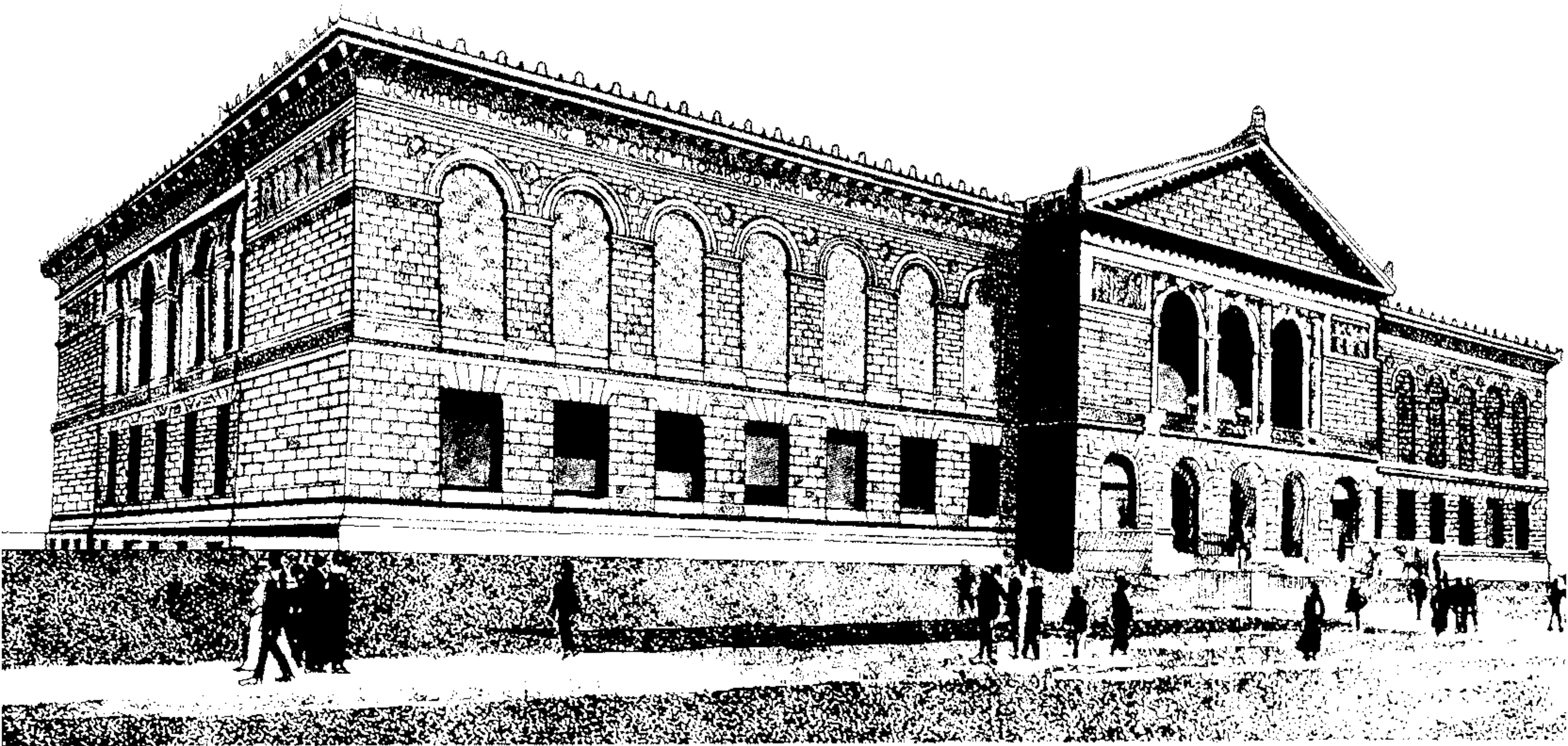




# Prabuddha Bharata

## or Awakened India



*"Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight,'  
'Assimilation and not Destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'"*

*Closing Address by Swami Vivekananda,  
Chicago Parliament of Religions, September 1893*



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5 Dehi Entally Road  
Calcutta 700 014  
Phone 44-0898



*Rates of Subscription  
(inclusive of postage)*

	Annual	Life (30 years)
India	Rs. 30	Rs. 500
Sri Lanka & Bangladesh	Rs. 120	Rs. 2000
U.S.A. & Canada		
Surface Mail	\$ 20	\$ 300
Air Mail	\$ 35	\$ 600
Other Countries		
Surface Mail	£ 15	£ 225
Air Mail	£ 25	£ 375

*Cover:* The Art Institute  
of Chicago

# Prabuddha Bharata

A Monthly Journal of the  
Ramakrishna Order

*Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*

**JANUARY 1993**

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**Our Motto****Service with a Smile****TIDE WATER OIL CO (INDIA) LIMITED****8, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Sarani, Calcutta-700 001****OILS & GREASES****DELHI : BOMBAY : MADRAS****( A MEMBER OF THE YULE GROUP )****A Government of India Enterprise.**





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

# Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 98

JANUARY 1993

No. 1

## Divine Message

### CALL TO THE YOUTH

Therefore, my friends, my plan is to start institutions in India, to train our young men as preachers of the truths of our Scriptures, in India and outside India. Men, Men, these are wanted; everything else will be ready, but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. A hundred such and the world becomes revolutionized. The will is stronger than anything else. (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1991), Vol. III, pp. 223-224).

Compared to many other races, I must tell you that we are weak, very weak. First of all, is our physical weakness. That physical weakness is the cause at least of one-third of our miseries. We are lazy; we cannot work; we do not love each other; we are intensely selfish; not three of us can come together without being jealous of each other. That is the state in which we are—hopelessly disorganized mobs, immensely selfish, fighting each other for centuries. ...We speak of many things parrot-like, but never do them, speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of that? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything; we must strengthen it. First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come

afterwards. Be strong my young friends; that is my advice to you....You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. (*ibid.*, pp. 241-242)

Will you respond to the call of your nation? Each one of you has a glorious future if you dare believe me. Have that faith, each one of you, in yourself—that eternal power is lodged in every soul—and you will revive the whole of India....Now for that, I want young men. “It is the young, the strong, and healthy, of sharp intellect, that will reach the Lord,” say the Vedas. This is the time to decide your future—while you possess the energy of youth, not when you are worn out and jaded, but in the freshness and vigour of youth. Work; this is the time, for the freshest, the untouched, and unsmelled flowers alone are to be laid at the feet of the Lord, and such He receives. Rouse yourselves, therefore, for life is short. There are greater works to be done....A far greater work is this sacrifice of yourselves for the benefit of your race, for the welfare of humanity. (*ibid.*, pp. 303-304).

Swami Vivekananda

# Swami Vivekananda on the Future of India

Feel, my children, feel ; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden ; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad ; then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy. Struggle, struggle, was my motto for the last ten years. Struggle, still say I. When it was all dark, I used to say, struggle ; when light is breaking in, I still say struggle, Be not afraid, my children. (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, p. 367).

Have fire and spread all over. Work, work....Beware of everything that is untrue ; stick to truth, and we shall succeed, maybe slowly but surely. Work as if on each of you depended the whole work. Fifty centuries are looking on you, the future of India depends on you. Work on. (*ibid.*, pp. 369-370).

My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions. I have formul-

ated the idea and have given my life to it....They will spread from centre to centre, until we have covered the whole of India. (*ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 223).

What we want are some young men who will renounce everything and sacrifice their lives for their country's sake. We should first form their lives and then some real work can be expected. (*ibid.*, p. 352).

My boy, when death is inevitable, is it not better to die like heroes than as stocks and stones ? And what is the use of living a day or two more in this transitory world ? It is better to wear out than to rust out—specially for the sake of doing the least good to others. (*ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 176).

Work unto death—I am with you, and when I am gone, my spirit will work with you. This life comes and goes—wealth, fame, enjoyments are only of a few days. It is better, far better to die on the field of duty, preaching the truth, than to die like a worldly worm. Advance! (*ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 114).

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## To Our Readers

With the arrival of 1993 *Prabuddha Bharata*, the oldest running monthly Journal of India, is entering its 98th year.

This first issue of 1993 comes as a special number. Many eminent writers in the East and in the West have contributed valuable articles on varied themes, enriching it. We are grateful to them all. During the last year, 1992, writers, scholars, and devotees contributed dissertations, essays, travelogues and other types of articles for the monthly 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, or year-to-year subscribers, by offering donations, and by contributing articles which will help to fulfil Swami Vivekananda's vision of Awakened India.

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

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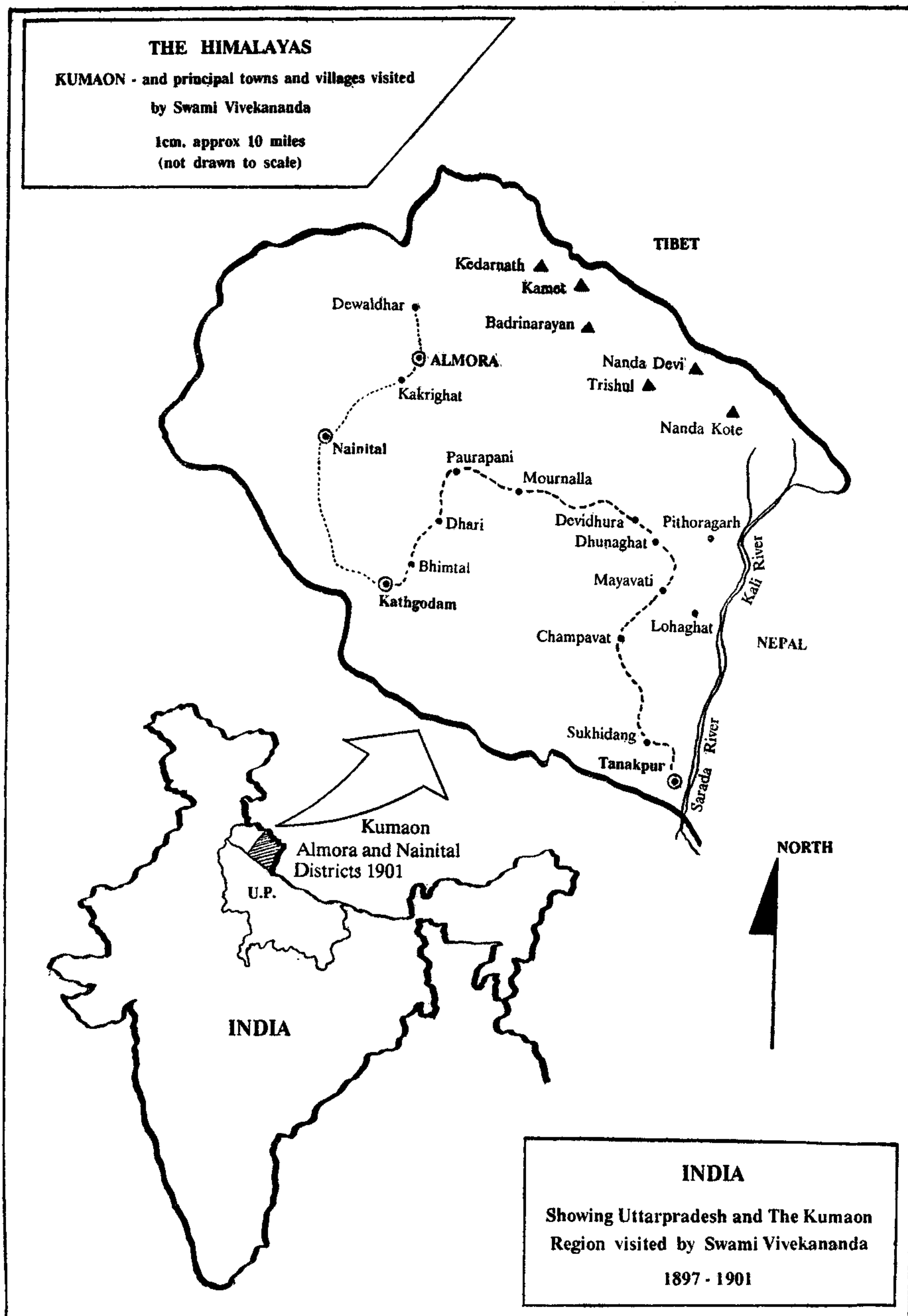
## Vivekananda in Kumaon—I

The eternal snow-clad silvery mountains, the stillness of the dense forests, the scenic beauty of rushing streams and broad rivers, and above all, the spiritually vibrant atmosphere of the Kumaon region always held a great attraction for Vivekananda. He had many indescribable spiritual experiences in this land of Siva and Uma. The very sight of these majestic mountains, he once said, stilled his brain feverish with work and future plans ; and he prayed that his last days would be spent in the Himalayas. In his short life he visited Kumaon four times and the fact that he spent many months here, itself testifies to his deep love for the place. Whether for practising meditation and other spiritual sadhanas, or for recouping his health, or just for much needed rest after his many journeys, he always came to stay for a time in the great hills and forests of Kumaon. His four visits were: (1) August-September 1890, when he came to the region as an unknown itinerant monk, (2) May-August 1897, when after traversing the country South to North he came to recoup his health, (3) May-June 1898, he came for rest and to recover on his way to a tour to Kashmir, and (4) December-January 1901, when he came to visit the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati.

From time immemorial in Indian tradition, the Himalayan region of Kumaon-Garhwal has been held in high esteem, great wonder, and reverence by the people of the Indian sub-continent, as the dwelling place of gods and sages, as the source of perennial rivers, the Ganga and the Jamuna, as the land of rare and precious herbs and medicines, and as the Abode of Viṣṇu and

Śiva, Badri and Kedār. As of old, this holy land of peace and spiritual tranquillity still draws innumerable devoted Hindus and spiritual aspirants. The Himalayas have always had an important place in Hindu thought. Therefore the epics and Purāṇas, and other great literary works again and again have sung the glory and power of these mountains. To Hindus, "it is what Palestine is to Christians..., the great way to final liberation," said a British historian. During the age of the Ramayana the Kumaon was known as *Uttar Kauśal* ; during the Mahabharata period, it was called the *Uttar Kuru*, and in the Purāṇas it was known as *Uttarākhand*. According to historians, the Uttaranchal was ruled over by the Kuru kings in ancient times for a long period. Rama and Sita spent some time here, and the Pāṇḍavas visited many times. Every place in Uttaranchal is associated either with Rama or the Pāṇḍava brothers, or with other great sages. Colourful legends are woven around every temple, river and natural cave or grotto. Kumaon-Garhwal in fact resonates with Hindu tradition more than any other place in India.

The whole north-western region of Uttar Pradesh, from the edge of the plains to deep within the Himalayan foothills, is known as the Kumaon. At present it consists of three districts: Almora, Nainital, and Pithoragarh named after the three large towns. The word Kumaon itself is derived from the word *Kūrma*. In ancient times it was called *Kūrmāchala*. There is a widely prevailing legend about it. According to this story: Viṣṇu incarnated in his second incarnation as a *Kūrma*—a tortoise, to save the world. He stayed in his tortoise form





for three years on the mountain (the present Kāndeva Hill) in Champawat. Champawat is in the Pithoragarh district and is six km. by footpath from Mayavati Ashrama. Even now people show the semblance of a reptile on a stone. In the beginning the name Kumaon was confined only to Champawat and its surrounding villages. The Chandra kings of Champawat, in course of time, expanded their domain to cover a wide area, and with it, use of the name Kumaon spread. Now Kumaon has distinct cultural as well as geographical characteristics of its own. The area was successively ruled from 500 B.C. onwards by the kings of the Kuru Dynasty—Kunindās, Paurava-Varmans, Katyuris, and finally by the Chandra rulers, till the end of the eighteenth century. All during this long period the region was a stronghold of Brahminical culture.

In the second week of April 1890, Vivekananda was compelled to go down from Varanasi to the Baranagore Math in Calcutta. He cast off from him his ardent wish to settle down for a time in the holy city practising meditation and spiritual disciplines when he heard of the passing away of Balaram Bose. He felt urgently the need to be with the bereaved family and also to enquire into the affairs of the fledgling Math. At the Math, with his brother monks he was his old buoyant self. He fired their hearts and minds ablaze with his luminous explanations of the teachings of the Master and the Upaniṣads. For hours, day after day, the young monks sat round their vibrant leader spellbound listening to his inexhaustible flow of words on various subjects. No university, it can be said, could have given them a richer education in knowledge, with profound insights, depth, and vastness. Like his Guru, he too was unfathomable.

The Swami was a man of wonderful versatility. He could speak on any

subject with authority, invariably throwing new light on it—be it religion, philosophy, history, science, art, literature, philology, sociology, and what not! He could clothe any dry subject with such a beauty and grace that it became a most interesting study and roused the keenest desire for further knowledge. One wondered as to how he could have garnered all this diverse knowledge, how he could have exercised his thinking and analytic mind in such a masterly way over them, especially those which were outside his sphere of study as a Sannyasin, and how without a moment's hesitation he could give them out, enriched with his own original comments and conclusions!<sup>1</sup>

Though Vivekananda devoted a few months to training his younger brother-disciples, yet now and then he felt intensely spurred by the desire to escape, to lose himself in tapasyā in the immensity of the Himalayas. He felt the call, no doubt, of the great mission that awaited him, but its exact contours and the form which it would take were still shrouded in mist. How and when the mission would begin, and when God would command him to embark upon it were uncertain. Swamiji waited impatiently, like a lion held captive. A colossal force that was rising in him could not be contained any longer. The indomitable spirit to be care-free and wander seized him anew and he wanted to fly like an eagle in the limitless sky.

In the meantime, Akhandananda had returned to the Math and narrated about the splendours of the journey to the shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath, and about his adventures in the mountains. This was

1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda, by his Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1918) Vol. IV, p. 216.



sufficient for Swamiji. He said to him, "You are my man! You have faith! Come, let us be off together." In his letter to Swami Saradananda on July 6, 1890, he wrote, "I intend shortly, as soon as I can get a portion of my fare, to go up to Almora and thence to some place in Garhwal on the Ganga, where I can settle down for a long meditation. Gangadhar (Swami Akhandananda) is accompanying me....I am longing for a flight to the Himalayas." To Saradananda again he wrote on July 15th, "I have my own plans for the future and they shall be a secret." Prior to his long journey he first went to Holy Mother with Akhandananda to ask for her blessings. He sought her out at Ghusuree, a village across the Ganga. He told her, "Mother, I shall not return until I have attained the highest jñāna." The Holy Mother, touching his forehead, blessed him in the name of the Master. The Mother asked Akhandananda to take care of Naren and to see that he would not suffer for food. Before leaving the Math Swamiji told his brother-disciples, "I shall not return until I acquire such realization that my very touch will transform a man." To carry out the gigantic work of the Lord, Swamiji needed preparation in solitude. To contain the stupendous cosmic energy which would transform a person by a mere touch of the body or brain was a task fit only for a spiritual giant. It is staggering to think how Swamiji became a huge reservoir of divine cosmic force whose mere words could set ablaze spirituality in any dry heart. In his later life we come across many an instance of how this very thing happened.

In the middle of July 1890, Vivekananda, free from all worries and responsibilities, doubtless with a rare joy surging within his heart, set out on his long wanderings to the Himalayas. His intention was not to hurry there by rail, but to travel on foot along the

Ganga, begging his food and sleeping under the trees, not harbouring any thoughts for the morrow. So with divine music in their hearts and countenances radiating peace and dispassion, the two sannyasins trudged on day after day. Though poorly clad, with only staffs and kamandalu in their hands, the sight of the two wanderers did not go unnoticed or unremembered by the villagers along their way. As for Vivekananda, with his athletic build, luminous eyes, and regal mien, it was impossible for him to remain inconspicuous anywhere. His pre-eminent characteristic, as Romain Rolland pointed out, "was his kingliness. He was a born king and nobody ever came near him, either in India or in America, without paying homage to his majesty."<sup>2</sup> There was a certain dignity and grace about him which set him apart from all others. Even in this period of *wanderjahre*, that Swami was a spiritual genius was made clear enough to many learned pandits.

To give rest to their tired limbs, the two monks halted at Bhagalpar, a town on the bank of the Ganga in Bihar, about 560 km. from Calcutta. The legend of the locality has it that Parasurāma, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, was born here. At Bhagalpur they stayed for a few days as guests of Manmathanath Chowdhury. This good man who became a great admirer of Swamiji, at first did not show any respect, thinking the two monks to be only ordinary wandering sadhus when they came to his home. But little by little as they talked, he came to realize that the leader was a man of great parts. It happened that Manmathanath Babu conversed with Swamiji on Buddhism and soon found out that the monk was a thousand times more learned than he himself was. To test Swamiji's knowledge of

2. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) page 5.

Sanskrit, he brought out all the Upaniṣads and questioned him on many abstruse passages. From his illuminating replies, Manmathanath discovered that Swamiji's mastery of the scriptures was of an extraordinary kind. And the way he could recite passage after passage was greatly charming. Thus, wrote Chowdhury, "being firmly convinced of his wonderful knowledge—equally in English, Sanskrit, and in Yoga, I was greatly drawn towards him....Once I noted that he was humming a tune to himself. So I asked him if he could sing. He replied, 'Very little.' But being pressed hard by us he sang, and what was my surprise to find that, as in learning so in music, he was wonderfully accomplished!"<sup>3</sup>

Before leaving Bhagalpur, after their seven days' stopover, Swamiji also had a long discussion with the Jain teachers of the place on religious beliefs. From Bhagalpur the two itinerants then visited on their northerly way, Vaidyanath, Varanasi, and Ayodhya. In Varanasi, Swamiji said as he took leave of Pramada Babu and others, that he would not come back to Kasi until he could burst on society like a bomb and make it follow him like a dog. This startling expression turned out to be prophetic, he did not return to that holy city until he had awakened the highest consciousness of his race and given a new direction to the current of world thought on its way to discovering the advaitic oneness of the Upaniṣads.

From Ayodhya they hurried straight towards Nainital, a distance of about 450 km. Passing over the Tarai, the hot and humid Gangetic Plain at the base of the Himalayan foothills, they began climbing the hills of the Siwaliks. The monsoon rains must have

nearly ended, because it was the end of August, and that year the rainy season was short. The monsoon is vigorous in the Kumaon hills during June to August. From the beginning of September the dark stratus-filled sky turns into blue, only here and there dotted with fleecy-white strato-cumulous patches. Immediately after the rains the hills and forests present a spectacular sight. In the distance also the great tufts of broken clouds so mingle amongst the snow covered peaks, that it is often difficult to distinguish them apart. The scenic beauty is breathtaking in the forests too, as the seemingly endless tiers of dark Siwaliks are silhouetted in various shades against the horizon, and within the dense jungle of pine, sal, deodar, holly, dense oak and rhododendrons, the deep green foliage glistens like liquid silver in the bright sunlight and morning dew. Cascades are seen rushing down every ravine and over rocky precipices to become boisterous mountain streams further down. Yet the background of deep silence, away from the turbulence of human travails, is imposing. Alternately entering the sudden coolness on the shady sides of the hills, then emerging into the bright warmth of the sun as they moved upward and onward, the mere touch of the vibrant air, contrasting with the memory of the plains below, must have lifted the minds of the sannyasins to soar into the transcendental heights of their Siva-nature. The Nainital hills are called the Siwalik Range, meaning "belonging to Siva the Supreme."

The foothills of the Siwaliks were once covered with these thick forests and inhabited by a great profusion of wild flora and fauna—tigers, leopards, pythons, hamad-rayads, various kinds of deer: kakar, cheetal and sambhar, and pea-fowls, partridges, pheasants, jungle cocks and hens, and innumerable varieties of other birds. The southern-most belt of the Himalayan foot-

3. *The Life*, by Eastern & Western Disciples, page 245.



hills, which extend north-westward for more than 1600 km. are all parts of the Siwaliks. They have an average elevation of 2000 to 3000 feet as they rise abruptly from the Gangetic Plain or Tarai. The hills are subject to severe erosion in their unforested state because of the torrential rains. Periodic flash floods also cause havoc to crops, property and cattle. Reckless felling of trees, growing population, and efforts to increase cultivable land have in recent years exacerbated this condition. Much of the natural beauty of the Kumaon has thus been destroyed in recent years. A century ago, however with its thin and widely scattered population, it was paradise on earth for the naturalist. Even in the 1930s Jim Corbett wrote that occasionally tiger, leopard and king cobra were to be seen in the forest that spread from Kathgodam to Nainital.

Walking nearly 35 km. the two monks reached Nainital, lying 6346 feet above sea level. Here they were the guests of one Ramprasanna Bhattacharya. When they reached the place, Swami Akhandananda complained of pain in his chest which was the beginning of a severe bout with bronchitis. It gave him much trouble in high altitude and bracing climate. They spent about a week at Nainital enjoying the scenic splendour and visiting nearby important places.

At the end of the 19th century Nainital was sparsely populated and only a few permanent residents lived here during the severe winters. It has, since the 1850s, been a hill-station and now attracts a large number of tourists in the summer. In the old days government officials, Europeans and wealthy Indians, came to Nainital to escape the unbearable heat of the plains. In recent years the city is found always crowded with tourists. The city was founded in 1841 by the Britishers and prior to that

there was dense forest, a beautiful lake and a temple of Goddess Naini. The lake is a little more than three kilometres in circumference, fed at the upper end by a perennial spring; in one or two places it is 90 feet in depth. The present town is built around this lake. Geologists have their own theories about the lake, but the local legend traces it back to ancient times. Myth and legend say, that three famous sages, Atri, Pulastya, and Pulaha, while on a pilgrimage, arrived at the crest of the nearby highest mountain (Cheena 8970 ft.) and, finding no water to quench their thirst, dug a hole at the foot of the hill and meditated on Manasarovar. The water from sacred Manasarovar filled the hole. Therefore the lake was also called *Triṣi-sarovar*. After the departure of the sages, Goddess Naina took up her residence in the waters. The present temple of Naini Devi on the bank was built in 1880; earlier it had been some distance away.

The lake and the temple were sacred to the Kumaon people and annual fairs used to be held. Word of the existence of a great lake reached the British administrators of the region. It was a closely guarded secret where it was exactly, the villagers were reluctant to disclose it for fear of defilement by the foreigners. But, it is said, one of the British officials, to discover the exact place, hit on an ingenious plan of placing a large stone on the head of a villager, instructing him that he would have to carry it until he arrived at the lake. After roaming over the hills for many days the man at last could not endure the burden of the heavy stone and disclosed the spot. The names and the elevation of the hills that surround the town are: Ayamrapatā, 7689 feet; Devpatā, 7181 feet; Hanibani, 7153 feet; Cheena, 8570 feet; Alma, 7980 feet, and Ladiyakanta, 8144 feet. Earlier there were many lakes, the four presently remaining are Naini Tal, Sat Tal, Bhim Tal, and Nakuchiya Tal.

After remaining nearly a week in Nainital the monks began their journey towards Almora town, a distance of 48 km. They determined to cover the entire distance on foot. In the course of their walking Vivekananda took a shortcut through the forest, wishing to be alone, and asked Akhandananda to go on by the usual route. Later they met each other. On the third day they stopped, intending to spend the night under a huge peepul tree standing on the bank of the Kosi River. Here another mountain stream, the Suāl, joins it. The natural scenery of the place was charming. The clear cold waters of the river flowed with a soothing sound and the surrounding hills covered with tall trees and the azure sky filled their hearts. Swamiji said to his companion, "This place is grand. What a delightful spot for meditation!" After refreshing himself with a bath in the cold river, he sat under the peepul tree and soon, as was natural with him, his mind soared to a transcendental plane. For a long time he remained in that state. When he regained his normal consciousness, he said to his *gurubhāi*, "Oh Gangadhar! Here under this peepul tree one of the greatest problems of my life has been solved." Then he explained his extraordinary realization, which has been pondered over by posterity since—the Oneness of the Macrocosm with the microcosm, and the vision of the whole universe within an atom. Swamiji later expounded these deep thoughts in many of his lectures in the West. This place, Kakri-ghat, is 25 km. from Almora by road. Even today the natural surroundings are picturesque. The peepul tree which sheltered and was sanctified by one of the greatest sages of our time is strong and healthy. Many devotees visit the spot and look on it with awe and wonder. A bright feather in the crest of the glorious Kumaon!

When they were about four kilometres

away from Almora, Swamiji suddenly felt desperately weary, footsore and famished. He sank down on the ground, almost collapsing. The place was near a Muslim cemetery. Akhandananda was naturally alarmed at the condition of Swamiji and went in haste to find food and water to revive him. Luckily, there was a keeper of the cemetery, one Zulfikar Ali, a fakir, who lived in a hut close by. Passing that way, and happening to notice the plight of the unknown sadhu, he brought a cucumber which alone he could provide. Vivekananda asked the fakir to put cucumber into his mouth, saying that he was too weak to do so. The man remonstrated saying, "Holy sir, I am a Muslim!" "That does not matter at all," said the Swami with a smile, "are we not all brothers?" After having been thus fed by the fakir, the Swami felt much refreshed. Speaking later of this incident he used to say, "The man really saved my life; I had never felt so exhausted."<sup>4</sup> When, long afterward Swamiji again visited Almora, the second time, honoured as a national hero, he recognized the same fakir standing in the crowd, approached him and embraced him. He gave him money also. The credit of this noble deed belongs to Kumaon.

