in *Aparājita-prcchā*, a Śilpa manual of the Maru-Gurjara architecture of 12th century A.D., and the *Kāmikāgama*, a South Indian Śaivite āgama of the same period. The former work defines *Nāgara* form: "The *Nāgara-jati* is that, which, in its elevation possesses the *aṇḍakas* (spirelets) of varied specifications classable into *śṛṅgas* (dediculae) of the *latina* which may be called *śikhara*, *urah śṛṅgas* or *aṅgas* (lean half *Śikharas*), and

pratyāṅgas (quarter *Śṛṅgas*) flanking the *tamaṅgas* (intermediary cavities) of the highest *urah śṛṅgas*. It possesses *rāthikas* (framed niches) over the *bhadra*, (central offset), the *rekhā* (curvature) above the *garbhagrha*, the *sukanasa* (antefix to the fronton) and finally the *āmalasāraka* (myrobalan) with a crowning *kalasa* (pot final).

Kāmikāgama defines the entire structure from the base to the final. The temples built according to this fully developed form can be found right from the southern slopes of the Himalayas upto the Narmadā river valley. Thus this type of architectural form truly retained its identity as the one belonging to Northern India. The types which developed in modification of the basic Nāgara form, will be separately dealt with.

DRĀVIDA: This very word expresses that this type of architectural form belongs to Drāviḍa Desa (southern India) where Drāviḍian languages i.e. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam are spoken. There is no trace of Drāviḍa type temples which could be dated to a period prior to sixth century A.D. This type of architectural form began appearing only during the rule of Pallava ruler, Mahendravarman, who ruled over vast areas of South India lying between the banks of River Kṛṣṇā and River Kāveri. Initially he was a Jain and later embraced Śaivism. The rock cut temples at Mahabalipuram and several places extending from Tiruchirapalli on the bank of River Kāveri and right upto Undavalli on the southern bank of River Kṛṣṇā came into existence during his period. His son Narasimhavarman took revenge on Vātāpi, Chālukya King Pulakeśin-II, who earlier defeated Harshavardhana, the renowned ruler of Northern India in the 7th century A.D. Several of the ornate rock cut temples and monolithic stone temple models of Mahabalipuram were built under his patronage. Several of the free-standing

temples, notably Shore temple at Mahabalipuram, and Kailāsanātha and Vaikunṭhānātha temples at Kāñcīpuram in the Drāviḍa architectural form, were built during the rule of his son and grandsons (8th and 9th centuries A.D.). Frequent wars and marriage alliances between Pallavas and Kalyāni Chālukyas and their successors the Raṣṭrakūṭas, resulted in the spread of the Drāviḍa architectural forms to the Deccan where temples in the early Nāgara architectural forms were already built under the patronage of the early Chālukyas who were ruling from Vātāpi. At Paṭṭaḍakal near Bādāmi and Alampur in Andhra Pradesh, the Nāgara type and Drāviḍa type temples can be seen side by side. Virūpākshaswami temple at Paṭṭaḍakal which resembles the earlier Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñcīpuram is said to have been built by the very same southern craftsmen who had gone to Paṭṭaḍakal at the invitation of the Chālukya ruler of the Deccan. Thus this type of architectural form, which appeared during the rule of early Pallavas (early 6th century A.D.), with comparative simplicity, steadily had grown during the period of the next twelve centuries with tolerable variations in the architectural forms, and also with enrichment of various components of the buildings, by the Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras, Vijayanagara rulers and their successors (the Nāyakas of South India). The Gopuras (temple entrance towers) which constitute strikingly dominant features of many of the temples of South India, did not appear till 12th century A.D.

Many śilpa śāstras and Āgamas defined Drāviḍa type of temples as the ones having octagonal or hexagonal forms from the base to the top. According to a few of them, the part of the shrine below the *galā* (neck) may be square and the *śikhara* (tower) should be either hexagonal or octagonal in shape. Contrary to these definitions, most of the existing examples including the ones

belonging to the earliest periods, have only square bases and the *śikhara* roughly in the shape of the square pyramid. There are also temples with their shrines having rectangular or apsidal shapes with upper *śikhara* parts treated with the forms which are similar to Ganeśa and Sahadeva Rathas of Mahābalipuram. *Viśvakarmīya Śilpa Śāstram* was one of the important texts followed in building Drāviḍa temples. According to this śilpa text, the shape of the shrine for the installation of *liṅgas* (Śiva) and for any god, shall be square. The shrines for the goddesses may be either square or rectangular in shape from the base to *śikhara*. The shrine for the gods in reclining posture (Śri Raṅganātha) shall always have rectangular shape. This Śilpa text also permitted circular, hexagonal, octagonal and oval shapes for the shrines of the temples.

The part of the temple below the *śikhara* consisted of *upapīṭha* (subplinth), *adhishthāna* (plinth), *pada varga* (upper part of the main wall), and *prastaram* (cornice). The *śikhara* consist of *vedikā*, *karṇakudu*, *talā*, *ganam*, *vimānam* and *kalasa*. The *śikhara* may have one *talā* (storey) or multiple ones. Usually the *śikharas* over the garbha gṛha may have three or five stories. But the Rājarājeśvara (Bṛhadeśwara) temple at Tanjore was built with its thirteen storeyed *śikhara* reaching an impressive height of 210.0 feet. Its *stūpīka* (*vimānam*) which is made out of a single piece of stone, is 24'-0" in diameter and weighs eighty tons. The scholars are yet to come to a conclusion as to how the builders of this great temple could lift such a heavy piece of stone to a height equivalent to a 20 storeyed modern sky-scraper, and place it in position. It is not possible to find adequate words to express our admiration of the great engineering skills of the builders of this great temple. Every shrine of the temple complex enshrined the presiding deity, which was

according to known legends or historical events, classified as *Svayambhū*, *Devapratiṣṭhā* and *Mānāvapratiṣṭhā*. According to the codes laid down in the *Āgamas*, the dimensions and the shape of the *garbhagrha* (inner sanctum) are determined by the height of the *mūla bera* (presiding deity) to be enshrined within it. This size of the *mūla bera* also governed the dimensions of the *antarāla*, *mahā-maṇḍapa*, *vāhana maṇḍapa* and the location of the *dhvajastambha*, *balipīṭha* and various appurtenant structures of the temple. Once the shrine with *Śikharas* (*Vimānam*) had been built for housing the deity which is believed to be *Svayambhū* (the self-manifested) or the one installed by the *devas* (gods), neither the position of the image of the deity can be disturbed nor the size and shape of the shrine structure can be changed or enlarged. Therefore the patrons who desired to contribute towards the enlargement of such a temple, had to expand them horizontally with the construction of temples of subsidiary gods, goddesses and saints connected with the history of these temples. Thus several big temple complexes in South India were built with a series of *prākāras* (enclosures) and with a series of high *gopurams* (gateways) which became dominant features in the surrounding landscapes. Many of them were the highest structures within the human settlements around the temples. When the ego of Rājarāja Chola enthused him to build a temple bigger and taller than the ones which then existed in India, he built the Rājarājeśvara (*Bṛhadeśvara*) temple in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu and installed a massive *liṅga* (symbol of *Śiva*) accompanied by elaborate ceremonies which are said to have excelled the coronation ceremonies of an emperor.

“Build the temple before building a town around it.” This was one of the old proverbs of the Tamils. Unlike the temples in Northern and Central India, these South Indian

temples which formed the heart of the human settlements, were not merely places of worship. By the 10th century they assumed additional functions as those of the civic centres of the citizens of the towns or cities built around them. These human settlements were planned and built strictly in accordance with the patterns stipulated in the *Āgamas* and *Śilpa-Vāstu Śāstras* and they grew in size with the corresponding expansion of these temple complexes. For centuries many of the massive temple complexes in Tamil Nadu housed the educational institutions for learning languages, arts, music and dance, administration centres, the courts of justice, the treasury of the local authority, dispensaries and many other institutions connected with the civic life of the people. The greatness of renowned poets, musicians, dancers and talented artisans was acknowledged by the assemblies, specially convened in the spacious *maṇḍapams* within the temple complexes. The very same *maṇḍapams* were also used as centres for electing the members of the local authorities and for according civic receptions for the visiting dignitaries.

By borrowing the basic architectural forms and building techniques from the Buddhist builders, the Pallavas introduced the basic *Drāviḍa* architectural form in the 6th century A.D. During the course of the next three centuries they developed a distinct *Drāviḍa* style marked by simplicity in the treatment of various components of the buildings. They were pleasantly proportionate with appropriately placed ornaments and sculptures which were influenced by the sculptured panels of *Amarāvati stūpa* and the Buddhists art in *Ajantā* and other places in the Deccan. For three centuries, beginning with the 10th century *Drāviḍa* architectural and art forms, further developed with richer ornamentation and varieties in the forms of various components of the temples. During the 14th to 18th centuries,

the Vijayanagara rulers and the Nāyakas who succeeded them, were the great temple builders of South India. The richness of the Hoysala temples of Karnataka enthused them to build several temple complexes on a massive scale all over Tamil Nadu and the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh with highly ornamented components within the frame of the basic Drāviḍa temple architecture. In South India, building of temples of Drāviḍa style extended during a period of twelve long centuries and ultimately the temple building activities came to a halt with the advent of British rule during the 19th century A.D.

VEŚARA:

Northern Śilpa texts do not mention about this form "Veśara". It is strictly Southern and most of the South Indian śilpa works defined this form of architecture. *Mānasāra* defines that the temple which is circular or elliptical from the base to the *grīvā* (entablature) and thereon up to *stūpī* also, or square below and round or apsidal above is called *Veśara*. Similar definitions are to be found in *Mārici-Saṁhitā* and *Mayamata*. *Kāṁik-āgama* has summarised that it means "a mule", an issue of heterogeneous parents. In plan it is Drāviḍa, in the shape of details it is *Nāgara*. *Veśara* denotes a mixed style. It first appeared in the beginning of the 11th century, mostly in Karnataka, with the cocentration of most of the works around Mysore. In the second half of 12th century A.D., this *Veśara* form extended to the realms of Kākatīyas which initially comprised the Eastern parts of the Deccan (between the Rivers of Godāvāri and Kṛṣṇā) and later in 13th century extended right upto Kāñcīpuram which was the capital of the last of the Chola Kings. This *Veśara* type of architectural form blossomed under the patronage of Hoysala Kings and their vassals who were Jains till they were conver-

ted to Vaiṣnavism by Rāmānujācārya towards the end of the 11th century A.D. The Southern and Eastern boundaries of the territory of Hoysala rulers bordered Chola Nadu where the Drāviḍa form of architecture attained maturity. During this time in Tamil Nadu under the patronage of Chola and Pāndyan kings and their vassals a great number of temples were being built without any influence of *Nāgara* form of Northern India. When such was the case, it is interesting to note that in the adjacent territory, the temples which were built by Hoysalas, though they had basic Drāviḍa form, contained several details which were influenced by the contemporary *Nāgara* idioms developed in Mālvā, Gurja and Chandelas of western Madhya Pradesh. During this period in Central and Western India, the Jains undertook massive temple projects like temple complexes at Mount Abu, Palitana and Girnar. Even to this day, the Mysore region of Karnataka contains several Jain religious centres of veneration which are being visited by Jains from all over India. It is quite possible that the Jains of this part of Karnataka in 11th and 12th centuries A.D. had strong cultural interactions with the Jains of central and Western India. The use of marble and fine-grained sandstones enabled the Jain builders of Western and Central India to enrich their temples with intricate ornaments in every architectural component of their temples. The Hoysala builders also having seen these Jaina temples with rich ornamentation, made all efforts to evolve their own techniques to richly ornament their temples by making use of the locally available fine-grained and soft-black granite stone which enabled them to carve out intricate details with smooth mirror-like polishing.

Unlike the builders of Tamil Nadu, the Hoysala builders were familiar with *Nāgara*, *Bhūmija* and *Kaliṅga* type of architectural forms which were in vogue in Northern

India. The models of temple towers belonging to all contemporary architectural forms i.e. *Nāgara*, *Drāviḍa*, *Veśara*, *Bhūmiḥa* and *Kaliṅga*, were incorporated as part of the ornamentation of the niches of several Hoysala temples. None of the temple groups built during this period in other parts of India possess such innumerable variety in the treatment of each part of the temple. It is admirable to notice several beautiful variations in the treatment of their temple *śikhara*s without deviating from the contours of the Drāviḍian architectural forms. The Hoysalas mastered their temple art and architecture within a period of two centuries and their builders enriched their temples with highly polished, intricate, and refined ornaments carved out of fine-grained black granite stones which were used in building their temples. There will be none who will not be astonished at the high skills of the Hoysala craftsmen. After visiting the famous *Veśara* temples of the Hoysalas at Belur, Halebidu, Somanāthapura (all near Mysore), and other places in Karnataka, Heinrich Zimmer, the famous German Indologist of 20th century, exclaimed, "Great are these builders. They conceived like giants and finished like goldsmiths". No better words can be found to sum up the rich heritage of art and architecture of the Hoysalas in the shape of hundreds of *Veśara* temples built under their patronage.

In the 13th century, this *Veśara* form of architecture was extended to the eastern parts of the Deccan which was under the rule of the Kākatīyas. The rich ornamentation and mentation and the types of the columns and sculptures which are found in the temples of the Kākatīyas, though similar to the Hoysala temples, are certainly inferior to those of the Hoysalas in quality and grandeur. From the base, right up to *grīvā* (entablature with cornice), the Kākatīya temples were built of the kind of stone used by the Hoysala builders. But the *śikhara*s

of most of the *Veśara* temples of the Kākatīyas were made of bricks. This may be due to the fact that the builders were subjected to frequent Muslim invasions from the North and therefore within short spells of time of peace, they had to complete their temples. Except a few temples like Rāmāppā temple at Palempet, Warangal District, many of them are in ruins or on the verge of collapse due to defective foundation techniques adopted by the builders. After the fall of the Kākatīyas, the construction of *Veśara* type of temples on a reduced scale continued for about a century under the rule of the Nāyakas who were the vassals of the Kākatīyas. Thereafter the entire region between the River Kṛṣṇā and Kanyākumāri came under the sway of Vijayanagara rulers and during their rule there was a "renaissance" of Drāviḍa form of architecture.

BHŪMIJA :

This form of architecture first appeared in the *Nāgara* temples of Dakṣiṇa Kośala (Raipur region and Northwestern Orissa and Central India) in the 11th century A.D. It was perfected in the Mālvā region (southeastern Madhya Pradesh). The temples which may be grouped under this category have the profiles of the *Nāgara Śikhara* but in details they are totally different from those which are considered as essential parts of *Nāgara Śikhara*. This form which is unknown in the *vāstu* works of Tamil Nadu, has been adequately defined in *Aparājitaṇṇā* and *Sumarāṅgaṇa Sūtra-dhāra*, which has its origin at Bojpur near Bhopal and which give sufficient clues regarding the place of its origin and development, i.e. Mālvā and southeastern Rajasthan. *Bhūmiḥa śikhara* consists of storeyed arrangements of miniature *śikhara*s (*Kūṭas* or *Śṛṅgas*) over miniature *stambhas* (pillars) arranged in rows over latina (curvilinear)

shaped *Nāgara* type *śikharas* and they create an illusion of vertically placed necklaces of gigantic beads. The crowning member is the *āmalasaraka* of a peculiar non-*Nāgara* kind and it resembles more the inverted petals of lotus (*padmachatra*), whose number equals the dominant projections found in the *Śikhara*. The plans of these temples are either star-shaped or circular and these projections in the plan were carried over right upto the *Śikhara* including its *stūpī*. Udayeśvara Temple at Udaipur (South Rajasthan), and Namaleśvara temple at Jamili in Western Madhya Pradesh are a few of the best examples to illustrate this *Bhūmija* form of architecture. It is interesting to note that Hoysala builders in Mysore region have also successfully blended the *Bhūmija* form in many of the temples built by them with *Veśara* form. Someśvara temple at Somanāthapuram and Muleśankareśvara temple at Tiruvekere near Mysore are a few of the good examples. Rāmaliṅgesvara temple at Nandikundi in Andhra Pradesh which was built by the Kākatīyas, reveals faithful adoption of *Bhūmija* grammar to the *Veśara* idiom. The study of various surviving examples all over India would reveal that the *Bhūmija* type of architecture is not a common form but it had been confined to certain specific regions of India. There was a modified form of *Bhūmija* which was named *Varata*. The definition and details about it are to be found in *Kāmikāgama* and *Samarāṅgana Sūtradhāra*. It is said that it was also a regional idiom, confined to the areas, roughly identifiable to Southern Maharashtra bordering Karnataka and Trilingadeśa (Telenganā). This *Varata* form of architecture basically differs from the *Bhūmija* form to the extent that the *karnas* and *śṛṅgas* (miniature shrines) are placed in the *śikharas* one above the other without *stambhas* (pillars). It appears that the temples built with *Varata* do not now exist and only the

models of this temple form are found in the Hoysala temples in the shape of ornamentation above the niches or in the shape of miniature shrines built on either of the sides of the stairway leading to the main Chennakeśava temple at Belur (near Mysore).

KALINGA:

This form of architecture is essentially confined to Kaliṅgadeśa which comprises the whole of Orissa state, the region around Raipur (Madhya Pradesh) forming the Mahānadi River basin, and northeastern districts of Andhra Pradesh i.e. Srikakulam and Vishakhapatnam. The śilpa texts like *Lakshmanasamuccaya*, *Aparājitapṛcchā*, and *Kāmikāgama* briefly refer to the Kaliṅga's style of architecture. The śilpa text by name *Śilpa Prakāśa* of 12th century exclusively deals with the practice of the Kaliṅga form of architecture. The author of this text, who gives his name as Rāmācandra Bhaṭṭaraka, was a Kaliṅga architect. He lived in a tantric village on the banks of the Musali River and was enjoying the patronage of one Raja Viravarma of Airāvata Mandala. According to the author, the *Saudhikāgama* was his source and authority. In accordance with the codes laid down in *Śilpa Prakāśa*, the temples with Kaliṅga form of architecture were continued to be built right up to the 18th century A.D. with striking similarities to the famous temples built at Bhuvaneśwar, Konārak, and Purī during 11th to 13th centuries A.D.

Right from the days of Ashoka the Great, Kaliṅga and the adjoining Dakṣiṇa Kośala regions came under the sway of Buddhism. Several Buddhist Caityas and Vihāras were built all over to serve the needs of the people. These Buddhist temples later served as models for evolving the basic architectural forms of the early *Nāgara* temples. During the early sixth century A.D. when

Hinduism became the dominant religion of the people of this region, several existing Buddhist temples were converted into Hindu temples. New temples built with early *Nāgara* architectural forms which are found in central India, the Deccan (Paṭṭaḍakal, Alampur) and southeastern Rajasthan. After 10th century A.D. a distinct architectural form peculiar to this Kalinga region had been gradually evolved and in several contemporary śilpa texts, it was categorised as the Kalinga type. Basically the Kalinga form of temples can be considered to be a variation to the *Nāgara* form of architecture. Most of the Kalinga temples are based on the square plans right from their base and most of their *śikharas* are also square with gentle curving towards their top. The *śikharas* are crowned by flattened and beautifully proportioned *āmalasāraka* which are peculiar to the Kalinga temples. The *maṇḍapams* in front of the temples are provided with pyramidal roofs which are emphasised by receding horizontal courses which are ultimately crowned by *padma-chatra* (lotus petal shaped umbrella) and *kalasa*. The architectural forms of these *maṇḍapas* greatly influenced the form of the smaller temples of the Kākatīyas which have similar pyramidal *śikharas* over the *Garbhagrhas* (shrines). In Karnataka also, a few temples were built by the Hoysalas with *śikharas* similar to pyramidal roofs over the *maṇḍapas* of the Kalinga temples. The elegance and richness of the Kalinga temples can be grouped with any of the best examples left behind in various parts of India. The Kalinga temples at Bhuvaneśwar, Purī, Konārak (famous Sun temple), Mukhalingam in Andhra Pradesh, are a few of the best of the legacies left behind by the great builders of Kalingadeśa. These builders had to make best use of the locally available stone, poor in quality like hard laterite stones or reddish coarse-grained sandstones for building their temples. If

they had had the type of fine-grained soft granite stone used in the temples of Karnataka, perhaps, the highly skilled *śilpīs* (craftsmen) of Kalinga, could have produced works comparable to the skills exhibited in the temples built by the Hoysalas.

Art is not archaeology, and yet, strange as it may seem, it was the archaeologists who have been, till very recently, the pioneers in interpreting Indian art to the West, and the theories they propounded and the conclusions they arrived at, still dominate the world of art. Archaeologists, both by their scholarship and aptitude, are necessarily antiquarians, and their interest mainly lies in the historical value of the objects discovered. They are mostly concerned with epigraphy, palaeography and iconography, in fixing dates, eras and periods, and in discovering a connecting historical continuity of a race or nation and its cultural reactions to its environments. The ideals of the art and the aesthetic philosophy of its people do not generally interest them very much. Magnificent and praiseworthy as have been their services along their own line, their criticisms and conclusion on the origins, growth and development of the fine arts, including architecture, have been confusing and often misleading. Therefore in this paper efforts have been made to highlight the evolution of Hindu temple architecture on the basis of the progressive growth of culture of the people of India with their periodical variations in their religious beliefs and practices. In the 8th century A.D. Ādi Śankarācārya could eliminate the prevailing decadent form or Buddhism without persecution or bloodshed and could bring the people of India back to the Vedic fold of post-Buddhist Hinduism through his Advaitic (monistic) philosophy based on the Vedas and the Upaniṣads.

By the time Rāmānujācārya appeared in the 11th century A.D. the *Āgamas* which

laid down the codes for worship of Viṣṇu, Śiva, śakti, Sūrya, Gaṇapati, and Skandha were already in use. The *Āgamas*, which laid down the methods of worship of a particular god, also gave the principles governing the building of the temples for enshrining that god. Several *Vāstu* or *Śilpa śāstras* which came into existence during the same period, are in the shape of manuals for guiding the master builders and their assistants to scientifically build not only the temples but also to plan the human settlements i.e. villages, towns, and cities and to build the forts, palaces, residential buildings and all other buildings which were required for the community. Some of the *Vāstu śāstras* explain the methods of preparing colours and painting of murals. The methods of manufacture of various kinds of furniture for human use, and war machines, are also found in some of the *Vāstu śāstras*. The details regarding the making of various images of gods and demi-gods in stone, metals, wood, etc. are found to be the essential components of each of the *Śilpa śāstras*.

KERALA TEMPLES:

Ten centuries ago, approximately the whole of the area under modern Kerala state was known as Chera Nadu which was glorified in Tamil literature along with the territories ruled by Cholas and Pandyas. The narrow and thickly wooded strip of land lying in between the mountains of the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea is subjected to heavy rainfall. In this region it is difficult to secure hard building stone like granite and from ancient times locally available laterite which is the soft stone is being widely used for construction of all kinds of buildings including temples.

The gables or multiple-roofed structures of Kerala, built of laterite stone, bricks, wood, and tiles present a completely diffe-

rent appearance from the architectural counterparts elsewhere in South India. Travancore, the southern-most district of Kerala, was the meeting place of both the Drāviḍa form of architecture and indigenous styles. Not only did the two traditions coexist here, but they continually influenced each other. While the influence of the Drāviḍa style is found confined largely to the extreme South, the Malabar district in the North has retained the indigenous character or its style to a much greater degree. The typical Kerala temple (Shrikoil) is square, rectangular or circular in plan, the structure being raised on a plain or moulded pedestal. The main building usually lies on east-west axis and is surrounded by a rectangular cloister. The roofs are by far the most dominant features of Kerala temples, and they conform to the shape of the plan of the structure i.e. circular or rectangular. It is a broadbased, steep and pointing superstructure resembling the thatched roof huts and houses commonly built in Kerala. The temple roofs are as a rule covered with thin tiles or copper plates. Great attention had been bestowed on the construction of these roofs as per the rules laid down by ancient treatises on architecture (*Vāstu Vidyā*). These roofs can be single or double and the sloping roofs dominate so much that the visible part of the walls below, is about a quarter of the total height of the structure. Architecturally this quality of the Kerala temple is not only unique, but altogether pleasing. If the plan is circular, the roof becomes an enormous cone, and the square temple has its steep pyramidal roof. There are also varieties with single or double ridged roofs, which run breadth-wise and project beyond the hipped end terminating in a characteristic triangular gable, and resembling an open attic. The roofs with wide projecting eaves not only add to the height and majesty of the structures, but provide ample opportunity for

the wood carvers to display their skills on and around the struts that support the roofs. The ceilings are often covered with beautiful images of gods and goddesses, not to speak of the walls and pillars. Though the superstructures are made of laterite stones, the plinth of the temples is usually of granite stone. In some cases the walls and columns are made entirely of wood with rich carvings depicting the scenes from the Epic of Ramayana, Bhagavatam or Puranas. Though earlier Kerala temples were built according to *Mayamata*, later shilpa texts i.e. *Tantrasamuccaya* and *Silparatna* (14th and 16th centuries respectively) laid down detail codes governing the temple constructions.