Almora town lies on a ridge of the hills, at an altitude of 5500 feet. Besides being the headquarters of the district, the town is one of India's popular hill resorts. Almora was first under the rule of the *Katyuri* kings who ruled from Katyur-Baijanath (Almora District) from the eighth to the twelfth century. The name *Katyuri* is derived from Katyur valley, the Sanskritized form of which was *Kārtikeya Pura*. During this period Almora was a village and was called *Khasiyā Kholā*. The villagers of the place used to supply to a nearby sun temple a kind of grass, *Almodi*, and therefore these people came to be called *Almodias*. Later

4. *Ibid.*, page 251.



the village assumed the name of Almora. Katyuri rulers were famous for building hundreds of Siva and Durga temples in Kumaon, and their particular architectural style is called Katyuri art. In the twelfth century A.D. Kumaon was invaded by the Mallas of Nepal. It marked the liquidation of the Katyuri kingdom. This paved the way for the rise of several independent principalities. These principalities struggled with one another for political supremacy till the Chandra kings of Champawat subdued all their adversaries. It was King Rudra Chandra (1565-1597) who brought the entire Kumaon hill region under his suzerainty, and it was King Bhisma Chandra (1512-1530) who initiated the transfer of his capital from Champawat to Almora. It was easy to rule from a central place like Almora. The completion of the new capital at Almora took place during the time of Kalyan Chandra III (A.D. 1545). The Gurkhas captured Almora in 1790, but suffered a defeat by the British in 1815. Britishers wanted Almora for the expansion of their commercial and economic power. They helped to a great extent in the town's development.

When Swamiji visited Almora the population of the town was less than 6000. Amidst the stillness of the mountains and surrounded by forests, the town nestled quietly on the lap of bounteous nature. Life was unhurried and leisurely. Swami Saradananda and Swami Kripananda, who had already been in Almora for some time, were overjoyed to meet their leader. Lala Badri Shah, a pious and wealthy citizen of Almora, took Swamiji into his home. During his short stay at Lalaji's house a curious event took place. Someone informed Lalaji that a certain person was possessed by a *devatā* (*demi-god*). Lala Badri Shah hurried to the spot, and Swamiji was also curious to see the phenomenon. Seeing a sannyasin, a group

of people gathered at the place called out, "Here is a sadhu, and he will cure the man." Swamiji had not expected this. The people pressed and fell at his feet, and finding no other recourse Swamiji placed his hand on the sick man's head and prayed. Strangely, after a while the man completely recovered.

Vivekananda stayed on at the house of Lalaji for a few days and then took leave of him and of his brother-disciples, and retired to a solitary cave above a mountain village to perform most severe spiritual disciplines. In the stillness of the cave and undisturbed by anyone, "he had higher and higher spiritual illuminations, until his face shone with celestial fire."<sup>5</sup> About seven kilometres away from Almora City, on the top of a hill there is *Kāṣār*, or *Kāṣār Devī Durga* temple. Around the temple are a few caves. It is said that the original temple was inside a natural cave, and about 25 years ago it was reconstructed here. The hill is called in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Kāṣāya Mountain*. The *Purāṇa* says: Between *Kauśiki* (present Kośi) and *Śālmali* (present Suāl) rivers stands the holy *Kāṣāya* mountain, and to the West of this lies the region of Viṣṇu.<sup>6</sup> According to an inscription found here, the temple was built sometime in the seventh century A.D. It is believed that Swamiji must have done his *tapasyā* here. Vivekananda could not remain immersed in sublime beatitude, he had a mission to fulfil. That great force brought him back again and again. But his happiness this time was marred by a telegram which brought him the sad news of his sister's tragic death. Because of this he suddenly left Almora in September 1890, with other monks, for Garhwal on his way to Badrikashrama.

5. *Ibid.*, page 252.

6. कौशिकि शाल्मली मध्ये पुण्य काषाय पर्वतः ।  
तत्र पश्चिमे भागे वै क्षेत्र विष्णोः प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥

# The Ideal of Education\*

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

*Dissemination of secular education is praiseworthy but inadequate. Real education must help us to manifest the innate perfection of the Soul. In India we are still far away from it. Education in a wrong direction may do harm rather than good, cautions Revered President Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.*

It is a matter of joy to see that educational institutions are coming up in various places. This is absolutely necessary for a country like India where education is still not within the reach of many people. A large section of the Indian population is yet without education in any form. This is an unfortunate state of affairs; it is essential that education has to be made available to every one of the citizens. As the condition is at present, we have to go a long way in achieving the goal. Education has to be a part and parcel of a country's ethos without which there cannot be real progress in any form. Swami Vivekananda laid great stress on the spread of education. According to him, "A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses. If we are to rise again we shall have to do it by spreading education among the masses."<sup>1</sup> But, at the same time, Swamiji wanted us to be aware of the ideal of education. This point has to be kept in mind so that we can have a clear direction along which we can proceed. This is because, education in a wrong direction may be worse than having no education at all. Therefore Swami Vivekananda wanted us to

have a clear vision of the goal to be achieved through education. As he defines it, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man." This statement may seem somewhat obscure. What perfection do we find already in man? This has to be understood.

Swami Vivekananda was a Vedantin and his vision was Vedantic. He did not believe in the growth of a thing which does not already exist. Perfection according to him is already inherent in every one of us. Our attempt is to manifest that inherent perfection. The method by which this is done is through proper education. The word 'Education' is used in a very broad sense—it does not merely mean that system of education which is being followed now. We have to be perfect in every sense and that is achieved by a well thought out system of education which trains students physically, mentally and spiritually. Education is not something that is put in from outside into the brain of a child. That is not education according to Swamiji. He says that every child is a potentially perfect individual and it is the duty of the teacher to help him bring out that innate perfection. A teacher who tries to impose his personality or infuse into the student ideas which are irrelevant to his individual being is doing more harm than good to the student. The teacher has to take the view that he is only to help the student manifest, his innate

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\* The essay is based on a talk delivered by Revered Maharaj at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bhilai, on Dec. 2, 1985.

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978) Vol. 4, page 482.



divinity, and that in a manner which is the best method possible. The teacher must have the outlook that he is not giving something new to the student but helping him bring out what is latent in him. That is the Vedantic idea with which education must be viewed and Swamiji wanted this type of education to be imparted.

What kind of perfection do we mean when we say that it is latent in us? According to Vedanta, man is divine, a perfect being; he is the Atman which is pure and perfect. Ignorance has covered this perfection. To attain perfection simply means the complete removal of all sorts of imperfection. We are all aware of our imperfections. We think we are not able to do this or that, we do not know what our duties are towards ourselves and the world around us and we cannot understand the essence of our own self, and so on. All these problems are to be solved from within. These cannot be imposed upon the student by the teacher. Our education should be imparted in this manner. We are fumbling with the idea of education as yet. We are not clear about it. Swamiji's ideas on education are familiar to many, and people marvel at the ideas of Swamiji on education. These are being gradually accepted by deep thinkers on the subject.

Swamiji said: "The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion—is it worth the name?"<sup>2</sup> That means, it is not merely storing of some ideas which the student gets from outside, but assimilating them into his being so that these ideas can stimulate him in bringing about the perfection that is latent in him.

Education should not be lopsided. It should be a force which finds manifestation in every walk of life. Merely committing something to memory does not make one educated—as Swamiji would humorously say, our libraries would then be the best educated in the world. Ideas are there, stored in books, but what is required is that they should be assimilated and life has to be shaped under the influence of those ideas. Our boys and girls know many things, they read many things and learn many things. But they do not know how to make use of their knowledge. The present system of education gives only ideas and not the power to make use of them in a fruitful manner. Our boys, even after having the highest degrees do not know what to do with their qualification. I remember an incident in this connection. When a candidate went to an American institution during the second world war seeking a job, the authorities asked the question: "What is your qualification?" He replied, "I am an M.A., or M. Sc." The next question was, "What can you do?" He could not reply to this question. They did not know what to do with their knowledge. That is the sorry state of affairs. That is why our generation is not much advanced practically, though theoretically they are much ahead of many brilliant western students. I heard a comment about Indian students studying abroad from one of the devotees, who was himself educated in the West. He used to say, "In theory we found western students to be not so good as we are. But so far as practical work is concerned, they are far superior to us,—Indian students." This is because, we have never tried to put our knowledge into practice. For us it remains only as theory. We have never tried to make them practical. That is why we lag behind while other countries go ahead with their tendency to make ideas practical. We have stored our ideas, with-

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, page 147.

out making them productive in life. So, our education has to be productive and fruitful in life without which it is not worth its name. Such a fruitful education has to be imparted to the younger generation so that they can be stronger and more useful in society by contributing their best to the future of the country. Education must make us competent to solve all our problems in life.

As has been pointed out earlier, education is not mere book-learning. Take the instance of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. She did not know even to write her name. She started but did not go much ahead in learning because in those days her social position was such that women were debarred from having formal education. They could hardly go to schools. They were not allowed to study, simply because they happened to be women. A vast section of our population had to go without education in this manner. But, Mother Sarada Devi has been described as the goddess of learning incarnate by Sri Ramakrishna, who alone could assess what the Mother was. She has incarnated to impart knowledge to people. But she herself did not know how to read or write! Even though she tried to learn during her younger days, she was not allowed to do so. However, she was a veritable incarnation of knowledge. So, education does not mean simply reading and writing. A man can be educated even without going to schools, colleges and universities. Sri Ramakrishna never went to any formal school, though his education was arranged for in a make-shift lower primary school for sometime in his village. His education was limited to only a preliminary standard. He could just read and write. But then, there were people who were great scholars, educationists, lawyers among people who sat at his feet spellbound for hours and profited by the words of wisdom that flowed from his

lips. Was he then not educated? Sri Ramakrishna says, "As long as I live, so long do I learn." Lifelong education, and that, not merely derived from books or schools and colleges, but by shrewd observation of the world around him and by the vast fund of personal experience; these were the sources of his knowledge. He was a keen observer of nature and the teachings he imparted showed how keen an observer he must have been. His illustrations are from everyday experiences of human beings and are very practical. That is why they are so much appreciated, so much readily understood even by those who are without any formal education. A man without any book-learning could understand what Sri Ramakrishna said and could derive great benefit from the knowledge imparted that way. So that is education—it must enrich our intellect and also shape our life as a whole. It cannot be divided into compartments. We have to be integrated individuals and that integration is possible only when we develop in a perfect manner, in a comprehensive way which involves our whole life and not merely a part of it. We should develop physically, mentally, morally and spiritually. That is how real progress and comprehensive development take place. Education is not merely the amount of information we gather, but it must give us real wisdom. Knowledge may be superficial and borrowed from outside, but that does not help us. We have got to assimilate ideas, as Swamiji said. That assimilation will give us power to transform or evolve ourselves properly and then only our education will be a blessing to ourselves and to the world.

So, our education must make *men* of us. That must make us a blessing to ourselves and to the world at large. Without that education is not worth its name. Unless we are aware of the ideal of education our education will be mere waste of energy or



even it can be harmful. We gather certain information and feel proud that we have got so much knowledge. Information must bring wisdom and knowledge. It has to give competence to challenge the problems of oneself and of those that come in everybody's life.

Girls also will have to get proper education so that they can be good mothers, good women. Swamiji had said that women have to mould their lives according to the ideal of Sītā, Sāvitrī, Gārgī, and others. The ideal should not be lost. We have to see that our womenfolk develop in such a way that they will be a great force for the making of future India. The training received from the mother is far more important for the child than what it receives from any other source. The scriptures say, "*Mātr devo bhava, pitṛ devo bhava, ācārya devo bhava*—Look upon the mother as god, look upon the father as god, look upon the teacher as

god." First comes the mother in the place of respect, then the father and then the teacher. So, a mother has great responsibility towards her children, because through proper example she can train and educate them in the right manner. Her training is the foundation for all further education of the child. It was believed in olden days that the child's training begins as early as from its life in the mother's womb. The way the mother thinks and behaves directly affects the child. So, the responsibility of the mother is great and therefore she herself should be properly educated to think noble thoughts and behave accordingly. In this manner, womenfolk can play the roles of real mothers, real wives, real sisters for the well-being of not only their own homes, but of society and the world at large.

I pray to Sṛī Ramakrishna that by His grace, there may be ideal institutions everywhere for the glorious future of the nation.

The knowers of Brahman declare that there are two kinds of knowledge worthy to be known, namely, the Higher (Parā) and the lower (Aparā). Of these the lower consists of the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, the Atharva-Veda, the science dealing with pronunciation and accent, the sacrificial liturgy, grammar, the science dealing with etymology and the meaning of the words, prosody, and astronomy; and the Higher is that by which that Unchangeable is known.

—Mundaka Upaniṣad.

# On Practicality and Practical Spirituality

(Notes of conversations with Swami Ranganathananda)

MISS SOMA GHOSH

*Armed with spiritual insight and deep understanding of human nature, Revered Maharaj, who is a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, instils vigorous positive attitudes in every person who talks with him. The author, Miss Soma Ghosh, who resides in Calcutta, preserved notes of her conversation for the benefit of others. Readers will notice that some of the problems that vex human beings are answered in these notes with great clarity of thought.*

21st March 1991

It was 11:30 A.M. I was standing outside Swami Ranganathanandaji's room. Everybody was sweating. R—and her mother had accompanied me to Belur Math with the desire of meeting this great sannyasin. They were sitting on the bench outside his room, fanning themselves. Maharaj was talking to someone and his voice drifted out to us now and then.

Five minutes later he came out, smiling. He sat on the chair put out for him. A lady, probably his disciple, had come with her son and daughter. They were hardly out of schools, but their mother wanted them to be initiated. She was complaining to Maharaj about their excessive love for freedom, when Maharaj turned his eyes on them and said in his deep firm voice, 'On Sunday I will give you complete freedom, there will be no more bondage.'

Then his eyes fell on me. 'I remember you,' he said. I introduced R—to him and said, 'Maharaj, this friend of mine does not believe in God. But she was greatly interested in meeting you ; so she has come with me.'

To that he smiled. 'The concept of an extra-cosmic God is outdated. Very few believe in it anymore. This is the age of science. To know the truth you must question. The more you heat gold, the more it shines. So does truth—the more you question, the more it shines. The sages of the Upanishads questioned and investigated and realized God as the Self of the human being and as the Self of the universe. That is why Vedanta does not fear or hate atheist or atheism, for one can negate a god in the sky but cannot negate one's own Self. In the West, people were not allowed to question religion. They were appalled when, after the lecture, I asked them to question me. In Germany, a group of people once told me: 'We have only been told to believe what the clergy told us, and here you are asking us to question religion!'

But our Upanishads say otherwise,' said Maharaj. 'You don't have to believe in a god, they say. But you have to seek to know your Self—that unknown dimension which is in you. This body and the world around are the known dimension'—his hand swept from head to foot. 'I see with my eyes my known dimension. But behind this is the Unseen, Unknown, the Self, and to know that Self you must rise above your sensory



self. To do that, you don't have to be religious in the formal sense or believe in an extra-cosmic God. In my book *Science and Religion* you will find presented religion from a different approach, the questioning approach, which is the scientific approach.'

'A human being's idea of God is very limited. What is God? The dog can think of Him only as a b-i-g d-o-g — that is as far as its imagination can go. And a human being can similarly think of Him as a b-i-g m-a-n — his imagination cannot go beyond that. But God-intoxicated human beings like Sri Ramakrishna are beyond all what you can imagine. You don't have to believe in any imaginary God to know what Sri Ramakrishna is, and how divine was his life.'

23rd March 1991

Today, R—and I crossed the Ganga on a launch, then took a bus from Howrah to Belur. It was cloudy, windy and cool. Our minds were calm, in a state to absorb the teachings of the Swami.

We reached the Belur Math at 9:30 A.M. Hearing our voices, he came out of his room. We bowed before him. He smiled and raised his right hand in a spirit of welcoming. We felt elevated. 'Come in, please,' he invited us into his room. Then, indicating the chairs he said, 'Please sit down.' But we always prefer to sit on the ground by his feet and said so. 'Then sit on the carpet,' saying which he moved his chair slightly so that he now faced us sideways. And immediately, without even waiting for me to ask the question uppermost in my mind, he started answering it.

'Thoughts ... thoughts ...,' he began, 'what you would call in Bengali *cintā*, here. One thought mixing with another thought to

create a new thought. That's like particle physics; one particle colliding with another particle to produce a new particle. And it goes on like that endlessly.'

'But Maharaj, how do you control these thoughts?' I asked.

'You don't control them,' he answered, 'you must manipulate them. The mind hates to be controlled, to be dominated. It loves freedom, so it is always disobedient. So give it its freedom, only manipulate it. Control of the mind is something else, it is a life-long struggle.'

'But it has to be done,' I said.

'Yes, one must never give up,' he added. 'In Chinese Zen Buddhism, the mind is compared to an ox. There are a series of ten pictures of the taming of the recalcitrant ox. It is called the ten ox-herding pictures. In the first picture you will see a man is searching for the ox. In the second picture he has found the tracks of the ox, in the third picture he glimpses the tail of the ox and in the fourth picture he sees the ox with its horns poised, breathing fire as it were, through its nostrils.

The man is standing afar, he cannot even approach the ox. Some pictures later, you see the man sitting calmly on the back of the calm ox. He has succeeded in taming it, so he is now master of it. In the next picture, and this is a beautiful picture, you see the bull standing quietly, and the man sitting near it, playing his flute. The next picture is the most wonderful. The man and the ox have disappeared, and in their place appears a big zero, names and forms have disappeared into the Infinite'.

I remembered the picture of a man on an ox's back on the cover of *Tao-te-Ching*

and said, 'Maharaj, I found Tao-te-Ching had many similarities with the Vedanta.'

'Yes', he said, 'Taoism is a philosophy higher than Confucianism, which has more to do with the subject of human being in the social context.'

One of us asked suddenly, 'Can mental peace ever be gained?'

'All human beings have mental tensions', answered Ranganathanandaji. 'It is only human to have them. Tensions arise when you tell the mind to go somewhere it doesn't want to, or you don't want to let it go where it wants to. So all human beings have tensions. All except two kinds of people.' Here he quoted a verse from the *Srimad Bhagavatam* and explained it:

*Yastu mūdhatamoloke Yaśca buddheḥ  
param gatāḥ,  
Tāvubhau sukhamedhete  
klisyantyantarito janāḥ.*

"That is, only the *mūdhatama*, or the most foolish person (who has no control of his senses, whose mind is so completely attached to the senses that he or she only listens to them) and the *buddheḥ param gatāḥ*, the *paramahansa* (the person of highest wisdom) experience happiness (and are free from all tensions). Except these two, all persons in between these two are in varying states of tension and sorrow."

'But usually', he continued, 'as the Americans say, with most people, it is "gone with the wind"!'. He smiled, enjoying his own joke, while we laughed outright.

'The Indian tradition makes our people appreciate the spiritual dimension of the human being. Our bodies and minds are conditioned in such a manner that we can

easily grasp the idea of the Self, of the nature of pure Consciousness, within but beyond the sensory system and the mind. That is the truth conveyed by the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* utterance: *Tat Tvam asi*, 'That thou art'. We can follow the ideals, and struggle to realize our true Self; this is a difficult process for the West but the West is developing the capacity to recognize the Self within the body and to develop spirituality thereby.'

'The human beings are made in such a manner that the mind is attached to the senses. When the senses rule the mind completely, the man is at the animal level. The animal has mind, but it doesn't think, it does what its senses tell it to do. It is only when you don't want to allow your mind where the senses lead it to, that all your higher development problems begin. The mind becomes rebellious like the ox and refuses to obey. But the human being tries to raise his or her mind above the sensory level to the intellectual and artistic levels and ultimately to the spiritual level, turn it from the senses towards the Self. So all people between the highest *Paramahansa* and the lowest utterly ignorant person have these mental tensions and have to learn to reckon with them.

'Maharaj', said one of us, 'I practise meditation for one or one and a half hours every day. But the mind refuses to sit, and I suffer and feel frustrated.'

He smiled and said, 'Suppose you are digging for gold. You dig up a whole lot of mud and at the end you get two or three nuggets of gold. Now, you were not digging for mud, the mud has no value at all. You get gold after a long toil, may be only two or three nuggets; but that is enough. So two or three minutes of true meditation during one and a half hours is enough in



the early stages. This will slowly increase—five minutes, ten minutes. Don't worry about that. The important thing is that you should meditate.'

'Our minds are actually like the infant who tries to take his first step. It falls down ninety times and succeeds only once or twice. It's the same thing while meditating. The mind is always failing at first, but it slowly succeeds with practice. So you must keep up the practice. Sri Ramakrishna has said: first comes *bhoga*, sensory pleasure; then must come *yoga*, spiritual growth; if you do not rise to *yoga* after *bhoga*, you will get *roga*, i.e. sickness; physical and mental diseases. He has expressed this truth in that beautiful language.'

At this moment we were interrupted by a gentleman who had come from Bokaro with the proposal for building a hospital there and Ranganathanandaji began talking with him on this subject. Meanwhile, I took out from my bag a small pad in which I had written down a few questions. When he finished talking to the gentleman, his eye immediately caught sight of the pad, however small of size, and he asked me what it was.

'Questions, Maharaj', I answered.

'Come on, come on', he said briskly.'

'Is visualization of an idea and realization the same thing?'

'No', he replied. 'They are not the same thing. Visualization of an idea is thinking, thinking, thinking very deeply on an idea, reaching down to the deepest layers of the mind, and slowly such visualization merges into realization. Then you see the ever-present Reality.'

At this juncture one of us asked him if we could tape the lecture that he was going

to deliver on Sunday at Yogodyan Ramakrishna Math. He said we could, of course, but what he would say was all in the books I asked him what the subject of his lecture was and he said, 'Oh! I don't know, they'll tell me when I go to that centre.'

He sat back in his chair, hands resting on the arm-rests, and began again:

'Imagination plays a great role in the formation of human character. You see a stone, you may think that you are the stone, but you don't become one because the stone is an object outside of you. But if you think: "I am wicked, I am a sinner, a debauch": you will become that. If you think: "I am pure, I am the Self": you become pure, you will realize the Self.'

'Says the Katha Upaniṣad (4.1):

*Parānci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūh-  
tasmātparānpaśyati nāntarātman ;  
Kasciddhīrah pratyagātmānamaikṣadāvṛtta-  
cakṣuramṛtattvamicchan.*

'The Self existent Reality evolved the sense organs with a certain defect of an outgoing disposition; therefore the human being sees things outside but not the Inner Self; A certain *dhīrah* (intelligent and heroic person), desirous of immortality, realized the Inner Self by giving a right about turn to the energies of the senses and the mind.'

'*Dhīrah*, i.e. a person of heroic mould; such a person alone can realize the Self. One must be a *dhīrah*.'

R— asked, 'Maharaj, what if I don't believe in God?'

'You don't have to believe in any God sitting up there in the sky. The Self is within

me, within you, within her. So it is only natural that you struggle to know your true Self. So, Swami Vivekananda defined religion as "the manifestation of the Divinity already within man".

One of my companions said: 'Maharaj, I have some personal problems. My father died three years ago. My uncles have taken away everything from me. My elder sisters are married. My mother and I live alone. All the responsibility to recover the property that our father left us is upon me. What should I do?'

Maharaj: 'This is not the work of the youngest in the family: you have elder sisters, this is their duty.'

My companion was taciturn, so I intervened, 'In her case it is the other way round.'

Maharaj: 'Then, if it is like that, you must rise to the occasion.' He straightened himself, squared his broad shoulders and fisted his hand. 'Take all the burden on your shoulders; have faith in yourself; you must not be afraid of responsibilities, and strength will come.'

My companion: 'Maharaj, my mother is very worried about me. She says I should get married. But I cannot understand what I must do.'

Maharaj: 'You are old enough to decide that yourself. You have a mature mind. How old are you?'

My companion: 'Thirty.'

Maharaj: 'Well then, dissect your mind. If you have the *vāsanā* (strong desire) to marry and raise a family, then choose a husband whom you like, whom your mother likes, and stick to your choice. But you

should choose well, otherwise life will become hell from the moment you marry. I have seen so much drunkenness, so much corruption in certain husbands; in such cases, the choice was bad. So choose correctly, and stick to that choice. Lead a happy life with your husband.' And he continued:

'But if you think that you can live without marriage, that it is not very necessary to have a husband, then finish off all such thoughts. The best age for women to get married is from 20 to 25 or 28. One can easily make friends during this period, the qualities needed for marriage are also good. But beyond this age the mind becomes rigid, it cannot mix freely. Also, if you marry when you are older, the children will be born later, and many problems arise from this. So if you have to marry, then marry now.'

My companion: 'I have no belief, nor do I want to marry. What do I do in such a situation?'

Maharaj: 'Dissect your mind first and see what it wants. If you have any strong worldly *vāsanā*, then it is better that you marry. But if you don't want to marry, then be the servant of the Lord, and work for bringing happiness and welfare to others.'

Then he added, 'As men renounce women when they become monks, you should also renounce men if and when you choose to be a nun. There is no hatred of the other sex involved in this, but only reverence.'

'But one thing. Sri Ramakrishna is no teacher of any narrow and exclusive religious creed. He includes all, excludes none. He is above all gods of creeds and higher than the highest imagination of mankind. Drink

(Continued on page 28)



# The Message of Swami Vivekananda

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

*The article is reproduced from the May 1952 issue of this Journal. It was an English translation of the Hindi speech delivered by the well known leader of India at our Delhi centre. The lucid and pure thought of the great mind expressed here reflect the deep reverence Jayaprakashji had for Swamiji.*

Swami Vivekananda belongs to the class of great seers of Truth. His intellect was great, but greater still was his heart. He once told his disciples at the Belur Math that if a conflict were to arise between the intellect and the heart they should reject the intellect and follow the heart. Many a Mahātma has appeared in this land, and some of them understood that to meditate on the soul in the caves of the Himalayas was the correct path to follow. Swami Vivekananda's mind also was influenced by this tradition and there arose a conflict in him early in his career ; his intellect advocating the traditional absorption in Self-realization and his heart bleeding for the miseries of the people around him. In the end he came to the conclusion that leaving the solitude he would enter into the soul of every being and worship his God by serving them. And what attracts the poor and lowly to him is this compassionate heart which ever bled for them and exhausted itself in their incessant service in thirty-nine brief years. It was in the anguish of that heart that he cried out, in his memorable message at Madras, in 1897:

Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that

ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it made you almost mad?

It was this measureless feeling for the spiritual and material poverty and misery of his fellow men, particularly of his fellow countrymen, that drove him round the world like a tornado of moral energy and gave him no rest till the end. His life's campaigns in the East and the West, including the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, were in response to this feeling. His life was all purity and love ; his coming to and going from this world was quick, sudden. But in the short period of thirty-nine years he accomplished so much by way of stirring up and infusing new life and new hope into the people that in the history of our great country we do not find a second to stand equal to him in this except perhaps the great Śankarācārya.

Today we are building a new India, in our own way. It is now that we need Swamiji's power and presence. Of course Swamiji is not physically with us ; but his words are there ; his teachings are there. They are before us. In our country there is ignorance ; there is poverty. Swamiji gave us a *mantra* in keeping with the cultural and spiritual heritage of our nation. He cut a new path, a new dharma, a religion of tolerance, universal brotherhood, and equality of mankind. We have experienced various revolutions in our country ; but we

have always preserved the soul of our culture in the midst of those cataclysmic changes. We cannot go forward, we cannot be a progressive nation by forsaking that soul of our civilization and culture. It may be that a gifted few can walk in the right path all alone, but for the rest it is necessary that they draw their inspiration from our ancient culture. Swamiji tried to do this. There were many weakening influences in our country during Swamiji's time. He wanted these to be removed and replaced by the national dynamic culture. His message was therefore to make ourselves nurtured and nourished by this culture which would lead the nation to power and strength.

We want to build the nation. How shall we do it is the problem. It is my conviction that we cannot progress unless and until there comes about a Dhārmic regeneration in our country; we need the ministrations of a *dharma* which accepts every other *dharma*, and this Vivekananda gave us in the great Vedanta. No doubt, Vedanta is not new to our country. But we had no means to find access to it; we could not make use of it; we could not practise it. We need the love and practicality of Buddha and the philosophy of Vedanta. In one of his Madras lectures, Swamiji said that he would give a message which would be useful not only to his own nation but also to the nations outside. To make his teachings effective and to make them spread among the people, just as Buddha started his organization of monks, so also Swamiji brought into existence the great Ramakrishna Mission. It is a matter of pride, it is a matter of joy, that his aims and objects are being realized and his vision is being fulfilled through the work of the centres of the Mission through all of which the Vedanta reaches the people in various forms to help the poor, to educate the ignorant, and to lift up the depressed.

The greatest problem in our country is its divergent sects, its divergent castes and creeds. Can we compose these differences? Can we go forward and gather strength? Vivekananda strongly criticized caste distinctions. He said this was the cause for much of our social weakness. Social unity was broken long ago, causing a tragedy of a thousand years! Swamiji spoke scathingly about the prevailing conceptions of religion—of religion entering the kitchen and the cooking-pots, of the religion of “don't-touchism”. He declared unequivocally that so long as we are caught in this ‘*dharma*’, we shall remain far from the *real dharma* which preaches human unity. People should unite; but there is everything to keep us disunited. A Brāhmin is engaged in Brahmavidyā. And if his son takes to business or any other activity, he is still reckoned as a Brāhmin just because he is born of a Brāhmin.

If we want to progress, we should understand the truth of *dharma* and follow it up. Quality should be the criterion of greatness or Brāhminhood and not mere birth. The aim of our *dharma* is that even a *mleccha* can be led up to the highest. Based on this fundamental idea of Vedanta, Swamiji discouraged the ‘kitchen religion’ and proclaimed that there is no difference between man and man. The difference seen is only in manifestation and not in the potential divinity. All could be brought up to the highest, all could become the greatest. Our weakness, our ignorance, can be driven away with this tonic. Can we build a society, a civilization on this great ideal of Vedanta? I believe that we shall succeed if we try earnestly. If this ideal is broadcast in our country, which Hindu will refuse to accept it? Which foreigner will fail to respond to this call to his own innate divinity? We should realize that our differences, cultural, social, and political, resulting from



this caste and other distinctions, can be composed only by this Vedantic teaching of Swami Vivekananda. By the same teaching we can solve the Hindu-Muslim problem. The question of poverty can be dealt with on the same footing. When our dream is to build a happy society, there should not be a few rich and many poor. Swamiji sought a solution for this economic inequality years ago. In one of his epistles he writes: "I am a socialist." The unity and equality he found in Brahmayā he wanted to establish in the field of national economy and in the field of society. Today the Rājās, Zamīndārs, and the rich look down upon the labouring class. This is the opposite of what Swamiji taught. He said, "They are one with you. The same divinity shines through them and you." What unity of existence he saw in Advaita Vedānta, what equality he experienced in the human personality, the same he wanted to bring into the fields of economics and society too. He saw the hungry and the naked about him; and he felt that until they were fed and clothed no *dharma* could be preached to them; without the welfare of the masses no *dharma* could be firmly established. So today our hearts bow to Swamiji. I am a student of Swamiji. I am not worthy to talk about him. But this is what I see in him, what I learn from him. He went beyond and wanted to take us also beyond. He

sees our weakness not with the eye of contempt, but with that of compassion, with a passion to serve, with a feeling of agony at our fallen condition. In that same epistle he writes about his advocacy of socialism not as a perfect foolproof system but that "half a loaf is better than none."

I consider Swami Vivekananda a leader in every respect,—in religion, culture, economics, sociology—, all of which ought to be established on the bed-rock of Vedānta, our ancient rational philosophy. If we fail to remember this and to build our nation on the foundations of our historic legacy, then India will not remain India. We shall, through the help of the Ramakrishna Mission and by our own efforts, inspired by the Message of the great Swamiji, have to try earnestly to realize a fuller and richer life for ourselves individually and for the vast mass of our countrymen. Our progress does not stop with our own realization, but must flow into a struggle to bring the fullness of freedom to others. All of us should understand this aspect of Swami Vivekananda's teachings, and should not exclude from the purview of religion the consideration and solution of the pressing problems of our village, of our country, and of our brothers and sisters. A solution for these can be successfully achieved if we live and act up to the Message of Swami Vivekananda.

"It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teaching on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe."

—Swami Vivekananda

# Mysticism in The Vakhs of Lal Ded

A. N. DHAR

*Prof A. N. Dhar's thoughtful essay continued from November '92 is concluded here.*

Thus we see that Lalla realized God as the Self within and also as the universal Spirit. It was her universal consciousness which underlay her deep conviction about the essential oneness of mankind. She repeats in many a *vākh* that Siva is all-pervasive. In the *vākh* that follows she stresses that we should not discriminate between man and man on the basis of the differences in religion (and the like):

Siva is everywhere, abiding in all things ;  
Do not then discriminate between a Hindu  
and a Mussalman ;  
If you are wise, know thyself—  
That itself is getting to know God.

The *vākh* makes it clear that Lalla sees no distinction between Self-realization and God-realization. This is particularly emphasized in Kashmir Saivism, and affirmed by *Advaita Vedānta*, and also upheld by many Sufi mystics. Lalla's conviction, based on her realization of Siva both as her inmost Self and as the Universal Self, rings forcefully in this *vākh* too:

I came from my country,  
Roamed the ten directions,  
And wind-like I pierced the Void ;  
I closed the nine apertures of the body  
And found Siva, within and everywhere  
around.

Tracing her descent from the Country of the Soul, Lalla recounts here the realization that she had attained of the infinite vastness of the universe, and she speaks of her

miraculous ability to "ascend" to the ethereal sphere, which is far beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. Her control of the mind and senses (implied in the phrase *sya ta treha trovimasa*) enabled her to realize Śiva within herself; the experience endowed her with "spiritual senses." Thus transformed, she could see the world itself, including all living and non-living things, radiant with divine beauty. She realized the oneness of Man and God, of Mind and Nature. This is asserted and conveyed in a confident tone in another *vākh* too:

Intense cold transforms water into snow  
and ice ;  
As we reflect, we find water differentiated  
into three forms ;  
When the sun of consciousness shines  
bright  
All different forms dissolve into One  
Substance ;  
We see the world of the living and the  
lifeless as Śiva Himself.

Lalla brings home to us the essential oneness of the world of multiplicity, a spiritual truth emphasized in the *Trika* (Kashmir Śaivism) as much as it is in the Upaniṣads, and in the Sufi doctrine of *wahadatulwajūd*. A significant feature of the above *vākh* is that herein Lalla makes use of an analogy drawn in terms of physical science (the facts of freezing of water and melting of snow or ice) to illuminate a spiritual concept—the underlying unity of all that exists, comprehended in the great Being she calls Śiva.



As pointed out earlier, Lalla attaches utmost importance to inward purification accompanied by self-control and introspection. Accordingly, she attaches little significance to external worship. What she values highly is a balanced attitude in life and a harmonious development of the various human faculties; she stresses an integrated growth of all aspects of the individual personality. In this respect, she has the vision and calibre of a great educationist too. Thus, while insisting on physical and mental culture, she gives due place to such values as social welfare, keeping in view the good of mankind in general. However, she considers meditation on the Self of supreme value. Hard practices such as fasting, remaining thirsty, and subjecting the body to physical suffering in different ways are disfavoured by her as acts of little spiritual value. Conversely, she rejects exaggerated attention paid to the care and maintenance of the body. In the following vākh, she disapproves of religious practices involving physical pain, while she characterizes the service of mankind as true religion:

Do not afflict your body with hunger and  
thirst,  
Take due care of it when it gets famished;  
Fie on your observance of religious rites,  
Do good to others; that is true worship.

We have seen earlier how much Lalla values the human body, in terms of its vital role in *sādhana*. It is in the same context that she disapproves of the physical suffering that some seekers inflict on themselves in the fond hope that this will "open their doors of perception." Lalla believes that the human faculties are shaped into the instruments of spiritual knowledge only in a sound body. So she considers austerities such as fasting of little value, rather harmful to the body as a spiritual apparatus. Nor do superficial religious rites, performed

mechanically, have any use for the aspirant in her view. Having realized the Divine in man, she looks upon the selfless service of mankind in general as genuine worship. Here is another vākh related, in regard to content, to the foregoing vākh in a significant sense:

O fool, right action does not consist in  
religious rites,  
Or in adorning yourself; nor in providing  
for bodily comforts,  
Or in taking extra-ordinary care of the  
body;  
Meditating on the Self (in earnest) is the  
doctrine for you to follow.

One might infer from this vākh that Lalla is contradicting what she maintained in the previous one. Therein she said: *yānya dvyayi taṁ saṁdārun diha*, cautioning the listener not to overtax the body, but feed and maintain it properly. On the other hand, in the present vākh she says: *muḍo kraya daya na radinya kāya/muḍo kraya daya na diha saṁdārun*, conveying actually that we should not care exclusively and extraordinarily for the preservation and maintenance of the body to the neglect of spiritual culture. What is desirable in her view is that we should give due attention to meditation on the Self, and not ignore it, while paying an exaggerated attention to mere physical culture. Lalla is highlighting here how mindful man should be of his ultimate spiritual goal in life, reachable only through single-minded devotion to the Lord. She directs the aspirant to consider this goal as the highest attainment in life. Divine contemplation, in her view, as we gather it from her vākhs throughout, should be the end-all and be-all of our lives. Looking at the two vākhs under discussion together, we do not see any contradiction between them. In one, bodily culture is emphasized as a positive value; in the other, attainment

of God, and contemplation as the chief means towards this end, are insisted upon. What Lalla evidently wants us to bear in mind is that while a sound body is an important means to take us Godward, it does not exhaust the means. She, in effect, cautions us not to confuse the end and the means, and exhorts us to aim at the harmonious development of the body and the mind.

In several other vākhs too, Lalla dwells on the theme of external worship, which we have seen she does not consider of any value in the absence of self-control accompanied by meditation on the inner Self. The burden of these vākhs is her distrust of merely external renunciation and hard physical penances; she instructs the aspirant to seek and recognize God within:

Laughing, sneezing, coughing, yawning.  
Taking dips in sacred waters,  
And remaining nude throughout the year  
(Are of little use);  
He is close at hand, recognize Him.

The vākh seems addressed to the ascetic visiting sacred places and bathing in holy waters, going about naked (as a form of penance) in the belief that all this would lead him to God. Lalla wants to disenchant the seekers who look upon external rites and penances as requisite in *sādhana*, by driving home for them the truth that God is no other than the indwelling Spirit, ever within man's reach. In matters of spirituality, penances involving physical suffering deliberately inflicted, according to Lalla, are not to be relied upon. On the contrary, it is the sincerity of aspiration and the intensity of devotion, aided by contemplation and self-introspection, which really enable the seeker to recognize the Master within and without.

In the following vākh, Lalla reiterates what she has said elsewhere—that we had

better stay where we are and as we are. She sees no intrinsic significance in *sannyāsa* (external renunciation) and *gārhasthya* (household life), alike as modes of living, but lays all the emphasis on the internal state of the mind:

Some renounced their homes, some the  
hermitages,  
All in vain, as long as the mind is not  
anchored in the Self!  
Watching (the movement of) your breath  
day and night,  
You stay where you are (at home or in  
the forest).

Lalla dwells here on the true mark of a *Rāja-yogin*, whose *sādhana* consists mainly in achieving control over the mind, and consequently over the breath, or vice versa (the two disciplines being complementary). With this requirement fulfilled, one need not attach any value or significance to the aspirant's external state—whether he lives at home as a householder or lives in the forest as a *sannyāsin* or contemplative. Talking of the wandering *sannyāsin* elsewhere, Lalla observes that such an aspirant, visiting holy places in search of the Self, is actually misled in taking the distant "green" for turf. As mentioned earlier, what Lalla prizes are the intensity and one-pointedness of the spiritual seeker; the outer garb of the seeker is a sheer label that hardly reveals anything of his inner condition. In another vākh, Lalla exhorts the aspirant to aim at tranquillizing his mind to be able to realize God as *sarvagatha prabhu amol*, omnipresent and stainless. She considers the facts of staying at home (amidst society) and living a life of solitude in the hermitage as sheer accidents, which actually have no bearing on one's spiritual life. "The soul stays at home," says Emerson. Lalla illuminates this very truth in her vākhs.

In vākh after vākh, Lalla reveals her innermost esoteric experiences, giving us



What we gather from this vākh is Lalla's confident assertion of her attainment as a practical *yoginī*, her excellence in *sāḍhanā* of the highest order. In all cultures, the goal of mysticism is looked upon as Union—direct contact with the Divine. We can rightly imagine that Lalla had set this as her goal and she pursued it single-mindedly, facing trials and tribulations, hardships of an extreme kind, until she reached it surely. The mystics are believed to pass through a very critical transitional stage before they attain perfection referred to as the “dark night of the soul” in Christian mysticism. The aspirant “dies into life,” almost literally, and metaphorically too, in this critical phase. This experience is hinted at—rather conveyed through words as best as it possibly could be—in the first two lines of the above vākh. Lalla's experience of the Void suggests that mastering the little self demands a severe spiritual discipline, summoning up of

Lalla, the perfect spiritual teacher, speaks here from direct experience. Her teaching does not involve any complexity but the hard facts relating to *sādhana*: constancy in repeating the Divine Name and continuous remembrance of *soham śabda* (one's identity with the Divine Name), with every inhaling and exhaling of the vital air, which the *paramahamsas* and advanced Sufi mystics

tremendous daring and power of self-possession—a mortifying experience that is only followed by the annihilation of the ego or selfhood. Lalla evidently had stood the ground; she flowered spiritually and attained the supreme state of Sivahood, having cultivated “the Way of the Swan” as a *yoginī*, a Saivite, or an *arifa*, by whatever title we may choose to describe her extraordinary achievement as a God-seeker.

There is a cluster of Lalla’s vākhs, five of them, translated sequentially in Jayalal Kaul’s *Lal Ded*, which are linked together by the refrain *śiva durya krūtha taya cenaṣvapadiśa* (Śiva is hard to attain, grasp the teaching), coming at the end of each vākh. These vākhs, as a distinct group, serve a useful purpose in that they motivate the listener to engage in self-introspection and ponder Lalla’s perceptive observations on man and his world. In turn, the qualified listener shares and profits from her mystic vision of Śiva.

Each vākh serves as a kind of puzzle with a question in-built, which poses a challenge to the addressee’s intelligence, prompting him to find the answer through self-introspection and grasp the teaching that is meant to be perceived and internalized. The gist of the vākhs is that man persists in the folly of leading a purposeless life, and thus falls into an endless cycle of births and rebirths. In his state of delusion, he fails to perceive the one Reality underlying phenomena. He does not realize Śiva, the Sub-stratum of this universe, nor does he perceive Śakti (who is none other than Śiva in the dynamic aspect) in her diverse divine manifestations, the same feminine principle in three roles—Mother, Wife, and Māyā. Let us look at one particular vākh from the group as an illustrative example:

Is it conceivable that the sun will not  
shine alike at all places,

Shine only on holy places ?

Is it, likewise, possible that Varuṇa, the  
God of water,

Will not visit all homes alike ?

Śiva is hard to attain, heed the doctrine.

The vākh consists of indirect statements, put in the form of questions, which point to the all-pervasiveness of Śiva, what Lalla has realized as a *yoginī*. She now wants to drive this truth home to us through the indirect questioning mode of communication that she has adopted here, using analogies drawn from nature (bringing in the sun and Varuṇa), which are easy to grasp and appreciate. Lalla’s manner is very appropriate to her purpose; one cannot think of a better way of putting across to the reader/listener what she wants to say. She is as unsurpassable in her style of communication as in her spiritual attainment.

Before concluding this brief study, I consider it befitting to mention a few names from the women poets and saints who provide classic examples of feminine virtue combined with spiritual genius, being as such comparable to Lal Ded. The two names that come foremost to my mind, one from the East and the other from the West, are Mira Bai and St. Teresa. Mira’s devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, which flows uninterruptedly through her incomparable songs, or *bhajans*, shows beyond doubt that she was wedded to the Lord in the true spirit. Sung to music, the *bhajans* are a valuable spiritual legacy the saint-poet has handed down to us. Mira often speaks of the pain of separation and also communicates to us her foretaste of the joy of divine union she longs for. The keen listener does not, however, fail to perceive in the songs, in spite of the longing for union conveyed, Mira’s awareness of her abiding relationship with the Lord. Though they never have the teacher’s tone, nor are loaded with any



learning or philosophical concepts, one is convinced that Mira has gone far beyond disciplines, being totally absorbed in God. She sees the world as a divine "sport" and delights in the bond of true love that she has forged with Him. She does not recognize any other relationship than that she bears with Kṛṣṇa: *mere to girdhar gopāla dūro na koi*. She calls him "*gahir gaṁbhīrā*," (Profound and wise), which easily suggests that she is a *jñāni* in her own right. Logical disputation and philosophical analysis have no relevance for her. Leaving them far behind her, she *knows* the Lord as much as she loves Him.

St. Teresa's also is a classic example of supreme devotion to the Beloved: her love of Lord Jesus Christ, which she cherished intensely throughout her cloistered life as a nun of the Spanish church in the sixteenth century. Like Mira, she also thought of

herself as the Bride of the Lord. The accounts of her spiritual experiences, of her "encounters" with the Lord, which are conveyed in a voluptuous language involving erotic images, both touch our hearts and illuminate our minds, as do Mira's pure devotional songs. St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross are known to have enriched Christian mystical literature in a significant way. Mira's *bhajans* constitute a valuable part of the *bhakti* literature in India today; they will continue to inspire and inflame the hearts of God-lovers in our country. Lal Ded, too, has passed on a rich legacy to us in the shape of the *vākhs*, an invaluable addition in the Kashmiri language, to the 'riches' her great predecessors, Utpala Deva and Abhinavagupta, have handed down to us through their scholarly works on Self-knowledge.

(concluded)

## ON PRACTICALITY AND PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

(Continued from page 19)

some of the wine of his nectarine words. Read at least the first 250 pages of *the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and then look around you. You will see that your outlook towards life has changed. *The Gospel* is poetry, beautiful and elevating. Sri Ramakrishna loved to sing this song:

*Surā pān kori na āmi,  
Sudhā khāi, joy kālī bole,  
Mon mātāle mātāl kore,  
Mad mātāle mātāl bole.*

'I do not drink ordinary wine,  
I enjoy divine nectar singing victory to  
Mother Kali;

but unlike the ordinary wine which renders one insensible,

the mind is lifted to a high plane of bliss when the mind is intoxicated with the Name of Mother Kali.'

He pointed at one of us smilingly and told my companion, 'She has tasted some of this wine. Take some from her.'

Then he said, 'I must go now, the barber is waiting for me.' After exchanging a few words with us he stood up. We bowed in pranam before him; he blessed us again. We took leave feeling absolutely light, drained of all tensions and conflicting thoughts.

# Some Notes on Thai Buddhism

WILLIAM PAGE

*Buddhism has exerted its seminal influence, for millennia, on many countries Thailand, being one of them, is a stronghold of the Theravada School Some salient features of it are brought into focus by the learned author who teaches English at Thammasat University, Bangkok*

Tradition holds that Theravada Buddhism was first introduced into what is now Thailand about 2000 years ago by missionaries sent from India by King Ashoka At that time the country was known as Suvarnabhumi, the "Golden Land" Subsequently Mahayana Buddhism spread to Thailand from India and Cambodia, together with Brahministic influences During the reign of King Ramakhamhaeng of Sukhothai (reigned A.D. 1275-1317) Sri Lankan monks were invited to propagate their school of Buddhism, known as the Lankavamsa From that time, Theravada Buddhism became firmly established in Thailand, and the Mahayana gradually died out (Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*, Bangkok, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1987, pp. 18-20 Also M.L. Manich Jumsai, *Understanding Thai Buddhism*, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn Press, 1980, pp. 8-9) At present about 90% of the Thais count themselves as Theravaders, with a large Muslim population in the south

## *"Orthodox" vs "Popular" Buddhism*

In any discussion of Thai Buddhism, a distinction needs to be made between the "orthodox" Buddhism followed by practising laypeople and monks and the popular Buddhism of the vast mass of the people The distinction is not always clear, there is a lot of overlapping, and it would be more accurate to view the situation as a continuum

rather than as two clearly defined camps. Some would say that the distinction is false, and that the two are so hopelessly mixed up that it is impossible to separate them So here it is necessary to define our terms By "orthodox" Buddhism I mean those beliefs and practices which are sanctioned by the Theravada scriptures. By "Popular" Buddhism, I mean those beliefs and practices which are widespread among the people but are not sanctioned by the scriptures

In general, practising laypeople and monks adhere to the Tripitaka, the "Three Baskets" of Buddhist teachings which constitute the Pali canon The Thai version fills 45 volumes, but its teachings can be summarized as follows Nothing is permanent, everything is in flux, craving for transient phenomena causes suffering, the only way to eliminate suffering is to uproot craving If you had to sum up Buddhism in two words, they would probably be "Stop wanting" Or as the great Thai reformist monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu puts it, somewhat more elegantly, "Nothing whatsoever is to be clung to"

Alongside this central doctrine are the auxiliary concepts of karma and rebirth which are common to both Buddhism and Hinduism They are important in Buddhism because they help to explain the connection between craving and suffering Craving creates karma, which binds us to the wheel of rebirth and hence perpetuates suffering



To get rid of suffering, we have to get free from the wheel of rebirth. To get free from the wheel of rebirth we have to stop producing karma. And the only way to do that is to uproot craving. This sequence is elaborated, although in a more detailed and complex fashion, in the famous Chain of Causation (*paticca samuppada*).

How to uproot craving? By following the Noble Eightfold Path, which is designed to dispel ignorance. For there is a cause of suffering that is even more fundamental than craving, and that is ignorance. It is ignorance of the true nature of things that gives rise to craving. What is the true nature of things? Everything is transitory; therefore nothing can be possessed for long, and nothing is worth possessing. Even the "I" that wants things is transitory: Buddhism regards the individual as a mere collection of five aggregates, always in flux, with no enduring self-nature. So nothing can be clung to, nothing is worth clinging to, and there is nothing that can cling. Once these truths are firmly realized, ignorance ceases, and with it craving and the whole concatenation of suffering that follows.

Gods exist—the gods of the Vedic pantheon—but they are regarded as unimportant because they are bound to the wheel of rebirth just like everybody else. They achieved their high position by virtue of meritorious karma, and when that is exhausted they will fall from their high state and be reborn as something else. The purpose of life is to uproot craving and get off the wheel of rebirth.

This is an extremely severe form of Jñāna which does not even give the believer the comfort of an eternal substratum like the Atman to hold onto. The message is stern, stoical, uncompromising: Get rid of craving! Nobody can help you, you have

to help yourself. Everything is transient, there is nothing to cling to.

Obviously this was not a religion designed for the masses. It is recorded that after his enlightenment the Buddha was tempted to keep his message to himself. He knew that it was "abstruse, profound, difficult to perceive, and subtle" (Narada Mahathera, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Colombo, 1980; p. 62). But then, realizing that a few people might be found to understand and follow it, out of pity for humanity he went forth and taught.

The Thais in general are a graceful, charming, and fun-loving people—not the type of people you would expect to be attracted to an austere doctrine like this. Just as one can hardly imagine the Italians ever becoming Calvinists, so the warm and exuberant Thai personality seems unsuited to the rigours of Theravada. Consequently, over the ages popular Thai Buddhism has gradually gilded over the Buddha's central message and shifted the emphasis to make it more congenial.

It has done this by manipulating the concept of rebirth. The goal of Buddhism is to attain Nirvana—a term which is difficult to define satisfactorily, but which is always associated with the cessation of ignorance, the extinction of craving, and the indescribable bliss of emancipation that follows. But most Thais do not think it is possible for laypeople to attain Nirvana. It was possible for the Buddha and the arahants in past ages, and it may even be possible for monks nowadays. But Nirvana is beyond the capabilities of the average layperson. The best they can hope for is a better life in the next birth. So the average Thai layman concentrates on accumulating merit, which will ensure him a better birth next time around. (Frederica M. Bunge, ed.,

*Thailand: A Country Study*, Fifth Edition, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981; pp. 97-98. See also Jane Bunnage, *Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman*, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1973; pp. 19-20, in which it is stated that the monks do not regard Nirvana as a realistic goal even for them, since it was attained in the past only by the Buddha and a few of his disciples, and if attainable nowadays would require "billions of years of tireless effort." Like the laymen, the monks also concentrate on attaining a favourable rebirth.)

Hence "making merit" (*thamboon*) is a pervasive feature of popular Thai Buddhism. Generally this consists of presenting food to the monks in the morning when they go on the almsround. It also consists of donating new robes to monks at the end of the Rains Residence; of donating money to temples and to individual monks; and of supporting the monkhood and religion in general. Monks are invited to chant on special occasions, such as weddings, birthdays, or funerals, and always they are sumptuously fed. They are also invited to perform religious ceremonies at the opening of new department stores, or factories, or even bars. All of this is supposed to bring good luck to the institution in question. Feeding the monks, in particular, is supposed to result in merit which will contribute to a favourable rebirth.

Orthodox Buddhism frowns on praying to gods; and since the Buddha is off the wheel of rebirth, praying to him is pointless. But devout Thai Buddhists pray to him anyway. I am told that they also pray to eminent monks, both living and dead. Almost every Thai home, no matter how poor, has a shrine bearing a Buddha image, always raised high as a sign of respect. Flowers and incense are offered at various times.

Every temple has Buddha images, and these are also venerated.

Popular Buddhism also features belief in spirits and ghosts (*phii*), astrology, magic, fortune telling, and amulets. Most Thais wear a protective Buddha amulet around their necks (some wear more than one), and many Thais consult fortune tellers, some of whom are monks.

Even the ruling power elite are prone to this kind of thinking. A former prime minister once worried that his government might fall because a flock of cranes had been seen flying over the parliament building—an inauspicious omen. A former cabinet minister grew a moustache because an astrologer advised that it would bring him good luck; and a powerful general recently stated that he was not afraid to plunge into the maelstrom of Thai politics because he had a good Buddha amulet to protect him. The intelligentsia are also not immune: a university professor once boasted that the Thai version of Brahmā, the creator-god, was more powerful than the Indian version because he was able to give winning lottery numbers to the faithful!

The belief in spirits is widespread. Whenever a building is constructed, it is believed to displace spirits who had been living on the land. To placate these spirits, a miniature house is always built for them to live in. These are called spirit houses, every building has one perched on a pole outside, and sometimes they are very ornate. Often householders make foodofferings to these spirits.

One of the most popular shrines in Bangkok is a statue of Brahmā (in Thai, *Phra Prom*) outside the Erawan Hotel. The story has it that when the hotel was first being constructed, accidents were always



happening and many workmen were injured. A local seer was consulted, and he advised that a shrine to Brahmā be set up. So they built the shrine, and immediately the accidents stopped.

Since then, the Erawan Shrine has enjoyed great prestige. Classical Thai dances are performed in front of the image of Brahmā all the time. People come in droves to burn incense, offer flowers, and garland the image. Often they ask Brahmā for favours and vow to perform some service if the favour is granted. A famous movie star once vowed to dance in front of the image if she was granted a certain favour, and when the favour was granted, she did so.

Religious festivals are usually occasions of great merrymaking, often accompanied by music and almost always followed by a feast, for the Thais love to eat. Sometimes temple fairs are held, and some temples are the sites of markets on weekends and special religious holidays.

Some of the Thai intelligentsia decry this situation as a perversion of the true spirit of Buddhism. They usually explain it by saying that in Thailand Buddhism has gotten mixed up with elements from animism and Brahminism. This may be true, but it also seems to me that the Thais have simply adapted Buddhism to suit their own needs. They have taken an austere, no-nonsense religion and tried to make it as much fun as possible. Real Buddhism is a type of Jñāna, and not everybody is psychologically equipped to be a Jñāni. So the Thais have turned Buddhism into something they can feel comfortable with. It is hard to believe that the Buddha, who was the embodiment of compassion, would blame them.

Buddhism as practised by devout laypeople and the monks is somewhat different,

but as mentioned before, there is a lot of overlapping. Devout laypeople will pay homage to the Buddha image in the family shrine, offer food to the monks in the morning, donate requisites to the monks, and attend sermons at the temples. Often they will study the Buddhist scriptures and practise meditation. Probably they will adhere to the basic Five Precepts—no killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, or intoxicants. On special holidays they may follow three additional precepts, and refrain from eating after noon; using high or luxurious beds or chairs; and singing, dancing, using perfumes, cosmetics, or adornments, and attending games or shows. (Bill Weir, *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Thailand*, Bangkok, World Fellowship of Buddhists, 1991; p. 11). Sometimes they may go on meditation retreats or pilgrimages.

### Ordination

One of the striking features of Thai Buddhism is that almost every young man joins the monkhood for at least a brief period before getting married. This is a sort of *rite de passage* before embarking on the duties of the household life. Usually the period spent in the monkhood is not long—sometimes as short as two weeks. But sometimes a young man finds that he likes the monkhood and stays for good.

The most popular time for becoming a “temporary monk” is during the Rains Residence, from mid- or late July to October. During this time, the monks are supposed to stay in their monasteries and not move about. Traditionally they spend most of this time studying the scriptures. During these three months, many “temporary monks” join them. The merit accruing from their ordination goes to their mothers. To become a monk is to gain great merit, but women

cannot become monks. So their sons become monks instead, and give the merit to their mothers.