KASHMIR TEMPLES:

Kashmir is a valley at a height of six thousand feet above sea level, enclosed within snow-clad Himalayan ranges and approached by long and tortuous routes. The Kashmir valley imposed an isolation which tend to make its inhabitants self-supporting and self-contained. Therefore right from ancient times, Kashmir had maintained its own identity in its art and architecture. The distinctive architecture of Kashmir was more suited to its geographic and climatic conditions. In the 6th century A.D. the Buddhists in Gāndhāra region (northwestern province of Pakistan and eastern region of Afghanistan) had fled from the wrath of the Huns, and took refuge in the Kashmir valley. They built a number of stūpas and monasteries in the Gāndhāra style with which they were familiar. The climate being unkind to brick masonry, not one has survived in a recognizable form. From the eighth century A.D. onwards Kashmir Valley came under the rule of Hindu kings. The craftsmen of Kashmir were not familiar with the architectural developments in the plains of India and with their background of Buddhist artistic

traditions of the Gāndhāra style, they evolved a style of Hindu temple architecture of their own. The Śiva temple on the top of Śankarācārya hill which overlooks famous Dal Lake of Modern Srinagar is the earliest known Hindu temple built in the eighth century A.D. The architectural details of this temple abundantly prove that they have derived from the earlier Buddhist Caityas with modifications effected by Greco-Roman traditions of Gāndhāra craftsmen. The triangular pediment and trefoil arch over the doorways and pyramidal tower over the cells have derived from the Greek architecture well known to Gāndhāra builders. Due to enthusiastic zeal of the kings of the newly found Hindu kingdom, Kashmir could inherit the famous Sun temple at Martand, Avanti Swami temple at Avantipura near Srinagar. These temples were conceived much like the Great Stūpa courts built in the Gāndhāra country over 400 years ago. The contemporary builders of the temples in the plains were content with the stone masonry laid dry. But the walls of the temples of Kashmir were constructed of evenly dressed ashlar masonry carefully jointed together either with lime mortar or even steel dowels and these techniques could have been learnt from the masons of the Gāndhāra regions. Even these refined techniques of construction could not stand up to the rigorous climate of Kashmir, and only a few of the vast number of temples which were built during the period of five centuries, beginning with the Eighth century A.D., survive today. With the advent of Muslim rule in the 14th century A.D. almost all the temples became the pitiable victims of the Muslim conquerors, and today not a single ancient Hindu temple remains in its original form.

TEMPLES OF BENGAL:

Bengal comprises the whole of the fertile delta region of the perennial rivers Gangā

and Brahmaputra. Historical records throw light about the existence of more than one great civilization which flourished within this region. But the structural remains of these are extremely scanty and are not rich in architectural character. The nature of soil and climate of this region encourages the rapid growth of jungle vegetation. Once a building ceases to be cared for, the creeping shrubs and trees speedily take charge, soon to tear it to pieces, and it becomes an unrecognisable mound of ruins. The remains of some of the finest buildings amply testify to the destruction brought about by the hand of man. The great Hindu cultural movements of Bengal were superseded by Muslim movements in the 14th century A.D. and many mosques and tombs were built out of the demolished cities and temples of the Hindus. From the history of India, it could be seen that the people of Bengal right upto the advent of Muslim domination, never lagged behind in any of the cultural advancements which were taking place in other parts of India. Right up to 8th century A.D., the builders in Bengal came under the direct influence of the Buddhist builders in Magadha Region (Pāṭaliputra and Gayā) which formed the central part of fertile Gangetic plains. Temples built during this period were similar to the caityas of Buddhists built at Rajgir, Patna, Gaya, Nalanda, Vikramaśila, etc. All of them appear to have been fully destroyed by the creeping vegetation, and now only scattered remains of their foundations are found in many parts of Bengal. During the rule by the Pāla and Sena dynasties (from 10th to 14th centuries A.D.) the style of architecture of the temples was greatly influenced by the Kalinga form of architecture which was in vogue in the adjacent southern region. Many temples were built by Pāla and Sena rulers in stone. However, not a single one exists in full recognizable state and it appears that they have become the victims

of the Muslim conquerers, who with the threat of sword converted large sections of the population of Bengal to Islamic faith. Nearly a century had lapsed before the remaining Hindus could recover from the shocks of the Muslim conquests. The Muslim rulers for their immediate needs, built their places of worship out of the spoils of the temples and the palaces of the Hindus which had been razed to the ground. There is ample evidence in the rich repositories of sculptured remains in early mosques so constructed at Gaur and Pānduā, which were the new capitals of the Muslim rulers, to illustrate the manner in which the temples of Bengal were architecturally decorated. With the advent of Muslim rule, perhaps all the skilled craftsmen who were under the patronage of Sena rulers, took refuge under the various Hindu Kingdoms in the South, North and East. But the rural craftsmen of Bengal, right from early Buddhist period, had highly developed their skills in brick masonry and terracota art. Their old traditions of wood and bamboo architecture offered new forms based on the simple residential style of the rural folk and their *Caṇḍī Maṇḍapas*. To cope with the growing needs of the people who were converted to Islamic faith, the rulers recruited required craftsmen from the villages of Bengal for constructing new mosques, with curvilinear roofs evidently derived from the shape of bamboo roofs of the typical rural houses of Bengal. The Hindus who had to coexist with their Muslim brethren made use of the same craftsmen who were building mosques. Thus there was no difference in the basic architectural forms of the temples and mosques. Islamic faith prohibited ornamentation with animate objects. Therefore floral and geometrical patterns alone were used for ornamentation of all their buildings. Whereas the temples of Hindus were profusely decorated, not only with the types of ornaments found in the buildings

of the Muslims, but also with rich terracota panels and sculptures depicting the various gods and goddesses belonging to Hindu pantheon and the scenes from Hindu legends. It can be said that the skills in the terracota art of India had reached a climax in the Hindu temples built during the 15th to 18th centuries A.D. in a style which is purely indigenous to Bengal. A very characteristic form generally used for temples of Śiva has a sloped-over, truncated at the top, which is mounted by another miniature tower, evidently borrowed from "leaf huts" very common in Bengal. Another typical form is illustrated in the temple at Kantanagar, designed in the form of wooden *rathas*, arranged in tiers of bent cornice, mounted at corners with miniature curvilinear towers. This type is repeated in the Dakshineswar temple at Calcutta which is closely connected with the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the guru of Swami Vivekananda, who was the priest of this temple and ultimately emerged as a Paramahansa. Very interesting variations of the type of "leaf hut" temples of Bengal are furnished by the *Cār-Bāṅgla* temple at Baranagar, near Murshidabad, and the temple of Rānī Bhavāni (dated 1675 A.D.) is an elaborate development of the type of earlier and simple Śiva temples. Several of the details of these temples have affinities with Kalinga parallels. The characteristic trifoiled arch supported by characteristic pillars frequently occurs as architectural backgrounds in stone sculptures of the early Hindu period (9th to 13th centuries).

TEMPLES OF NEPAL:

Nepal is the only independent Hindu Kingdom of the world. In the sphere of architecture Nepal illustrates the impact of two most forceful civilizations in the East, that of India and that of China meeting within the region of Nepal's mountainous borders. Although this country extends in the shape of an irregular parallelogram along

the ranges of Himalayas, occupying a region some 450 miles in length and averaging 150 miles in breadth, major part of the population of the country is concentrated in rather a small area popularly known as Kathmandu Valley. The remainder of the state is composed of rugged mountainous terrain sparsely populated and containing few features to note. Buddhism was first brought to Nepal in the 3rd century B.C. by Ashoka the Great, who built several stūpas and monasteries. It appears that Buddhism was the dominant religion of the people right upto 9th century A.D. Though the Buddhist *stūpas* of Nepal had the orthodox semi-global form, their finals have unusable designs with imaginative treatment which has no resemblance to others. The temple styles of Nepal fall under two broad categories. They are the Pagoda type influenced by the Buddhist pagodas of China, and the temples with *śikhara*s, influenced by the *Nāgara* type of temples of North India.

In *śikhara* form of Nepalese temples, the *śikhara* surrounds a single cell to which no *maṇḍapa* is attached. But the shrine is surrounded by a columned verandah and is elevated on a series of diminishing platforms. All the main elements of *Nāgara śikhara* are found in the temples of Nepal. A typical example of this class of building is the Krishna temple in the Darbar Square at Patan. This temple rises up in three arcaded stories and is notable for the minutely carved stone frieze of considerable length depicting the episodes of the enshrined divinity. The pillar of the arcaded verandah have octagonal shafts and are provided with rudimentary bases and capital of distinctive design with wide brackets, resembling the ones in the structures made of wood.

Certain prominent features on the pagoda type of temple include elaborately carved wooden struts which support the overhanging roof, the great metal griffins which guard the entrance, and the massive tympana-

nums which project over the doorways and sometimes over windows also, contain highly artistic wooden carvings. This type of treatment of the tympanums over doors and windows was either intricately carved in wood or embossed in gilt metal. It is difficult to describe the exquisite beauty of these delicate and artistic wooden carvings and metal embossings which are lavishly distributed all over their temples. It was the custom of the ancient builders of Nepal to project the wooden lintels of their doorways and other openings beyond the uprights forming the jambs. To act as a support to this projection, they introduced a carved bracket which they decorated with a figure. It was usually the practice to design these pagodas in three stories. The ground floor usually had a square cell surrounded by "crutch" pillars to support the superstructure. The first floor was composed of brick or wood, in which were interposed windows of a highly ornate and often intricate pattern. Over this, the upper-most storey consisting of a substantial wooden construction was projected on brackets and struts which were decoratively carved, often painted in variegated colours and the openings filled with wooden screens. The roof of red curved tiles overhang the whole by means of prominent cornices, shading the upper storey and keeping out rain. Such a composition in itself forms a highly picturesque façade. But when each feature is carved, embossed, overlaid, and wrought with the most ingenious and fanciful patterns including tinkling metal bells and hanging lamps, the beauty of such façades of the pagoda temples are highly enhanced. The builders of these temples of Nepal were remarkably adept in manipulation of their materials, both metal and wood. The tensile nature of the metals was highly exploited by twisting and turning them and they brought out skilful and intricate ornamentation. They also took full advantage of the texture, grain and colour

of the wood in obtaining wonderful and artistic effects. The craftsmen of Nepal were also fully aware of the fact of beauty in utility, so that every object of their daily lives was aesthetically treated. It is gratifying to note that the craftsmen and highly aesthetic traditions of the past, are kept alive even today without succumbing to the changes which affected the ways of life of the people in many other parts of the world.

The beginnings of 12th century A.D. were marked by several invasions of Northern India by Muslim hordes mainly with an objective of plundering the rich temples of the Hindus. Within a few decades, Muslim rule was well established at Delhi. Rich Hindu temples were mainly the targets of plunder and destruction by the generals of the Muslim rulers, who criss-crossed the country right from Kashmir in the North to Rameswaram in the South. Among the people who were predominantly Hindus, there were signs of losing faith in their religion. At that time Rāmānujācārya in a modification of *Advaita* philosophy of Ādi-Śankarācārya, introduced *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy (qualified monism) with emphasis on surrender to God as the only way to realise the Ultimate Reality. Hinduism in this modified and simplified form was being propagated among the people of India by his disciples from 12th century A.D. onwards. When Muslim rule was firmly established in Northern India, the Hindus were in the fear of facing forcible conversing to Islam. At this juncture Madhavācārya, another great Hindu religious reformer, introduced *Dvaita* philosophy (dualism), mainly based on Bhakti (devotion) for keeping the people together with firm faith in Hinduism or *Sanātana Dharma*. He was followed by several great saints of high spiritual attainments and they, along with their worthy monastic disciples, tried hard and succeeded in keeping the people together with firm faith in Hinduism in spite of the harassment

of the Hindus by the Muslim rulers. Avviayar is the most venerated saint and poetess of Tamil Nadu. The simplicity of expression in her poems is inimitable. Her poems are also among those prescribed by universal agreement, from time immemorial, for the youngest children as soon as they begin to learn to read. In one of her poems she said that it would do immense good to worship in temples. She also declared that none should venture to live in any human settlement without a temple. Thus it could be seen that saints of this kind were responsible for having kept alive the glorious tradition of building temples right upto this day. Rāmānujācārya was known to have induced and influenced several monarchs and rulers of his day, including the Hoysala kings of Karnataka, to build several temples. When the whole of the Deccan was under Muslim rule, the great saint Vidyāraṇya is said to have been the force behind the establishment of the Vijayanagara kingdom with the sole purpose of arresting the spread of Muslim rule in South India beyond the Southern banks of rivers Tungabhadra and Kṛṣṇā. It is needless to elaborate the noble contributions of the Vijayanagara kings and their vassal Nāyakas, who left behind worthy legacies in the shape of new temples, and the enlarged temple complexes within their kingdom, which extended right upto Kanyakumari.