This phenomenon of "temporary monks" has one very positive effect. By becoming monks, young laymen get a good education in real Buddhist principles, and they can carry this over into lay life. So temporary monasticism has a beneficial influence on the laity.

The requirements for ordination are simple and straightforward. The candidate must be a male; at least 20 years old; and free from debt, serious contagious diseases, and military or contractual obligations. He must have the permission of his parents, must not be physically crippled or deformed, and must not be guilty of major crimes. (Somdet Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorasa, *Ordination Procedure and the Preliminary Duties of a New Bhikkhu*, Bangkok, n.d., n.p.; p. 3).

He must also be a human being! This last requirement is based on a touching story. It seems that a snake (*nāga*) wanted to be ordained. He changed himself into a human being through magic and asked the Buddha for ordination. But the Buddha saw through the snake's magic and refused: only human beings could become monks. At this, the snake was very sad and began to bewail his fate. But the Buddha, who always seems to have been very tender-hearted, cheered him up by promising him that in ages to come, all candidates for ordination would be called *nāgās*, in honour of him. And so they are: in Thailand every candidate for ordination is called a *nak*.

Before being ordained, the candidate must get a senior monk to act as his preceptor (*upajjhaya*), and must equip himself with the requisites of a monk—the robes and almsbowl. Often the preceptor will require him to serve as a novice for a period

of time, or as a temple boy (*dek wat*), in order to determine his suitability and give him some preliminary training. This depends on the strictness of the preceptor.

Before the actual ordination, the candidate's family and friends will hold a big celebration, usually involving music, feasting, and theatrical shows. His head is shaved, he is dressed in white, and the festivities begin. Then on the day of his ordination he is garlanded and carried to the temple on the backs of his friends amidst a veritable parade, with drums and music. One can say it is almost like a wedding ceremony.

Once he is inside the temple, though, things get serious. A quorum of monks will already be there. He has to formally request ordination and answer questions put to him by two monks. Then, if no one has any objection, he is accepted into the Order and ordained. It is quite a lengthy ceremony, with lots of chanting in Pali. At the end the monks take him aside and show him how to wear his new robes. He then presents himself to the congregation dressed in his monk's robes, and from then until the time he formally disrobes, he is a monk. Even his parents have to pay respect to him, for he is a sacred being, set apart. (Jumsai, pp. 75-77).

This is not the end of the matter, of course, for he still has a lot to learn, and in subsequent days he spends a great deal of time studying: the life and teachings of the Buddha, the 227 rules of monastic discipline (*Patimokkha*), and the Pali chants, all of which must be memorized.

#### *Some Aspects of Monastic Life*

Monks wear three pieces of clothing, usually called robes, although strictly speaking, none of them are robes. There is a waistcloth, which is wrapped around the waist and secured by a belt made of cloth. This waistcloth hangs below the knees to



about the middle of the calves, much like a shortened version of the *dhoti*. There is also a sleeveless upper garment—a sort of cloth waistcoat cut so as to leave the right shoulder bare. Usually it has one or more zippered pockets. And finally, there is the outer robe, a large rectangular cloth about the size of a bedsheet. The monks wrap themselves in this whenever they go outside the temple, covering both shoulders.

The method of wearing the outer robe is difficult to describe. Since it is so large (nine feet by six), the edge is rolled up tightly, draped over the left shoulder, and tucked under the armpit. It is somewhat cumbersome, and often monks have to stop and reroll it. One elderly British gentleman who was ordained confessed that his biggest worry in the monkhood was that his shoulder-roll would slip off his shoulder and the entire outer robe would fall off! (Denis Segaller, *New Thoughts on Thai Ways*, Bangkok, Magazine Distribution Service, 1989; pp. 22-23.) Every time I see a Thai monk pausing to rearrange his shoulder-roll, I think how convenient a simple *kurta* and *chadar* would be.

Monks go bareheaded, even in the hot sun, although sometimes if the sun is unusually bright they pull a corner of the outer robe over their heads as a sunscreen. Sometimes they carry umbrellas, but many of them do without. They almost always carry a cloth shoulderbag for miscellaneous possessions. Almost all of them wear sandals, except on the almsround when they go barefoot. If they are observing austerities, they may go barefoot all the time. But they never wear shoes, shirts, hats, or any sort of jewelry or adornment.

The colour of the robes may vary widely, ranging from bright yellow, through various shades of orange, to mud brown, russet, or dark brown. The different hues have no significance, although newly ordained monks

tend to wear bright yellow and senior monks tend to wear the darker colours. The darker colours are more convenient, one monk told me, because often monks have to sit on the grass, and the dark colours hide the grass-stains better.

Monks usually sleep on mats on the floor. If they use a bed, it must be a low one, since the Buddha prohibited high and luxurious beds.

The standard Thai greeting, and also a gesture of respect, is the *wai*, which is the same as the *namaskar* greeting in India: palms pressed together in front of the face, head slightly inclined. Thailand is a highly stratified society: the younger always wais the older, the junior wais the senior, the inferior wais the superior, and the latter returns the gesture. But the monks don't wai anybody except each other. A junior monk will wai his senior, who will return the gesture. Laymen will wai monks, but the monks don't wai back. Even the king has to wai the monks, and the monks are the only people in the kingdom who don't wai the king.

The reason why the monks don't return the wais of laymen is that the laymen are supposed to gain merit by wai-ing them, and if the monks returned the gesture, the laymen would lose the merit. For the same reason, the monks never acknowledge gifts, or food placed in their almsbowls. To say thank you, or to acknowledge the gift in any way, would rob the donor of his merit. Our revered and beloved Swami Ranganathanandaji, who dislikes hearing Westerners say "thank you" all the time, would be very happy among the Thai monks!

Monks are not allowed to touch or be touched by women—not even their own mothers. If a woman wants to give something to a monk, she never hands it to him directly, but places it on a handkerchief. He will then draw the handkerchief toward him.



Sometimes she will give the item to a layman, who will then hand it to the monk. If a monk touches a woman, or if she touches him, he has to confess it before the congregation of monks on *uposatha* day (the day when the monks gather to recite the training rules [*Patimokkha*]).

This sometimes causes awkwardness. In Thailand the monks ride on the buses (without having to pay the fare), and in fact, the back seat is reserved for them. Others may sit there if there is no monk on the bus, but if a monk boards the bus someone is expected to surrender his seat. In getting on and off the buses, the monks have to be careful not to brush against women. The women, aware of the prohibition, have to be careful too. The same applies any time a monk is walking on a crowded street, or in the marketplace. Of course, a monk cannot sit beside a woman, either in a bus or anywhere else, because he might accidentally brush against her.

I first found out about this rule many years ago while riding on a Thai train. A group of monks were sitting at one end of the car. The toilet was at the other end. A group of young Western backpack travellers got on the train, both men and women. As it was night, and they had no seats, they lay down in the aisle to sleep. In fact, they lay across the aisle, blocking it, which was rather inconvenient for the other passengers and not very considerate on the part of the travellers.

Pretty soon one of the monks had to go to the bathroom. He walked down the aisle till he came to the first traveller, a girl. Then he stopped, scratched his head in frustration, and returned to his seat. Pretty soon another monk did the same. Eventually there were several monks hunched up in agony at the end of the car, all having to go to the bathroom badly.

"Why don't they just step over the

travellers?" I asked a Thai gentleman sitting beside me.

"You don't understand," he replied. "They are not allowed to touch a woman. If one of the monks tries to step over one of the girls and she moves in her sleep and touches him, it is a sin for him."

Eventually somebody informed the travellers that they were blocking the way and they moved long enough to allow the monks to go to the bathroom.

Monks aren't allowed to take solid food after noon, but the interpretation of "solid" is sometimes very flexible. Here it is a matter of interpretation. There are two schools of Buddhism in Thailand: the older Mahanikaya, and the newer Dhammayuttika. The Dhammayuttika was founded by King Rama IV (King Mongkut, of the famous musical *The King and I*), who objected to the lax discipline of the Mahanikaya monks and wanted to tighten things up. Since then, the Dhammayuttika sect has benefited from royal patronage. They have stricter rules, but as a British Mahanikaya monk once told me tongue in cheek, "They also have more ways of getting around the rules." The Dhammayuttikas don't allow their monks to drink milk after noon, but I have been among Mahanikaya monks who drank not only milk, but coffee with milk, after noon. They also drank soft drinks, ate hard candy that melts in the mouth, and even ate a kind of sweet cracker which crumbled in the mouth and didn't require much chewing. So the interpretation of "solid" is flexible.

Most monks eat two meals a day: one at 8:00 a.m., after the morning almsround, and one around 11:00. I have heard that 12:30 is the absolute deadline by which they must be finished eating. Other monks, more austere, limit themselves to one meal a day, the 8:00 one.

One interesting feature of Thai monasti-



cism is that the monks never eat with laymen. In any gathering where monks and laymen are both present, the monks eat first, while the laymen watch. When the monks are finished, they depart and the laymen eat the leftovers. I suppose it is a little like taking *prasad*.

It took me a long time to find out about this custom. One of my friends is a Thai monk named Kittiyano Bhikkhu. I first met him at Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace, in Nepal. We used to eat together, and I thought nothing of it. Later, in Thailand, I kept inviting him to come eat with me in the university cafeteria. He would always smile, but say nothing, and he never came. After I saw the monks and laymen eating separately at an ordination ceremony, I realized why he never accepted my invitation. The Thais would have been shocked to see a monk eating at the same time as a layman, and at the same table. "I don't like this custom," Ven. Kittiyano told me later, "but in Thailand we have to follow it, or people will get upset."

Thai monks get up early, usually at 4:00 a.m., and go shortly thereafter to the temple for chanting. Around daybreak they embark on the almsround. Since this is a sacred activity, they go barefoot. Wearing full robes, they take their almsbowls and go forth into the streets.

The almsbowl is a large black metal bowl that looks like a big pot. Usually it is carried in a cloth case, with a sling that can be put around the neck. There is a cover, usually made of brass or aluminium, which can double as a plate.

The monk walks along until he comes to a group of laypeople who have come out into the street to offer alms. Usually they have prepared rice, curries, sweets, and fruit, which they have put in plastic bags tied with a rubber band. (In the old days

they would wrap the food in banana leaves, but now plastic bags are the norm.) The monk stops in front of them and removes the cover from his almsbowl. The layperson offering the food will step out of his or her sandals, wai and bow respectfully, place the food in the almsbowl, and wai and bow again. The monk may exchange words of greetings with them, and then proceed on his way.

If there are many laypeople offering food, the almsbowl will get filled up very quickly. So often the monk is accompanied by a temple boy carrying a plastic yellow bucket. When the almsbowl is full, they transfer the food to the bucket. Sometimes they return to the temple with a full almsbowl and a full bucket too.

But the food thus gathered is not just for the individual monk and temple boy. Not every monk in the monastery goes on the almsround. Some may be old, or sick, or have other business to attend to. So there are other monks who have to be fed, and novices (monks under the age of 20 who have taken preliminary vows), and lay volunteers who help out at the temple, and temple boys—often orphans who have been abandoned by their parents—and poor students who may be staying in the monastery, and usually a motley collection of cats and dogs who have been abandoned by their owners and adopted by the monks. In short, there is a whole community that has to be fed, all living at the monastery.

Once the monks have returned from the almsround, the lay volunteers take the food, remove it from the plastic bags, and serve it to the monks. After the monks have finished, the lay volunteers, students, and temple boys eat the leftovers, as described above. Presumably the dogs and cats get what's left.

(To be continued)

# The Vedanta Society of Southern California : Its History and Traditions

PRAVRAJIKA VARADAPRANA

*The task of nourishing and nurturing the spiritual tree planted by Swami Vivekananda in the West fell on the shoulders of a few able young monks. All of them had to struggle hard, but their noble aims, compassion, and broad outlook drew to them many followers, wellwishers, and admirers. The fascinating story of one of the Vedanta Centres is told here by a senior nun of the Centre.*

The history of the Vedanta Society of Southern California really began in 1893 when Swami Vivekananda came to America to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. He touched the lives of many with whom he came in contact, and this created a growing need for swamis to come and open Vedanta centres in America.

In 1923 Swami Prabhavananda was summoned into the august presence of Swamis Shivananda, Saradananda, Subodhananda, and Shuddhananda, who were having a trustees' meeting. Swami Shivananda, who was then president of the Ramakrishna Order said, "We have decided to send you to America. Will you go?" The Swami replied "Of course, Maharaj, I will go wherever you send me."

Then Swami Saradananda remarked, "Oh, he is so young." (The Swami was only twenty-nine at the time and looked much younger.) Swami Saradananda looked gravely at the young swami for a long time and then said, "He will do." And so the fate of the young swami was sealed.

After the meeting, Swami returned with Swami Saradananda to the Udbodhan. Swami Saradananda said to him, quoting from a Bengali saying, "So you are going

to cross seven oceans and thirteen rivers." Swami Prabhavananda answered, "Yes, Maharaj, but I feel nervous. What do I know that I can teach?" Swami Saradananda replied in English, "That is none of your business! We shall see to that!"

Soon after Swami joined the monastery, Swami Premananda had said to him and another young monk, "Boys, read the Bible and get ready to come with me to America." Swami did not take the prospect seriously, but he did study the Bible, which helped to prepare him for work in a Christian land.

One of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna said to the Swami before he left for the West, "Never forget that you have seen the son of God (Swami Brahmananda). You have seen God."

In April 1923, Swami Prabhavananda left for the United States in the company of Swami Prakashananda, who was in charge of the San Francisco Vedanta Society. The plan had been for Swami to open a centre in Los Angeles, but when they arrived in Boston, they learned that Swami Paramananda was planning to open a branch centre in Los Angeles.

Therefore Swami Prakashananda invited Swami to go with him to San Francisco to



be his assistant. Swami agreed, and this gave him the opportunity to become acclimatized to American culture under the protection and affectionate guidance of the older swami. After six months Swami Prabhavananda started giving lectures and classes. Realizing that an Indian accent is hard for Americans to understand, he formed the habit of speaking slowly.

While in San Francisco, Swami Prabhavananda visited the Shanti Ashrama where Swami Turiyananda had trained a group of American students. The Swami wrote about this experience in a letter to Swami Siddheswarananda: "...and the spiritual atmosphere! One could feel it tangibly. The spirit of Hari Maharaj is still vibrating. Hari Maharaj once said that the atmosphere of spirituality that he created would remain for at least a century."

#### *Portland and Sister Lalita*

After two years in San Francisco, Swami Prabhavananda went to Portland to establish a centre; he was there four years. In 1928 he was invited to give a series of three talks in Los Angeles. It was at one of these lectures that Mrs. Carrie Mead Wyckoff (Sister Lalita), and her sister Mrs. Alice Hansbrough (Shanti) first met Swami Prabhavananda.

Lalita and Shanti were two of the Mead sisters who had entertained Swami Vivekananda in 1900 at their house in Pasadena. Swamiji had called the Mead sisters "the three graces." The sisters also met Swami Trigunatitananda who gave Mrs. Wyckoff the name of Lalita. Later she became known as Sister Lalita, or just Sister.

Swami Turiyananda also visited the Pasadena house where he initiated Lalita in the garden. He said to Lalita, "You will

have work to do, but it will be quiet work." These words proved to be most prophetic.

Lalita was impressed with Swami Prabhavananda and visited him in Portland. Later she invited him to start a centre in her home in the Hollywood hills. Swami accepted her offer and after received the blessings of Swami Shivananda.

#### *The Early Beginnings*

In December of 1929 Swami Prabhavananda moved into Sister Lalita's home on 1946 Ivar Avenue (later renamed Vedanta Place.) They called this house the Vivekananda Home; later it became known as the Green House because of its colour.

Having lost her only son in an accident a few years earlier, Sister Lalita regarded Swami as a son as well as a teacher. Sister Lalita not only donated her house, but shared her modest annuity, until it was discontinued in 1932.

At first the Swami advertised and gave lectures in rented halls. He found however, that this method was not attracting sincere spiritual seekers, so he stopped advertising and held meetings in the living room of the Vivekananda Home. Initially only a handful of people came, but gradually a group of sincere devotees formed.

During the thirties several women joined the household to help Sister and Swami with the work. They held outside jobs when it was necessary to help support the household. They managed to save enough money to build on two rooms, the smaller of which was reserved for a shrine room, and the relics that Swami Shivananda had sent from India were installed there.

The dedication of the shrine was celebrated with a three day vigil and the continuous

chanting of the Lord's name. After that, a simple worship was performed daily, usually by Sister Lalita.

### *Difficult Times*

The second generation of swamis who came to work in this country had to struggle through many difficulties. They were often confronted with racial prejudice and misconceptions about Hinduism. The people who came in the thirties were not able to give much financial support because the country was going through a severe depression. In those early years Swami Prabhavananda and the household members were sometimes short on food.

When it came time to pay the property taxes, there usually was not enough money until the last moment. On one such occasion, when the taxes were due the following Monday, Tantine (Josephine MacLeod) arrived on Sunday from New York. She asked for a pen, and wrote out a check for the exact amount that was needed.

During those years, Swami often remembered the words of his guru, Swami Brahmananda, "Wherever you go, stay patiently, 'bite the earth' (dig in), and build something for me." During this period he needed that kind of determination and forbearance. Maharaj had also said to him in another vein, "Sri Ramakrishna does his own preaching. Be the witness." This outlook set the tone for the center in later years.

### *The Vedanta Temple*

In 1934, the Vedanta Society of Southern California was officially established as a non-profit corporation "to promote harmony between Eastern and Western thought, and recognition of the truth in all the great religions of the world." A board of trustees

was established to guide the financial and business aspects of the Vedanta Society.

As more people started attending the lectures, the need for a temple was felt. When Swami Prabhavananda went to India in 1935 with Sister Lalita, he ordered a carved, wooden shrine to be made, with the temple in mind. When the shrine was finished, it was kept in Swami's room at Belur Math. Two of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamis Akhandananda and Vijnanananda blessed the shrine in turn. Swami noticed that as each of the swamis came to visit him, they stood before the shrine, and then placed a hand on it for a long time as they talked with Swami.

After returning from India, plans went ahead for building the temple. The groundbreaking ceremony was sanctified with the dust of Brindaban and Kamarpukur, laid under the corner stone. Swami Paramananda attended the ceremony.

The Society had \$10,000 from Sister Lalita's inheritance to use for the temple. However, before the building was completed the money ran out, and the temple was to be boarded up, as Swami did not approve of taking out a mortgage. Just at that time a new student started coming who offered the \$2500 needed to complete the temple.

The white temple with its three domes was dedicated in July of 1938, and five of Swami's brother monks were present. On the following Sunday three hundred people attended the public celebration. The guest speakers were Swamis Akhilananda, Ashokananda, Devatmananda, Satprakashananda, and Vividishananda.

Swami Prabhavananda always loved the atmosphere in the shrine of the Hollywood temple, and said that the Lord was very



much present there. He would ask, "Don't you hear that humming sound in there?"

A short worship was performed daily in the temple, and later a ten-item worship was introduced. A yearly Kali Puja was started in 1939, and the Śivarātri was introduced in the early forties. A monthly twenty-four hour vigil was added, and also Rāmnām. Special pujas are celebrated on the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda. At least 350 people attend the public dinner each year, held in honour of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday.

There were not many people to help with the work in the early days, and on Sundays before the lecture the Swami used to sweep around the temple. Once when Swami Jnaneswarananda was visiting the Hollywood centre, he took a photograph of Swami Prabhavananda sweeping on Sunday morning. He gave it the caption, "Swami preparing for his Sunday lecture."

#### *New Devotees*

Religion in America in the 1930s and 1940s tended to be sombre and formal. When new people came to the Vedanta centre, they found the lack of sanctimony refreshing and appealing. They discovered that the path to God can also be fun and joyful, as Swami had learned from the direct disciples.

The group of devotees coming in the late thirties and early forties was fairly small, and the atmosphere at the centre was intimate and cozy. The devotees were like an extended family who could come at any time during the day to have a chat with Swami in the living room. Those coming in the morning would invariably be invited to lunch. Swami would remind those living in

the household, "Remember, whoever comes here has something special. He or she is a child of God."

Gradually new devotees began to come, including businessmen who served on the board of trustees, and distinguished people in the fields of education and science. Dr. Frederick Manchester helped Swami with his translations of the *Srimad Bhāgavatam* and *The Upaniṣads*.

In January of 1938, the *Voice of India* magazine was started jointly by the San Francisco and Los Angeles centres. It was published in Los Angeles and edited by Swami Prabhavananda and Dr. Manchester. Two years later the magazine was turned over to the Southern California centre, and was renamed *Vedanta and the West*. The magazine was of a high calibre, attracting many new people to Vedanta.

#### *The British Writers*

In 1939, Swami Prabhavananda met Gerald Heard, a wellknown writer and lecturer, who became his student and later his disciple. Gerald Heard brought his friends Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and John Van Druten to meet the Swami, and they also became interested in Vedanta. The influence of these British writers stimulated a period of growth for the Hollywood centre, and for the Vedanta movement in America through literature.

Christopher Isherwood became Swami's disciple and lived for a while at the centre at first as a monk. During this period he worked on several translations of scriptures with Swami Prabhavananda, and became the editor of the *Vedanta and the West* magazine. Mr. Isherwood's honesty and devotion to Swami were remarkable.

Aldous Huxley's book *The Perennial Philosophy*, and other writings during this period, were instrumental in bringing the attention of intellectuals and spiritual seekers to the message of Vedanta. Mr. Huxley took initiation from Swami and remained a good friend. However, their relationship cooled when Mr. Huxley started experimenting with drugs, and wrote his book *The Doors of Perception*. Swami admired Huxley's great intellect, but felt that his open mind took him in too many directions.

These English writers regularly contributed articles for the *Vedanta and the West* magazine. Christopher Isherwood later compiled some of these articles into books, one of which was *Vedanta for the Western World*, which was popular for many years. These writers also gave lectures, drawing large crowds to the temple, on occasions when Swami was away or ill.

In addition to the Sunday lectures and two scripture classes a week, there was a Gospel reading in the living room on Wednesday evenings. Until his health failed Christopher Isherwood was usually the reader and read beautifully, while Swami would comment and answer questions.

Swami Prabhavananda wrote and published many books in the 1940s. One of the most popular was the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, translated in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, with an introduction by Aldous Huxley. The book was heralded in a *Time* magazine review as a wonderful literary, as well as spiritual, work. Later, a mass market edition was printed by Mentor Books. By 1992, all editions sold over a million copies.

In 1947 the Vedanta Press came into being with its publication of Śankara's *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, and the

revised version of *The Eternal Companion*. The *Upaniṣads Breath of the Eternal* was published in the following year, and later in a mass-market edition by Mentor Religious Classics.

The first book Swami wrote in this country was the last to be published, because the manuscript was lost for many years in an unused cupboard. This was the *Spiritual Heritage of India*, written in the thirties, with the assistance of Frederick Manchester. Swami said he could never have rewritten the book—it was something he could only have done as a young man.

#### *Sister Lalita and The Monastic Community*

In 1940 a young woman moved into the Vedanta household, giving Swami the idea of forming a convent. It was Sister Lalita's presence that made the founding of a convent possible. In the following few years, several other young women joined what was then considered the convent.

Those of us who joined the household during the 1940s were inspired by Sister Lalita's saintly character. We found Sister to be completely self-effacing, gentle and affectionate, with a radiant serenity. We remember how she would occasionally come quietly into the kitchen when we were cooking, and ask if it would be alright if she took a piece of fruit! You would never have known from her behaviour that this had been her own house.

Even in her eighties, Sister would go to the temple twice a day to meditate, sitting cross-legged on the floor. She loved gardening, and we would see her in the garden, bending over, digging and tending to the plants.

In the early forties, a small group of young men also wanted to try living a



monastic life ; a house on the other side of the temple was purchased to provide living quarters for them. The monastery house was dedicated in 1943 with a homa fire and given the name Brahmananda Cottage.

There was a steady influx of monastic novices during the 1940s. Many of them however, did not stay. Swami therefore adopted the policy that prospective monastics should associate closely with the centre for at least a year before joining.

In training the monastic community, the Swami set the example by meditating regularly in the temple three times a day, which he expected others to follow. He inspired us with talks about spiritual ideals and his reminiscences of the Holy Mother and the direct disciples. He often said that group living is our greatest austerity, and the greatest teacher as well ; it rubs off the rough edges and makes us more humble. He urged us to love one another and to see the best in everyone.

#### *Prince Boncampagni and The Orange Grove*

Swami Prabhavananda used to say that when he first came to teach Vedanta in this country, he felt that it was *his* work, and it did not grow. Later, when he sincerely felt that it was the *Lord's work and Maharaj's work*, it began to grow and everything opened up. He often said that the Lord does his own work ; He brings His own people and those who are instrumental in spreading the message.

The general policy of the swamis in this country not to ask for money has worked to their advantage. The policy of the Ramakrishna Order monks in this regard, gives them credibility and makes their message ring true. The American devotees of their own volition have given generously

to help the work, according to their means and the needs of the time.

An interesting episode took place in 1941. A complete stranger walked into the office, selected \$40 worth of books, and walked off without paying for them. Swami didn't say anything, and after a few days a check arrived for \$500. The man later returned and introduced himself as Prince Andrea Boncampagni-Ludovici from Italy. He gave the Swami a copy of the Jesus shroud of Turin, one of the first twentyfive prints made of the shroud. It was framed and now hangs in the auditorium of the temple.

Before returning to Italy, Prince Boncampagni gave the Vedanta Society \$15,000, specifying that he wanted it to be used for land. An orange grove was bought in nearby Whittier, and the income from it helped to support the Vedanta Society for many years.

#### *The Santa Barbara Property*

Around 1942 Swami met Spencer Kellogg, a retired businessman in his seventies. Mr. Kellogg had a lovely country estate in the hills of Santa Barbara, with a sweeping view of the ocean in front, and the beautiful Santa Ynez mountains at the back. He wanted to use this property for an ashram, and he built a small shrine room in the eucalyptus grove for meditation. In the little shrine a statue of Sri Ramakrishna rested on a stone pillar.

Mr. Kellogg's wife did not like living in the country, and since they also owned a town house, he offered the property to Swami. Twice Swami refused, because it would be too expensive to keep up the large property. Mr. Kellogg put the estate up for sale, and invited Swami to stay there during

his vacation in July of 1943. One day when Mr. Kellogg was sweeping around the shrine, Swami heard him saying to himself, "Why should I sell Divine Mother's place? I don't need the money. I will give the place to Swami, and I will give money for its upkeep." Swami said, "All right Mr. Kellogg, we accept your offer." And they shook hands.

Mr. Kellogg passed away before the property was transferred, but he left the property to the Vedanta Society in his will, along with a generous endowment for its support. Swami felt relieved. For the first time the Vedanta Society would not be pinched for money.

The twelve-acre estate consisted of a two-bedroom house, art studio, and two rooms attached to the garage. The garage was soon turned into two bedrooms. A devotee paid for an additional eighteen acres which went to the top of the hill.

At first the newly acquired ashram was used as a retreat where Swami could go for a few days with several devotees or monastics. A group of monks went there in 1946 and built four bedrooms on to the art studio. This was completed in 1947, in time to house the swamis who came for the first Brahmacharya vows which took place in Santa Barbara.

#### *Brahmacharya Vows*

In 1946 the Belur Math trustees gave permission for Swami to establish a monastery and a convent, and to give Brahmacharya vows to one man and two women who had been living the monastic life for at least five years. This was the first time women had been accepted by the Ramakrishna Order.

In an excerpt from the Swami's letter to Belur Math it said: "Both these institutions will aim at God-realization through the unfoldment of the inner life, following a course of spiritual discipline, self-sacrifice and performance of household duties on lines set forth in the rules of the Belur Math framed by Swami Vivekananda."

The first Brahmacharya vows were given to George Fitts (Swami Krishnananda), and two women monastics. The guest swamis who took part in the ceremony were Swamis Yatiswarananda, Vividishananda, Akhilananda, Vishwananda, Satprakashananda, and Devatmananda. In the afternoon programme each of the Swamis gave an inspiring talk under the shade of the olive trees.

Soon after the vows were given, Swami sent the younger nuns to Santa Barbara which was then designated as a convent. Swami wanted us to be well-rounded; everyone learned to cook, clean, worship, garden, etc. A new altar was made for the shrine, pictures installed, and a ten-item noon worship and evening arati were performed daily.

#### *Hollywood Expansion and the Trabuco Monastery*

In 1948 the house behind the Vivekananda Home was purchased for its larger kitchen and dining room. It had a separate apartment which was refurbished for the Swami's quarters.

There was a growing need among the devotees for a larger selection of books about Vedanta. Accordingly, a bookstore and office were created out of the back section of the Green House. The bookstore gradually grew to take up most of the house. As the Vedanta Press sales grew, a major mail order business developed. Incense and



books of the world's religions were sold through the wholesale and retail catalogues.

In 1949 wings were added to each side of the temple to accommodate the larger crowds that were attending the lectures.

Gerald Heard was aware of the Society's need for a larger monastery. Mr. Heard with the help of his friends and students had started a religious College in Trabuco Canyon, as a place for prayer and the study of Eastern and Western mysticism. When Gerald Heard found that his experiment was not practical, he persuaded the college's board members to deed the property over to the Vedanta Society in 1949.

The property is located in what was then a remote area of the Santa Ana mountains, 60 miles south of Los Angeles. The tile-roofed buildings were beautifully laid out in the style of an old Italian monastery. The monastery came equipped with complete furnishings, a valuable library of religious books, and a chapel for meditation.

The Ramakrishna Monastery at Trabuco was dedicated in 1949. Swami Aseshananda, who had been sent to assist Swami, resided there along with a group of monks. In the following year, a large photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was installed in the chapel, and regular worship was begun.

Swami Prabhavananda had admired the statue of Swami Vivekananda sculpted by Malvina Hoffman for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York. Swami commissioned a copy of the statue to be made for the Trabuco monastery, and it was installed in the courtyard, with a lily pond in front of it and the view of the hills at the back. On the 4th of July in 1951, the statue was dedicated with a special worship, attended by over 300 people. Since

then a worship and Open House on the 4th of July has become a yearly tradition.

Sunday afternoon classes were started in the early fifties at the Trabuco Monastery, drawing people from San Diego, Laguna Beach and Orange County. These classes were dropped during periods when there were not enough speakers, but they were resumed in 1977.

In the mid-sixties the monks built a house with airconditioning for the Swami-in-charge and visiting swamis. The Trabuco monastery has been a place where men can go on retreat and help the monks with the work. In recent years a small bookstore was opened to make books and other items available to the local devotees.

### *Tantine, Sister and Ujjvala*

Josephine MacLeod (Tantine) was very fond of Swami Prabhavananda who she said reminded her of Swamiji. She visited the Hollywood centre nearly every year during the 1940s. She often spoke of Swamiji saying proudly, "I was never a disciple of Vivekananda's. I was his friend." She was fond of relating the story of Swamiji's triumph at the Parliament of Religions, saying dramatically, "When Swamiji addressed the audience as 'Sisters and Brothers of America,' seven thousand people rose to their feet with thunderous applause."

When Tantine came to the Vivekananda Home in the spring of 1949 at the age of ninety, she became a permanent member of the household. She announced to Swami that she had "come home to die." In the last two months of her life she was bed-ridden, and several monastics helped in her care. In October 1949 she breathed her last to join her beloved Swamiji.

There had been a plan for Sister Lalita to go to India with Swami in the fall (autumn) of 1949, but she became very ill with pneumonia on a visit to Santa Barbara. Several of the nuns nursed Sister in turns, and she was always a considerate patient. Sister went into a coma and passed away at the age of ninety. She was greatly missed by Swami and all those who knew and loved her.

In 1950 Swami invited Ujjvala (Ida Ansell), who was in her seventies, to live at the centre in Hollywood. She was one of the students who had lived at Shanti Ashrama with Swami Turiyananda and he had given her the name Ujjvala. She had also attended many of Swami Vivekananda's lectures in 1900, and took notes of them in shorthand.

Ujjvala had been an office worker, so during her years at the centre she contributed her services in the bookstore. Ujjvala had always wanted to be a writer, and this wish was fulfilled when she wrote her reminiscences of the early days with Swamis Vivekananda and Turiyananda, which were published as a series in the *Vedanta and the West* magazine.

Perhaps her greatest contribution was her transcriptions of Swami Vivekananda's previously unpublished lectures, completed just before her death in 1955. These were published in the *Vedanta and the West* magazine, and later incorporated in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

After Ujjvala's passing, Swami Prabhavananda wrote in a letter to a devotee: "In one sense our Hollywood centre is blessed. [Here] the three beloved disciples of Swamiji breathed their last, and Swamiji had to come personally to carry them. Swamiji is quite familiar with this place and with his own work that is carried on."

In October 1949, Swami Prabhavananda made a trip to India with Brahmachari Krishna (Swami Krishnananda) and three nuns from Santa Barbara. One of Swami's purposes for this trip was to discuss with the Belur Math trustees the need for a women's Math in India. Swami had been corresponding with the group of nuns who became the nucleus for Sri Sarada Math, and had been giving them financial support. When the formation of a women's Math was approved by Belur Math, he sent money to purchase the convent property.

### *The Santa Barbara Temple*

A new devotee came in 1952, Mrs. Ruth Sheets (Sita), who was to be the catalyst for the public work in Santa Barbara. Through her enthusiasm, lectures were started in 1954. She invited all her friends to come to the first lecture, which was held in the convent living room. There were soon seventy people coming to the lectures every other weekend when Swami came to Santa Barbara. Providing space for the lectures was difficult; furniture had to be moved out of the house, and chairs set up in rows.

Sita urged Swami to build a temple, and she found one of the finest architects in Santa Barbara, Lutah Maria Riggs, to design it. Sita purchased a large Egyptian screen, carved in wood, which was used to separate the entrance way from the main part of the temple.

Lutah Riggs had made a study of Indian temple architecture. Her temple design was inspired by the early South Indian wooden structures which were built before 600 B.C. She found laminated wood arches and tall wooden pillars to support the high, arched ceiling. A friend of Sita's donated some carved wood panels from Indonesia which were used inside the temple and on the entrance doors.



Swamis Madhavananda and Nirvanananda were invited from India to take part in the temple dedication in 1956. Also present for the occasion were Swamis Ashokananda, Vividishananda, Satprakashananda, Pavitr-ananda and Shantaswarupananda.

Swami Madhavananda carried the picture of Sri Ramakrishna and placed it on the altar. He performed a 16-item puja and was assisted by Swami Nirvanananda, who acted as tantra dhāarak. The puja was followed by a homa fire in the living room of the main house. This was the first and only puja performed by Swami Madhavananda, and in preparation he had studied the worship book for days with Swami Prabhavananda. On the following Sunday there was a public celebration when the guest Swamis gave talks.

After the dedication, regular lectures and Friday evening scripture classes were held in the temple. A ten-item noon worship and evening vesper service were established. Special pujas and Rāmnām have been observed. Every year there is a Durgā Pūjā celebration, when devotees from all of our centres are invited.

It was a tribute to Lulah Riggs' artistry that the temple won an award in 1956 as the best new civic building. The temple has been recommended on the Chamber of Commerce tour, and is regularly visited by architectural groups from all over the world.

Lulah Riggs asked her friend, Mr. Donahue, to donate a large Chinese 12th century bell, in memory of his late wife. The beautiful bronze bell, with its soft green patina, stayed for many years in front of the gatehouse. In 1983 an artist was hired to build a heavy frame from which to hang the bell, and he placed it near the temple where it could be rung for services.

In the 1960s Swami Tadatmananda made a large painting of Sri Ramakrishna, which was placed on the top altar in the temple. He was also requested to make paintings of Jesus and Buddha for the side niches, bringing in the idea of universality for which Vedanta stands.

We met the daughter of the owner of the Santa Barbara News Press soon after the temple was built. She wrote several full-page illustrated articles on the Vedanta temple and convent, which served to introduce us to the people of Santa Barbara.

In 1957, after the temple had been vandalized, a gatehouse was built near the temple for its protection. Devotees from Portland lived there, and later, in 1975, the house was converted into a bookstore called Sarada Convent Books. Gradually the store grew to include images, incense, religious objects and gift items, which helped to support a larger book selection. Sarada Convent Books became known in the Santa Barbara area for having the best selection of books from all religious traditions.

### *Events in Hollywood*

In 1953 a freeway was built that cut across directly in front of the Vedanta property. The temple had to be sound-proofed to muffle the freeway noise. Since the freeway cut off any expansion to the south, Swami decided to slowly acquire the property to the north. Houses were purchased as needed, providing living quarters for the growing monastic communities, and as rentals for devotees who wanted to live near the temple. In 1974 a monastic compound with a large kitchen and dining room was built behind the temple.

In 1955 Swami Aseshananda left for Portland to take charge of the Vedanta centre

there. Swami Vandanananda came from India to assist Swami in Hollywood. He was given lessons by Dr. Norman Wright in the speaking voice and diction.

### *The Vivekananda House*

In December 1899, the three Mead sisters—Alice Hansbrough (Shanti), Carrie Wyckoff (Sister Lalita), and Helen Mead—attended one of Swami Vivekananda's lectures in Los Angeles. Afterwards they visited Swamiji, and it was arranged for him to give lectures in Pasadena.

The three sisters lived in a small rented house at 309 Monterey Road in South Pasadena with their father, Lalita's young son Ralph, and Alice's daughter, Dorothy. One morning Swamiji drove up in a horse carriage to their door and said, "I have come to stay with you."

Swamiji gave lectures in Pasadena almost every day while he was there. Sometimes they had informal classes and picnics on a hilltop near the house. Swamiji usually helped Sister Lalita with the cooking, and sometimes he made curries and chapatis which the children loved.

Sister said later about this period, "It was as if Christ had come in our midst." Sister Lalita related one incident that occurred while Swamiji was with them. One day she was following Swamiji down the narrow stairway from the house's upper storey. Sister started to lose her balance, and put her hand on Swamiji's shoulder to steady herself. Suddenly another consciousness

opened up, and she scarcely knew how she got down the stairs. From then on Swamiji was "God" to Sister.

Swamiji left his pipe on the mantelpiece when he left the Pasadena house, as it was his habit to always leave something behind. The pipe is now preserved by the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

In 1955 Don Montague (Virabhadra) purchased the house in Pasadena where Swamiji stayed with the Meads, and he deeded it over to the Vedanta Society. Virabhadra restored the house, keeping it in its original Victorian style. Since then, the house has been further restored and refurbished.

In February of 1956, the Vivekananda House was officially dedicated in the presence of Swamis Madhavananda and Nirvanananda. The upstairs room where Swamiji stayed was consecrated as a shrine room. Since then, an Open House has been held there every year in honour of Swami Vivekananda. In 1989 the Vivekananda House received a Historic Landmark presentation.

An American swami is currently living at the Swamiji House as caretaker and host for visiting devotees. Every year he organizes a pilgrimage to Mt. Lowe where Swamiji stayed one night at a hotel where he lectured. Swamiji had ascended the mountain in a cable car which no longer exists, but there is a photograph of him riding in the car.

*(To be continued)*



God Lived with Them

## Swami Trigunatitananda

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

*With this issue we are happy to be able to start a new series of articles by Swami Chetanananda as instalments of a new book that will be published. This is the first of the series. The Swami, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, is the author of the two recent books of absorbing interest, 'They Lived With God', and 'Ramakrishna As We Saw Him'. He is spiritual leader of the St. Louis Centre, Missouri, U.S.A.*

The story begins with the loss of a gold watch. Sarada Prasanna, the son of a rich landlord, was accepted to the Metropolitan Institution in North Calcutta when he was in the seventh grade. M., the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was headmaster there. Sarada studied in that school for four years. He was a talented boy; his teachers expected him to achieve a brilliant score in the matriculation examination and obtain a scholarship. Sarada was also contemplating his bright future—but who can change Divine Providence? On the second day of the examination, someone stole Sarada's gold watch while he was having refreshments. Sarada was extremely upset; he felt it was because of his carelessness that such a valuable thing had been stolen. He could not concentrate on the remaining subjects of the test, and he failed to place in the first division.

The loss of the gold watch caused Sarada prolonged agony. M., who was very fond of Sarada, noticed his depression and on December 27, 1884, brought Sarada to Dakshineswar. This was Sarada's first visit to Sri Ramakrishna. There is no record of what the Master said to Sarada that day, but the *Gospel* entry indicates that Sri Ramakrishna talked about some important aspects

of human life. Referring to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's famous novel *Devi Chaudhurani*, the Master said: "People like the author of this book believe that knowledge is impossible without the study of books. In order to know God one must read books! But if I want to know Jadu Mallik, must I first know the number of his houses and the amount of money he has in government securities? Do I really need all this information?...He who seeks God plunges headlong; he doesn't calculate about how much or how little he needs for the protection of his body....It is the pure mind that perceives God, and at that time this ordinary mind does not function. A mind that has the slightest trace of attachment to the world cannot be called pure." The Master's teachings worked on Sarada's mind. He came to realize that spiritual treasures are more valuable than a gold watch. This trivial incident was the turning point of his life.

Sarada Prasanna Mitra, who later became Swami Trigunatitananda, was born in the village of Naora (Paikhati), 24-Parganas, on Monday, January 30, 1865, at 9:26 p.m. His parents believed that he was born to them through the grace of the Divine Mother Durga; therefore they named him "Sarada,"

another name for Durga. The astrologer who made his horoscope said that Sarada was born at an auspicious time, and predicted that he would be a great yogi and a man of wisdom. Sarada's maternal grandfather, Nilkamal Sarkar, was a powerful and wealthy landlord of Paikhati. His father, Shivakrishna Mittera, was also a rich landlord who moved the family to a home in Nandan Bagan, Calcutta, when Sarada was three years old.

Shivakrishna was a religious man who spent his time in worship and study of the scriptures; he therefore raised his son in a spiritual atmosphere. Sarada had such a wonderful memory that he memorized 108 hymns and salutation mantras on different gods and goddesses before he was fourteen. He could also chant the Gītā, the Caṇḍī, and the Upaniṣads in a melodious voice. He was pure and simple, and religious-minded even as a boy. His contact with Sri Ramakrishna when he was nineteen further stimulated his religious spirit.

In Sarada's home there had always been servants and maids who did all household work. As a result, Sarada considered himself above menial tasks. However, one hot day when Sarada arrived at Dakshineswar, the Master said to him, "Please bring some water and wash my feet." Many of Sarada's friends were standing nearby, making the situation all the more embarrassing. Sarada's face flushed with humiliation. He did not know what to do. But the Master repeated the request, and Sarada felt compelled to obey. He said later that the Master thus forever broke down his aristocratic pride and implanted in his mind the spirit of service.

In April 1885, a few months after he first met the Master, Sarada entered Metropolitan College. He made good marks in the first

year and was recognized as a brilliant student. But as his visits to Dakshineswar became more and more frequent, he began to show a growing indifference to secular learning. Quite often he would miss classes in order to be with the Master. Sri Ramakrishna gave spiritual instructions to this sincere young disciple, fed him, and asked Holy Mother to pay his carriage fare. Whenever Sarada came to Dakshineswar, Holy Mother would keep money on the step of the nahabat as she knew Sarada had come surreptitiously, eluding his father's watchful eyes. One day Sri Ramakrishna sent Sarada to Holy Mother for spiritual instruction and mentioned her infinite power, quoting a Bengali couplet:

Radha's infinite power of maya is beyond  
description,  
Millions of Krishnas and Ramas evolve,  
abide, and dissolve in it.

Holy Mother probably initiated Sarada much later since she said that Jogin (Swami Yogananda), whom she initiated in Vrindaban after the Master's passing away, was her first disciple. As far as the record shows, Sarada and Jogin were the only two monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were initiated by Holy Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna taught the householders and monastics differently. Sarada wrote: "Without self-control householders can never be true to their ideals. Sri Ramakrishna used to say to all, including the householders: 'Have the knowledge of oneness first, and then do your work'; 'Hold fast to the pole, i.e. [God] and then go on whirling'; 'Keep the greater part of your mind fixed on God and with the rest attend to your ordinary rounds of duty.' With these and many other beautiful similes he used to teach householders how they



should lead their lives." However he taught his monastic disciples: "The only way to conquer lust is to look upon all women as your own mother, as images of the Divine Mother....When a man succeeds in the conservation of his sexual energy, his intellect reflects the image of Brahman, even as a glass gives a perfect image when its back is painted with silver nitrate. The man who carries this image of Brahman in his heart is able to accomplish everything—he will succeed wonderfully in whatever action he engages himself."

Of Sarada's many wonderful experiences associated with the Master, one stands in marked relief. One of the last vestiges of the ego to be removed is sex, with all its subtle ramifications. Years of practice and asceticism are often necessary for its eradication. Sarada had set his will to conquer this great foe, but the task seemed impossible. However, one day as he sat in meditation, he felt the Master's grace within and the idea of sex disappeared like a mirage, never to return.

Sarada's frequent visits to Dakshineswar alarmed his parents. They secretly arranged his marriage, thinking this might divert his mind. M. recorded in the *Gospel*, on July 14, 1885:

Master (to Sarada): "Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? Why don't you see me when I come to Calcutta?"

Sarada: "Nobody tells me about it."

Master: "Next time I shall let you know. (To M., smiling) Make a list of these youngsters." (M. and the devotees laugh.)

Sarada: "My relatives at home want me to marry. (Pointing to M.) How many times he has scolded me about marriage!"

Master: "Why should you marry just now? (To M.) Sarada is now in a very good state of mind. Formerly he had a hesitant look; now his face beams with joy."

In September 1885, Sri Ramakrishna was moved from Dakshineswar to Shyampukur, Calcutta for cancer treatment, and in December 1885 moved again to Cossipore. Sarada continued his visits to the Master and served him during his last days. Sometimes he stayed overnight, enduring his father's scoldings. On January 3, 1886, Sarada's mother told him that his father had finalized arrangements for his marriage. Sarada was stunned. He could not believe it. He hurried to his room, and after thinking about his future, wrote a short note: "My respected parents, I will not marry. I have no desire to be trapped in the mesh of maya. In whatever direction my eyes go, I am going." He put the note on his desk and left at 11:30 a.m. He first went to Cossipore, and after receiving the Master's blessings, left for Puri (300 miles away) on foot. He did not tell the Master that he had run away from home.

In the meantime Sarada's parents discovered that he was missing and began to search for him. Finally they went to the Master and learned what had happened. After a few days Sarada wrote to them from Panshkura, Midnapore: "Respected parents, I am your ungrateful son and have caused you so much pain. Please forgive me. Millions of people in our country are suffering—under such circumstances that it is hard for me to live idly at home. Don't worry about me. I am fine. Please don't come here to get me because I shall leave this place as soon as I mail this letter."

After travelling to various places, Sarada reached Puri via Bhadrak, Orissa. His parents had also departed for Puri, and

arrived there on Wednesday, January 27, 1886, and found Sarada. They were overwhelmed with joy. Sarada narrated his journey to his parents:

After writing to you I began to walk and did not get any food for two days. I was hungry and exhausted. I expected to find a village before evening, but unfortunately I reached a dense forest. I followed a zigzag path for some time and then I was lost in darkness. I began to chant Sri Ramakrishna's name and prayed to God for help. Without finding any way out, I climbed up a big tree and fell asleep on its branch. Suddenly I heard a man's voice, saying: "Hello, holy man. Here are some sweets. Please come down and appease your hunger." After a short while he brought a jug of water and disappeared in the darkness. I was impressed with his sympathy and received that food and drink as the grace of the compassionate God. At daybreak I searched for that man in the forest, but I couldn't find any human being or any village nearby.

When Sarada was leaving Cossipore, Tarak (later, Swami Shivananda) had given him five rupees, knowing he was penniless. But in spite of all his hardship Sarada didn't spend that money. Such was his spirit of renunciation! He wanted to experience the divine promise, "Lo, I am with you always."

Sarada stayed at Puri with his parents for some days and visited all the important temples. He returned to Calcutta with them only one month before the First Arts Examination. Knowing that Sarada was willing to take the examination, Shivakrishna met the principal of the college and arranged everything. Although Sarada had not touched his books for almost a whole year, he passed the examination creditably with only one month's preparation.

To worldly people spiritual life is distasteful, and to spiritual people worldly enjoyments are disgusting. It is not possible to force a worldly person to be spiritual or a spiritual person to be worldly. In spite of his persistent efforts, Shivakrishna failed to stop Sarada's visits to Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore. But when Sri Ramakrishna passed away on August 16, 1886, Sarada's father made this comment with a smile, "I repeated the mantram regularly at Kalighat, so I got the result." In other words, he most probably prayed for the Master's death. What an awful attachment for his son! Shivakrishna believed that he would get Sarada back after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, but things did not work out that way.

#### *Austerity at Baranagore Math*

After the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lost their beloved Master, they rented a dilapidated house at Baranagore with the help of Surendra Nath Mittra. This house became the first Ramakrishna Monastery. Sarada continued to visit the brother disciples, although his parents did not like it at all. They were afraid that he might leave home and become a monk. Before Christmas, 1886, the disciples decided to visit Antpur, the birthplace of Baburam (later, Swami Premananda). Narendra (later, Swami Vivekananda) secretly sent a messenger to Sarada with news of the forthcoming trip to Antpur. Sarada immediately left home, joined the group, and went with them to Antpur. There, on Christmas Eve, the disciples took vows of renunciation in front of a sacrificial fire: they vowed that they would never go back to family life. Their Master had enkindled the fire of renunciation in their hearts and also the burning desire for liberation. One day Sarada went to bathe in a pond, although he could not swim well. Suddenly he fell



into deep water. Immediately Niranjan dived into the water and rescued him. On another day the disciples arranged the Hara-Gauri festival, dressing Sarada as Shiva and Gangadhar as Gauri. These young disciples had learned from their Master how to make spiritual life enjoyable.

After a week the disciples of the Master returned to Baranagore and Sarada stayed in the monastery rather than return home. Sarada's elder brother, Binay, secretly arranged an esoteric sacrificial ceremony to try to turn Sarada away from spiritual life. Twelve brahmins performed the sacrifice for one month and twelve days. At the end of this time they told Binay: "It is impossible to bring your brother back to the world. He is praying intensely to realize God by embracing monastic life. Therefore, this sacrifice is not capable of bringing a pure soul to the lower plane." Binay spent four thousand rupees for the ceremony, but to no avail. At last he went to the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and asked them to send Sarada back home. In all likelihood they refused, preferring to let Sarada decide where to live. A month later Sarada heard about his brother's conspiracy. He became disgusted and stopped visiting home completely.

In January 1887, Sarada and other disciples performed Viraja Homa, a special fire sacrifice, in front of Sri Ramakrishna's picture and took their final monastic vows. Swami Vivekananda gave Sarada the name "Swami Trigunatitananda." Later on Swami Vivekananda taunted him about his long name and asked him to shorten it; so "Trigunatita" became what he was usually called.

In Baranagore Monastery the disciples began intense spiritual practices. They would also go on pilgrimages. One day Swami

Vivekananda asked Swami Saradananda to visit Navadwip, the birthplace of Chaitanya, on foot. Swami Saradananda immediately prepared to walk the sixty miles to Navadwip alone, without taking any money. However Swamis Shivananda and Trigunatita found out about it and went along with him. At noon, after they had walked for some time, Trigunatita disappeared. Saradananda and Shivananda sat under a tree to wait for him and contemplated begging some food from a nearby village. In the meantime, Trigunatita appeared and told them: "It is noon. So after finishing my bath, I have satisfied my hunger." When asked how, Trigunatita replied: "I have eaten some tender grass and then have drunk some water." Both the swamis were dumbfounded.

Swami Trigunatita's eating habits were very unusual. Once while at Baranagore Monastery Trigunatita suffered from stomach trouble. Swami Brahmananda sent him to Dr. Bepin Ghosh for treatment. The doctor was a devotee and knew the holy man and his food-habits well. So he wanted to serve him at the very outset. He said, "Please tell me what you would like to eat." "Rasogolla [cheese balls soaked in syrup]," the swami replied. Dr. Ghosh offered the swami two rupees' worth of rasogolla [more than two dozen]. Trigunatita finished these very quickly. Then the doctor said, "Please tell me why you have come to me today." Swami Trigunatita replied, "I have stomach trouble, so Swami Brahmananda sent me to you for treatment." "My goodness! Why then did you eat those rasogolla?" "You offered them with love, so what else could I do?" answered the swami. The doctor then gave him medicine.

Swami Trigunatita had a strange capacity for food. He could eat an enormous amount of food, and again, he could fast for days. About his eating habits, Swami Premananda

said: "He had an occult power. Once I thickened seven and a half seers of milk and served him the whole quantity. He ate it all without stopping. On another occasion he stayed under the bel tree of Belur Math for several days, eating only one banana a day." Once Swami Premananda's mother invited three disciples of the Master to the house of Balaram Basu, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. She cooked various dishes, but because of unavoidable circumstances only Swami Trigunatita was able to go there. She was unhappy that a lot of food would be wasted. However, Trigunatita began to eat and gradually finished the entire quantity of food. Premananda's mother was frightened, thinking that the swami would be sick. The next day, when she saw the swami well, she remarked: "It is amazing how Sarada eats! He has travelled over many mountains and learned many mantras so he can make any amount of food vanish. Otherwise it is not possible for a human being to eat so much."

Trigunatita's self-control was also phenomenal. Once he decided to reduce his food intake. He began to eat two ounces of rice and two ounces of chili each day and continued this regimen for a month. Another time while staying at Balaram's house, he went with Swami Brahmananda and two other disciples to a devotee's house where they were unexpectedly served a meal. After returning to Balaram's house, Swami Brahmananda realized that Balaram would be upset if the food he planned to serve were wasted. Trigunatita said to him: "Don't worry. I shall finish the food." Even though he had just eaten a regular meal, he consumed the food meant for four persons.

He had very little body-consciousness. Sometimes in the winter he would cover his body with a piece of thin cloth, and sometimes with two blankets. Once he was

suffering from blood dysentery and living on barley water. When he went to a devotee's house, however, he was able to eat a large amount of sweets. He told the doctor, "This excessive eating has cured my disease." Another time when he was shivering with fever, he bathed with cold water, ate a sumptuous meal and recovered completely.

Like his food habits, Swami Trigunatita's actions and behaviour were unusual and sometimes not understandable to others. He had indomitable energy and was undaunted in every situation. He was skeptical about the existence of ghosts; he visited a number of haunted houses and found nothing to substantiate claims of ghostly inhabitants. This aroused in him a determination to see a ghost, if one really existed. Someone told him about an old empty house near Baranagore Monastery where he could see a ghost at midnight. Without telling anyone, Trigunatita went there before midnight and waited for the ghost. Suddenly he saw a faint light appear in the corner of the room. The light grew brighter until, in the centre of the light, there appeared an eye. It approached him with deadly malevolence. The swami felt his blood dry up in his veins and his body wither like a green tree before a forest fire in the baleful light of that eye. He was about to faint, when all of a sudden Sri Ramakrishna appeared. Holding his hand, the Master said: "My child, why are you so foolishly taking chances with certain death? It is sufficient for you to keep your mind fixed on me." With those words, the Master disappeared. Trigunatita's spirit at once revived and he left the house. His curiosity about ghosts was satisfied forever.

During his sadhana at Baranagore Monastery, he had a great desire to perform some tantric rituals at midnight in the



cremation ground. So one night when all the others were asleep, Trigunatita silently prepared to leave for the cremation ground. To his utter astonishment he heard Swami Brahmananda calling out, "Sarada, don't go ; don't go." The swami stood speechless ; and Swami Brahmananda went on to say : "Sri Ramakrishna appeared to me in my dream and told me to forbid you from going." Hence the Swami did not go. This was the end of his attempt to practise tantric sadhana.

Swami Trigunatita once decided to repeat his mantram day and night. The other swamis were very concerned about this young brother monk, and tried to persuade him to come out of his room and take food. Trigunatita did come out, but he refused to eat lest there might be a break in his japam. At last it was decided that while Trigunatita ate, Swami Shivananda would touch him, which touch would be as beneficial as doing japam. Thus he hurriedly took his meal and continued his japam.

When Trigunatita studied the Vedanta scriptures, he put his whole mind and all his energy into it. He forgot food and drink, sleep and surroundings. When it was dark, he would come to his senses and light a lantern. He would study Sanskrit literature and European philosophy until midnight. He practised spiritual disciplines with steadfast devotion ; and he never lost his temper if scolded or criticized.

Trigunatita's father again tried to bring him back home, and asked him to finish his B. A. degree. Trigunatita refused, and instead left for Puri on February 26, 1887, along with some brother disciples. There he practised Vaiṣṇava sadhana with all the traditional face and body marks ; he wore a tulsi rosary around his neck and he also carried a picture of his Chosen Deity. After some time he returned to Baranagore.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, M. recorded Swami Trigunatita's mental condition while he was at Baranagore Monastery :

May 7, 1887

Narendra was in charge of the members of the monastery. Prasanna<sup>1</sup> had been practising austere sadhana for the past few days. Once Narendra had told him of his desire to fast to death for the realization of God. During Narendra's absence in Calcutta, Prasanna had left the monastery for an unknown destination.

Narendra (to M.): "You see what a lot of trouble I am in! Here, too, I am involved in a world of maya. Who knows where this boy has gone?"

Prasanna had left a letter for Narendra. This was the substance of the letter: "I am going to Vrindaban on foot. It is very risky for me to live here. Here my mind is undergoing a change. Formerly I used to dream about my parents and other relatives. Then I dreamt of woman, the embodiment of maya. I have suffered twice ; I had to go back to my relatives at home. Therefore I am going far away from them. The Master once told me, 'Your people at home are apt to do anything ; never trust them.'"