Himalayas conjure up before one's mind visions of beauty, purity, majesty, and sublimity and bring to one's heart thrills of joy, wonder, adoration and mystery. The Himalayas are not merely the highest and mightiest mountain ranges in the world but are intimately associated with the religious and cultural life of the Indian people. They are not only the birth-place of life-giving rivers and sacred lakes, but are also considered to be the abode of gods and rishis and their *ashramas*. They have for ages influenced the thoughts and ideals of Hindu

mind and subtly moulded the arts of ancient India. They stand as the material manifestation of the highest spiritual aspiration of man, as a physical symbol of supreme strength, nobility and serenity. To the Hindu, a temple is a microcosm, a miniature cosmos, wherein all life finds expression and therefore all things: plant life, animal life, human life and even the life of the gods, find representation in their manifold aspects. The inner-most sanctuary, the holy of the holies in all temples is a small, dark cell with no embellishments of any kind. The worshipper's attention is ever drawn to and generally centres round, this *garbhagrha* and his mind is not allowed to wander about on the external that surrounds the shrine. These temples, in fact, symbolise the nature of the universe, with its outer attractions, which ever lead the senses astray, and its inner simplicity, which is the very nature of life and truth. From the view point of art, they reveal a commendable mastery of human anatomy and bodily form in different poses and movements achieved by those ancient sculptors. A glimpse at any of the ancient temples of India would reveal the unity in the treatment of each of their components with diverse architectural forms.

During the British rule in the 18th and 19th centuries A.D. most educated Indians, having fallen a prey to the glammers of European civilisation, had become ignorant of the rich and glorious heritage left behind by their ancestors. Next to Sister Nivedita, a British National, and considered to be the spiritual daughter of Swami Vivekananda, E.B. Havell, another noble British National, who worked as principal of Government School of Art and the keeper of the Art Gallery at Calcutta in the first decade of this century, through his inspiring books on Indian art and architecture, made Indians realise the greatness of the legacies inherited from their ancestors from pre-historic days.

in his book *Himalayas in Indian art* he said:

“An art which is closely related to life and work is infinitely more important and humanly interesting than one which is related only to museums and mummies. If India is not to be wholly submerged in the mire of modern commercialism, her art must continue, as it has done from the dawn of history, to spiritualize the Indian duly in his life and work. Man does not live by bread alone, it is the spiritual growth rather than increase of numbers which counts in the progress of humanity. Without the artistic spirit stimulating her daily life, India will lack the divine force which created her civilisation, and one of the greatest intellectual empires of the world. As yet, however, there is no need to despair of the future of art in India. It rests entirely with Indians themselves, whether they will let it live or die. So far, English educated Indians, with some bright exceptions, have been more blind to their country's real needs, more indifferent to the appeal of art, and less capable of understanding it, than several Europeans. But a fine unbroken tradition of four or five thousand years, which still holds upto India an example of sincerity and truth in art, must contain within itself some of those qualities of stability and enduring strength which belong to the Himalayas, that glorious abode of snow, India's perennial source of life and inspiration. And on such a stable foundation every good builder would wish to build the temple of art.”

Though these words of advice were uttered by E.B. Havell seventy five years ago, even to this day they are relevant. Even after forty years of independence we Indians have not learnt adequately about the glorious and rich cultural heritage of our ancestors.

Nikolay Roerich was one of the greatest Russian painters and philosophers. He lived in many countries and ultimately in his old age he came to live in Kulu town of Himachal Pradesh and passed away just four months after India became an independent nation on 15th August 1947. None of the contemporary Indian artists depicted like him, on the canvas the sublime and serene beauty of the peaks of the Himalayas and their silent fertile valleys. This article may be concluded with the following words relating to what he thought of India when he was on one of his many travels in Central Asia:

“Whether we think of those sublime temples of southern India, of the grandeur of Chittor and Gwalior and the great strongholds of Rajputana or of the solemn spirit of the Himalayas, everywhere we shall find the joy of great thought. On the moonlit Ganges in the mystery of Benares seen at night, and in the great cadences of the Himalayan waterfalls, we find the same lofty sense of joy.

In the repetitions of such ancient names as Manu, Rama, Vyasa, Arjuna, Krishna, of the Pandavas, Rishis, heroes, creators and great builders, we recognise a loving respect for the past. From the Mother of the World, from the Queen of Peace, we receive this delicate flower-like joy of heart. Marvellous India, resplendent in outer beauty, most beautiful in her secret inner life,—Beautiful beloved India.”

This humble attempt to briefly expound the evolution of Hindu architecture through the ages will be amply justified if it awakens in the readers a desire to know more about the rich Hindu architectural traditions, to see more of India's natural beauty and to learn more of her cultural heritage.

APPEARANCE AND REALITY

SWAMI BRAHMASTHANANDA

Facts and figures tally some times,
Reasons and logic agree to the lines—
But often it breaks the laws of rhyme!
Science and equations—theories of the world,
Readings and perceptions of things outward,
Nothing reveals nature and takes us
Godward ;
But pure, good life and love of innerworld.

Mother of pearl shines like silver,
Many are befooled and go so near,
With greed inside, treading roads unclear,
Rushing to grasp the dream as dear,
Rope in twilight looks like a snake,
And we are frightened by this fake!
Isn't it wise to kindle the 'light'
To see the thing in its real sight ?

Which seems real in a state of dream,
Becomes unreal in the waking realm,

Where is that space and where is that time,
When you wake from the wondrous dream ?

Earth looks steady, the sun looks moving
But the truth is the earth is revolving!
What is that force which makes them spin ?
Such hopeless delusion is a perennial theme!

'Senses drag the embodied soul',
Into the surging river of hope ;
Sometimes good and sometimes bad,
Bring the waves, happy and sad.

Consciousness alone creates the fun
Out of the fund of the Infinite One!
This is the 'Atman', the Eternal Being,
This is the only God, all pervading.

Eternal play of the Eternal One,
Know Him alone and the play is done!
This is the joy of the liberated soul ;
Then all is Blissful and this is the Goal!

JOSIAH JOHN GOODWIN: THE FAITHFUL DISCIPLE (1870-1898)

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

History periodically shows the influence of the manifestation of the Divine in man. The Supreme Being manifests Itself in a special way from age to age through those individuals known as 'the makers of history'. Through a multitude of His agents, in an unbroken succession of geniuses, God disseminates spiritual teachings to the world. When our dormant spiritual life is awakened through such messengers of Truth, we struggle to experience our innate divinity. Thus, God reveals Himself through great lives which act as transmitters of spiritual idealism among people. The timely emergence of these high souls in every epoch, and their various activities bring forth a new awakening and a new dimension to life. We distinctly perceive that a series of events is not a sport of chance, but well-calculated

and timely actions of ever-watchful, God.

The advent of Swami Vivekananda in the world's history was the result of a deep irrepressible moral necessity of the age. In him, we witness a brilliant manifestation of divine splendour, creating in our minds a conviction of its authenticity. Swamiji exhorted people to value the spiritual in life, and he incorporated in his own personality the manliness of the West and the saintliness of the East. He appeared in the history of humanity to fulfil God's spiritual mission. A most important phenomenon in the history of the last century was the meeting of the East and the West through Swamiji, who inaugurated this rapprochement during and after the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. He was a great champion of universal cooperation and under-

standing. So the New World looked upon him as a pilot and guide of humanity.

Swami Vivekananda's illuminating and universal teachings are available to us mainly due to the loving and untiring services of Mr. J. J. Goodwin, a brilliant stenographer. His contribution to the Vedanta movement is well known. Swamiji had been in the U.S.A. since 1893. The year 1896 was a remarkable one because of the invaluable services of Mr. Goodwin, who did his best in every possible way to preserve the lectures and class notes of Swamiji. He came to Swamiji at the right time when Swamiji wanted to publish his lectures in a book form. Swamiji's main message to the world can be found in his speeches delivered in the U.S.A., London and India. Feeling the necessity of having a qualified stenographer to take notes of his lectures and classes, Swamiji's friends placed an advertisement, only once (December 13, 1895), in both *The New York Herald* and *The New York World* newspapers. Its text reads as follows:

WANTED—A RAPID SHORTHAND WRITER
TO TAKE DOWN
LECTURES FOR SEVERAL HOURS A WEEK.
APPLY AT 228 WEST 39TH STREET.

Mr. Goodwin responded promptly and was immediately hired.

From Swamiji's biography it appears that, before the appointment of Mr. Goodwin, two other stenographers had applied and were tested. One seems to have been Kripananda who, in spite of his hard labour in acquiring expertise in stenography, was not suitable for the task. The second applicant, though efficient, was found unsatisfactory due to his lack of comprehension of Swamiji's ideas. So, Mr. Goodwin was literally a 'God-sent' man who 'at once took over as Secretary and right-hand man'. He was very useful in many other works as well. Not only was he exceptionally gifted as a stenographer, but also he had the capacity

to understand Swamiji's ideas and thoughts. His spiritual sensitivity was accentuated by his loving association with Swamiji:

From the beginning, 'he would work day and night over the lectures,' the *Life* (by his Eastern and Western Disciples) tells us, 'taking them down stenographically and then typewriting them, all in the same day.' Even if he took down only the advanced morning class, this was in itself a feat for, as Kripananda wrote in reference to Swamiji's karma yoga class, 'These lectures are very long if taken down verbatim.' To keep pace with Swamiji was to have little time to spare, and if there had been an unoccupied room in the same lodging house, Goodwin most probably would have taken it. As it was, he took a room almost directly across the street at 247 West Thirty-ninth, and it was undoubtedly there that he did his typing, going from the morning class to his typewriter and back again to the evening class, or first perhaps to dinner at Swamiji's table.¹

In no time Goodwin's entire outlook was radically transformed from within and he blossomed into one of Swamiji's fruitful devotees. His sparkling sincerity, unflagging patience, and sacrifice for the propagation of Vedanta, was a gift of incalculable magnitude. These sterling virtues along with his professional efficiency, made him the only 'ideal person' available at the time. He could transcribe Swamiji's thoughts almost as they were uttered, to everyone's joy and satisfaction. Any serious scholar of Swamiji's works can easily find the difference between his earlier lectures as reported in newspapers and the later transcriptions that came to us through Goodwin. The research work of M.L. Burke has thrown much light on this point:

...We are forced to recognize that much of the originality and subtlety of his ideas and many of the fresh and shining insights that must have flashed through his lectures, illuminating whole fields of knowledge, were lost upon the general run of reporters—and thus lost to us. The news-

1. M.L. Burke: *Swami Vivekananda in the West—New Discoveries*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, Vol. III, p. 339.

paper reports, moreover, are for the most part short. While we are often told by the reporters of Swamiji's clarity and strength of thought, of his genius for imparting new ideas, we are seldom given a verbatim account of those ideas. Lectures that took him two hours to deliver were summarized (often incompletely) in one or two columns, and ideas which must have poured forth in torrents were reduced to a trickle.²

Swamiji was well aware of his divine mission and was, therefore, confident of securing someone fit for the task. In that vein, he said earlier that year, 'I have intense faith in Truth, ... the Lord will send help and hands to work with me'.³

It will be very interesting to know about Goodwin's background and the circumstances under which he joined Swamiji. M.L. Burke, in her above mentioned book, unearthed certain facts about his past. Goodwin's paternal grandfather, the Rev. Josiah Goodwin, was a minister connected to the Wesleyan Church of Scarborough, Yorkshire, in England. His son, Josiah the younger, was born in 1817 and became a well-reputed journalist, having proficiency in shorthand writing. He lived permanently in Bath-Easton, a suburb of Bath. He was very talented and a celebrity in social life. He died in 1890.

Josiah John Goodwin was born in September, 1870. He inherited his father's talents and received a good training in his early life. He grew "restless" in spirit, though, and, after having some unsuccessful attempts at newspaper publication in Bath in 1893, he moved to Australia first and to the United States thereafter, in search of a more promising future. He made his living in different ways, mostly "editing things here and there". This instability of life and uncertainty of a steady income, made him prone to mental depression and agnosticism. The grace of God brought him in December 1895 to 228 West 39th Street. The magne-

tic influence of Swamiji's luminous personality moved him deeply from the very first instance. "The Swami told him many incidents of his past life, and this created such a moral revolution in him," the *Life* narrates, 'that henceforth his whole life was changed'.⁴ The spiritual eminence of Swamiji coupled with his loving nature and sympathetic understanding conquered Goodwin's heart. "He was as simple as a child," Swami Sadananda reports, 'and wonderfully responsive to the slightest show of kindness'.⁵ No wonder Goodwin accepted Swamiji as Christ and prostrated before him like a Hindu. In the spring of 1896, prior to his arrival in London in order to join Swamiji, he wrote to Miss Macleod, "Shall I shock you very much if I tell you that the Swami takes the place of Christ to me? I think not, for you will understand what I mean."⁶ Goodwin received *brahmacharya* from Swamiji in New York, in February, 1896.