May 8, 1887

There was a big plot of wooded land to the west of the monastery compound. M. was seated alone under a tree, when suddenly Prasanna appeared. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon.

M.: "Where have you been all these days? Everyone has been so worried about

<sup>1</sup>Sarada Prasanna, Swami Trigunatitananda's premonastic name.

you. Have you seen the brothers ? When did you arrive ?”

Prasanna: “Just now. Yes, I have seen them.”

M.: “You left a note saying that you were going to Vrindaban. We were terribly worried about you. How far did you go ?”

Prasanna: “Only as far as Konnagar.”

Both of them laughed.

M.: “Sit down. Tell me all about it. Where did you stop first ?”

Prasanna: “At the Dakshineswar temple garden. I spent one night there.”

M. (*smiling*): “What is Hazra’s present mood ?”

Prasanna: “Hazra asked me, ‘What do you think of me ?’”

Both laughed.

M. (*smiling*): “What did you say ?”

Prasanna: “I said nothing.”

M.: “Then ?”

Prasanna: “Then he asked me whether I had brought tobacco for him.”

Both laughed.

Prasanna: “He wanted me to wait on him.” (*Laughter.*)

M.: “Where did you go next ?”

Prasanna: “By degrees I got to Konnagar. I spent the night in the open. I intended to proceed farther and asked some gentlemen whether I could procure enough money there for a railway ticket to the up-country.”

M.: “What did they say ?”

Prasanna: “They said, ‘You may get a rupee or so ; but who will give you the whole fare ?’”

Both laughed.

M.: “What did you take with you ?”

Prasanna: “Oh, one or two pieces of cloth and a picture of the Master. I didn’t show the picture to anybody.”

Rakhal was seated in Kali Tapasvi’s room. Prasanna sat near him. M., too, was there.

Rakhal (*to Prasanna*): “Where do you want to go, running away from here ? Here you are in the company of holy men. Wouldn’t it be foolish to run away from this ? Where will you find another like Narendra ?”

Prasanna: “My parents live in Calcutta. I am afraid of being drawn by their love. That is why I want to flee to a distant place.”

Rakhal: “Can our parents love us as intensely as Gurumaharaj [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] did ? What have we done for him, to deserve all this love ? Why was he so eager for our welfare in body, mind, and soul ? What have we done for him, to deserve all this ?”

Prasanna (*to Rakhal*): “Don’t you yourself feel like running away from here ?”

Rakhal: “Yes, now and then I have a fancy to spend a few days on the bank of the Narmada.”

Tarak and Prasanna were talking in the room of the “danas.” He too was trying to persuade Prasanna to live there.

Prasanna: “I have neither jnana [knowledge] nor prema [love]. What have I in the world for a support ?”

Tarak: “It is no doubt difficult to attain jnana ; but how can you say you have no prema ?”

Prasanna: “I have not yet wept for God. How can I say I have prema ? What have I realized in all these days ?”



Tarak: "But you have seen the Master. And why do you say that you have no jnana?"

Prasanna: "What sort of jnana are you talking about? Jnana means Knowledge. Knowledge of what? Certainly of God. But I am not even sure of the existence of God."

Tarak: "Yes, that's true. According to the jnani, there is no God."

M. (to himself): "Ah! The Master used to say that those who seek God pass through the state that Prasanna is now experiencing. In that state sometimes one doubts the very existence of God."

Narendra and Prasanna were talking in the meditation room. Rakhal, Harish, and the younger Gopal were seated in another part of the room.

Narendra was reading from the *Gītā* and explaining the verses to Prasanna:

The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the hearts of all beings, causing them, by His maya, to revolve as if mounted on a machine. Take refuge in Him with all thy heart, O Bharata. By His grace wilt thou attain Supreme Peace and the Eternal Abode. Relinquishing all dharmas, take refuge in Me alone. I shall liberate thee from all sins. Grieve not.

Then he said to Prasanna: "Surrender yourself at His feet. Resign yourself completely to His will."

Narendra said to Prasanna: "Don't you remember Sri Ramakrishna's words? God is the hill of sugar and you are but an ant. One grain is enough to fill your stomach, and you think of bringing home the entire

hill! Don't you remember what the Master said about Sukadeva? Even Sukadeva was a big ant at the most. That is why I scolded Kali, saying: 'You fool! Do you want to measure God with your tape and foot-rule?'

"God is the Ocean of Mercy. Be His slave and take refuge in Him. He will show compassion. Pray to Him: 'Protect me always with Thy compassionate face. Lead me from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality. Reveal thyself to me and protect me always with Thy compassionate face.'"

Prasanna: "What kind of spiritual discipline should one practise?"

Narendra: "Repeat His name. That's enough."

Prasanna: "How are we to know that God is kind?"

Narendra: "The Vedas say, 'That which is Thy compassionate face.' John Stuart Mill said the same thing. He said, 'How much kindness must He have, who has implanted kindness in the hearts of men.' The Master used to say: 'Faith is the one essential thing. God exists. He is very near us. Through faith alone one sees Him.'"

Prasanna: "Sometimes you say that God does not exist, and now you are saying all these things! You are not consistent. You keep changing your opinions."

All laughed.

Narendra: "All right! I shall never change what I have just said. As long as one has desires and cravings, so long one doubts the existence of God."

(To be continued)

# Universality of Swami Vivekananda

SWAMI DEVENDRANANDA

*The momentous appearance of Vivekananda and his vibrant impact on India in particular and on the world in general are portrayed by the author. He is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order.*

The year 1993 marks the 131st year of Swami Vivekananda's birth. In this broad span of years, he lived in the mortal form of flesh and blood for only a period of thirty-nine years. And throughout the course of the remaining years, he has been inspiring us through his immortal lectures and unforgettable writings. We know that he himself wished to live as a formless inspirer. At times, he used to think of himself, as he said, 'a voice without a form.' "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body—to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God."

The inexhaustible energy that Swamiji stood for did not choose to remain in a skeletal form. Throughout the spell of over nine decades, since his passing away, a flood of spiritual upheaval has swept over the world. He is still awake in the thoughts of the thoughtful, in the intellect of the intellectual, in the patriotism of the patriot, in the sacrifice of the Sannyasin, and in the tears of the downtrodden.

On the 12th of January, the day which commemorates his sacred advent, is celebrated every year National Youth Day in India. Befittingly, his 125th birthday was celebrated in 1988 with great enthusiasm and grandeur. It is learnt that Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature has created a notable impression even in Russia. The great former socialist republic has surely amazed the world by being an enthusiastic beneficiary of the new fold of spirituality. Not only a new Rama-

krishna Mission centre has been founded in Moscow, but also there are people even in China who are showing interest in Swamiji and his teachings. A Chinese author, Huan Zin Chuan a few years ago published a book dealing especially with Swamiji's patriotism, his love towards his countrymen, his staunch opposition to imperialistic colonialism, and his unflinching faith in global peace.

A question may arise at this point regarding the continued presence of Swamiji in the hearts of so many people throughout the globe, even after the lapse of so many years: What is the immortal gift that he presented to the world? Why are so many captivated by his writings?

The answer to these questions is rather simple. He is loved because he loved us intensely. He is adored because he was the first to adore humanity equally with God. It was his voice that vibrated in those dark days to proclaim to the world, "each soul is potentially divine." He believed in the eternal purity of the human soul. It was he who could distinguish between sin and the sinner, and emphasized the immense possibilities lying dormant. It was Vivekananda's philosophy that told the world, that "an atheist is not a person who does not believe in God, but it is one who does not believe in himself."

The world has really witnessed very few of such a high order of humanists who could believe in the equality and divinity of every person, and Swamiji was one who belonged to that exalted order of world



teachers. It was he who injected energy into the nearly lifeless Indian society torn within by the subtle but deadly barriers of meaningless casteism, and oppressed without, by the domination of the foreign political power. People were overweeningly proud of their religious creeds and high social position due to birth, but Swamiji embraced all Indians, irrespective of everything, as his dearest brothers and countrymen. It was his energy that galvanized the stagnant society and provided it with the impetus to march forward towards the goal of equality. It has been rightly said by Sister Nivedita that Swamiji came to teach a single message that he repeatedly emphasized—"Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."

Swamiji loved to fight against all injustices and he gave vigour to others to help in the struggle. His fight was against weakness and cowardice, against wrong-doings and oppression, and above all he strived to root out communal narrowness. Vivekananda's powerful weapons were love and compassion, and deep insight into how to lead men upward. He said that his work would go on till every person realizes his Self—his eternal link with the ever-loving and all-pervasive God.

*For India, Vivekananda is wanted in every sphere.*

Swamiji wanted to bring about a tidal wave of spirituality in India. He said, "Every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas."

But it does not mean that Swamiji wanted to see our countrymen go mad about philosophical speculations and dogmas. His practical Vedanta was entirely different from the common idea of religion. He did not think in terms of devotion and salvation

only. Religion to Swamiji was not an other-worldly concern, but a synthesizing and combining of all aspects of human life and action. He said, "Material civilization, nay even luxury is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! Pooh! India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread..." (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, IV, 368)

This was the realism of Swami Vivekananda. His religion was not in Heaven but very much on earth. His religion was not centred in pleasing theories, but in action. It was not to serve any selfish interests, but was to be practised in serving the welfare of all. His religion lay not in claiming superiority over others, or in gaining power or privilege, but in self-sacrifice for the service of mankind. In brief, Vivekananda's religion was to awaken man's consciousness of his divine origin and potential, and in this awakened consciousness lies the spiritual strength of mankind. The purpose of Swamiji's practical religion was not in miracle-mongering or sensationalism, but in awakening the latent godhead in man.

Swamiji never wanted to bring about this spiritual revolution at the cost of the ancient Indian culture and traditions. On the contrary, his plans and ideas centred around that great and glorious tradition and civilization. What he actually did was to meet the challenge of cowardice, communal selfishness, superstitions, and other weaknesses that were too much in evidence in society, and called upon the people to fight these evils with strength drawn from the large and generous spirit of their religion. He said, "It is only when the body is weak that these germs take possession of it and produce disease. Just so with the national

life. It is when the national body is weak that all sorts of disease germs in the political state of the race or in its social state, in its educational or intellectual state, crowd into the system and produce disease. To remedy it, therefore, we must go to the root of this disease and cleanse the blood of all impurities. The one tendency will be to strengthen the man, to make the blood pure, the body vigorous, so that it will be able to resist and throw off all external poisons." (*ibid.*, III, 288).

Swamiji, like a true physician, wanted to purge society of these poisons which had entered into the national life and consciousness, and he was able to perform this process of purification. He strengthened the self-confidence and inner conviction of men and women so that they could fight against all kinds of weaknesses, physical and psychological, by urging his countrymen not to draw upon any materialistic theory, but upon the strength of the Vedic and Upanishadic wisdom, and their own minds and innermost souls. And this was the eternal doctrine of the Vedanta, the brightest beacon of spirituality of ancient India brought to life in modern times. Swamiji brought out for practice blazing truths of Vedanta which had been so long confined only in the discourses of the learned pandits and intellectuals. It reflected a new light and proved its relevance in the everyday life of the people. He wanted to rebuild and reorganize the Indian society. His writings and speeches attest to this. But we, especially the youth of India, fail to understand and evaluate him because of the fact that he was not a political leader.

Today the youth of our country must be convinced that Swamiji was not just a mere religious reformer. The personality that developed in him through renunciation and patriotism was on the one hand, an evidence of the strength still present in the ancient

Indian culture, and on the other, it was a searchlight for the helpless masses of India. It was not an easy task to try to bring back the ancient glory of India, because the country was deeply afflicted by the maladies of prolonged bondage, humiliation and lethargy.

It would have been very difficult for Swamiji to tackle this momentous task had he been motivated only by narrow personal interests. If he had so desired he could have meditated in the Himalayas, forgetting the plight of his country. But like Lord Buddha he ushered in a new way of life: "*Bahu-jana-hitāya ; bahu-jana-sukhāya*—for the welfare, peace and happiness of others." He even gave up the desire for his own salvation, for the cause of the people of his motherland. He used to say that he did not want his own salvation so long as there remained even a single person afflicted by misery and hunger. Was there any parallel to his spirit of self-sacrifice? There is the stamp of an extraordinary personality in all his thoughts and ideas, which are not merely a replica of the ancient or modern thoughts and theories. They go beyond all the 'isms' of modern political thinkers.

Swamiji delivered an eternal message to the world at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893. As a result the Indian people, and especially the youth who were misguided and groping in darkness, found at last a rock to hold onto. Thus it came about that India was able to sever the chains of foreign subjugation which had been responsible to a large extent for the national backwardness. Now roused by the thundering call of Swamiji, the nation stands on its own feet, has shaken off the slavish mentality, and marches ahead. Had he not been present to lead this victory campaign, especially in the spiritual, social and cultural affairs of the country, the picture of India

(Continued on page 66)



# Divine Grace

LETA JANE LEWIS

*Between free will and divine grace, which plays a pivotal role in spiritual life? This interesting essay contains an illuminating answer. The author is Professor Emeritus from California State University, Fresno, U.S.A.*

Webster defines grace as “unmerited divine assistance given man for his regeneration and sanctification.” Grace sometimes seems capricious, and it is certainly unpredictable. It can descend as swiftly as lightning upon those who appear to merit it least. Saul, who had been violently persecuting the Christians, experienced a tremendous influx of grace on the road to Damascus. He was overwhelmed and incapacitated by a sudden flash of blinding light and a voice admonishing him: “Saul! Saul! Why persecutest thou me?”<sup>1</sup> Saul was transformed in an instant. From that moment on he completely ceased persecuting the Christians for their beliefs. He became one of them and eventually gave his life on behalf of them and their faith.

In the context of Vedanta, Webster’s definition of grace can be elaborated and refined to include its manifestation in the universe culminating with the appearance of creatures capable of experiencing divine grace: ourselves! Vedantists agree with Webster that the spiritually ignorant ego does not merit grace. But since grace is an expression of divinity, which is absolute truth and wisdom, they cannot concur with the common assumption that it is capricious.

In order better to understand the Vedantic conception of divine grace, it is essential to review what Vedanta teaches regarding its source. Where precisely does grace come from? According to Vedanta there is only one divine Existence, known in Sanskrit as Brahman, which is the source of all divinity.

The personal God has His being in Brahman as do all individual souls. But the personal God is eternally perfect and aware of His divinity, while we human beings are not. We are ignorant of our divine nature because we block out our higher awareness by identifying ourselves with our bodies, minds, and senses.<sup>2</sup>

We are God’s creatures, but, of course, not in the sense that God has created our souls, which, as we have seen, have their uncreated existence in Brahman. God’s grace, however, is responsible for the development of appropriate bodies to house our souls. God did not create the universe at any moment in time nor did He take clay in His hands to mould its objects as a human sculptor might do. According to Vedanta, He worked and continues to work from within nature, which He sustains with His vitality and energy in an eternal process without beginning or end. Swami Shraddhananda defines grace in terms of this process: “Divine grace is God’s outpouring of Himself in love and joy....God’s work of projecting, pervading and interpenetrating the world proceeds out of his overflow of love for the individual beings....”<sup>3</sup>

Since Indian philosophers had integrated evolution into their various philosophical and religious systems long before Darwin, they have no fear that modern evolutionary

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1. Acts 9:4.

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2. The Vedantic sages teach that the goal of human life is to cast off this false identity and realize our divinity.

3. Swami Shraddhananda, “Bhakta and Bhagavan” in *The Grace Divine*, the president, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1983), p. 207.

theories will conflict with their beliefs. For instance, one of the foremost of these philosophers, the great Advaitist Śankara, "affirmed that the whole cosmic evolution is a gradual unfoldment of the various possibilities of the supreme spirit."<sup>4</sup> Swami Vivekananda was more explicit: "Wherever there is life, the storehouse of infinite energy is behind it. Starting as some fungus, some very minute microscopic bubble, and all the time drawing from that infinite storehouse of energy, a form is changed slowly and steadily until in course of time it becomes a plant then an animal, then man, ultimately God."<sup>5</sup> This is attained through millions of aeons, but what is time?"<sup>6</sup> Sri Aurobindo's viewpoint is similar: "A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation, till the form can reveal the in-dwelling spirit, is then the key-note, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence."<sup>7</sup> We cannot know the divine intention directly, but since the divine Reality is the final irresistible Truth, it is inevitable that It would reveal Itself through some viable process. Sri Aurobindo is, therefore, logical in asserting that the divine will has been to create new and different forms until one appeared in which divinity could manifest itself.

Everything that has form owes its existence to divine grace: the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the inhabitants of land, air, and sea are creatures of God's grace. And it seems that of all God's creatures we

have received the most abundant grace, for He has given us human births which are the primary prerequisite for Self-knowledge.

The sages tell us that we are capable of Self-realization, but how is that possible? Since we share our bodies and instincts with the animals, we begin our lives on this planet as virtual slaves of nature. Animals cannot lift themselves by their instinctual bootstraps and neither can we. How, then, are we to escape from this slavery? Through divine grace. That is the only way. Divine grace is the only way in which humanity can cast off its lower identity and realize its innate divinity.

Grace, then, is the sum and substance of spiritual life.

Swami Swahananda states: "As for spiritual life, nothing happens without God's grace."<sup>8</sup> Swami Sarvagatananda elaborates: "It is grace that keeps us moving, evolving, and gaining higher spiritual realms."<sup>9</sup> Although we may not be aware that grace is changing our lives, it inspires those noble thoughts and deeds which we are apt to take for granted in ourselves. Grace motivates us to become spiritually earnest, to cultivate renunciation, to attempt to conquer selfishness, and to practise discrimination between those things which will further our spiritual progress and those which won't.

Grace slowly and imperceptibly enters the spiritual aspirant's heart until it eventually breaks down all barriers and inundates his surface consciousness. Sri Aurobindo comments: "I have always seen that there has been a long unobserved preparation before the Grace intervened."<sup>10</sup> Saul assuredly

4. S. Radhakrishnan, *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1952-1953), p. 442.

5. By "God" the swami does not mean the personal God; he means Godmen and -women, persons who have realized their divinity.

6. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1939), pp. 44-45.

7. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (New York: the Greystone Press, 1949), p. 734.

8. Swami Swahananda, "The Doctrines of Grace and Karma" in *The Grace Divine*, p. 197.

9. Swami Sarvagatananda, "The Holy Mother and her Divine Grace" in *The Grace Divine*, p. 7.

10. Quoted by S. Sankaranaryanan in "Sri Aurobindo's Yoga" in *The Grace Divine*, p. 120.



went through such a period of preparation. True, he had not been practising spiritual disciplines in the usual way! But his concentration on Jesus was almost constant. He could hardly have concentrated on Jesus more steadily if he had deliberately set about meditating on him.<sup>11</sup> Saul must also have been impressed by the courage and conviction with which the persecuted Christians met their cruel fates. Without his realizing it, admiration and love for Christ and the Christians must have grown deep inside him opening the way for the lightning stroke of grace that descended upon him.

Christ, who bestowed his grace upon Saul and upon many Christians after him, is one of numerous vehicles of divine grace. Foremost among these is the personal God, whose grace Swami Shraddhananda has defined so beautifully as His "outpouring of Himself in love and joy." God has nothing to gain for Himself. And, like Him, His emissaries, the divine incarnations, have no other purpose in life than to shower their grace upon humanity. These are the greatest spiritual teachers. But there are others. In order to reach as many people as possible, the divine incarnations bring realized souls with them. And these apostles are followed by other holy men and women who also bestow their grace upon mankind. Swami Vivekananda describes his own experience as a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna as follows:

He who has realized the Atman [the divine Self] becomes a storehouse of great power. From him as the centre and within a certain radius emanates a spiritual force, and all those who come within this circle become animated with his ideas and are overwhelmed by them. Thus, without

much religious striving they inherit the results of his wonderful spirituality. This is grace.<sup>12</sup>

The Hindu gods and goddesses are also vehicles of divine grace. We in the West would call them mythological figures. Although they have never walked the earth in flesh and blood, they, too, are powerful and real, for God in his infinite compassion has taken their forms for the sake of devotees who love them. Being omnipotent and able to enter wherever he chooses, God fills the form the devotee loves with His own divinity, making it a vehicle of His grace.

The aspirant's own superconscious mind, which is the seat of his divinity, is the indispensable vehicle of grace. Like the subconscious mind, the superconscious mind is by very definition outside the ordinary surface consciousness. When the hard shell of egotism becomes somewhat attenuated, occasional rays of divine light from the superconscious break through it and enter the surface consciousness. If these sparks of intuition are frequent enough and strong enough, they eventually motivate a spiritual search. Then the typical aspirant wanders from one religious or philosophical group to another without finding complete satisfaction in any of them. Finally, when he has become thoroughly frustrated, his personal miracle occurs. Through the miracle of divine grace he meets his spiritual teacher, his guru, who gives him the inspiration and wise guidance for which he has been longing. Of course, there are gurus in name only who might lead an aspirant astray. Discrimination is always a good idea, but the Vedantic sages assure us from their own experience that divine grace will bring the sincere seeker to a legitimate guru when the time is right. This is what happened to Girish

<sup>11</sup>. According to Indian tradition, anyone who concentrates intensely on the Lord, even in anger, will receive His grace.

<sup>12</sup>. Swami Vivekananda's Eastern and Western Disciples, *The life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1960), p. 736.

Chandra Ghosh, who met his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, at a crucial time of great spiritual turmoil and distress. Girish's eloquent account of his relationship with Sri Ramakrishna is a moving testimonial to grace. Girish writes: "Sri Ramakrishna has taken full possession of my heart and bound it with his love. But such love cannot be measured by any earthly standard. If I have acquired any virtues, it is not through my own efforts, but only due to his grace."<sup>13</sup>

The grace of God or of a great sage like Sri Ramakrishna does not bring the soul anything alien to it, because, as we have already noted, the soul's true nature is divine. Instead of giving it something that it did not already have, grace awakens the soul's innate divinity.<sup>14</sup> Sri Ramakrishna did not impart divinity to Girish. He aroused Girish's own divinity, making him conscious of it.

Because he still feels that his little ego, which identifies itself with his psycho/physical complex, is his total self, even the most pure-hearted recipient of grace (to say nothing of a Bohemian like Girish) assumes that it comes from outside himself. And from the standpoint of his limited knowledge his assumption is correct. These impulses *are* external to the self he takes himself to be. He will not know beyond a shadow of a doubt that his real Self, the Atman, is their actual source until he expands, bursts out of his ego shell, and fully realizes his divine identity.

The aspirant's impression that his little ego is his total self also prompts his belief that he could not merit the grace he receives. A well-intentioned aspirant, who identifies

himself with his body, mind, and senses, knows himself to be a mixture of good and evil. Negative traits like jealousy and anger plague the best of human beings to some extent, and all honest aspirants are aware of faults and weaknesses against which they have been struggling with only partial success. So when, through divine grace, these negative traits disappear and are replaced by other positive traits like compassion, generosity, and forbearance, the saint attributes the apparent miracle to a Being higher than himself. Saints in some traditions which don't emphasize the divinity of man credit their "regeneration" solely to the grace of God or to their chosen Ideal. But according to Vedanta, the credit for a spiritual transformation belongs as much to the aspirant's own divinity as to the grace of any divine Being that might have roused it into consciousness.

Moral and ethical perfection, which is beyond the aspirant's immediate grasp, is, of course, not a prerequisite for the experience of grace. The one and only prerequisite (other than that of a human birth) is a type of dissatisfaction known to Christian mystics as "divine discontentment." Dissatisfaction with one's character, with one's worldly life and goals, produces a psychological emptiness which makes room for grace to enter the surface consciousness. Persons living comfortably, hardly aware that suffering and death are inevitable, may be dissatisfied with the materialism surrounding them, invading their lives, and debasing their characters. Jesus had such persons in mind when he said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."<sup>15</sup> Since Jesus did not qualify this statement, we can assume that this promise of grace applies to so-called great sinners as well as to those who have made

13. *Ramakrishna as we saw him*, trans. and ed. Swami Chetanananda (Vedanta Society of Saint Louis: 1990), p. 338.

14. I am reminded of the fairy tale in which the prince's kiss awakens the sleeping princess.

15. Matthew 5:6.



an honest effort to live good lives but feel pangs of regret at having fallen short of their own high standards. Knowing that worldly pleasures would never satisfy him, Goethe's Faust, who had much in common with the world's great sinners, was able to trick Mephistopheles. Since Mephistopheles, who was offering Faust all possible sense enjoyments in exchange for his soul, had no higher intuition, he thought that sense pleasures would satisfy anyone. So he did not understand Faust's intention in bargaining with him as follows: "If ever I shall say to the moment, 'Tarry, then, you are so beautiful,' then you can put me in chains. Then I will gladly go to ruin."<sup>16</sup> In the end, Mephistopheles was forced to let Faust go because he couldn't satisfy him with worldly pleasures.

Spiritual life begins with divine discontentment and continues with spiritual discipline and struggle.

Like all honest spiritual teachers, Swami Vivekananda stressed the necessity of struggle:

The Lord is very merciful to him whom He sees struggling heart and soul for realization. But remain idle, without any struggle and you will see that His grace will never come. God bestows his mercy when this struggle is maintained.<sup>17</sup> ....The secret of it all is His grace! But then one must persevere, so that the grace may be received.<sup>18</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna was fond of saying that the breeze of God's grace is always blowing but we need to set our sails. He also told his friends and disciples:

16. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *Faust*, lines 1699-1702.

17. "Swami Vivekananda on Divine Grace", the editor *The Grace Divine*, p. 21.

18. "Swami Vivekananda on Divine Grace," p. 22.

If you merely sit on the shore of a lake and say, "There are fish in this lake," will you get any fish? Go and get the things necessary for fishing—get a rod and line and bait and throw some food into the water to entice them. Then from the deep water the fish will rise and come near, when you can see and hook them. You wish me to show you God while you sit quietly by without making the least effort.<sup>19</sup>

Swami Prabhavananda used to tell us that a student wishing to learn chemistry couldn't just go into the chemistry laboratory and say, "Chemistry come to me," if he wanted to get results. He would have to study the textbook and do the experiments.

Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the farmer who wanted to irrigate a dry field gives a graphic description of how grace enters the heart of the aspirant when the impediments are removed by the hard work of spiritual practice.

The farmer was very anxious to irrigate his dry field in order to save his crop, but a large mound of heavy dirt separated the source of water from the field. So the farmer grabbed a shovel, worked long and hard, and finally removed the dirt. The water then gushed onto the field under its own pressure. Likewise, when the accretions of wrong thought and action are removed through spiritual practices, divine grace will flow into the aspirant's consciousness.

One of the most serious impediments blocking the action of divine grace is the self-satisfied ego's conceited notion that it can attain enlightenment unaided. Spiritual humility is a sine qua non of spiritual life. This type of humility, a natural corollary to self-dissatisfaction, is the recognition on the part of the aspirant that he needs divine

19. "Sri Ramakrishna on Divine Grace", the editor *The Grace Divine*, p. 4.

assistance. Of course, there is a common fear that any type of humility will be degrading, but this isn't true of spiritual humility. In the case of spiritual humility the aspirant humbles himself before the divine Existence as he conceives It and before his own higher Self rather than before the king or any other ordinary mortal. Sri Krishna, who was the living embodiment of divinity in the eyes of his disciple Arjuna, admonished him: "Fixing your mind on Me, you will overcome all difficulties through My grace. But if from self-conceit, you do not listen to Me, you will perish."<sup>20</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna told a pertinent story about one of the Lord's devotees. Being assailed by a bandit who was about to beat and rob him, the terrified devotee began praying loudly. When the compassionate Lord in heaven heard His devotee's frantic cries for help, He jumped up from His seat in alarm and started running down to the earth to protect him. He had already gone a considerable distance when the devotee picked up a board to defend himself. Seeing that the devotee was taking care of himself, the Lord turned around and strolled back up to heaven.

Grace, like the sunshine and the rain, descends on the good and evil alike. God is same-sighted. He loves all of His children equally and is always eager to bestow His grace upon any of them. The sages tell us that we ourselves are to blame if we do not experience it. We have not tried hard enough to purify our hearts in order to receive it. As Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."<sup>21</sup> It does seem, however, that God is partial, that He sometimes bestows His grace upon those who are not struggling to become pure in heart. Persons who have been dissolute

and unacceptable in decent society, the Girish Ghoshes and Mary Magdalenes, are apparently singled out for divine favour while good upstanding citizens are denied it. But appearances are often deceptive. The popular citizen who gets along with his neighbours and obeys the laws may be following the dictates of society in order to maintain a pleasure-oriented mode of living with which he is perfectly satisfied. He craves nothing more and would find the possibility of engaging in spiritual disciplines a threat to his comfortable life-style. Girish Ghosh and Mary Magdalene, on the other hand, were desperately unhappy with their dissolute living but did not know where to turn for help. Disillusioned with shallow morality and rationalizing religiosity, they hungered for a Truth in which they could honestly and whole-heartedly believe.<sup>22</sup> So when to their amazement, they met their spiritual teachers, Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ, they were ready for them.