After acquiring this new view, Goodwin dedicated his life entirely to the spread of Vedanta. As he wrote in a letter of August 1896 to Mrs. Ole Bull, he had to accept a very nominal salary, due to the lack of other resources: "If I am to work for the Vedanta—and my wishes are all that way: I think I may say my heart is thoroughly in the work—I am afraid I shall have to accept bare living, but beyond that, I would not consent to any arrangement."⁷ Goodwin also worked with Swami Saradananda for some time in the United Kingdom, as well as in the United States. At this time, he articulated his feelings about Swamiji to Swami Saradananda: "Being poor from childhood, I have gone many places trying to make a living. I have hobnobbed with all kinds of people; they gave me work

2. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 332.

3. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 336.

4. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 338.

5. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 338.

6. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 334.

7. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 338-39.

and a salary, but no one gave me his heart's love. Then in America I met Swami Vivekananda; then alone could I understand what love was. So, income or no income, I am caught! Never have I found such a noble being as Swami Vivekananda. One is drawn to him as if to one's very own."⁸

Swamiji, along with his English disciples Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, left London on December 16, 1896. Goodwin followed a short while after. They reached Ceylon (Sri Lanka) on January 15, 1897. Goodwin travelled with Swamiji from Colombo to Almora, from one end of India to the other. He was present at every single lecture Swamiji gave, at every single interview granted to reporters. Further, he did not miss "one single report of any utterance of his in any paper."⁹ This life of dedication elicited admiration from everyone. Swami Virajananda, one of Swamiji's disciples, informs us: "Goodwin used to serve the Swami day and night. Oh, what a wonderful spirit of service he had!"¹⁰ He was a vegetarian and lived like a monk.

About Goodwin's complete identification with the spirit of monastic life, Swami Akhandananda wrote: "Goodwin mostly stayed at the Math. ... Goodwin ... used to eat with us. Goodwin would dance and sing like a small child. It was very sweet to hear him sing 'Śankara Śiva Vyom Vyom Bholā ...'"¹¹ In July, 1897, at the request of Swamiji, Goodwin went to Madras to start a newspaper and he gave his services to the *Brahmavādin*, a religious periodical started by some of Swamiji's followers. He

then took a job on the staff of *The Madras Mail*. Unfortunately, he did not live long thereafter. He died of enteric fever on June 2, 1898, at Ootacamund, where he was buried at the St. Thomas Cemetery.

The sad news reached Swamiji at Almora. He maintained his poise in spite of this severe shock and wrote about his "Faithful Goodwin" as follows:

The debt of gratitude I owe him can never be repaid and those who think they have been helped by any thought of mine ought to know that almost every word of it was published through the untiring and most unselfish exertions of Mr. Goodwin. In him I have lost a friend true as steel, a disciple of never-failing devotion, a worker who knew not what tiring was, and the world is less rich by one of those few who are born, as it were, to live only for others.¹²

The Swami also sent the following poem to Goodwin's mother in England, for her consolation:

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Speed forth, O Soul! upon thy star-strewn path;
Speed, blissful one! where thought is ever free,
Where time and space no longer mist the view,
Eternal peace and blessings be with thee!
Thy service true, complete thy sacrifice,
Thy home the heart of love transcendent find;
Remembrance sweet, that kills all space and time,
Like altar roses fill thy place behind!
Thy bonds are broke, thy quest in bliss is found,
And one with That which comes as Death and
Life;
Thou helpful one! unselfish e'er on earth,
Ahead! still help with love this world of strife!¹³

On April 23rd, 1967, a 10 feet high granite marble memorial was erected on his burial place at the initiative of the Ramakrishna Math at Ootacamund.

Thus, Goodwin has become immortal in the history of the Ramakrishna movement through his life of absolute dedication and purity of character. Swami Premananda, a

8. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 338.

9. His Eastern and Western Disciples: *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1981, Vol. II, p. 272.

10. M.L. Burke: *Swami Vivekananda in the West—New Discoveries*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, Vol. IV, p. 488.

11. His Eastern and Western Disciples: *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1981, Vol. II, p. 235.

12. M.L. Burke: *Swami Vivekananda in the West—New Discoveries*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, Vol. IV, p. 563.

13. Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 563-64.

direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, used to place flowers in remembrance of Goodwin, while worshipping Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine.

Our 'mother'—I mean Mrs. Sevier—is an example of superb renunciation. Her husband, too, was of the same type. I remember Goodwin—Swamiji's Ganesha¹⁴—and Nivedita. What an exquisite ideal of self-sacrifice they showed! To tell you the truth, the day when I have to

14. Reference is to the mythological tradition of the god Ganesha's undertaking to write out the *Mahabharata* as the sage Vyasa would go on composing the verses and dictating them to him.

perform worship in the shrine, I offer flowers in their memory...I am a humble servant of these disciples of Swamiji.¹⁵

In the history of the world, a bare handful of individuals are known to have developed such a strong character as did Mr. Goodwin. Only these great characters are able to project such a balanced unity of moral courage and integrity, with creative idealism. We pay our reverential homage to this great hero of the Spirit.

15. Swami Shraddhananda: *The Story of an Epoch*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, p. 146.

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

HIGHER CONCENTRATION

What is the result of constant practice of this higher concentration? All old tendencies of restlessness and dullness will be destroyed, as well as the tendencies of goodness too. The case is similar to that of the chemicals used to take the dirt and alloy off gold. When the ore is smelted down, the dross is burnt along with the chemicals. So this constant controlling power will stop the previous bad tendencies, and eventually, the good ones also. Those good and evil tendencies will suppress each other, leaving alone the Soul in its own splendour, untrammelled by either good or bad, the omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.

All of you have observed that, when you are trying to concentrate your mind, your thoughts wander. When you are trying to think of God, that is the very time these Samskaras appear. At other times they are not so active, but when you want them not, they are sure to be there, trying their best to crowd in your mind. Why should that be so? Why should they be much more potent at the time of concentration? It is because you are repressing them, and they react with all their force. At other times they do not react. How countless these old past impressions must be all lodged somewhere in the Chitta, ready, waiting like tigers, to jump up! These have to be suppressed that the one idea which we want may arise, to the exclusion of the other. Instead they are all struggling to come up at the same time.

The Samskara which will be raised by this sort of concentration will be so powerful that it will hinder the action of the others, and hold them in check.

Every reaction in the form of hatred or evil is so much loss to the mind; and every evil thought or deed of hatred, or any thought of reaction, if it is controlled, will be laid in our favour. It is not that we lose by thus restraining ourselves; we are gaining infinitely more than we suspect. Each time we suppress hatred, or a feeling of anger, it is so much good energy stored up in our favour; that piece of energy will be converted into the higher powers.

You must remember that Yoga changes the body. As you go on practising, your body changes; it is not the same body that you had before the practice. That is very rational, and can be explained, because every new thought that we have must make, as it were, a new channel through the brain, and that explains the tremendous conservatism of human nature.

Take some holy person, some great person whom you revere, some saint whom you know to be perfectly non-attached, and think of his heart. That heart has become non-attached, and meditate on that heart; it will calm the mind. If you cannot do that, there is the next way.

(*Raja-yoga*, p. 135, 164-65, 149, 152, 156).

Arise! Awake! and stop not till the goal is reached! Katha Upanishad, I. iii. 14

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A PERSIAN TALE

A king, while lying on the roof of his palace, was startled by the sudden appearance of a stranger. 'What are you here for?' asked the king in surprise. 'I have come here in search of a lost camel,' replied the stranger. 'Seeking for a lost camel on the roof of a palace?' was the question that came out of the lips of the bewildered king. The stranger remarked: 'Is it not more strange to seek the Kingdom of God on the golden throne in the midst of all the pleasures and luxuries of the earth and among the distracting anxieties of royalty?'

Another day a sannyasin came running into the royal court. The king asked him 'Why are you here?' The sannyasin said 'To take rest in this temporary shed for travellers.'

The king: 'But this is a palace and not a traveller's rest-house!'

The Sannyasin: 'Where are your father, grandfather and great-grandfather who were once here?'

The king: 'They are all gone now.'

The sannyasin: 'Ponder then; is it not a temporary resting-place for wanderers?'

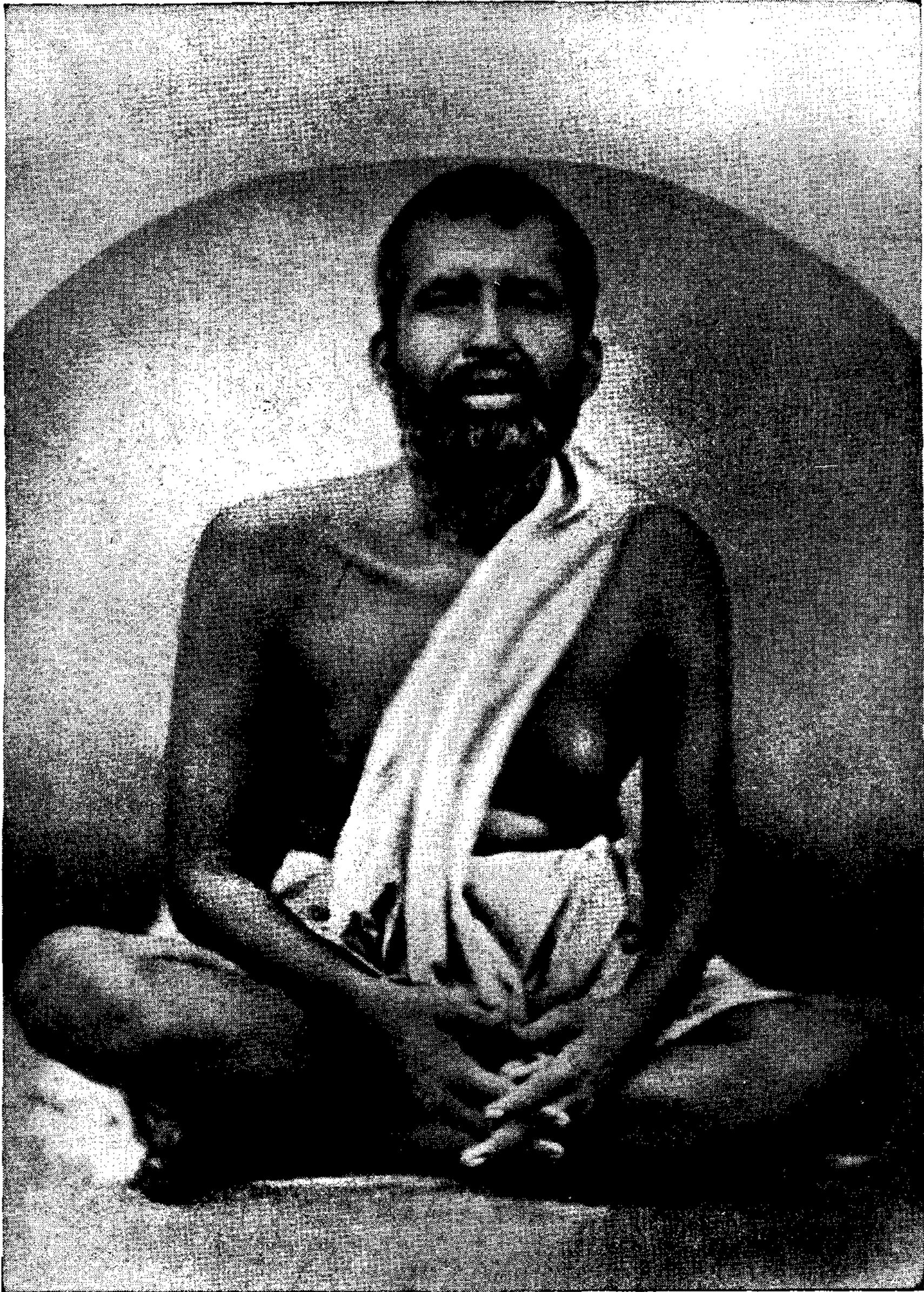
These incidents made such a great impression upon the mind of the king that he

renounced all his comforts and territories, and became a monk.