Appearances are likewise deceptive when it comes to judging which of our acquaintances are in a state of grace. Forgetting that other people's spiritual states do not concern us, we in the West have often made the mistake of supposing that prosperous families and individuals have received divine favour while those less fortunate have not. But divine grace in our view, serves no material ends. It is actually possible that

<sup>22</sup>. Girish Ghosh wrote: "Terrible conflicts pierced my heart through and through. That condition can better be imagined than described. Suppose a man, all of a sudden, is forcibly dragged to a dark, solitary room with his eyes covered and kept confined there with no food and drink. What will be the state of his mind? If you can picture his mental condition, you will be able to understand something of my own. There were moments when I was breathless with emotion. Thoughts of despair bit through me like a saw. At other times the memory of the past revived and the darkness of my heart knew no bounds." —*Sri Ramakrishna as we saw him*, p. 329.

<sup>20</sup>. *The Bhagavad Gita* XVIII : 58.

<sup>21</sup>. Matthew 5:8.



a person in a state of grace is being made to suffer in order to grow spiritually, but we cannot know that this is the case in any particular instance. Since the workings of divine Providence are inscrutable, speculating about the reasons for the disparities in human fortunes is not only presumptuous but futile. The only sure evidence that anyone is in a state of grace is the elevation of consciousness his presence induces in those capable of experiencing it.

Divine grace and free will are so intimately connected that a study of one should not be completed without including the other. As a matter of fact, there are significant questions regarding free will that cannot be answered definitively without reference to divine grace. Is the will ever free? If so, in what does its freedom consist? Determinists have maintained with thought-provoking logic that we are pawns of heredity and environment. Even love, which is one of the most cherished human emotions, is rarely free. Instead of being freely given and received, our love is most often conditioned by the need for reciprocity. Without realizing it, we bargain with each other. If you love me, I'll love you. If a friend severely wounds my ego, my friendship cools. Furthermore, our much-lauded parental love is not as far removed from the instinctual love of the birds and beasts as we might like to believe. Even the love of a self-sacrificing mother is not completely

free. In all probability she loves her own children more than she loves other people's children. But if her love were truly free, it would be all-embracing like the Lord's.

Can a will so bound by heredity and environment ever be free, and, if so, in what does its freedom consist? Vedantists answer in the affirmative. The will can be free and its freedom consists in our divinity. We have bound the will with the shackles of heredity and environment because we have identified ourselves with the body, mind, and senses. The will becomes free when grace awakens us to the knowledge that we are Divinity unaffected by any psycho/physical limitations. This awakening ordinarily occurs gradually and in its process our human relationships are transformed. The mother, for instance, grows increasingly aware of the divinity in all human beings, and as she does so, she becomes less possessive of her own children and more loving not only toward them but toward other people's children as well.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize the fact that grace rarely manifests itself with sudden violence as it did in the case of Saint Paul. Its action is most often subtle and unperceived. The person who is dissatisfied with a materialistic life and aspires to something better can be assured that divine grace is already working within him and will go on doing so as long as he continues to struggle.

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## UNIVERSALITY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

*(Continued from page 59)*

might have been different and less fortunate. The last flames of the glimmering fire of ancient Indian tradition would have been extinguished. Now the time is ripe for a total re-evaluation of Swami Vivekananda's historic contribution to the rejuvenation of composite culture in India.

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# Three Days with Swami Akhandananda

DR. SASANKA BHUSAN BANDYOPADHYAY

*Even a few minutes spent with an enlightened soul is enough to awaken the dormant spiritual urge. The author reverentially recaptures the blessed few days of intimate contact with his Guru. Dr. Bandyopadhyaya, who lives in Calcutta, devotes his time and energy to philanthropic works.*

Sri Śankarācārya says:—

*durlabham trayamevaitat devānugraha  
hetukam  
manuṣyatvaṃ mumukṣutvaṃ  
mahāpuruṣasaṃśrayaḥ*

“Human birth, desire for liberation, protecting care of a great soul, are indeed rare, but can be obtained by Divine Grace.”

I do not know whether I had the requisite qualifications, yet I had the privilege of sitting at the feet of a great soul like Swami Akhandanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva for three days. The reminiscences of these days, along with a prologue and some gloss on the effect of such a meet, have been recounted here.

I had the great fortune of being initiated by Swami Akhandanandaji in 1936, on May 14 (the last day of Baisakh 1343 B.S.), at the age of twenty-one. But before that solemn occasion several hurdles had to be crossed; they were my ego, my logic, and above all, objections from elders. However, Divine Grace prevailed.

On March 1, 1936, I had a glimpse of Swami Akhandanandaji from a distance, when he came to Belur Math during the Birth Centenary Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna, but I did not actually meet him, probably sufficient urge was not there.

It so happened that on April 25, 1936, Rashbehari Maharaj (Swami Arupananda), a disciple of the Holy Mother and my elder brother Bibhuti (later Swami Niramayananda), were going to Swami Akhand-

anandaji at Sargacchi Ashrama. I accompanied them up to the bus stand. On the way, Swami Arupananda pointed out to me that two monks of Belur Math, Nirmal Maharaj (Swami Madhavanandaji), and Bimal Maharaj (Swami Dayanandaji), were two brothers; probably he hinted at my elder brother's and my joining the Order. Conversation could not continue since the bus for Sealdah came along; Arupanandaji simply asked me to meet him at Udbodhan Office, Bagbazar, after five days.

Although two years back Swami Bhaskar-eswaranandaji of Nagpur, out of love instructed me on the nature of householder's life and the ideal of celibacy, I never thought of joining the Order, but started visiting the Holy Mother's place at Bagbazar occasionally.

After five days I met Arupanandaji again at the appointed place and time. While sitting in front of his bed I noticed that his rosary was under his pillow; so I questioned, whether that was the proper place of the rosary. He replied that a sadhu's bed is never impure; he further said that the rosary had been consecrated by the Holy Mother, it was a treasure to him and acted as the Guru in her absence, and that he never parted with it. He also narrated the significance of japa and the use of the garland of beads, as he heard from the Holy Mother.

He asked me whether I was initiated. When I answered in the negative he said, “What a fool you are. While your elder



brother and younger sister had this rare privilege, you never sought for it?" Out of ego I said, "I had been initiated in the Gayatri Mantra, which I repeat regularly. Is there any necessity of further initiation? If at all, I shall think of it when I am older; now I am an M.Sc. Physics student—class studies are more important." Having listened to me calmly, Rashbehari Maharaj briefly narrated the significance of the Iṣṭa mantra and asked me to come next day.

The day after, when we met, the earlier discussion continued. He gave me a glimpse of the experience and knowledge he had gained through service to the Holy Mother for so many years. Then he said, "Concentrated spiritual energies are manifested in *Avatārs*, like Sri Ramakrishna Deva, and their disciples during special junctures of time; as time goes on the intensity of such spiritual emanation is bound to be reduced, just as the intensity of light is reduced inversely as the square of the distance from the source. Direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are still living and have kept the spiritual fire burning; go and get your lamp lit up; if you are intelligent do not lose time, for they may not be living long; and chance once lost may not be easily available again. For learning science you have to go to a renowned scientist; similarly for spiritual emancipation won't you go to a spiritual giant?" He also said that he learnt the Inverse Square Law from our Professor Bidhubhusan Roy of Science College, Calcutta University.

When I was convinced, he asked me to draft a letter to Revered Swami Akhandanandaji who was then the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and staying at the Mission Ashrama, Sargacchi, P.O. Mohula, Murshidabad. After several corrections in terms of politeness, definiteness of purpose and proper information, the letter was despatched on the same day.

After five or six days came the reply in Swami Akhandanandaji's own handwriting, asking me to be present at Sargacchi on the last day of Baisak, which was a Wednesday. Later I learned from Nityaswarupanandaji, the then Secretary to the President, that though he offered to write an affirmative reply Akhandanandaji insisted on writing it himself.

On the receipt of the news, Arupanandaji arranged for a rosary of 108 beads of smallest rudrākṣas (pits of rudrākṣa fruits) at a cost of Rs. 2 only, through Moti Maharaj (Shivaswarupananda), who happened to come to Udbodhan that day; I was asked to go to the shrine and pray for the blessings of the Holy Mother.

As soon as my guardians came to know of this arrangement, they were afraid of my following my elder brother's path and enjoined that according to the Hindu *śāstras*, all religious activities are to be performed along with a wife, and as such, the arrangement should be deferred. This instruction was repeated on several days, but without any effect on me. However, after a few days' ordeal and mental strain, when I was about to start for Sargacchi, my guardians did not fail to bless me for the fulfillment of the purpose.

I heard that Swami Akhandanandaji was an epitome of love and austerity; this led him to organize the first relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission and later start the Sargacchi Ashrama and Orphanage. The orphans were taught weaving and other handicrafts. Khaddar and other country-made articles were very dear to him. So I took a khaddar *dhoti*, some Mosombic oranges (imported), a few dehusked green coconuts for him and some sweets for offering to Sri Ramakrishna. At Sealdah Station I met a Brahmachārin who was going to Sargacchi to relieve Swami

Nityaswarupanandaji, and another young aspirant (at present Swami Sarvagatananda of Boston), from Bombay. We took the afternoon train and reached Sargacchi in the evening of the day before the appointed date, as advised in the letter.

In the moonlit night the view of the Ashrama reminded me of the Greek scientist Archimedes' utterance, "Give me a place to stand and I shall move the earth," and led me to think that to initiate any change in worldly life one would have to go out of it to a secluded place like this and devote some time in the practice of austerity and meditation.

After crossing the main gate of the Ashrama, we walked a furlong and found a small house. On entering the hall I got a glimpse of Swami Akhandanandaji. He was seated on a cane chair with a few of the Ashrama boys and some older devotees around. What a calm and simple look! In company with the boys, an environment of love and serenity was created; as such all barriers between him and me appeared to have been removed. Even the hesitation normally felt by a student when he first meets a senior professor was not there. After I knelt down and saluted him by touching his feet, he enquired about the journey and the well-being of my parents as well as of my sister. He then instructed me to separate the articles brought for *Thakurseva* (Sri Ramakrishna's worship), leaving those meant for him, and take them to the shrine.

After washing, I carried out his instructions, offered pranams to Thakur, the Holy Mother and Swamiji in the shrine room, and finished my evening prayer. When I came back to Akhandanandaji he asked me, "Have you seen me earlier?" I said, "Yes, at Belur Math during centenary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna Deva." He looked at my elder brother, who was

nearby and said, "He says that he has seen me, but I have not, how could it happen?" I said, "At that time I was rather hesitant to come before you and was satisfied after having a glimpse of yourself from outside through the window." He smiled. To me the smile was indicative of his awareness of the removal of my mind's barrier through the entire process which led me to him. Might be, the process was initiated by him. A closer tie of love overwhelmed me.

He then talked about the coming Annual Celebrations of the Ashrama: "I was thinking what all works remain to be done? All on a sudden I heard, as if Thakur was saying 'Purchase'. Truly I say, at start it appears that I am thinking, I am saying—just as in a soliloquy—at the end I clearly hear that Thakur is saying. At times I see, in a dream, Thakur is saying 'For early morning *āratrik* (worship), not much is necessary, simply light an incense stick.' Clearly, I see the same figure—the same Dakshineswar room—the same cot, himself arranging for all his requirements. There were no sweets to offer this evening. I was worrying. But somehow sweets came." I thought: "Is this his (Akhandanandaji's) identification with Sri Ramakrishna—his 'living in God'?" As Abhoy Maharaj, the attending monk of Akhandanandaji, announced dinner time we dispersed.

Next morning when I went to his room and bowed, he advised me: "Finish your bath early and go to the shrine room. At about ten, I shall call for you."

At ten, Abhoy Maharaj took me from the shrine room and helped in gathering some flowers on the way; I also collected the articles I brought from Calcutta.

As I entered Akhandanandaji's room he asked me to bolt the door and to sit on the *āsana* already spread in his front. He then put several questions to me, including my choice with regard to initiation; my answers



being satisfactory, he gave in my ears instructions on the appropriate *Iṣṭa* and Mantra, explained the procedures of japa and meditation, at the heart and on the top of the head, and finally said, "You must know that the ultimate goal of life is nothing less than the realization of oneness of the Divine, the *Iṣṭa*, the Guru and the disciple." Further, he stressed on the efficacy of earnest and sincere prayer, and narrated how Thakur would pray to the Mother, verily, like a child.

Next he asked me, "You are a Brāhmin, do you practise the morning and evening rites regularly?" My answers to both the questions were in the affirmative, and with a tinge of self-assertion I said, "The *Gāyatrī* Mantra is a prayer to the Sun-god for the unfoldment of knowledge." Thwarting my ego, he rebuffed me and said, "Get it from me." He then recited the *Gāyatrī* Mantra with Vedic accents and intonations, pronouncing each word in its proper perspective, and explained, "The *Gāyatrī* Mantra is a prayer to the supreme effulgent principle—the Origin of all things, including the Sun. He is to be meditated upon and invoked for Self-Illumination." It became clear to me how smaller limits, including the Sun, were to be transcended on the path to the Ultimate Goal, and that the complete meaning of the *Gāyatrī* could be understood when explained by an illumined Soul like Swami Akhandanandaji.

Thereafter, I performed Guru-pūjā—worship of the human embodiment of the Divine in the Guru—with ritual offerings of a new cloth, fruits, and so on, but when I was about to offer the flowers on his feet he asked me to desist, and said, "These garden flowers were already offered to Thakur, in his Infinite Form, while they were on the trees, how can you offer them to my feet?" However, a few flowers obtained from trees outside the garden were

allowed to be put on his feet. I learned to discriminate the subtleties of spiritual worship from ordinary rituals.

The last item of Guru-pūjā is salutation to the Guru. As I was about to bow down to his lotus feet, he said, "Don't you know *Sāṣṭāṅga Pranām*? Prostrate yourself, offering all the eight limbs (feet, knees, palms, breast, mouth, eye, forehead, and head) at the feet of the Guru." As I obeyed, he blessed me by putting his hand on my head; my mind was permeated with profound peace, I learned that unless the disciple fully surrenders to the Guru, he cannot obtain the best out of him.

He now asked me, "Call that Marathi boy to me, and yourself go to the shrine and meditate." After about an hour and a half I again returned to his room, and found that he was resting in a chair after finishing his meal. On my bowing down, he smilingly said, "So quickly have you finished your Meditation! (again battering my ego). Now take some food." Abhoy Maharaj gave me some *prasād* of the Guru, which I took. Bābā (for that was the name by which Swami Akhandanandaji was commonly known) did not put any condition or restriction on my way of life or with regard to japa or meditation, but out of the few words he uttered and the behaviour meted out to me, I felt that this freedom enjoined more discipline and responsibility in life, and learnt that neither any special way of living nor the count of japa would be sufficient for attaining divine knowledge—one had to dive deep. Throughout my life, whenever I thought of results, the question came to my mind—"Have I been able to dive deep?"

In the evening Baba sat with us on the open veranda in front of his living apartment, called 'Binode Kutir', (after the name of the donor). Beyond the veranda there was a small garden with a mould of roun-

ded stones which looked like a small hillock of man-height. This 'hillock' named 'Binode Kuta' was sufficient to attract his mind to the thought of the Himalayas. He said, "After Thakur left his material body, I could not bear his absence. Continued meditation could not satisfy me, so I went to the Himalayas, the abode of Gods. In the eternal calmness and eternal whiteness of the snow-covered mountain ranges I felt the living presence of Śiva. Now I feel the presence of Thakur in these *Nara-Nārāyaṇas* (human beings when thought of as manifestations of the Divine). The vastness of the Himalayas broadens the mind and heart, and leads one to the final Goal." Baba's love of the Himalayas and living in the presence of Thakur taught me a lesson in the art of broadening mind and heart, which alone could lead one to the highest goal.

He was then taken in a perambulator round the gardens and different spots within the Ashrama. After sunset we joined the Ārati and Bhajan in the shrine.

We again assembled within the hall. Baba talked about the orphan boys of the Ashrama, who sat around, saying how he looked upon these boys as Nārāyaṇa, or God Himself, and served them through feeding, bathing, playing, cutting jokes, teaching the three-R's and training them in useful arts. He referred to the plight of the people affected by the Bihar earthquake in 1934, and service to them. Addressing the householders, he said, "The whole world is Thakur's household—one should see that all people get food, and one should eat or spend only as much as is necessary—that also is a form of service; any form of extravagance should be discouraged." Swami Nirlepananda, of the Holy Mother's House, for whom Baba was waiting, came by the evening train. After exchange of

tidings, Baba talked about the loving care of the Holy Mother he received when she brought him to Calcutta from Sargacchi for recovery from wretched condition of health after a long period of austerity and hard work during the development of the Ashrama.

When the others left Baba called me and my elder brother and asked us to rub in a medicine for rheumatic pain in both his hands. With great satisfaction at being able to render some service to the Guru, we knelt on either side of him and applied the medicine for some time. Baba said, "So long you have been only blood brothers, from today you have become spiritual brothers too. No more separation—very nice, I feel very happy." He then took stock of my daily routine and said, "With all inputs for physical work, always try to provide some food for the mind." Knowing my educational background and that I was still a student in the M.Sc. Physics class, he asked, "What would you do after the Master's Degree?" "Teaching and research," was my reply. He was pleased and blessed me, and said, "In spite of degrees, never forget that common sense is the most important tool in all walks of life. Be sure about the purpose of life and adopt a programme of work which will cause the least hindrance on the path to your cherished goal." His blessings and advice led me to seek and succeed in getting a junior research assistant's assignment in a Research Institute, and to dedicate myself there in the service of the people, through research, for about forty years, and during the last ten years of this period, as its head. Since retirement from active research, even at seventy-seven, the same spirit is inspiring me to serve an old philanthropic and spiritual institution which had the good fortune of being blessed by some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.



I was to leave the Ashrama the next day. So, while wondering as to how I could be of a little service to Baba, I fell asleep. At midnight someone called me to fan Baba in his bed with a big palm-leaf fan. I was overwhelmed with joy and did the assigned duty till another boy came after about an hour. During this time I found him to be alert, enquiring about the attendants.

After finishing morning rites, I went to Baba and found that he was already busy with work in the hall. On one side he was giving instructions to his secretary regarding replies to letters, and on the other, talking to the person looking after accounts. When I expressed my desire to donate something for the Ashrama he said, "Look, your brother is sitting with the account books, remit it there."

When I wanted to have the rosary I brought from Calcutta consecrated, he said, "Leave it there and come after an hour." I came back in time and found him engaged very attentively in writing letters in his own hand, clarifying the personal doubts of some and giving solace to many. As I touched his feet, he said, "You may take the rosary now, but touch it only after washing your hands ; and mind you, you must use it for repeating japa, every day, without fail."

When I told him that I would be leaving by the 10 o'clock train he said, "This very day ? All right. Go and serve your parents, worship them as god and goddess ; try to see the Supreme Lord in them. I have already kept one of their sons with me, I won't retain any more." The significance of these utterances became clear to me when, after about a year or so, Swami Shuddhanandaji called me at Belur Math and said, "I want a firm promise from you that you will look after your parents,

otherwise your brother's admission into the Order will be difficult". I promised.

Swami Annadanandaji, a senior Brahmacharin of the Ashrama, had been initiated into Sannyasa by Baba a few days earlier. He was away from the Ashrama for preaching work. On his return that morning I met him with great love and respect, which I continued to hold for him till the end of his life. Nityaswarupanandaji was also to leave by the morning train after handing over the charge to the new private secretary to the President of the Ramakrishna Math. A quick lunch was served to us.

When I bowed down to Baba to say good-bye, he said, "Come as often as possible. See the condition of this body, its action may stop at any time." But, being busy with my studies, I could not arrange any visit to Sargacchi during the next six months. His health deteriorated further. As he expressed his desire to see some of his disciples, including myself and my sister, we were about to start for Sargacchi when we learnt that he was being removed to Calcutta that very day. I attended the train at Sealdah Station, and learnt that his external senses stopped functioning on the way. I followed the ambulance up to Holy Mother's House at Bagbazar, where doctors decided to take him to Belur Math.

The next day at about 3:00 P. M., Swami Akhandanandaji left his material body, leaving a number of devotees in tears, and the story of his whole life to be meditated upon. As the fire of sandalwood engulfed the material remains, I, along with many, took the vow of cleansing our minds, following the ideals of realization, love, and service set forth in his life, and nurturing the spiritual seed received from him into a strong tree.

# Rice Husk Ash Cement

PROF. P. K. MEHTA

*The author, Prof. Mehta, has been doing extensive and valuable research in the field of production of cement from rice husk. India faces shortage of cement and would do well, with her abundance of rice husk to utilize fully the blessings of modern engineering technology. Prof. Mehta has been on the teaching staff of the Civil Engineering Department at the University of California, Berkeley, for many years. He is the recipient of many prestigious awards.*

## Abstract

The chemistry and technology of producing the type of rice husk ash which is suitable for making good hydraulic cements is described. The rice husk ash produced by controlled combustion of husk contains silica in a cellular and amorphous form, and is a better resource material for cements than the ash produced by ordinary burning. Properties of rice husk ash cements containing the reactive ash and made either by blending lime or Portland cement are reported. The technology developed in the United States is applicable to large scale disposal of husk normally in the vicinity of centralized rice milling operations. However, a proper appreciation of the chemistry involved is essential in order to develop the technology appropriate to needs of the developing countries if cements of structural quality are to be produced.

## Introduction

Since the publication of the results of the University of California studies on production of cement from rice husk ash in 1972-73, there has been considerable worldwide interest in the subject. For obvious reasons, the research effort has been great in Asian countries which suffer from a shortage of waterproof dwellings, but are abundant in rice husk. For instance, out of 300 million tons of annual rice production in the world, about 100 million tons are produced in China, 60 million tons in India, and 10-15 million tons each in Japan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Burma.

Since every ton of paddy yields 200 kg of husk, which on complete combustion produces about 40 kg of ash, the potential benefits are high to the population of the rice growing countries from a feasible process of making hydraulic cements from rice husk ash.

## Rice husk and Rice husk ash

Rice husk consists of about 40 per cent cellulose, 30 per cent lignin, and 20 per cent ash. The ash is derived mainly from opaline silica present in the cellular structure of the husk as shown by a typical scanning electron micrograph in Fig. 1. Due to its abrasive character, and almost negligible digestible protein content, the husk is not suitable for use as animal feed. Also, its high ash and lignin contents make it unsuitable as raw material for manufacture of paper products. A small portion of the available husk is disposed off for certain low value applications such as chicken litter, animal roughage, and pesticide carriers. Therefore, usually, the bulk of the husk is disposed off by burning, either in large heaps near rice mills or in small quantities by people who burn it for its heating value. The heat derived from combustion of husk is equivalent to about half the calorific value of good coal. In a few cases, husk is utilized as fuel for rice mill boilers.



The ash produced by ordinary combustion of husk contains little in the form of soil nutrients. It consists mainly of inert forms of silica, and does not possess adequate reactivity for making pozzolana cements. It is obvious, therefore, that the process of uncontrolled combustion, by permitting the destruction of the cellular

#### *The process technology*

Based on comprehensive laboratory investigations and pilot plant experiments, it was discovered<sup>1</sup> that rice husk ash containing totally amorphous silica in cellular structure could be produced by maintaining the combustion temperature for prolonged



Fig. 1. Scanning electron micrograph of rice husk

and amorphous silica present in the raw material, fails to take advantage of the potential of producing reactive silica ash from rice husk. This is the concept behind the successful development of high quality cements from rice husk ash at the Civil Engineering Materials Laboratory of the University of California. The chemistry and technology of the process is described in a number of publications, and only a brief review is presented in this paper.

periods below 500°C under oxidizing conditions or, alternatively, combustion temperatures up to about 680°C may be used provided the hold time is short, viz., less than one minute.

For large-scale industrialized burning operations, Pitt has designed a furnace

1. P.K. Mehta, *U.S. Patent* Nos. 3, 951, 907 and 4, 105, 459 (filed July 28, 1972).



which looks like an inverted cone into which rice husk is sucked due to negative pressure maintained by an exhaust fan. From the furnace the hot gases containing ash are taken to a boiler, and finally to a multicone separator which removes the ash from the gases. Thus the heat produced by combustion of husk is usefully recovered in the form of steam. A typical flow diagram of the process is shown in Fig. 2.

drying purposes or steam for generation of electricity and parboiling. Smaller units may be more practical for areas where a large number of small rice mills are widespread.

The total capital investment varies according to the size of the plants and the type of energy recovery system desired. Based on 1974 U.S. prices, the basic machinery

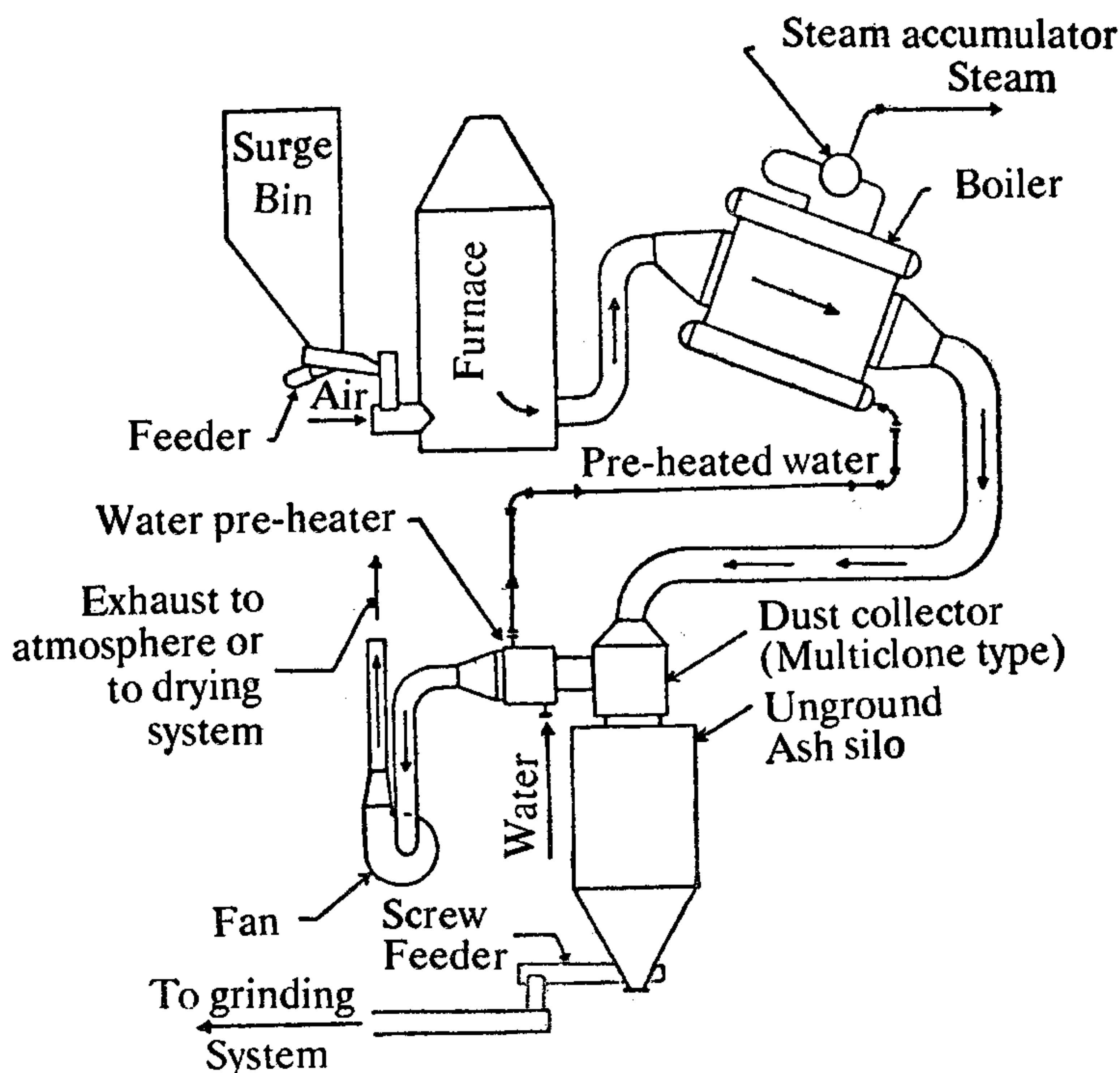


Fig. 2. Schematic flow diagram of plant producing rice husk ash and steam

The process equipment is simple and can be locally fabricated in most countries of the world. Individual plants can be designed for burning husk at the rate of a half ton to ten tons per hour. Bigger units can produce large quantities of hot air for paddy

for a one ton per hour husk burning plant, excluding the energy recovery system, was about US \$135,000 (Rs. 27 lakhs). The total installed cost for such a plant consisting of husk storage shed, transport conveyors, furnace, and finish grinding mill



was estimated at about US \$ 235,000 (Rs. 47 lakhs). In 1976, a  $7\frac{1}{2}$  ton per hour rice husk burning unit, designed to generate 22,000 kg per hour, 15 atm. pressure steam, was put into operation adjacent to a large rice mill in Stuttgart, Arkansas (U.S.A.). The total installed cost of a unit of this size was estimated at US \$ 1.5 million. The operational cost of the process is very low. Since the product, consisting of a high surface-area, reactive, silica is a valuable industrial material both for making high quality cements and for reinforcement of rubber, it was claimed that the plants with 2 tons per hour and larger sizes could pay off the invested capital in less than two years.<sup>2</sup>

The technology developed to meet the specific needs of the United States may not be directly applicable to many parts of Asia, but the chemistry underlying the process is still necessary for making a reactive silica which is essential for the production of hydraulic cements having reasonable strength development characteristics. For instance, from the standpoint of a very inexpensive small unit, it should be possible to design small stoves or hearths such as the ones used for cooking food, provide a simple mechanism for controlled combustion of husk, and arrange a centralized processing of ash into cement. This is a better approach than making cement from ordinarily burnt husk. If the chemistry of the burning operation is optimized to produce amorphous silica, hydraulic cements can be made from the reactive rice husk ash by simply blending the previously ground ash or by intergrinding the ash with a calcareous material such as quick lime or hydrated lime. The lime-rice husk ash cements

develop adequate strength for masonry, plastering, and many structural applications. Cement showing high early strength, superior long-term durability, and better ultimate strength than Portland cement are made by blending the reactive rice husk ash with ordinary Portland cement. The properties of both types of cements were described in an earlier publication from which the following data is taken.<sup>3</sup>

### *Properties of Cements*

#### RICE HUSK ASH

The ash used in this investigation was made in an industrial furnace described by Mehta and Pitt.<sup>2</sup> The chemical analysis of the ash showed 80-95 per cent of  $\text{SiO}_2$ , one to two per cent of  $\text{K}_2\text{O}$ , and the rest essentially unburnt carbon. X-ray diffraction analysis of the ash showed that the silica was present in amorphous state. The material pulverized easily and showed a surface area of 50 to 60  $\text{m}^2/\text{g}$  by gas absorption. This is due to a cellular structure of the ash (Fig. 3).