NANA KATHA

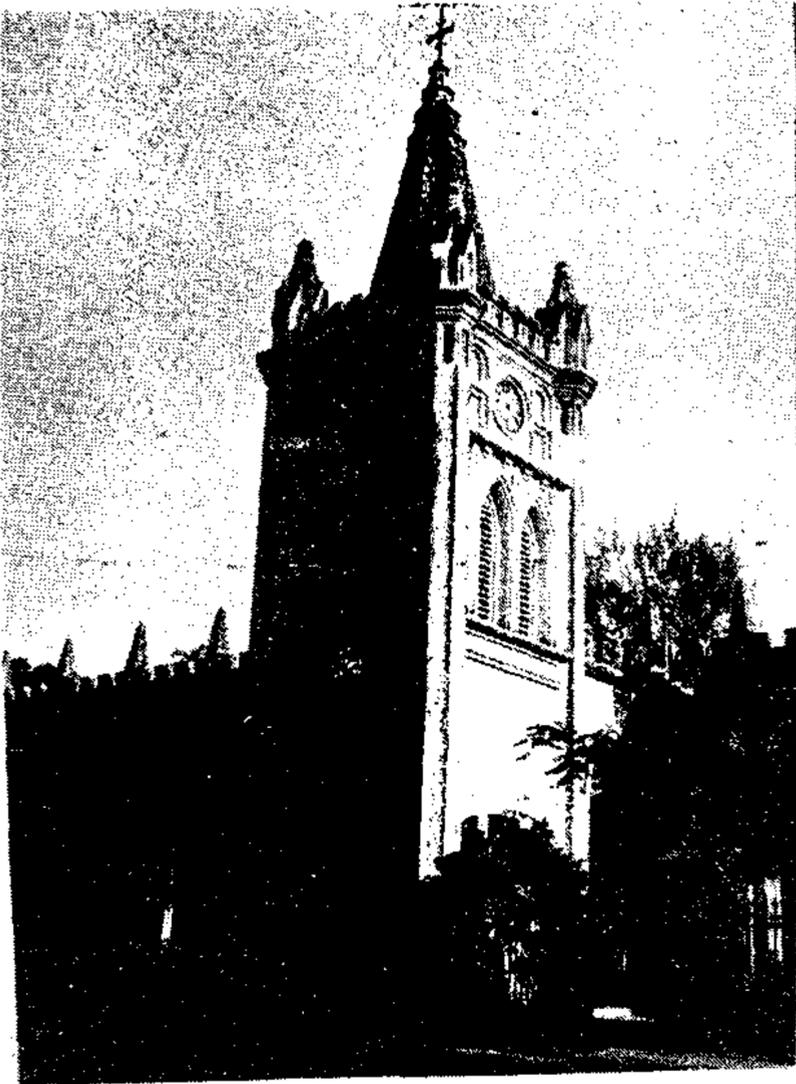
After two years' successful work Swami Abhedananda resumed his lectures in New York, October 22nd, 1899, in Tuxedo Hall, 59th Street, Madison Avenue, and will continue these throughout the winter and hold classes during the week in the Office and Library Rooms of the Vedanta Society, at 146 East 55th Street, between Lexington and Third Avenues.

Through the generous subscriptions and co-operation of students and friends, a headquarters for the Office and Library of the Vedanta Society was established on October 15th, 1899, at 146 East 55th Street. These rooms are open daily from 2 to 5 p.m. and from 7-30 to 9 p.m. for the conduct of the business of the Society; for the sale of pamphlets and books on the Vedanta philosophy, including lectures by the Swamis published by the Society, and current periodicals published under the direction of the Swamis in India; for class instruction and lectures; and for the founding of a library of the best books on metaphysics, philosophy and religion, especially of Vedanta literature.





The photo of Madonna and the Holy Child seen by Shri Ramakrishna at Jadulal Mullick's Garden House, Dakshineswar.



Cathedral Church, Elgin Road, Calcutta



Holy Trinity Church, Amherst Street, Calcutta



Mass in a Christian Church



Osmond Memorial Church, Calcutta



PORTRAIT OF CHRIST. (From the Countess of M. Chelmsford)

CHAPTER LV.
THE LAST SUPPER.

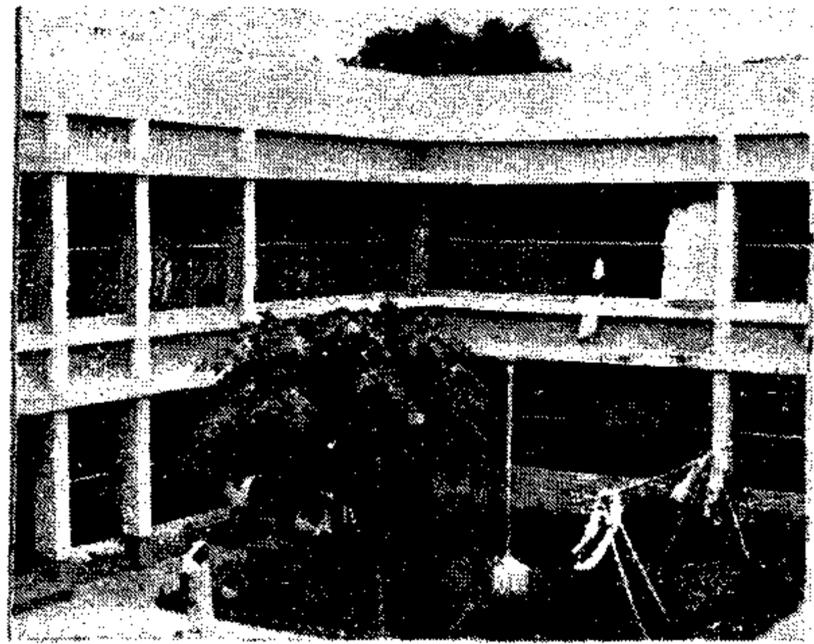
A portrait of Christ



The well-known portrait of the Harmony of Religions made by Shri Surendra Nath Mitra



An old woman in the ashrama dormitory



Old women's block.



Nurses at work.



Swamis meeting old women.



Outdoor patients.

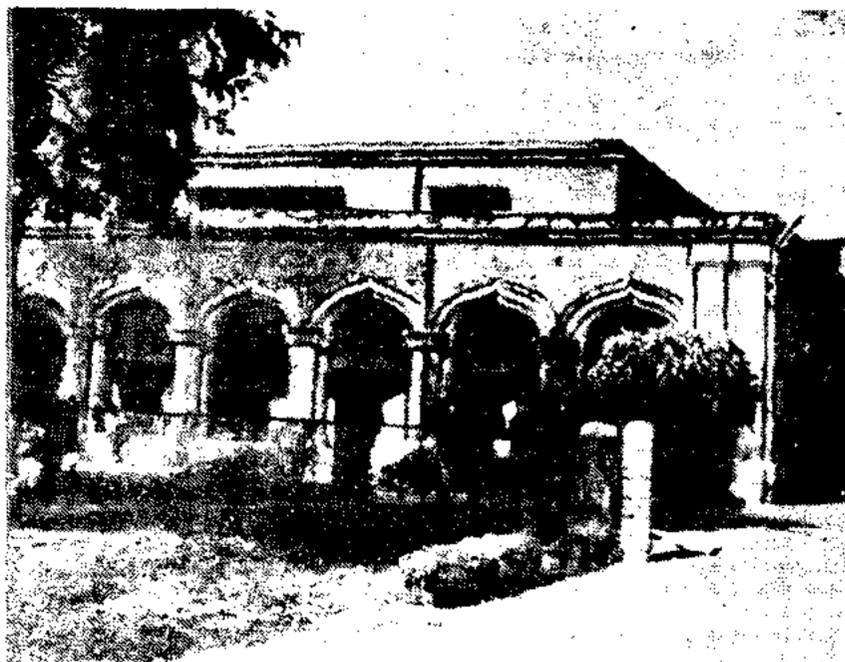


Patients in indoor beds.

R. K. Mission Home of Service



Benares Ghat at Ganga



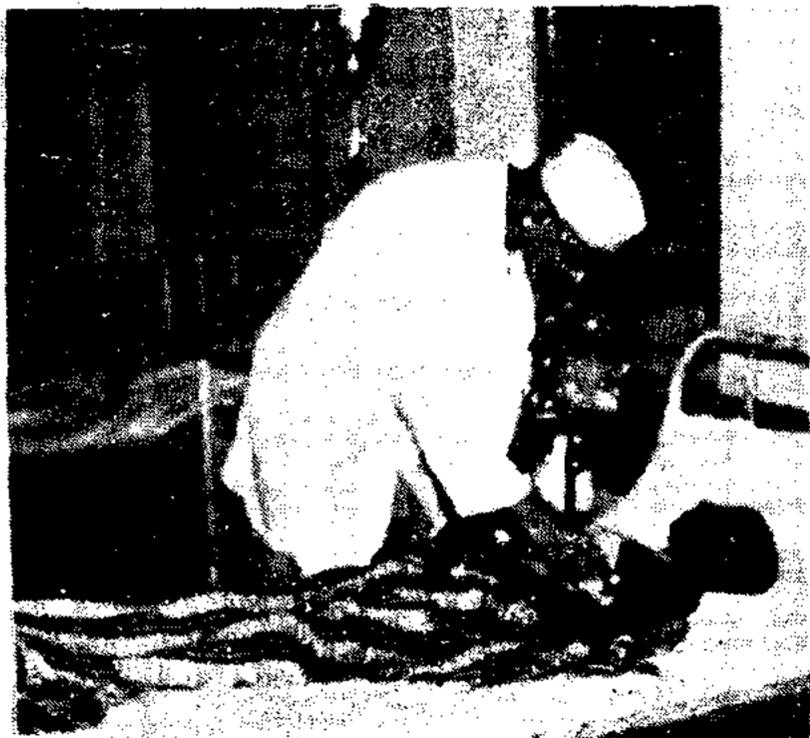
The original building of Sevashrama.



The main hospital.



The oldest monk serving patients.



A doctor monk at work.



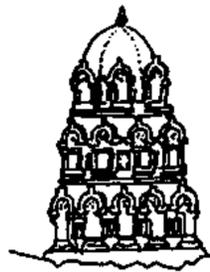
Operation Theatre.

Hindu Temple Architecture

PLATE . 8

EVOLUTION OF 'DRAVIDA' FORM.

AS DEPICTED IN
THE SCULPTURES
OF AMARAVATI
STUPA.

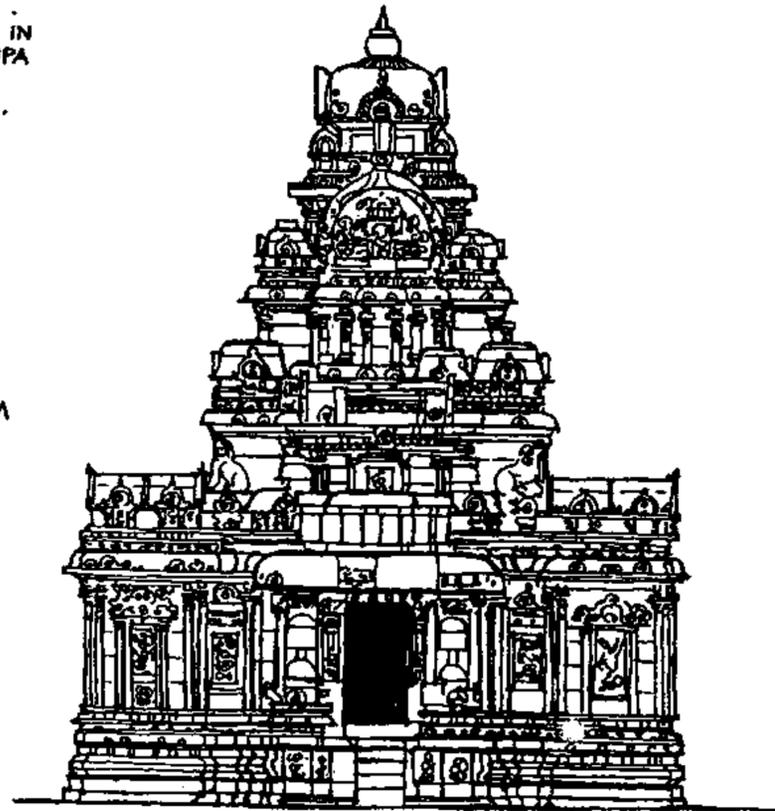
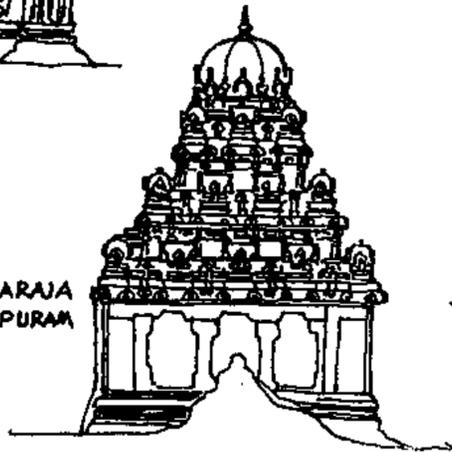


AS DEPICTED IN
BUDDHIST STUPA
SCULPTURE AT
SHANTASALA .



MONOLITH ARJUNA
RATHA AT MAHABALIPURAM
7TH CENTURY A.D.

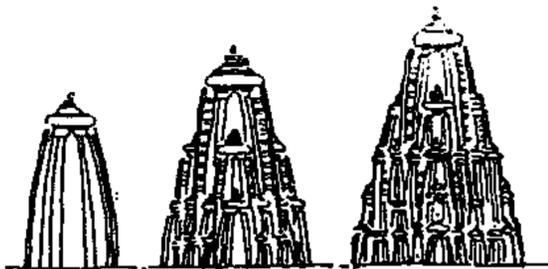
MONOLITH DHARMARAJA
RATHA AT MAHABALIPURAM



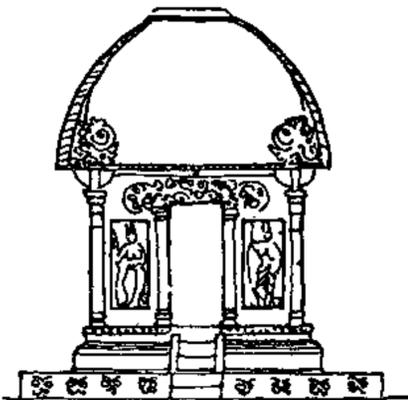
VIRUPAKSHA TEMPLE AT
PATTADAKAL - DECCAN.
8TH CENTURY A.D .

PLATE . 16

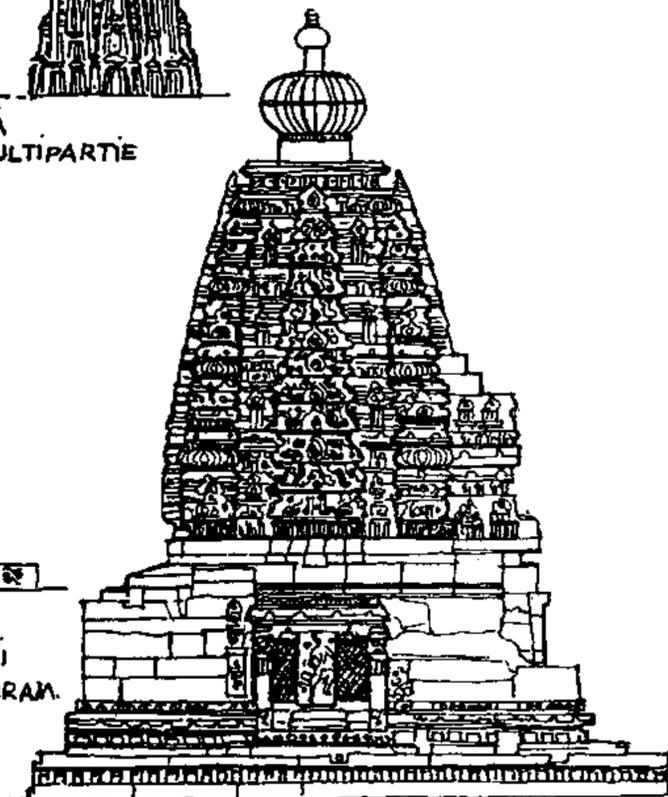
EXAMPLES OF 'NAGARA' FORMS



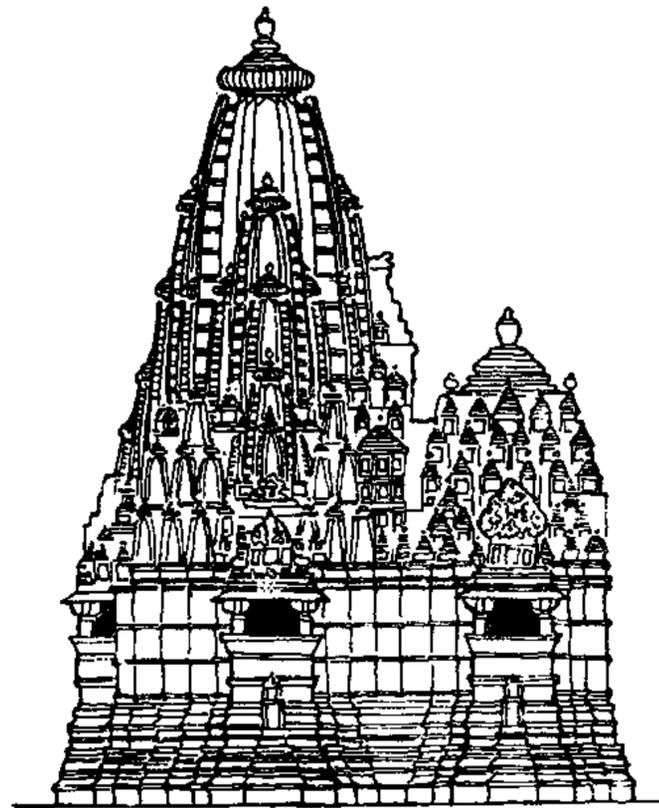
DEVELOPMENT FROM
UNIPARTITE TO THE MULTIPARTIE



MONOLITH. DRAUPADI
RATHA . AT MAHABALIPURAM.
7TH CENTURY



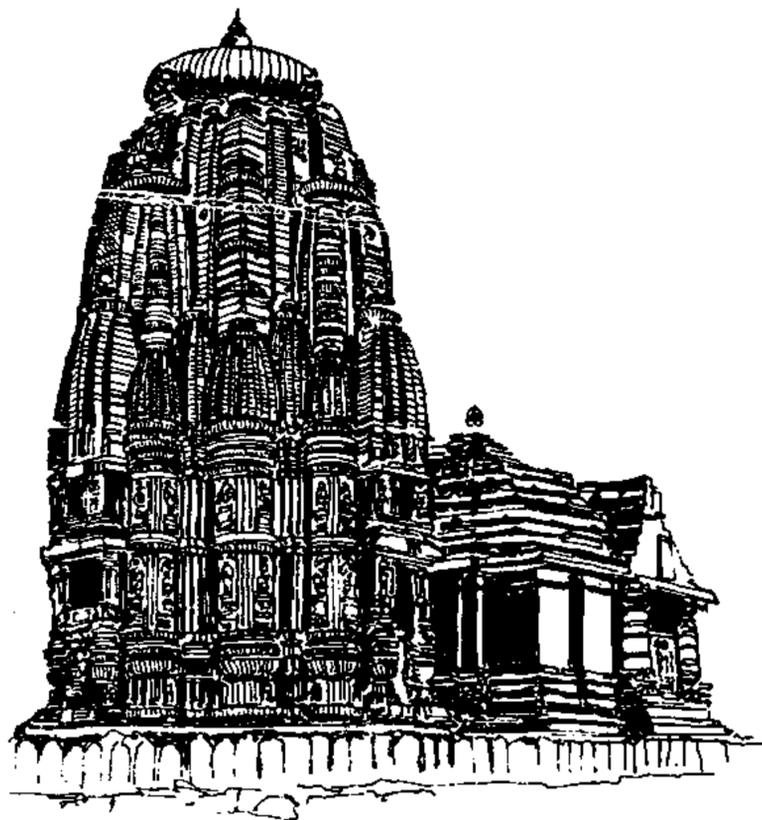
TEMPLE AT PATTADAKAL
8TH CENTURY



TEMPLE AT KHAJURAHU
MADHYA PRADESH
11TH CENTURY

EXAMPLES OF 'KALINGA' FORM

PLATE 23



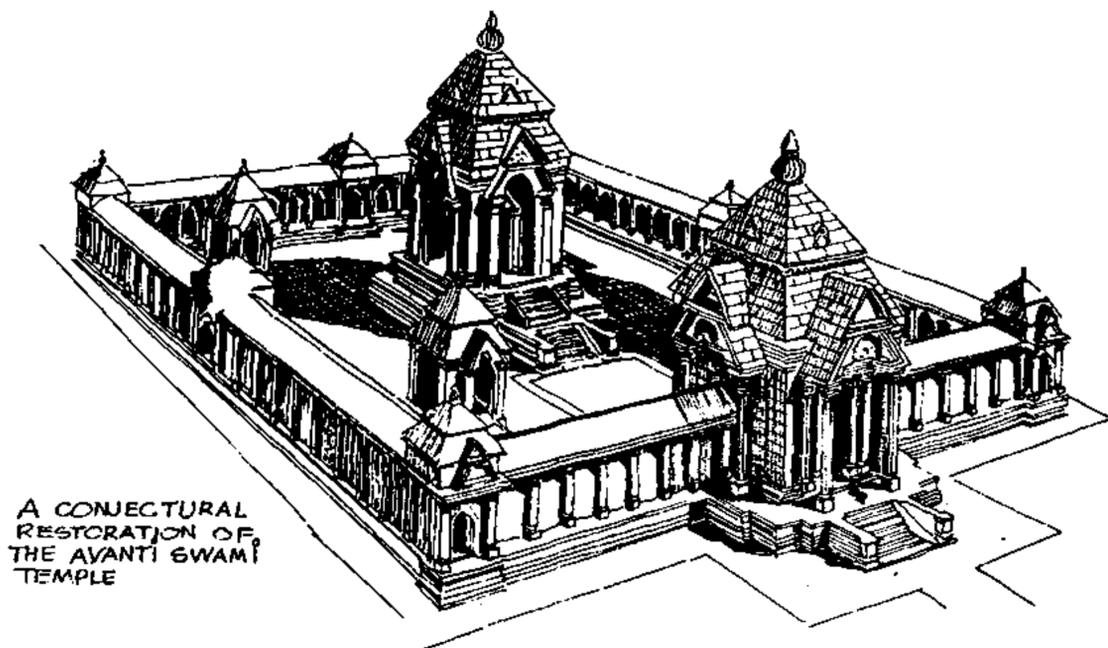
RAJA RANI TEMPLE AT
BHUVANESHWAR - ORISSA STATE

THE GREAT SIVA TEMPLE
AT BHUVANESHWAR
ORISSA STATE



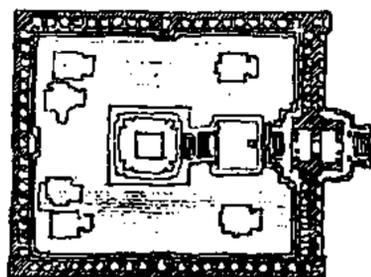
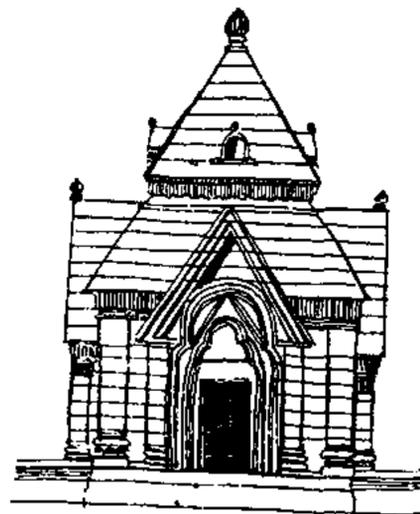
PLATE NO 27

KASHMIR TEMPLES



A CONJECTURAL
RESTORATION OF
THE AVANTI SWAMI
TEMPLE

TYPICAL SMALL
COUNTRYSIDE HINDU
TEMPLE



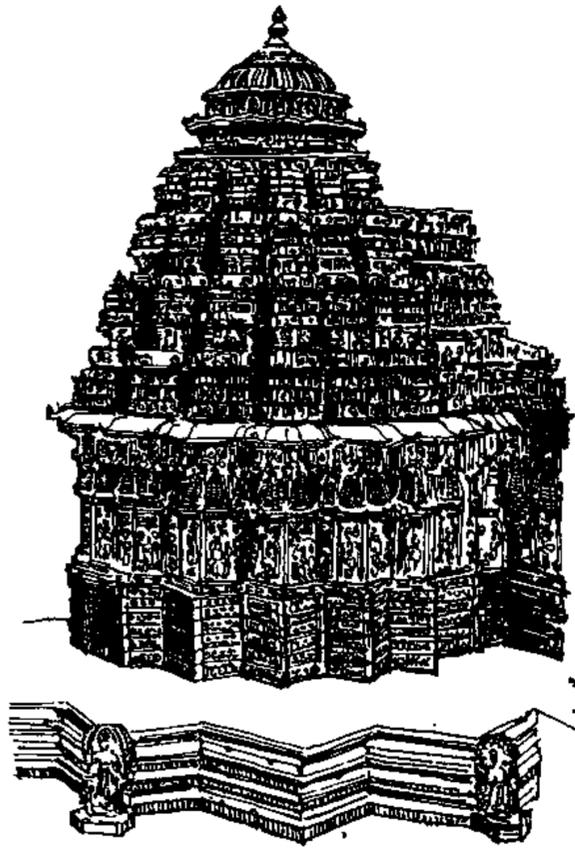
PLAN OF THE ABOVE TEMPLE.