#### CALCAREOUS MATERIALS

Industrial grade  $\text{Ca(OH)}_2$  and  $\text{CaO}$  of about 99 per cent purity were used for making lime-rice husk ash cements. Portland-rice husk ash cements were made with an ASTM Type II/III Portland cement.

#### RICE HUSK ASH CEMENTS

The blended cements were made by mixing in a laboratory blender the ball-milled ash with a suitable proportioned calcareous agent such as lime or Portland cement. The interground cements were

2. P.K. Mehta and N. Pitt, "A New Process of Rice Husk Utilization", *Proc. Fourth International Conference of Rice By-products Utilization*, Valencia, Spain, 1974.

3. P.K. Mehta, "Properties of Blended Cements made from Rice Husk Ash", *J. Amer. Concrete Institute*, V. 74, No. 9, pp. 440-442, 1977.



made by ball-milling for two hours in a laboratory ball mill, a mixture of the rice husk ash and a given calcareous material such as quick or hydrated lime.

psi (19.3 MPa) at 7 days. One of the reasons for low strength of many lime-rice husk ash cement compositions is their relatively high water demand.

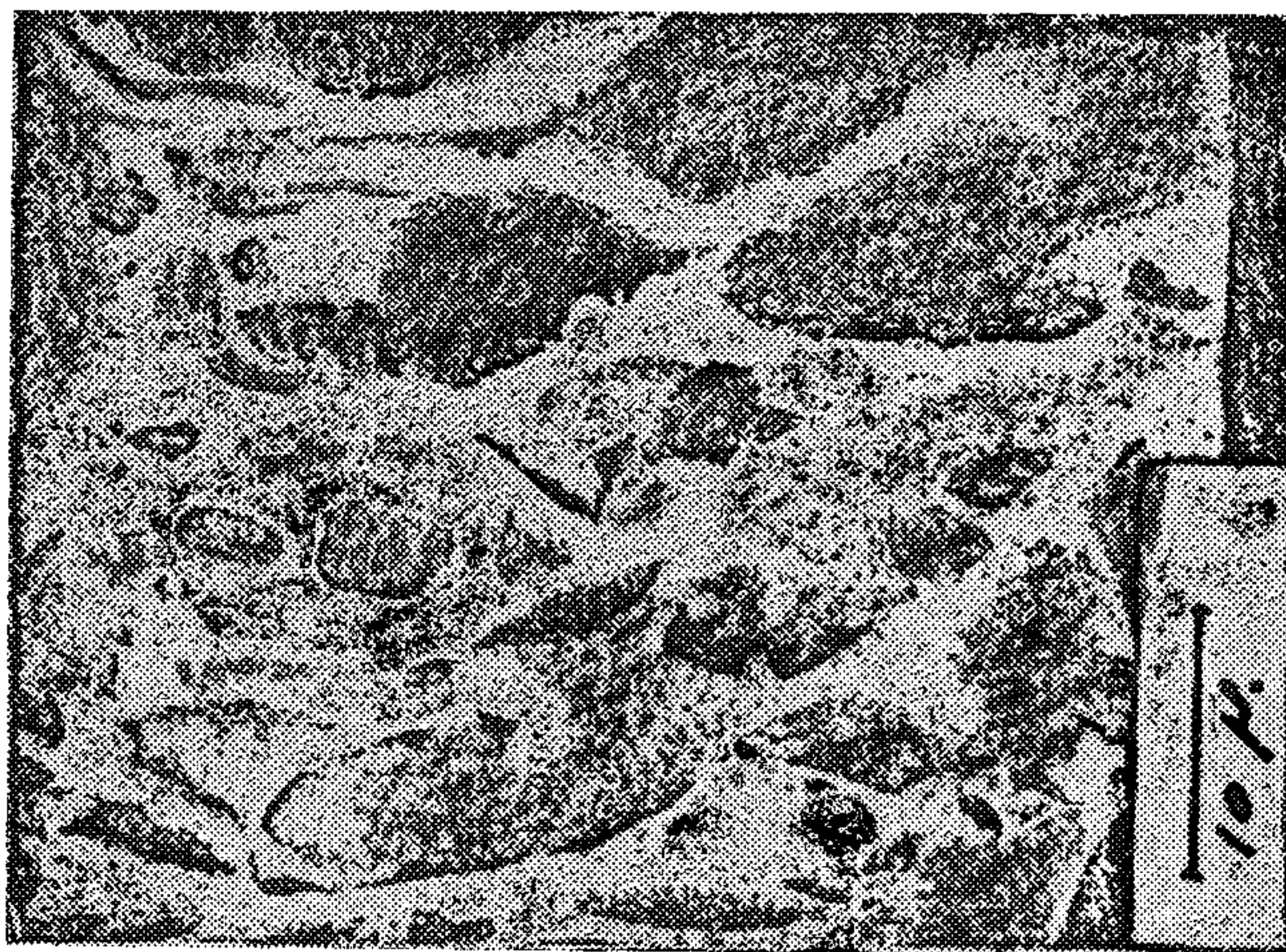


Fig. 3. Scanning electron micrograph of rice husk ash

#### PROPERTIES OF LIME-RICE HUSK ASH CEMENTS

It can be concluded that the strength of both the interground and the blended cements containing either  $\text{CaO}$  or  $\text{Ca(OH)}_2$  are adequate for general masonry work. It may be noted that the ASTM Standard Specifications for masonry cements, C91, require minimum strength of 500 psi (3.45 MPa) at 7 days and 900 psi (6.21 MPa) at 38 days. In fact, the 0.5 W/C mortars made with interground cements containing 20 per cent  $\text{CaO}$  or 25 per cent  $\text{Ca(OH)}_2$  by weight should be satisfactory for many structural applications because the 3, 7, and 28-day strength properties of these cements are close to many commercial ASTM Type I/II Portland cements. The ASTM Standard Specification for Type I Portland cement (C150) requires a minimum strength of 1800 psi (12.4 MPa) at 3 days and 2800

In general, the lime-rice husk ash cements were found to be quick setting. However, judged by the Standard ASTM Autoclave Expansion Test, their soundness characteristic was normal. A unique property of the cements made from rice husk ash is their superior durability to dilute acids. This is discussed below in detail.

#### PROPERTIES OF PORTLAND-RICE HUSK ASH CEMENTS

Preliminary tests showed no significant difference in the mechanical behaviour of Portland-rice husk ash cement mixture whether it was blended or interground. The properties reported below are from three Portland-rice husk ash cements produced by blending the pulverized rice husk ash with the Type II Portland cement in 30:70, 50:50, or 70:30 proportions by weight. The samples were designated as B-30, B-50,



and B-70, respectively. Although the normal consistency tests showed the water requirement to be higher for the Portland-rice husk ash cements than the control Portland cement, a fixed water/cement ratio of 0.5 was used in making the mortars.

The compressive strength shows that the Portland-rice husk ash cement containing 70 per cent ash possessed a strength development rate which was similar to the control Portland cement. However, the two Portland-rice husk ash cements containing 50 per cent and 30 per cent ash showed higher strength than the control Portland cement even at early ages of 3 and 7 days. When compared with the control Portland cement, cement B-30 showed about 40 per cent higher compressive strength at the ages 3, 7, and 28 days, and over 30 per cent higher strength at 90 days. The strength data shows that this rice husk ash cannot be treated as an ordinary pozzolana. It represents an exceptionally reactive silica material. Mehta and Pitt<sup>4</sup> reported that further improvements in strength of concretes made with Portland-rice husk ash cements were possible when siliceous aggregates are replaced by a limestone aggregate.

As determined by the Vicat apparatus (ASTM C191), the times of set were 205, 150, 60, and 150 minutes for B-30, B-50, B-70, and the control Portland cement, respectively. The autoclave expansion values for the four cements were less than 0.1 per cent. Shrinkage tests on 3 by 3 by 10 inch (7.6 by 7.6 by 25.4 cm) concrete prisms made with 658 lbs/yd<sup>3</sup> (390 kg/m<sup>3</sup>) cement cured for 28 days in lime water, and subsequently stored for four months in air at 50 per cent R. H. and 70°F (20°C),

showed no significant difference between the shrinkage behaviour of concrete containing the Portland-rice husk ash cements and the control Portland cement.

An important characteristic of mortars and concretes made with rice husk ash cements is their superior durability in acidic environments. Portland cements contain 60 to 65 per cent CaO and their hydration products contain about 25 per cent Ca(OH)<sub>2</sub>, which is primarily responsible for the poor resistance of Portland cement concretes exposed to acidic attack. On the contrary, the rice husk ash cements containing either lime or Portland cement may have 20 to 40 per cent CaO and practically no Ca(OH)<sub>2</sub> in the products of hydration. Concrete cylinders of 0.4 water-cement ratio and made with both the Type II Portland cement and a Portland-rice husk ash cement containing 35 per cent rice husk ash by weight were submerged continuously for a period of 1500 hours in 5 per cent solution of HCl or H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>. In the 5 per cent HCl solution, whereas the Portland cement concrete registered 35 percent weight loss during the test period, the Portland-rice husk ash cement concrete showed only 8 per cent weight loss. The corresponding weight losses in the 5 per cent H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> solution, were 27 per cent for the Portland cement concrete and 13 per cent for the Portland-rice husk ash concrete. Similarly lime-rice husk ash cement mortars stored in a 1 per cent solution of acetic acid have remained in excellent condition for over five years now, but the corresponding Portland cement mortars showed surface softening and substantial weight loss within one year.

#### *Field Applications in the U.S.*

The numerous field applications of the Portland-rice husk ash cement so far produced in the United States have been

4. P.K. Mehta and N. Pitt, "Energy and Industrial Materials from Crop Residues", *J. Resource Recovery and Conservation*, Vol. 2, 23-38, 1976.

mainly for construction of acid resisting floors. Due to acidic environment in many food and chemical process plants, ordinary Portland cement concrete floors exhibit a very short life, in some cases no longer than six months or 1-2 years. On the basis of field test data, it is reported that the life expectancy of such floors has been considerably increased by using rice husk ash cement. A concrete pumping operation involving 30,000 sq. ft. floor construction for a chemical fertilizer plant was reported in which rice husk ash cement was used.<sup>5</sup> Already 2-4 years of satisfactory life is reported for rice husk ash cement concrete floors in sugar mills, tomato processing plants, meat smokehouses and edible fat rendering rooms. In view of the heavy expenses involved in replacing or repairing deteriorated Portland-cement concrete, a higher initial cost of rice husk ash cement-concrete is justified, and this is usually reflected in the price premium at which the cement is marketed in the United States.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Hydraulic cement of high quality can be made with reactive silica ash produced by controlled combustion of rice husk. Cements showing strength development characteristics similar to Portland cement can be produced by intergrinding or blending 20-30 per cent lime with reactive rice husk ash. Cementitious products with strength and durability superior to Portland cements can be made from blends of Portland cement and reactive rice husk ash provided that the ash content is 50 per cent or less by weight of the blended cement.

Due to the specific needs of the U.S., such as the disposal problem of large quantities of husk in the vicinity of centralized rice milling operations, the technology developed for manufacturing the reactive rice husk ash is suitable for large-capacity plants which require relatively large capital costs. Also there is a great demand for cements possessing higher strength and durability characteristics than ordinary Portland cement, and that is why only Portland-rice husk ash type cements are being made commercially.

However, there is no reason why the chemistry underlying the process should not be used to develop technology appropriate to the needs of rural areas in the developing countries. It has been demonstrated by several researchers<sup>6-8</sup> that the setting and hardening properties of lime-rice husk ash cements are extremely poor when ash from ordinarily burnt husk is used. Except for non-structural use, such as plastering, these cements cannot be safely used for foundations, walls, and roofs of rural dwellings. Lime-rice husk ash type cements would be ideal for use on small jobs in remote rural areas provided small, inexpensive units for controlled combustion of husk are developed for production of reactive silica ash as described in this paper.

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6. P.D. Cady and P.R. Groney, "Hydraulic Cements from Rice Husk Ash", *Cement Technology*, Vol. 7, No. 6, page 215, 1976.

7. D.J. Cook, R.P. Pama, and S.A. Damer, "The Behaviour of Concrete and Cement Paste Containing Rice Husk Ash", *Proc. Conference on Hydraulic Cement Pastes*, University of Sheffield, pp. 268-283, 1976.

8. D.J. Cook, R.P. Pama, and B.K. Paul, "Rice Husk Ash-Lime Cement Mixes for Use in Masonry Units", *Building and Environment*, Vol. 12, pp. 281-288, 1977.

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5. Anon, "Cement Made from Rice Hulls Produces Acid Resisting Concrete", *Concrete Construction*, page 54, January 1977.



# News and Reports

## A SYMPOSIUM ON "SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS AT CHICAGO IN 1893: A REVIEW"

A symposium on the above subject was held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta on the 11th September, 1992, with Swami Atmasthananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Dr. Nemai Sadan Bose of the Jadavpur University, Dr. R.K. Das Gupta formerly Director of the National Library, and Dr. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay formerly of the University of Calcutta as participants and Swami Lokeshwarananda as the President.

The first speech of Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament, remarkable for its fine sentiments, was recited by Mr. Sankar Basu Mallick.

Explaining the purpose of the symposium, Swami Lokeshwarananda said that in 1993 the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Bhārat Parikramā (Itinerary in India) and the Centenary of his addresses at the World's Parliament of Religions would be observed in India and abroad. The present symposium was a forerunner of all that would follow later.

Swami Atmasthananda in his brief and enlightening speech remarked that no one could understand India without first understanding Swami Vivekananda and observed that it would be wrong to think that Swamiji was concerned about India only; he was concerned about the entire world. He added that Swamiji's participation at the Parliament of Religions gave a new impetus

to man's quest towards religious harmony based on mutual acceptance, destroyed man's fanaticism, and revealed to the world the glories of India's ancient spiritual culture.

Dr. Nemai Sadan Bose said "There are people who love Swami Vivekananda but they love him without knowing anything about him. There are also people who dislike him but they too know nothing about him. What is needed today is a correct appraisal of the man and his work."

Dr. R.K. Das Gupta read a learned paper on Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta as compared to Sankara's and opined that Swamiji was more modern, more pragmatic and wanted to see Vedanta applied in man's day-to-day life.

Prof. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay presented Swami Vivekananda as a champion of the cause of the poor and the down-trodden who saw God in man and wanted men to be so treated. He discussed how Swamiji brought about national awakening.

In his presidential address Swami Lokeshwarananda said that Swamiji was most modern. He did not preach obscurantism, he preached Truth which was verified and verifiable. Truth was above everything else, to him. Swamiji thought religion was as clear as daylight; there was no 'hide and seek' about it.





Riverside Monastery near Bangkok.



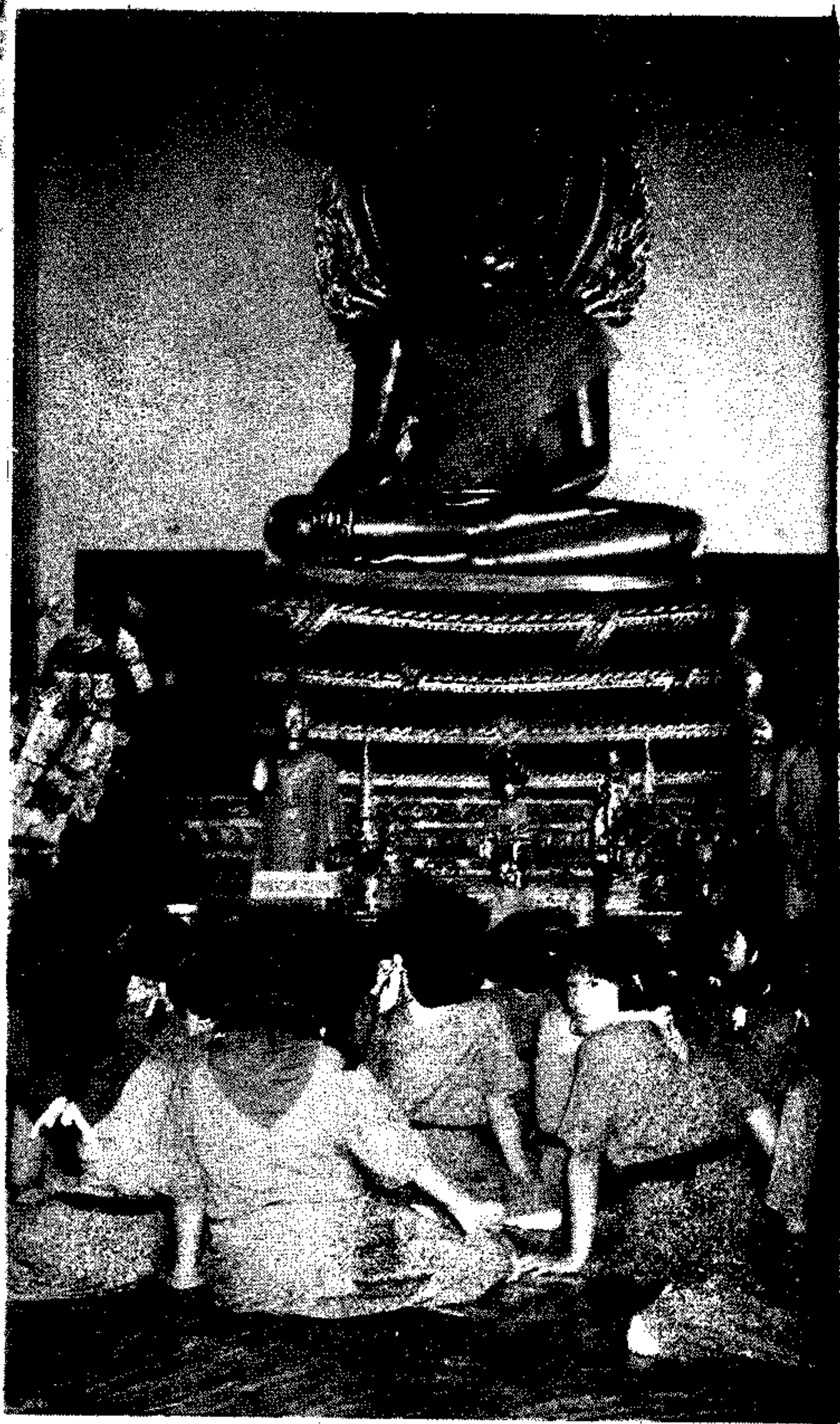
Monks' quarters, Southern Thailand.





Erawan Shrine, Bangkok.

Girl scouts in Temple, Bangkok.







Monks on alms round, Bangkok.



Monks preparing to eat, Southern Thailand.



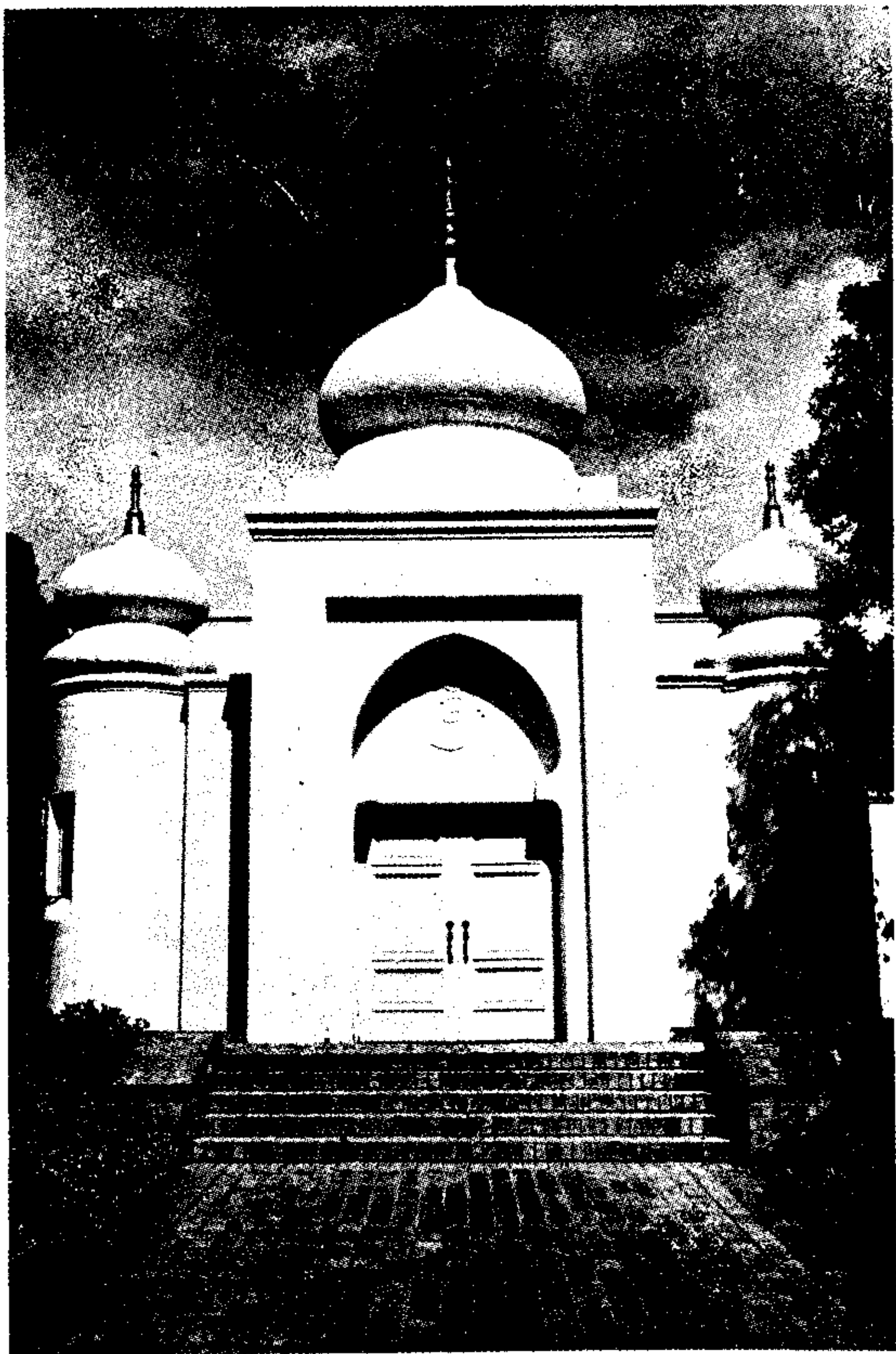


Thai dancers in front of Erawan Shrine.



Monastery, Southern Thailand.





Vedanta Temple  
in Hollywood.

Vedanta Temple  
in Santa Barbara.

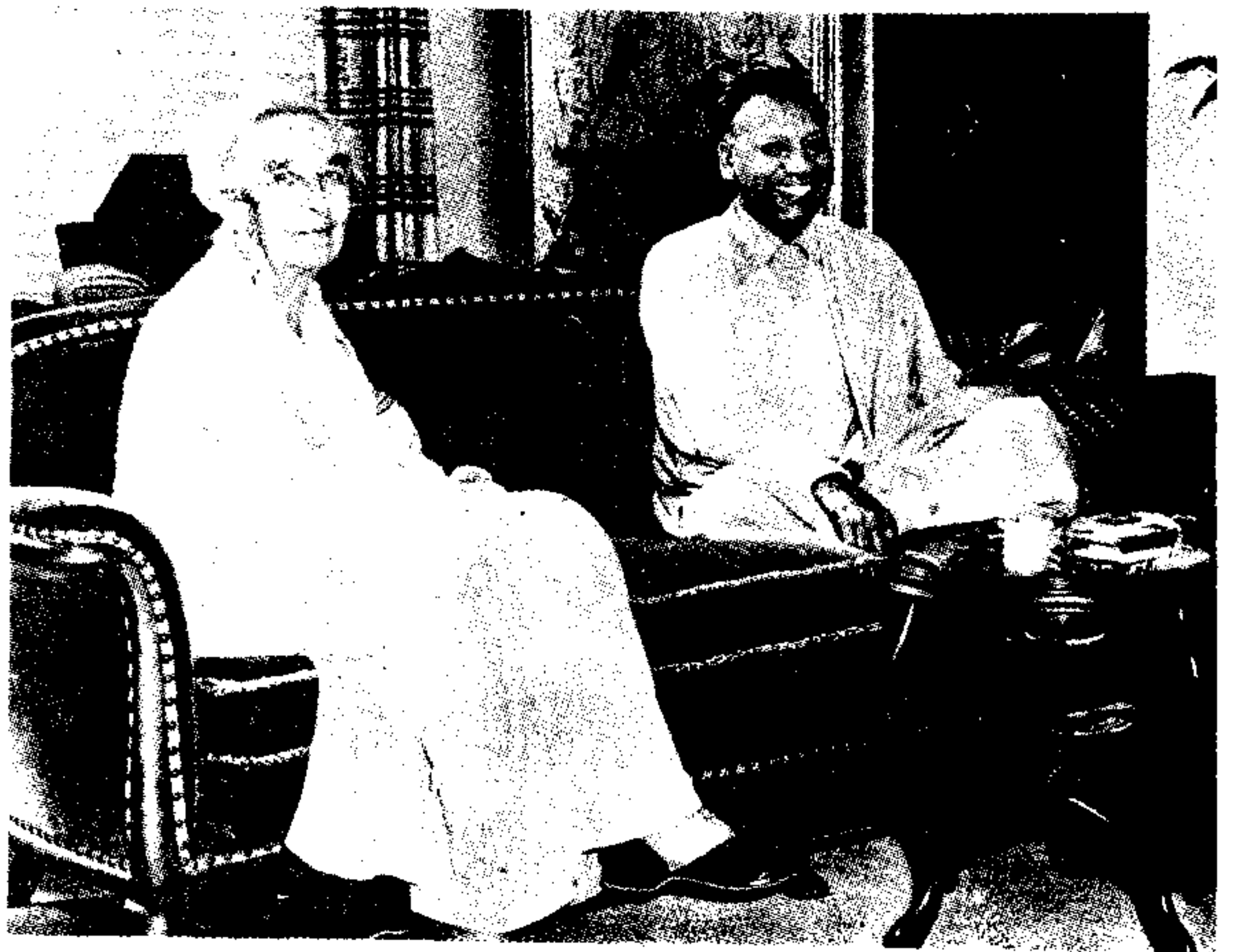






L to R  
Swamis  
Satprakashananda,  
Vividishananda,  
Yatiswarananda,  
Prabhavananda,  
Devatmananda,  
Akhilananda,  
in Santa Barbara 1947.

Sister Lalita  
and Swami Prabhavananda



Vivekananda House  
in Pasadena.



Ramakrishna Monastery at  
Trabuco.

L to R Swamis  
Satprakashananda,  
Prabhavananda,  
Vishwananda,  
Pavitrnananda,  
Asehananda



Josephine MacLeod with  
Swami Prabhavananda.



Swami Swahananda in  
Santa Barbara Shrine.







Swami Trigunatitananda.