Hindu Temple Architecture

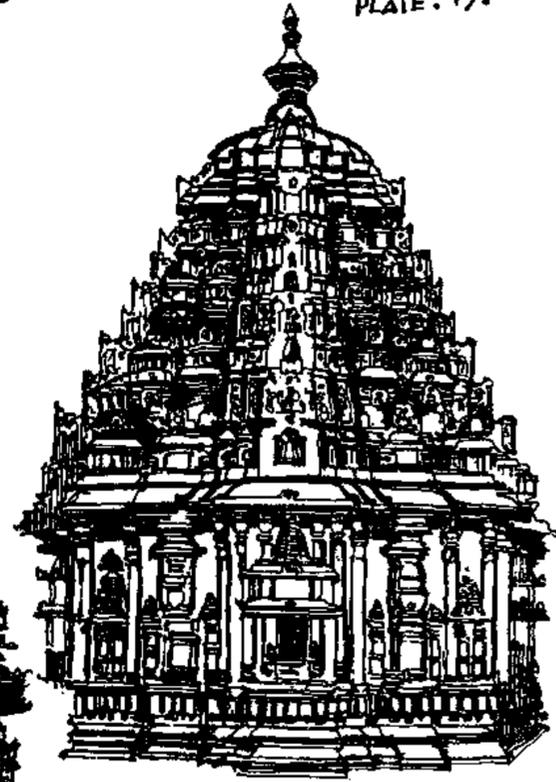
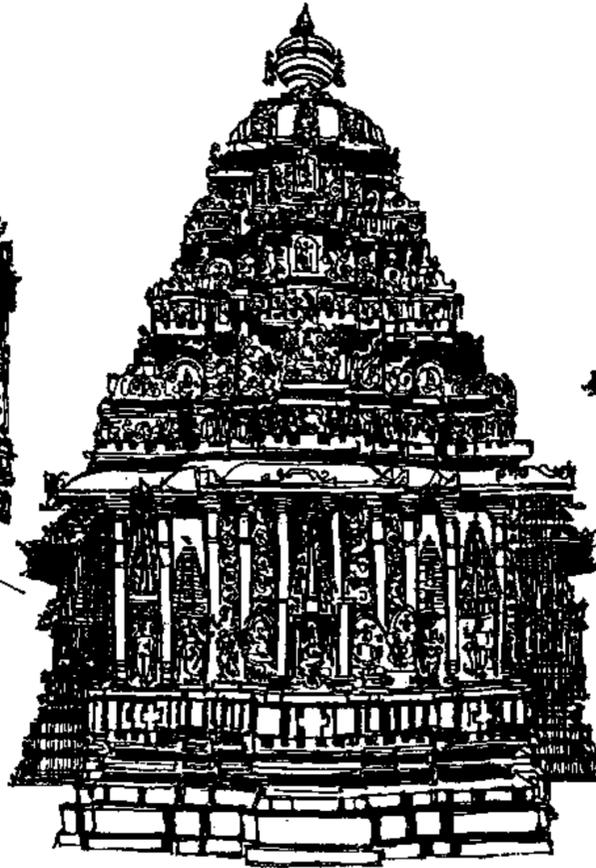
EXAMPLES OF 'VESARA' FORMS

PLATE - 19 -

CANNA-KESAVA TEMPLE
MOSALE - KARNATAKA



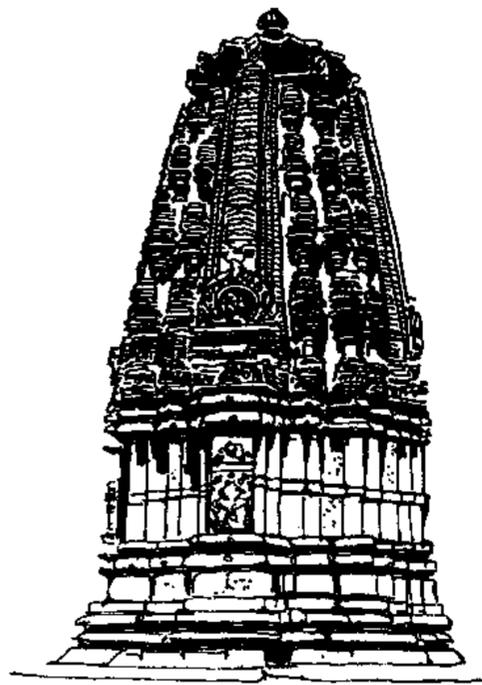
CANNA-KESAVA TEMPLE
BELUR - KARNATAKA



KOTINATHA TEMPLE
KUPPATUR - MYSORE

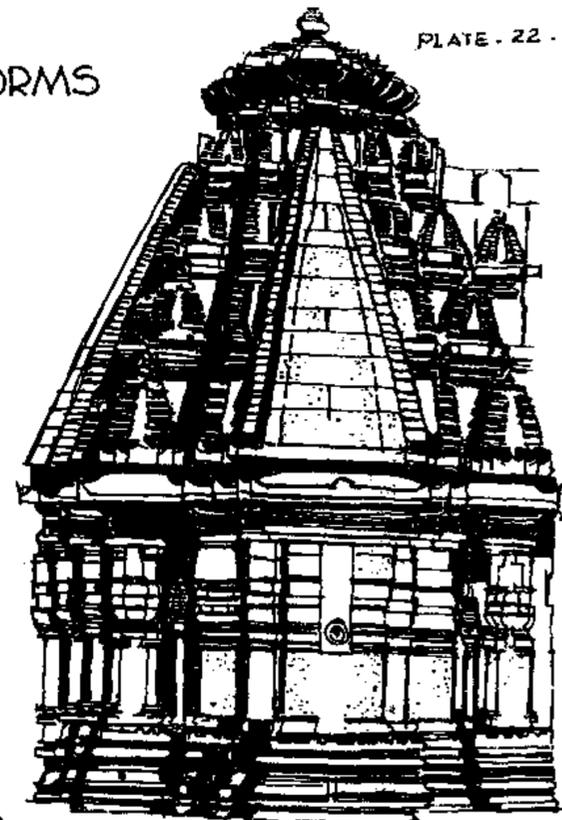
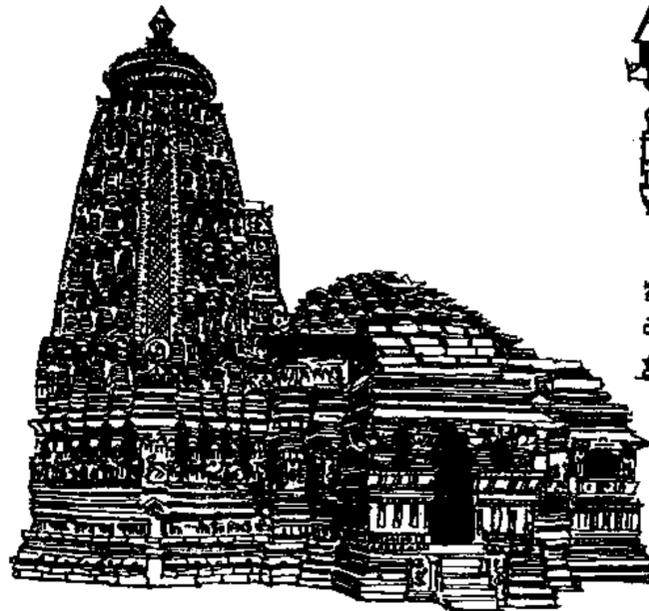
EXAMPLES OF 'BHUMIJA' FORMS

PLATE - 22 -



JAMLESWARA TEMPLE
JAMLI - MADHYA PRADESH
11TH CENTURY - A.D.

UDAYESWARA TEMPLE
UDAIPUR - RAJASTHAN
11TH CENTURY - A.D.

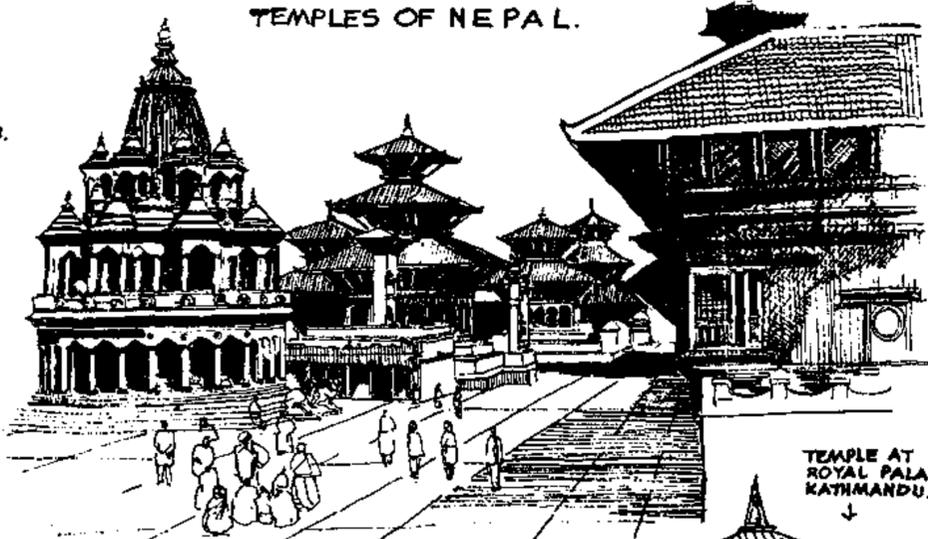


MULE - SANKARESWARA TEMPLE
TIRUVEKERE - MYSORE
INFLUENCE OF BHUMIJA IN
VESARA TEMPLE FORM.
13TH CENTURY A.D.

TEMPLES OF NEPAL.



TEMPLE AT KATHMANDU.



TEMPLE AT ROYAL PALACE KATHMANDU.

DARBAR SQUARE - PATAN



"KATHMANDU" STUPA - PATAN



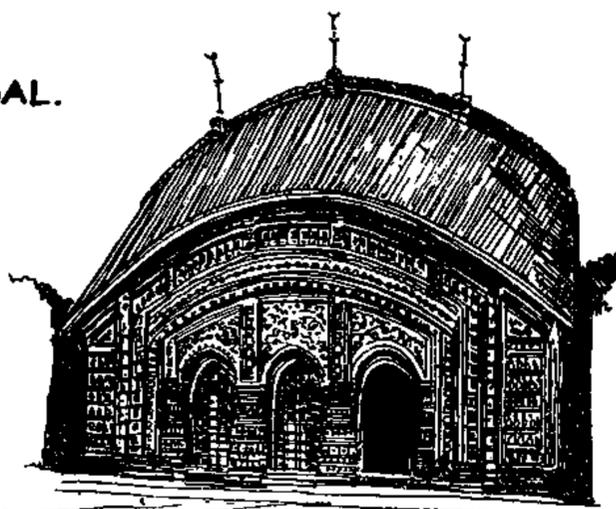
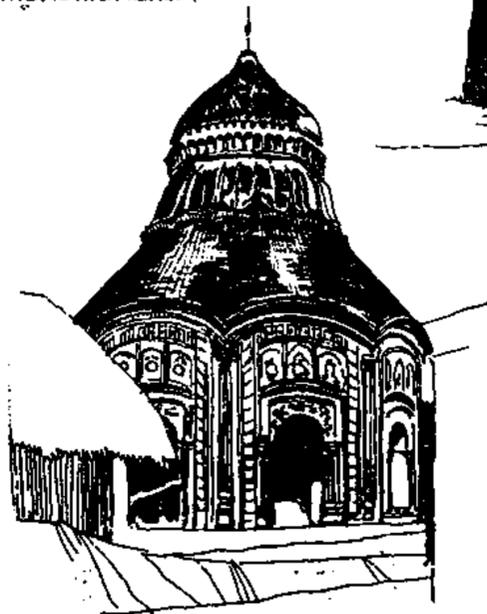
BUDDHIST STUPA AT KATHMANDU.



PLATE - NO. 28

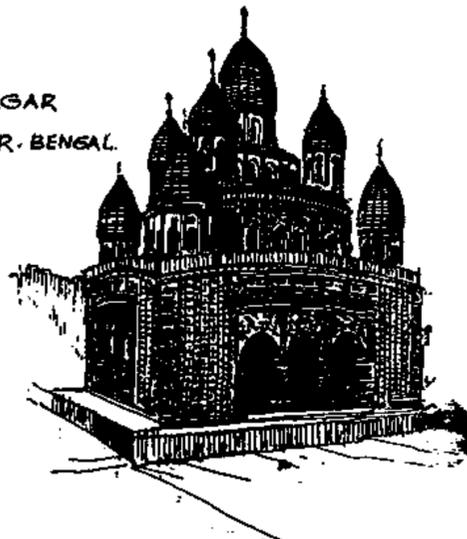
TEMPLES OF BENGAL.

TEMPLE OF RANI BHAVANI MURSHIDABAD.



CHHAR BANGLA TEMPLE BAD NAGAR. MURSHIDABAD. 1755 A.D.

KANTANAGAR TEMPLE DINAJPUR - BENGAL.



TYPE OF "LEAF HUT" SHIVA TEMPLE BENGAL

